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Alternative Dispute Resolution Strategies and Employee Performance in Selected Universities in North-East Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) strategies and employee performance in selected Universities in North-East, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the effects of Neutrality Dispute Resolution and Collaborative Law Dispute Resolution. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Where the population comprised staff of selected universities in North-East Nigeria. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to respondents. A total of 426 questionnaires were distributed, 389 were returned, while 379 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis. Data obtained were analyzed using multiple regression analysis with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. The findings revealed that Neutrality Dispute Resolution had a positive and significant impact on employee performance. Collaborative Law Dispute Resolution also exerted a positive and significant influence on employee performance. The study concluded that effective dispute resolution strategies significantly enhance employee performance by promoting fairness, cooperation, trust, workplace harmony, and organizational effectiveness. The study recommends that university management should strengthen collaborative dispute resolution mechanisms, institutionalize impartial conflict resolution procedures, engage qualified experts in dispute settlement, provide regular training for mediators and conciliators, increase awareness of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and establish dedicated dispute resolution units within universities. These measures will contribute to improved employee performance and institutional productivity.

Keywords: *Alternative Dispute Resolution; Collaborative Law; Employee Performance; Neutrality; Universities.*

Introduction

Employee performance is a essential factor in determining organizational success, as it directly influences efficiency, productivity, and the overall effectiveness of institutions. High-performing employees drive innovation, enhance service delivery, and provide a competitive edge in both public and private sectors. Dessler (2021) notes that employee performance is shaped by various factors, including motivation, job satisfaction, leadership style, and workplace policies. In the context of academic institutions, particularly federal universities, employee performance significantly impacts the quality of education, research output, and administrative operations (Okonkwo & Adebayo, 2022). However, conflicts whether between employees, between staff and management, or among academic and non-academic units can undermine performance, leading to reduced productivity, low morale, and organizational inefficiencies. To mitigate these challenges, effective dispute resolution mechanisms, such as Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), are critical. By addressing conflicts promptly and constructively, ADR not only preserves harmonious working relationships but also sustains employee performance and contributes to the overall functionality and reputation of federal universities in Nigeria's North-East Zone (Adams & Boulle, 2021).

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) strategies have long been a crucial tool for managing conflicts, promoting harmonious relationships, and maintaining institutional stability. In the Nigerian tertiary institutions, ADR methods such as negotiation, mediation, and arbitration are increasingly employed to address disputes among students, staff, and management. For instance, at the University of Lagos, mediation committees are often used to resolve conflicts between student groups without resorting to formal disciplinary actions, fostering a collaborative campus environment (Afolabi, 2024). Similarly, at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, arbitration panels have been convened to settle disputes over staff appointments and academic promotions, ensuring fair and timely resolutions while reducing litigation within the institution (Abdullahi & Musa, 2019). Additionally, the National Universities Commission (NUC) encourages tertiary institutions to adopt conciliation practices in handling grievances related to academic assessments and staff welfare, reflecting the broader Nigerian cultural emphasis on dialogue and compromise (Ajayi & Oloruntoba, 2023). These examples illustrate that ADR is not only rooted in global conflict management traditions but is also a practical and culturally resonant approach within Nigerian universities, enhancing institutional harmony and operational efficiency.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) strategies provide institutions with effective tools for resolving conflicts, lowering litigation costs, and maintaining positive relationships. These mechanisms encompass several approaches. Neutral evaluation ensures that an impartial third party facilitates fair proceedings, minimizing bias and promoting equitable outcomes (Oni-Ojo & Roland-Otaru, 2013). Collaborative law engages parties and their legal representatives in jointly crafting mutually beneficial solutions without resorting to court intervention (Mwenda, 2009).

Similarly, neutrality dispute resolution involves a neutral third party who facilitates communication and negotiation between disputing parties without taking sides or imposing a solution. This process is designed to ensure impartiality, promoting a fair and balanced resolution of conflicts. In terms of employee performance, the implementation of neutrality in resolving workplace disputes can significantly enhance trust and fairness. Employees are more likely to feel valued and understood, leading to improved job satisfaction, higher morale, and a reduction in workplace tension. Research by Adu and Mensah (2021) highlights that when employees perceive fairness in conflict resolution, they are more likely to be committed to their roles and exhibit higher levels of performance. Also, collaborative law dispute resolution is a structured process where all parties, along with their respective attorneys, commit to resolving disputes through negotiation without resorting to litigation (Oluwafemi, 2023). Collaborative law dispute resolution is significant as it encourages open and transparent communication, allowing employees to voice their concerns in a supportive environment (Oluwafemi, 2023). Also, Oluwafemi (2023) notes that this collaborative approach fosters a work culture of mutual respect and cooperation, which can lead to improved teamwork, enhanced job satisfaction, and increased employee performance, as employees feel empowered to contribute to conflict resolution processes.

Neglecting Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms such as neutrality, collaborative law, expert determination, mediation, arbitration, and conciliation in institutions in Nigeria has raised concerns about not utilizing their effectiveness in enhancing employee performance. While ADR is designed to provide a faster, less adversarial, and cost-effective approach to conflict resolution. Institutions have experienced challenges such as bias in neutral resolutions, ineffective collaborative law processes, and inconsistencies in expert determinations, leading to dissatisfaction among employees. Mediation and conciliation, which emphasize mutual agreement, often result in delayed resolutions due to prolonged negotiations, while arbitration decisions may lack fairness or transparency, negatively impacting trust and morale. Consequently, unresolved disputes, poor workplace relationships, and decreased performance continue to hinder institutional efficiency (Adamu & Mohammed, 2021).

It is on this note that this study tends to examine the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) i.e. neutrality dispute resolution, collaborative law dispute resolution, expert determination dispute resolution, mediation dispute resolution, arbitration dispute resolution and conciliation dispute resolution and their impact on employee performance in selected Universities in North-East, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Alternative Dispute Resolution Strategies

Alternative dispute resolution is frequently used to define a wide variety of dispute resolution mechanisms that are small of, or alternative to, complete court processes. It also refer to the whole thing from facilitated settlement negotiations in which disputants are encouraged to negotiate directly with each other preceding to some other legal processes such as arbitration systems or mini-trials that have attributes of a courtroom process. ADR remains an enduring feature of the legal system in the society and as an adjunct to courtroom adjudication, that holds promise for an improved and qualitative access to justice for all citizens, while serving as an attractive feature for economic development (Uwazie, 2014). ADR refers to any means of settling disputes outside of the courtroom involving early neutral evaluation, negotiation, conciliation, mediation, and arbitration (Block, 2016).

Neutrality Dispute Resolution Strategies

Neutrality in dispute resolution is a crucial principle that ensures fairness and balance in mediation and arbitration processes. Astor (2017) defines neutrality by highlighting three key aspects: mediators must not influence the mediation outcome, should treat all parties equally, and must avoid conflicts of interest. This definition highlight the role of mediators as facilitators rather than decision-makers, ensuring a fair and unbiased process. By maintaining neutrality, mediators help disputing parties reach mutually acceptable solutions without any external interference. This principle is essential in fostering trust among the parties involved, as they perceive the process as objective and impartial. When mediators remain neutral, they create an environment where each party feels heard and respected, reducing the chances of perceived bias. The effectiveness of neutrality also lies in the mediator's ability to manage emotions and power imbalances between parties, ensuring that no individual dominates the discussion. This approach enhances the credibility of the dispute resolution process and increases the likelihood of long-term compliance with agreements reached during mediation.

Collaborative Law Dispute Resolution Strategies

Dalena and Bosch (2023) describe collaborative law as a method of dispute resolution that prioritizes cooperation over confrontation. This approach fosters an environment where parties engage in open communication, transparency, and mutual respect. Unlike traditional litigation, which often leads to hostility and prolonged legal battles, collaborative law seeks to resolve conflicts amicably through constructive negotiation. The voluntary nature of this process ensures that all parties remain committed to achieving a fair and acceptable resolution without court intervention. Chukwuma (2021) emphasizes that collaborative law involves direct negotiations between parties, facilitated by their respective lawyers, to reach a mutually beneficial agreement. The focus is on preserving relationships and addressing the interests of all involved rather than imposing rigid legal judgments. This method is particularly advantageous in sensitive disputes, such as family law or business conflicts, where maintaining positive interactions is essential. By avoiding adversarial courtroom proceedings, collaborative law promotes a more harmonious resolution process.

Employee Performance

Wibowo (2013) defines employee performance as an activity that involves managing organizational resources to achieve predefined goals. This definition highlight the strategic role of employees in aligning their efforts with the broader objectives of the organization. It highlights the importance of efficient resource utilization, effective planning, and performance as key indicators of employee performance. Hasibuan (2016) views performance as the result of work achieved by an individual based on proficiency, experience, sincerity, and time management. This definition emphasizes that employee performance is not just about completing tasks but also about the quality and efficiency with which tasks are executed. It suggests that experience and expertise, combined with dedication, contribute to overall job performance.

Suwatno and Donni (2019) describe performance as work achievement, work implementation, or results produced from an individual’s efforts. Their definition highlights that performance is not only

about outcomes but also about how tasks are executed. It recognizes that the process and approach to work influence the overall effectiveness and efficiency of employees. Suwatno and Donni, (2016) defines performance as the output derived from processes, whether carried out by humans or automated systems. This definition suggests that performance is measurable and results-driven. It aligns with modern performance management principles, where output is assessed based on the efficiency of the processes leading to the desired results.

Neutrality Dispute Resolution Strategies and Employee Performance

Neutrality in dispute resolution plays a fundamental role in determining employee performance in organizations. When conflicts are managed impartially, employees perceive the work environment as just and fair. This perception enhances their trust in management, leading to increased job satisfaction and commitment. A neutral conflict resolution approach ensures that disputes are handled based on established policies rather than favoritism or bias. In Nigeria, Okwuise et al. (2020) studied conflict management strategies within the banking sector and found that neutrality in dispute resolution significantly affects employee performance. They observed that strategies such as compromise and avoidance positively influenced job efficiency and workplace harmony. This suggests that when organizations adopt neutral dispute resolution mechanisms, employees feel more secure and valued, leading to better performance. The study emphasized that regularly engaging employees in decision-making processes fosters trust and reduces workplace conflicts. Employees viewed these methods as either too submissive or too aggressive, leading to dissatisfaction. This highlights the importance of striking a balance between assertiveness and neutrality when resolving disputes. If an organization enforces policies that ensure impartiality in dispute resolution, employees are more likely to remain productive and committed to their roles (Ahmad et al. 2024).

Collaborative Law Dispute Resolution Strategies and Employee Performance

Collaborative Law Dispute Resolution (CLDR) is a conflict resolution approach that emphasizes cooperation, negotiation, and mutual agreement among conflicting parties. Unlike litigation, which often results in winners and losers, CLDR fosters a win-win situation where all parties benefit from the resolution process. One of the primary benefits of CLDR in the workplace is its ability to enhance employee performance. Employees who experience unresolved conflicts often struggle with stress, distraction, and disengagement, which can lead to decreased efficiency. However, when conflicts are resolved through a collaborative approach, employees can refocus on their tasks without lingering resentment or frustration. According to Tuni and Joseph (2022), integrating collaborative strategies in conflict management within the Nigerian banking industry led to improved performance among employees. Additionally, the transparency and fairness of CLDR encourage employees to be more proactive in addressing workplace issues. When employees see that conflicts are managed in a just and open manner, they develop a sense of trust in the organization, which translates into increased dedication to their roles. This level of trust enhances workplace collaboration, as employees are more willing to work together without fear of bias or unfair treatment. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as litigation or rigid arbitration, often lead to prolonged disputes that can affect performance. In contrast, collaborative approaches ensure that conflicts are resolved swiftly and effectively, allowing employees to focus on their tasks with minimal interruptions.

Conceptual Framework



Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher's Design, 2025.

The relationship between the dispute resolution strategies (neutrality, collaborative law, expert determination, mediation, arbitration, and conciliation) and employee performance in selected universities in North-East, Nigeria is fundamentally anchored on how effectively conflicts are managed to promote fairness, trust, and organizational harmony. Neutrality in dispute resolution enhances employees' perception of justice and impartiality, which fosters commitment, morale, and productivity. Collaborative law encourages open communication and joint problem-solving, thereby strengthening teamwork and enhancing individual and collective performance.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in conflict management theories and employee performance models that explain the relationship between Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) strategies and employee performance, job satisfaction, and overall workplace harmony. Conflict management theory provides a foundation for understanding how ADR strategies influence employee performance. According to Rahim (2011), conflict management strategies, including ADR mechanisms such as mediation, arbitration, and negotiation, help organizations reduce workplace conflicts and enhance collaboration. When conflicts arise in the workplace, they can lead to disruptions in teamwork, decreased morale, and lower performance. ADR offers structured processes that enable employees to resolve disputes in a non-adversarial manner, promoting positive working relationships and a cooperative culture. This, in turn, results in an improved work environment where employees are more willing to engage in their tasks effectively. Furthermore, Ury, Brett, and Goldberg (2016) argue that ADR fosters a cooperative culture within organizations, reducing the adversarial nature of dispute resolution and thereby enhancing employee morale. When employees feel that their grievances are addressed through fair and efficient mechanisms, they are more likely to remain engaged and motivated in their work. This aligns with the notion that conflict, when managed properly, can be a constructive force that leads to better decision-making and innovative solutions. Thus, by integrating ADR strategies into organizational conflict resolution policies, businesses can create a more harmonious workplace that boosts employee performance and job satisfaction.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was used for this study. The study focused on describing the characteristics of the population. This study was carried out on five selected Universities in North-East, Nigeria; i.e. Modibbo Adama University (MAU), Yola, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, University (ATBU), University of Maiduguri, (UNIMAID) and Taraba State University (TASU), Taraba and Yobe State University (YSU). The population of the study comprised the total number of academic and non-academic staff of the selected institutions, as presented in Table 1 below. The population of Modibbo Adama University, Yola (MAU), Taraba State University (TASU), Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU), Bauchi, and University of Maiduguri comprised both academic and non-academic staff. The study population comprised 12,755 staff drawn from five selected universities in the North-Eastern region of Nigeria, comprising Modibbo Adama University, Yola (2,053 staff), Taraba State University (2,564 staff), Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi (1,745 staff), University of Maiduguri (5,109 staff), and Yobe State University, Damaturu (1,284 staff), covering both teaching and non-teaching staff. Using Yamane's (1964) formula at a 5% margin of error, a sample size of 387 respondents was obtained from the total population, and an additional 10% (39 respondents) was added to compensate for possible non-response, resulting in a final sample size of 426 respondents. The sample was proportionately apportioned across the five institutions and their respective staff categories. The study adopted convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, for administering the research instrument to the selected respondents. Primary data constituted the major source of information and were collected using a well-structured, close-ended questionnaire. The data collected were analysed using inferential statistical techniques to examine the relationships among the study variables.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings

The results in the response rate table indicate that a total of 426 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, representing 100% of the sample. Out of this number, 389 questionnaires were successfully returned, representing a 91.3% response rate, while 37 questionnaires (8.7%) were not returned. Of the returned questionnaires, 10 (2.3% of the distributed questionnaires) were rejected because they were either incomplete or improperly completed and were therefore unsuitable for analysis. Consequently, 379 questionnaires, representing 89.0% of the total questionnaires distributed, were retained and used for the final data analysis.

Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses of this study were tested using multiple linear regression statistics at 5% level of significance as indicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Regression Results for ADR Strategies and Employee Performance

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Decision
Constant	27.369	2.787	9.822	< .001	—
NDR	0.396	0.063	6.245	< .001	H_{01} rejected
CLDR	0.600	0.076	7.882	< .001	H_{02} rejected
R	0.563				
R^2	0.414				
Adjusted R^2	0.412				
F-statistic	16.861				

Notes: NDR = Neutrality Dispute Resolution; CLDR = Collaborative Law Dispute Resolution; dependent variable = Employee Performance.

Source: Computed using SPSS 27 from field survey data, 2026.

Table 1 presents the multiple regression results on the impact of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) strategies on employee performance. The model produced a correlation coefficient of R = 0.563, indicating a moderate positive relationship between ADR strategies and employee performance. The coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.414) reveals that 41.4% of the variation in employee performance is explained by Neutrality Dispute Resolution (NDR) and Collaborative Law Dispute Resolution (CLDR) while the remaining 58.6% is explained by other factors outside the model. The adjusted R^2 = 0.412 confirms the stability of the model, and the F-statistic of 16.861 ($p < 0.001$) indicates that the regression model is statistically significant, implying that the ADR strategies jointly have a significant effect on employee performance.

The individual regression coefficients further show that all the ADR strategies have positive and statistically significant effects on employee performance. Specifically, Neutrality Dispute Resolution (β = 0.396, t = 6.245, $p < 0.001$) and Collaborative Law Dispute Resolution (β = 0.600, t = 7.882, $p < 0.001$) all significantly improve employee performance. Since the p-values for all the predictors are less than 0.05, hypotheses H01, H02, are rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that Neutrality Dispute Resolution (NDR) has a positive and statistically significant effect on employee performance in selected universities in North-East Nigeria. The result is consistent with the findings of Okwuise et al. (2020), who reported that neutrality in conflict management significantly improves employee performance within the Nigerian banking sector. Their study established that impartial conflict management strategies, particularly compromise and balanced decision-making, enhanced job efficiency, workplace harmony, and employee commitment. Similarly,

the present study confirms that when universities adopt neutral dispute resolution practices, employees perceive organizational processes as fair, thereby increasing their willingness to contribute meaningfully toward achieving institutional objectives. The current finding also agrees with the assertion of Okwuise et al. (2020) that involving employees in fair decision-making processes strengthens organizational trust and reduces workplace conflicts.

The study found that Collaborative Law Dispute Resolution (CLDR) exerts a strong positive and statistically significant influence on employee performance ($\beta = 0.600$, $t = 7.882$, $p < 0.05$). The finding strongly agrees with Tuni and Joseph (2022), who reported that collaborative conflict management strategies significantly improved employee performance within the Nigerian banking industry. Their study revealed that organizations adopting collaborative approaches experienced higher employee productivity because workers remained focused on organizational goals rather than interpersonal disagreements.

Conclusion, Contribution to Knowledge, Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Conclusion

The study concluded that dispute resolution strategies are critical determinants of employee performance in selected universities in North-East Nigeria. The findings demonstrated that the dispute resolution mechanisms examined, namely Neutrality Dispute Resolution and Collaborative Law Dispute Resolution, exerted positive and statistically significant influences on employee performance. This implies that the adoption of effective dispute resolution strategies contributes to the creation of a peaceful work environment, enhances employee trust in institutional processes, and promotes positive work attitudes that ultimately improve job performance. The study further concluded that the effectiveness of dispute resolution mechanisms lies in their ability to foster fairness, transparency, cooperation, and mutual understanding among employees and management. When disputes are handled impartially and professionally, employees are more likely to feel valued, respected, and motivated to contribute meaningfully to organizational goals. Effective dispute resolution also minimizes workplace tensions, reduces grievances, strengthens interpersonal relationships, and encourages teamwork, all of which are essential for achieving higher levels of employee productivity and organizational efficiency.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study contributes to existing knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between dispute resolution strategies and employee performance within the context of universities in North-East Nigeria, an area that has received comparatively limited empirical attention. Specifically, the study demonstrates that neutrality and collaborative approaches to dispute resolution can serve not merely as mechanisms for settling workplace disagreements but also as strategic tools for improving employee performance. The study also extends the understanding of dispute resolution by showing that fairness, impartiality, cooperation, dialogue, and mutual understanding can influence employees' attitudes and performance outcomes. Furthermore, the findings provide university administrators, human resource managers, and policymakers with empirical support for integrating structured and participatory dispute resolution mechanisms into institutional human resource management practices.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, the study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study was restricted to selected universities in North-East Nigeria; therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all universities in Nigeria or other types of organizations. Second, the study relied primarily on questionnaire responses, which may be influenced by respondents' perceptions, personal experiences, or the tendency to provide socially desirable responses. Third, the study adopted a cross-sectional research design, meaning that data were collected at a particular point in time and therefore could not adequately capture how the effects of dispute resolution strategies on employee performance may change over a longer period.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Future studies should extend the scope of investigation to include universities across other geopolitical zones of Nigeria to provide broader evidence and enhance the generalizability of findings. Researchers should also consider adopting a longitudinal research design to examine the long-term effects of dispute resolution strategies on employee performance and determine whether improvements in performance are sustained over time. Future studies could employ mixed-method approaches involving questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and institutional records to obtain deeper and more objective insights into dispute resolution practices.

Recommendations

1. University management should strengthen collaborative law dispute resolution mechanisms by encouraging dialogue, joint problem-solving, and stakeholder participation in resolving workplace disputes.
2. Universities should continue engaging qualified experts and professionals in dispute resolution processes to improve the effectiveness of expert determination mechanisms.

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