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Research

Conflict Management Practices in the Nigerian Construction Industry: A Study of Kaduna Metropolis

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Abstract: Conflict is an inherent and disruptive feature of the construction industry globally, leading to significant cost overruns, project delays, and adversarial relationships. This study investigates the dynamics of conflict management within the Nigerian construction industry, with a specific focus on Kaduna Metropolis. A quantitative research approach was adopted, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered electronically via Google Forms to 150 key industry stakeholders, including clients, consultants, and contractors. The research was guided by three objectives: to identify the primary causes of conflict, to assess factors contributing to conflicts, and to propose a framework for effective conflict management. Analysis using a 5-point Likert scale in SPSS revealed that the most prevalent causes of conflict are payment delays and financial issues (mean=3.55), poor communication (mean=3.33), and unrealistic project timelines (mean=3.15). Furthermore, assessment of traditional resolution methods indicated widespread dissatisfaction among practitioners. Upon empirical findings, the study proposes a proactive, multi-tiered conflict management framework emphasizing a dedicated construction mediation centre (mean=4.02), mandatory ADR clauses (mean=3.59), and standardized contracts (mean=3.25). The study concludes that adopting a structured, proactive approach to conflict management is imperative for improving project performance and fostering collaboration in Kaduna Metropolis.

Keywords: Conflict management, construction industry, Kaduna Metropolis, Alternative Dispute Resolution, payment delays, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The inevitability of conflicts in human endeavours can never be overemphasized; therefore, its occurrence in construction industries worldwide, including Nigeria, is

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expected. Conflicts arise from a host of factors and have significant negative impacts on the products of the industry. The construction industry contributes approximately 4.5% to Nigeria's GDP (NBS, 2023), yet it faces persistent conflicts leading to 30% project abandonment rates (Oladapo, 2021). However, the industry is plagued by numerous conflicts that hinder its growth and stability (Oyewunmi et al., 2018).

Kaduna Metropolis, a major construction and educational centre in northern Nigeria, experiences disputes arising from contractual breaches, payment delays, and cultural differences among stakeholders (Garba, Yakubu, and Abubakar, 2020; Mohammed, 2022). Other specific causes of conflict in Kaduna State include corruption identified as a top-ranking cause of project failure and abandonment, and changes in government administration leading to shifts in project priorities (Dankani and Mahmoud, 2019).

Despite the existence of conflict resolution mechanisms, 65% of construction firms in Nigeria report unresolved disputes (Aje et al., 2020). Litigation remains the primary approach, which is time-consuming, costly, and may not address underlying issues directly (Ezeokoli et al., 2020). Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the present Kaduna Metropolis construction industry's conflict management strategies with a view to proffer sustainable resolution frameworks. The objectives are to: (1) identify present key sources of conflict, (2) assess factors contributing to existing conflict, and (3) propose a framework for effective conflict management.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Nature of Conflict in Construction

Conflict, originating from the Latin word "conflictus" (a battle or struggle for dominance), represents a fundamental disagreement between interdependent parties. Rahim (2017) posits that conflict is an inevitable, normal, and often functional component of organizational life, focusing on how it is managed rather than avoided. In the construction industry, the intricate environment involves numerous stakeholders-clients, contractors, subcontractors, suppliers, and regulatory bodies-who inherently possess divergent objectives and risk tolerances.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) identifies five primary conflict-handling styles based on assertiveness and cooperativeness: competing, accommodating, avoiding, compromising, and collaborating (Thomas & Kilmann, 1970s). Collaborating is generally considered most effective for achieving sustainable outcomes.

The Interest-Based Relational (IBR) approach, popularized by Fisher and Ury (1981), prioritizes needs and interests over stated positions, emphasizing collaborative problem-solving and preservation of long-term relationships.

The Resource Curse Theory (RCT) explains why institutional failures persist in resource-rich nations like Nigeria. Williams (2016) argues that mineral wealth generates significant profits often shrouded in secrecy, leading to economic instability, corruption, and conflict. This framework is particularly relevant to Kaduna's construction sector, where governance failures drive project conflicts.

2.3 Causes of Conflict in Nigerian Construction

Financial issues consistently dominate the discourse. Delayed payments are cited as a source in 28% of conflicts studied (Oladapo, 2021). Abdullahi et al. (2021) and Ilaro (2025) note that when payments are delayed, contractors face severe cash flow problems, leading inevitably to project slowdowns or abandonment.

Contractual ambiguities account for 35% of conflict sources (Aibinu and Jagboro, 2022). Research identifies contract incompleteness as the underlying root cause of construction disputes, caused by bounded rationality and uncertainty. Opportunism manifests as evasion of obligations or refusal to adapt to change.

3. Methodology

A quantitative survey research design was adopted. The population comprised construction professionals in Kaduna Metropolis, including contractors, architects, builders, quantity surveyors, and engineers. A sample size of 180 professionals was selected using purposive sampling technique, with 150 valid responses retrieved (83.3% response rate).

A structured questionnaire was designed in Google Form and distributed electronically. The instrument covered demographic information, perception of conflicts, sources of conflict, contributing factors, and resolution methods using a 5-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean score) with SPSS version 29.0.2. Ethical considerations included anonymity and informed consent.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 150 respondents. The majority were male (79.33%), reflecting the masculinized nature of the Nigerian construction industry (Adeoye et al., 2021; Dania et al., 2020). Most respondents held

tertiary qualifications (86.67%), with consultants representing the largest stakeholder group (57.33%). Work experience ranging from 5–15 years accounted for 64.66% of participants, indicating a knowledgeable respondent base.

Table 1: *Respondents' Demographics*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	119	79.33
	Female	31	20.67
Education	Secondary	20	13.33
	Tertiary	130	86.67
Role	Client/Project Owner	14	9.33
	Contractor	10	6.66
	Consultant	86	57.33
	Project Manager	22	14.66
Experience	Less than 5 years	35	23.33
	5–10 years	59	39.33
	11–15 years	38	25.33
	Above 20 years	18	12.00

Source: Researchers' 2026

4.2 Perception of Conflicts

The overwhelming majority of respondents perceived conflicts as a frequent occurrence (64.00%), with an additional 9.33% indicating very frequent conflicts. Only 9.33% considered conflicts rare. This finding confirms that conflicts are a common and regular occurrence within the Kaduna construction industry, aligning with global literature (Loosemore, 2015; Ugwu and Okoroh, 2017).

4.3 Common Sources of Conflict

Table 2 presents the mean scores for five identified sources of conflict. Payment delays and financial issues ranked first (mean=3.55), indicating this factor is perceived as the most significant and frequent source of conflict. This finding aligns with numerous studies identifying untimely contractual payment as a leading cause of disputes (Jaffar et al., 2011; Mahamid, 2016; Ekhator, 2016).

Poor communication and information breaches ranked second (mean=3.33). Communication failures are a major, recurring problem, second only to financial issues.

Literature universally acknowledges communication breakdowns as a primary cause of disputes, leading to errors, rework, and conflicting subcontractor schedules (PMI, 2017; Trimble, 2023).

Unrealistic project timelines and delays ranked third (mean=3.15). Mahamid (2016) noted that unrealistic contract duration and time constraints imposed by clients often lead to conflicts. Variations in orders and design, and site conditions and quality of workmanship tied for fourth (mean=3.01), indicating scope changes and on-site execution problems are equally problematic.

Table 2: *Common Sources of Conflict*

Source	Mean Score	Rank
Payment delays and financial issues	3.55	1st
Poor communication and information breaches	3.33	2nd
Unrealistic project timelines and delays	3.15	3rd
Variations in orders & Design	3.01	4th
Site conditions and quality of workmanship	3.01	4th

Source: *Researchers' 2026 Scale: 1=Never adopted, 5=Mostly adopted*

4.4 Factors Contributing to Conflict

Table 3 shows the factors contributing to conflict in Kaduna's construction industry. Economic inflation and cost volatility ranked first (mean=3.45). Payment issues in the construction industry are consistently cited as the single most critical cause of conflicts (Jaffar et al., 2011; Dania et al., 2021). Delays in payment create severe financial strain on contractors and subcontractors, leading to adversarial relationships and work stoppages.

Cultural and ethnic differences ranked second (mean=3.24). This includes errors and omissions in contract documents and misunderstanding in interpretation of contract terms (Dania, 2021; Jaffar et al., 2011). Lu and Wang (2017) noted that personality and goal differences are inherent to diverse multidisciplinary project teams.

Regulatory and government policies ranked third (mean=3.10), while unclear risk allocation in contracts ranked fourth (mean=3.09). Weak contract administration was the only factor rejected (mean=2.98), suggesting respondents perceive contract administration as relatively less problematic than financial and cultural issues.

Table 3: *Factors Contributing to Conflict*

Factor	Mean Score	Rank	Decision
Economic inflation and cost volatility	3.45	1st	Accepted
Cultural and ethnic differences	3.24	2nd	Accepted
Regulatory and government policies	3.10	3rd	Accepted
Unclear risk allocation in contracts	3.09	4th	Accepted
Others (team spirit, organizational structure)	3.00	5th	Accepted
Weak contract administration	2.98	6th	Rejected

Source: *Researchers' 2026 Scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree; Acceptance cutoff = 3.00.*

4.5 Proposed Conflict Management Framework

Table 4 presents the proposed framework for effective conflict management. A dedicated construction industry mediation centre ranked first (mean=4.02), suggesting strong consensus among practitioners that a specialized, sector-focused institution is crucial. This aligns with global research emphasizing sector-specific ADR mechanisms to handle the technical complexity of construction disputes (Dania et al., 2017). Dedicated centres provide mediators with industry-specific knowledge, a key factor in successful mediation outcomes (See-Wing, 2013).

Mandatory ADR clauses in contracts ranked second (mean=3.59), indicating respondents believe commitment to ADR should be formalized at project inception. This supports the use of multi-tiered dispute resolution clauses that force parties to attempt amicable resolution before litigation (Ugochukwu and Onyegiri, 2014).

Standardized contracts for instance *Fédération Internationale Des Ingénieurs Conseils* (FIDIC) – Federation of Construction Engineers ranked third (mean=3.25), highlighting their role in conflict avoidance through clear allocation of risks and responsibilities (Chan et al., 2017). Training on negotiation and mediation ranked fourth (mean=3.21), addressing behavioural and competency aspects of conflict management (Bell and Schmidt, 2021).

Table 4: *Conflict Management Framework for Kaduna*

Strategy	Mean Score	Rank	Decision
Dedicated construction industry mediation centre	4.02	1st	Accepted
Mandatory ADR clauses in contracts	3.59	2nd	Accepted
Standardized contracts (e.g., FIDIC) in the study area	3.25	3rd	Accepted
Training on negotiation and mediation	3.21	4th	Accepted

Source: *Researchers' 2026. Scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 5=Strongly agree.*

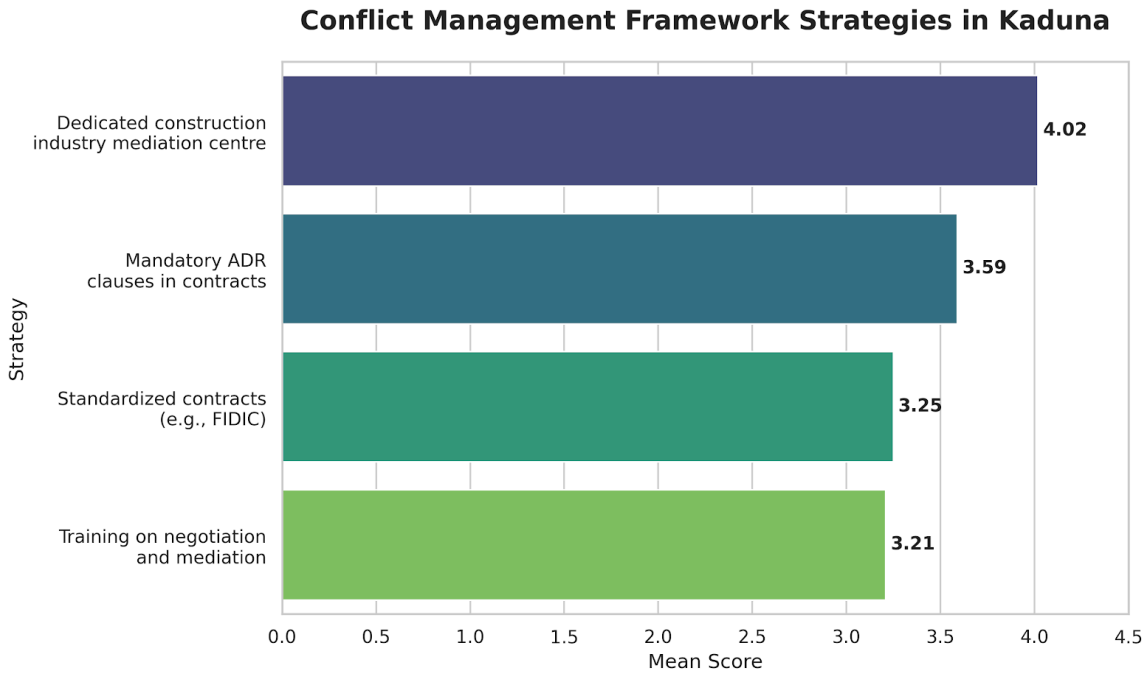

Figure 1: Conflict Management Framework Strategies in Kaduna

5. Discussion

The findings confirm that conflict is an inherent and inevitable feature of the Nigerian construction industry. The top-ranked causes-payment delays and poor communication-align with established literature (Jaffar et al., 2011; Mahamid, 2016). The Resource Curse Theory provides a macro-level explanation for these persistent issues: the volatility of resource revenue contributes to financial misconduct of public sector clients, and the secretive nature of resource profits fuels corruption in procurement (Williams, 2016).

The rejection of weak contract administration as a contributing factor (mean=2.98) is noteworthy. This may indicate that respondents perceive contract documents themselves as adequate, but the enforcement environment and financial realities undermine their effectiveness. This finding supports the argument that governance failure-not contractual inadequacy-is the fundamental driver of conflict in Kaduna's construction sector.

The strong support for a dedicated mediation centre (mean=4.02) reflects a desire for accessible, expert-driven, and culturally relevant dispute resolution mechanisms. This finding is significant because it moves beyond generic ADR recommendations and responds to the specific institutional context of Kaduna, where corruption and distrust have undermined formal legal processes (Aje et al., 2020).

The emphasis on mandatory ADR clauses (mean=3.59) and standardized contracts (mean=3.25) indicates that practitioners recognize the importance of proactive, contractually-enforced mechanisms. This aligns with the conflict transformation philosophy advocated by Lederach (1997), which addresses systemic causes rather than symptoms.

6. Conclusion

Conflict is an inherent and inevitable feature of the complex, multi-party environment of the Nigerian construction industry. The outcomes of conflict are determined entirely by the management approach adopted. Relying on traditional, adversarial methods leads to project failure and strained relationships. The study confirms that payment delays, poor communication, and unrealistic timelines are the most critical sources of conflict in Kaduna Metropolis.

The strong empirical support for a dedicated construction mediation centre, mandatory ADR clauses, and standardized contracts indicates a clear mandate from industry practitioners for a proactive, multi-tiered conflict management framework. Therefore, project stakeholders in Kaduna must strategically adopt collaborative and compromising conflict resolution techniques to ensure projects are delivered on time, within budget, and to the required quality standard.

7. Recommendations

Based on the empirical evidence, the following recommendations are put forth:

i. Establish a dedicated construction mediation centre in Kaduna Metropolis in collaboration with the government and professional bodies to provide accessible, expert-driven dispute resolution services.

ii. Mandate ADR clauses in all construction contracts, specifying a multi-step resolution procedure beginning with negotiation and mediation before escalating to arbitration or litigation.

iii. Adopt standardized contracts (e.g., FIDIC) that include clear allocation of risks, responsibilities, and change management procedures.

iv. Provide mandatory training for all project managers and site supervisors in negotiation, mediation, and collaborative conflict management techniques.

v. Implement formal communication protocols , including regular inter-stakeholder meetings and structured reporting, to proactively address potential conflicts before they escalate.

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