The Effect of Communication on the Administration of Tertiary Institutions: An In-depth Analysis

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Abstract

Effective communication is essential for the successful administration of tertiary institutions, influencing decision-making, policy implementation, and conflict resolution. Effective communication in the administration of tertiary institutions is essential for organizational success. This study examines the role of communication in managing tertiary institutions, using a random sample size of 200 individuals drawn from academic staff, administrative personnel, and students. The study analyzes the effectiveness of various communication channels, the clarity of institutional messages, and their impact on administrative efficiency, decision-making and its role in conflict resolution, this study offers insights into the significant role communication plays in institutional governance. The results show that while the use of traditional communication methods such as emails and meetings dominate, modern digital tools are underutilized. Additionally, while communication is generally clear and effective, some barriers persist, affecting decision-making and conflict resolution. The study concludes that communication has a significant impact on administrative efficiency and recommends improved use of digital platforms, transparency in decision-making and enhanced conflict management strategies. It also recommends enhanced communication strategies within tertiary institutions to foster greater organizational efficiency and harmony.

Key Words: Effective Communication' conflict management; tertiary institution

1. Introduction

Effective communication within tertiary institutions is integral to achieving administrative efficiency, student satisfaction, and institutional growth. It directly influences administrative decisions, resource allocation, conflict resolution, and the overall academic atmosphere. Universities, colleges, and other tertiary institutions are multi-layered organizations with a wide range of stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrative staff, and management. These stakeholders must receive timely, clear, and transparent communication for the smooth running of operations. Effective communication within educational institutions is paramount, Tertiary institutions are complex organizations with diverse stakeholders and strata. This intricate network requires streamlined and transparent communication practices to ensure all parties are informed, engaged, and aligned with institutional goals.

The communication process can be ineffective for many reasons. However, a key factor for success or failure is the personality of the communicators and their willingness to learn to communicate effectively and to recognize the need for communication (Brima et al. (2022). The concept of efficiency is multidimensional and a single definition cannot be given. The effectiveness of an educational institution depends on many factors that refer to every aspect of its activity (Stematis 2013). Identifying these factors will capture the characteristics of an effective educational institution. The interest in determining the factors of tertiary institution's effectiveness is demonstrated by the plethora of research that has been

carried out. The first person who established the key factors of effectiveness was Edmonds (Brima et al. 2022: Fisher, 2015. Parker & Savoie, 2016). According to him, an effective institution is determined by four factors: (1) strong management; (2) institution`s climate; (3) high expectations for student performance; (4) an emphasis on the acquisition of basic educational skills.

The educational institution`s effectiveness of communication is defined as the ability of the educational institution or organization to achieve its goals with the least possible waste of resources or with the body's ability to provide resources [Brima et al 2022]. The communication, as a concept, is complex and complicated. Generally, this is a form of interaction in which various messages are transmitted or exchanged.

Communication, as a concept, has attracted the interest of scholars and researchers of different scientific fields and backgrounds. It can have different interpretations and definitions depending on the approach followed or field of study. Generally speaking, this is a form of interaction in which various messages are transmitted or exchanged. It is the process through which a speaker or initiator is able to pass on information/ idea or concept (also known as encoding) and the ability of the receiver, hearer or the person spoken to is able to interpret and understand what is spoken is known as decoding. With the various technical definitions of communication available in all the literatures, communication is described as an interactive process between at least two people, the transmitter or sender and the receiver. This interactive process indicates that communication is a dynamic and constantly changing process depending on the nature and type of what is to be communicated or discussed.

In recent years, the evolution of communication technology has significantly altered the way institutions interact with their stakeholders. However, despite technological advancements, many institutions still rely on traditional communication methods. This study explores the impact of communication practices on administrative performance and examines whether communication affects decision-making, policy implementation, and conflict resolution within tertiary institutions.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the effect of communication on the administration of tertiary institutions. Through a sample size of 200 respondents, the research investigates the effectiveness of communication channels, the clarity of institutional messages, and the role of communication in decision-making and conflict resolution. The findings provide a detailed analysis of communication practices within these institutions and offer practical recommendations for improving administrative efficiency and effectiveness.

2. Background and Rationale

According to Brima et al (2022), communication is not a simple process of transmitting information but a complex process that presupposes the existence of basic structural elements that determine its effectiveness. The first structural element is "the source of the information or transmitter of the message". The role of the source is important in the communication process. The source needs to give a personal tone to their messages, which must be reliable and bring together their knowledge and experiences. The second is "codification". This is the process by which the transmitter is driven by the conception of the idea to the creation of the message. Ideas and perceptions take the form of fixed symbols, such as words, gestures, movements, numbers, and the tone of voice. The third is "message transmission", whereby the message is transmitted through a channel. The channels, or means of transmitting the message, are constantly increasing due to the rapid development of technology. The fourth is "decoding". This is a mental process in which the recipient of the message tries to interpret it and tries to turn it into information (whether meaningful or not). The latest is "message response and feedback". This is the phase at which the communication process is completed. According to Stamatis (2013), from the process of communication, it becomes clear that its effectiveness is related to the ability of people to understand and interpret in order to interact. The feedback process is in which the sender knows that the recipient has received or decoded the message and is understood in a way that responds to the sender's intention. This proves that real communication is reciprocal. The communication purpose is fulfilled when both the transmitter and the receiver understand each other perfectly.

Communication constitutes a crucial factor in each organization and has great importance for goal achievement in each organization as the persons involved cultivate a team spirit and unite their forces by communicating with each other. They obtain a common vision and manage their behaviors so that they correspond to their common goals. The role of the hierarchical culture in effecting change in organizations provides new and significant insights into organizational culture regarding change management issues and the challenges facing such organizations]. Communication in the educational institution is the basis on which the educational practice and principles are built. It is the process that leads to the achievement of its goals.

Communication within educational institutions typically involves multiple channels. For instance, formal communication may include meetings, emails, and official memos, while informal communication could encompass social media interactions, word of mouth, and casual conversations. Understanding the effectiveness of these channels in the context of administrative functions is crucial for fostering transparency and efficiency. In many tertiary institutions, communication often occurs through multiple channels, including formal meetings, informal conversations, emails, social media, notice boards, and other institutional media. However, the effectiveness of these communication methods in managing the institution's administrative functions is rarely systematically assessed. Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings, inefficiencies, delays in decision-making, and conflicts between staff and students.

Poor communication within tertiary institutions can lead to delays in decision-making, misunderstandings between staff and students, and inefficiencies in policy implementation. Furthermore, a lack of transparent communication has been linked to administrative dissatisfaction and negative student outcomes (Fisher, 2015). On the other hand, research suggests that institutions that employ clear and timely communication practices experience better decision-making and smoother conflict resolution (Parker & Savoie, 2016).

The effectiveness of human interaction can be compromised by obstacles that might arise.

According to Brima et al. (2022), Farrell introduced the factors of educational institution`s effectiveness to be the ability of the institution to integrate staff, other employees and students who are experiencing difficulties and to be interested in their learning and progress. According to (Stematis, 2013: Sussman, 2014: Parker & Savoie, 2016), effective schools are determined by the cooperation between school and family, the professional administration, and the organization of the school environment, as well as having high expectations. The concept of the school climate is directly related to a number of special internal features, which set the identity of each educational institution and differentiate it from the rest [19]. As with any organization, problems and conflicts also arise at school. In a positive school environment, problems are solved via democratic methods and cooperative strategies are adopted in conflict management. Conflicts are addressed in such away as to satisfy all parties, improving the relationships of those involved as well as their ability to deal with upcoming conflicts in a constructive way.

A necessary element for the development of staff and other employees and their active involvement in institutional issues is the cultivation of team spirit by the leaders. Those principals and senior management who prioritize the human factor cultivate an open communication climate, and as managing executives have a leadership role and strive to achieve a common vision in conditions of mutual trust. In contrast, those who perceive their role as being coordinators with an emphasis on management cannot effectively support staff and instill a common vision. This results in the formation of a negative institutional climate that does not contribute to the effective operation of the institution. The institution's leadership and the policy-makers who cultivate an open communication climate can effectively enhance the academic achievement of students in a school context (Brima et al. 2022: Parker & Savoie, 2016: Fisher, 2015: Sussman, 2014: Wright, 2013 & Stamatis, 2013).

Effective communication supports a productive academic environment by: Facilitating decision-making processes. Promoting transparency and trust between administrators, faculty, and students. Resolving conflicts through clear and direct dialogues amongst workers paves way for a better employee satisfaction and effective communication while ensuring smooth policy implementation and adherence to regulations. Despite the critical role communication plays, there is a need for a comprehensive study that investigates the impact of communication on the administration of tertiary institutions, particularly within the context of evolving digital communication channels.

3. Research Objectives

This study is guided by the following objectives:

To evaluate the effectiveness of communication channels used within tertiary institutions.

To analyze the clarity and transparency of institutional mode of communication,

To assess the relationship between communication effectiveness and decision-making processes.

To determine the role of communication in resolving conflicts within institutions,

The research seeks to explore whether effective communication can contribute to better management practices, reduce delays in decision-making, and mitigate conflicts between staff and students.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Communication in Educational Administration

Communication is the process of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, feelings, or messages between individuals or groups through various methods, including verbal, non-verbal, written, and digital means. It is a fundamental human activity that helps in the creation, sharing, and understanding of information in all aspects of life—whether in personal relationships, work environments, or large organizational structures. Communication is broadly classified into several categories like Verbal Communication involving the use of words, either spoken or written. It includes face-to-face conversations, phone calls, emails, and any form of communication that uses language. Non-verbal Communication includes body language, facial expressions, gestures, posture, and eye contact which often conveys emotions and reactions, sometimes more powerfully than words.

In the context of educational institutions, communication can be divided into formal and informal channels. Formal communication often referred to as "grapevine" communication involves structured and official channels such as emails, meetings, memos and other official documents, while informal communication includes casual conversations, emails, social interactions, interpersonal exchanges and other unofficial channels. Research has shown that a combination of both formal and informal channels can be highly effective in facilitating decision-making and fostering a positive

institutional culture. Studies also suggest that both formal and informal communication contribute to the functioning of tertiary institutions. According to Wright (2013), an institution's communication framework should strike a balance between the two types, ensuring that important information reaches all stakeholders, while also fostering an environment where informal communication is encouraged.

4.2 Communication and Administrative Efficiency

Effective communication in administrative practices has been shown to improve decision-making processes, enhance clarity in policy implementation, and contribute to organizational success. Sussman (2014) argues that communication breakdowns within university management can lead to inefficiency, delays in decision-making and diminished trust among stakeholders. Additionally, clear communication between departments ensures that resources are allocated efficiently, and policies are understood and followed correctly.

Several studies indicate that effective communication is a critical factor influencing administrative efficiency. Miscommunication or a lack of communication can lead to delays in processes, poor decision-making, and a lack of accountability. For example, studies by Savoie (2016) and Sussman (2014) suggest that clear communication in universities leads to quicker decision-making and more efficient resource management. Furthermore, open communication has been linked to higher levels of trust between administrators and faculty members, which in turn improves overall institutional performance.

4.3 Communication and Conflict Resolution

Communication in conflict resolution refers to the process of exchanging information, ideas, and emotions in a constructive manner to address and resolve disagreements or disputes. It involves clear, respectful dialogue that helps all parties understand each other's perspectives, express their needs, and work collaboratively toward a mutually agreeable solution. Effective communication in conflict resolution can de-escalate tension, promote understanding, and facilitate problem-solving, ultimately leading to a peaceful and positive resolution of conflicts. . Parker and Savoie (2016) say communication is essential for conflict resolution in organizations, particularly in educational institutions, by helping parties understand issues, express concerns, and work toward solutions. Clear communication channels promote transparency, prevent misunderstandings, and mitigate disputes, fostering a collaborative environment. Without effective communication, misunderstandings can escalate into significant conflicts, disrupting institutional operations. In educational institutions, communication is not only vital for resolving conflicts but also for managing and developing the organization through transparency and trust. Open, ongoing dialogue helps address issues early, ensuring smooth operations and institutional growth.

The role of communication in conflict resolution is well-documented. Conflict between staff and students or within the administrative body can be minimized or resolved through effective communication. According to a study by Parker and Savoie (2016), institutions that foster clear and transparent communication systems are better equipped to manage conflicts and maintain a harmonious environment. Communication is the backbone of conflict resolution. It fosters understanding, empathy, and cooperation, which are key to resolving conflicts in a constructive manner. By promoting open, respectful, and clear dialogue, individuals and groups can manage disagreements effectively, leading to resolutions that benefit all parties involved. Whether in personal relationships, organizational settings, or international diplomacy, communication remains an essential tool in preventing and resolving conflicts. Effective communication in institutional management, development and conflict resolution within educational institutions assert that clear communication channels help mitigate disputes by promoting transparency and offering a platform for addressing grievances. Without open channels, misunderstandings can escalate into more significant conflicts that hinder the smooth running of institutional operations.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative approach, using structured questionnaires to gather data. A total of 200 participants, including 100 students, 50 academic staff, and 50 administrative personnel from the Eastern Technical University of Sierra Leone Njala University Sierra Leone and the Kenema ICT and Management College were selected for the survey. The sample was stratified to ensure the representation of all major stakeholders within the institutions.

This study adopts a quantitative research design, using structured questionnaires to collect data from 200 participants. The respondents were selected from a range of departments within the three institutions to ensure diverse representation. The sample included 100 students, 50 academic staff, and 50 administrative personnel. The questionnaire was designed to gather information on the frequency and effectiveness of communication methods, the clarity of institutional messages, and the perceived impact of communication on decision-making and conflict resolution

5.2 Data Collection

Data was collected through an online and in-person survey, where respondents answered questions about their experiences and perceptions of communication within their institutions. The survey included multiple-choice questions and Likert scale questions (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), focusing on the use and effectiveness of communication channels, the transparency of institutional decisions, and the role of communication in conflict resolution.

The primary method of data collection was a questionnaire, which was distributed both in-person and electronically. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions to assess respondents' opinions on communication practices within the institution. Data was collected over a four-week period, and respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

5.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) to summarize the use and effectiveness of communication channels. Inferential statistics (correlation analysis) were employed to examine the relationship between communication practices and administrative outcomes, such as decision-making efficiency and conflict resolution.

The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) to determine the most commonly used communication channels and the perceived effectiveness of these methods. Inferential statistics, including correlation analysis, were used to explore relationships between communication effectiveness and administrative outcomes.

6. Results

6.1 Communication Channels

The study found that the most commonly used communication channels were emails (60%), meetings (55%), and notice boards (48%). Social media and other digital platforms were less frequently used, with only 32% of respondents reporting usage.

Table 1: Frequency of Communication Channels Used

Communication Channel	Percentage of Respondents Using It (%)
Email	60%
Meetings	55%
Notice Boards	48%
Social Media	32%
Others	12%

Analysis: The effectiveness of each communication channel was rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most effective. Emails and meetings were rated the highest, with average scores of 4.2 and 4.0, respectively. However, social media was rated the lowest, with an average score of 2.8. This indicates that, while social media is increasingly used, it is still considered less effective for formal communication compared to traditional channels. The results indicate that traditional channels (emails and meetings) are preferred by the respondents, while digital communication tools are not fully integrated into the institutional communication framework. This is consistent with the findings of Wright (2013), who suggests that many institutions are slow to adopt new communication technologies.

6.2 Clarity and Transparency of Communication

In terms of clarity and transparency, 68% of respondents felt that communication within the institution was clear and transparent. However, 25% reported ambiguity, particularly in relation to policy changes, while 7% felt that communication was rarely transparent.

Table 2: Perceived Clarity and Transparency of Communication

Response Category	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Clear and Transparent	68%
Ambiguous	25%
Rarely Transparent	7%

Analysis: When asked about the clarity and transparency of communication within the institution, 68% of respondents agreed that communication was generally clear and transparent. However, 25% of respondents felt that communication was often ambiguous, especially regarding policy changes and administrative decisions. Only 7% of respondents felt that communication was rarely transparent. A majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with the clarity of communication, but a significant portion noted that some policies were not communicated clearly. These findings align with the work of Fisher (2015), who emphasizes that transparency in decision-making enhances trust and improves institutional governance.

6.3 Impact on Decision-Making

When asked about the impact of communication on decision-making, 75% of respondents agreed that clear communication facilitated timely and effective decision-making. However, 20% of respondents indicated that communication failures had delayed or complicated decisions. A significant majority (75%) of respondents agreed that effective communication contributed positively to decision-making processes. However,

20% felt that delays or miscommunication had negatively impacted decision-making in specific cases. This highlights the critical role of timely and clear communication in ensuring administrative efficiency.

Table 3: Impact of Communication on Decision-Making

Response Category	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Positive Impact	75%
Negative Impact	20%
No Impact	5%

Analysis: Effective communication is seen as a major enabler of efficient decision-making. However, the 20% of respondents who reported negative impacts suggest that communication failures still occur, particularly when important decisions are not communicated quickly enough. A significant majority (75%) of respondents agreed that effective communication contributed positively to decision-making processes. However, 20% felt that delays or miscommunication had negatively impacted decision-making in specific cases. This highlights the critical role of timely and clear communication in ensuring administrative efficiency.

6.4 Communication and Conflict Resolution

In terms of conflict resolution, 18% of respondents agreed that communication played a significant role in resolving conflicts between staff and students. However, 63% indicated that poor communication had aggravated conflicts, and 19% believed communication did not help resolve disputes.

Table 4: Role of Communication in Conflict Resolution

Response Category	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Significant Role	18%
Aggravated Conflicts	63%
No Impact	19%

Analysis: While clear communication is seen as crucial in conflict resolution, a notable portion of respondents reported that communication failures contributed to unresolved conflicts. This finding underscores the importance of timely, clear, and transparent communication when addressing disputes.

7. Discussion

The findings highlight several important insights:

Prevalence of Traditional Communication: The dominance of email and meetings as communication methods suggests that tertiary institutions are still relying on traditional forms of communication. However, the low utilization of social media and digital platforms indicates that there is untapped potential in leveraging modern communication tools. Traditional channels like emails and meetings dominate, but there is room for growth in adopting digital communication platforms that could engage younger audiences (e.g., students).

Clarity and Transparency: While most respondents felt that communication was clear, the 25% who reported ambiguity suggest that institutions need to enhance clarity, particularly around policy changes and administrative decisions. While a majority of respondents felt communication was clear, a substantial portion expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of transparency in certain administrative processes. Clarity and transparency of communication within the institution help in the fast growth of such as worker are included in the communication process at almost all levels without much secrecy. This enables collaboration among workers and increase work coordination, peer/ group work and competitiveness. However, when many workers feel that communication is often ambiguous, especially regarding policy changes and administrative decisions will demotivate them and reduces their outputs like in the case of a significant number of this study`s respondents.

Impact on Decision-Making: Effective communication was strongly linked to efficient decision-making. Delays and confusion in communication are factors that hindered prompt and informed decision-making. Effective communication was crucial for decision-making, with a clear correlation between communication practices and timely, informed decisions.

Conflict Resolution: Communication is central to conflict resolution, but ineffective communication can exacerbate existing conflicts. Tertiary institutions must prioritize clear communication in conflict management processes. Clear communication can significantly reduce conflicts, but breakdowns in communication can escalate tensions, particularly when decisions are not communicated in a timely manner or done in secrecy.

Each educational organization has its own culture that determines the communication climate, such as the atmosphere and conditions within which ideas, information, actions, and feelings are exchanged. Effective communication presupposes an open communication climate that provides

security to people and encourages them to take initiatives aimed at improving the functioning of the organization. In this climate, the communicating members develop equal communication relationships with each other and learn to cooperate and understand each other without any hindrance. The principal of each educational institution, as the first among equals in the institution, is a decisive factor and player in shaping a supportive communication climate.

8. Conclusions

The findings show that, if the degree of staff satisfaction from the communication, significantly predicts its effectiveness. Therefore, an effective communication system should be an issue for everyone involved in educational institutions or organizations. However, given the particular identity of each educational institution, it was concluded that an effective communication network in a staff category association like the Academic Staff, Junior Staff and Senior Supporting Staff Associations, had teamwork and a positive communication effect on each member, despite their particular individual or labour characteristics. The present study highlights the need for staff members and other employees to be aware of the criteria by which their work is judged, as participants have a low level of satisfaction with the feedback they receive from their departmental heads and the central administration. Our study could contribute to the discussion around the need for lecturers and other workers/ employees to receive feedbacks in order to improve their educational work or output. The respondents who participated in this research ruminated that there is no smooth coexistence between some workers in same or other departments while some see their institutional administrations as leaders that are bias and selective. Staff with additional education were more parsimonious and frugal in characterizing their educational institution as effective, as shown by the results of the present research. Nonetheless, without underestimating the impact of training programs that set common objectives in all educational institutions.

This study demonstrates that communication significantly impacts the administration of tertiary institutions. While effective communication is essential for decision-making and conflict resolution, traditional channels dominate, and there is room for improvement in adopting modern communication tools. The findings suggest that communication breakdowns are often linked to delays in decision-making and conflicts, particularly when transparency and clarity are lacking. This study demonstrates that communication is a critical factor in the successful administration of tertiary institutions. Effective communication facilitates better decision-making, enhances transparency, and aids in conflict resolution. However, the results also point to areas where communication can be improved, particularly in terms of utilizing modern communication tools and ensuring transparency in decision-making processes.

9. Recommendations

Adopt Digital Communication Tools: Tertiary institutions should integrate digital platforms, such as mobile apps and social media, to engage with students and staff more effectively, particularly for real-time updates. Adopt Digital Communication Tools: Institutions should invest in mobile apps and other digital tools to enhance communication, particularly with students.

Enhance Training on Communication Skills: Regular workshops should be conducted to improve communication skills across the institution, including training faculty and staff in using digital tools effectively. Training Programs: Regular workshops should be organized to improve communication skills among faculty, staff, and students.

Increase Transparency in Decision-Making: Institutions should implement measures to ensure that decision-making processes are communicated clearly and transparently, reducing confusion and fostering trust. Transparent Decision-Making especially those affecting students and staff, are to be communicated transparently and in a timely manner. Develop Conflict Management Protocols: Institutions should establish clear protocols for addressing conflicts, ensuring that communication is at the forefront of conflict resolution strategies. Conflict Management Training with effective communication should be integrated into conflict resolution strategies, with mediation training for staff and administrators.

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