Kaduna State University Environmental Science Journal (KESJ)
Website: *https://kesj.org.ng* ***ISSN:*** *2734-2751*
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Volume 6, Issue 1, May 2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.66884/kesj.2026.j5468b8l

EVALUATION OF THE EFFECT OF DISPUTES ON REAL ESTATE MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE IN AKURE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *This study evaluated the effects of disputes on real estate management performance in Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria. Specifically, it examines financial implications, degraded relationships, threats to life and property, unrealized management objectives, property obsolescence, and devaluation of property as consequences of unresolved disputes. The study therefore highlights the role of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms as a strategic framework for mitigating these effects and enhancing real estate management performance.*

Design/Methodology/Approach: *A survey research design was adopted, utilising both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to all thirty-two (32) registered Estate Surveying and Valuation firms in Akure, of which twenty-three (23) valid responses were retrieved, representing a 71.9% response rate. Data were analysed using descriptive (weighted mean score (WMS) and standard deviation) and inferential (one-sample t-test) statistical analysis to determine the statistical significance of each identified effect. A 5-point Likert scale was applied: Very High (VH) = 5, High (H) = 4, Somewhat High (SH) = 3, Low (L) = 2, Very Low (VL) = 1.*

Findings: *Financial implications (mean = 4.39), degraded relationships (mean = 4.26), and threats to life and property (mean = 4.17) were identified as the most severe effects of disputes in real estate management, each exceeding the grand mean threshold. Unrealised objectives (mean = 3.78), property obsolescence (mean = 3.43), and devaluation of property (mean = 3.35) were found to be less frequent but remain significant. One-sample t-tests confirmed that the top three effects were statistically significant at the 0.05 level, reinforcing the reliability of the descriptive findings.* ***Research Limitations/Implications:*** *The study is limited to registered Estate Surveying and Valuation firms in Akure, and the small sample size (n = 23) restricts generalisation. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on dispute management in the Nigerian real estate sector by empirically substantiating the consequences of unresolved disputes.*

Practical Implications: *It is recommended that property managers and regulators prioritise the adoption of ADR mechanisms to reduce financial losses, preserve stakeholder relationships, and improve the overall sustainability of real estate management.*

Originality/Value: *The study provides empirical evidence of the effects of disputes in real estate management in a Nigerian urban area and demonstrates that unresolved disputes carry measurable,*

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ranked consequences. It also bridges a gap in the literature by linking dispute effects to ADR adoption imperatives in the Nigerian real estate sector.
Keywords: Akure; Alternative Dispute Resolution; Dispute; Nigeria; Property Management; Real Estate Management

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Divergences in opinions, views, perspectives and understanding often lead to disputes or conflicts. These situations are unavoidable in real estate transactions due to the diverse interests involved. This is due to the fact that in the real estate transaction, a relationship is established, and that which was established may produce divergent opinions and if not handled well may give rise to a conflict of interest in the long term. Dispute is an attendant property of human relationship (Oyetunji & Ajayi, 2016). Human interactions within the real estate sector naturally give rise to disagreements and misunderstandings among stakeholders. The real estate industry is one where human activity can bring about dispute (Okpaleke et al., 2014).

According to Olukolajo *et al*. (2021), conflicting interests are a common and unavoidable aspect of real estate interactions. This may be because of the complexity of the property market and the heterogeneous character of the players in the market. Griffin (2002) also observed that dispute is an unavoidable part of interpersonal relationships. Efforts by individuals to reach shared goals can result in differing viewpoints that may strain their professional or personal relationships. This is because people are expected to have competing interests as they deal with one another. If the competing claims are not well managed, it could lead to dispute (Agbi, 2013). However, Hellriegel and Slocum (2004) asserted that conflict might negatively or positively help problem-solving, sound decision-making and enhance innovations, thus increasing productivity. Almusdy (2007) and Tjosvold (2006, 2008) further affirmed that dispute is unavoidable. However, it may negatively affect the parties involved if not adequately managed. It has been realized that the impact of any argument on any transaction is dependent on how it is managed (Mullins, 2005; Adomi & Anie, 2006; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). Although several studies have addressed real estate management issues, limited research specifically examines how effective Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods are among real estate professionals. It is against this background that the study is focused on evaluating the effect of dispute on real estate management performance in Akure, Nigeria, using appropriate indicators.

The study assesses the effectiveness of adopting ADR in dispute resolution in real estate management using indicators such as cost effectiveness, operational efficiency, time consumption, acceptance of resolution, and preservation of good working relationship amongst disputants in the real estate sector. The selection of Akure, Ondo State, as the geographical focus of this study is premised on the neverending nature of dispute often caused by the locals living in the region. The persistent practice of some customary norms has played an important role in ensuring dispute never ends in every area of their dealing and most especially in relation to real estate management.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Real estate management can be simplified as relating to the hard elements of the building; finding it, assessing its suitability against senior management brief, checking a long list of issues involve reviewing an extensive list of concerns in relation to specific needs and requirements, and overseeing tasks such as planning, accessibility, communication, and modifications (Scarrett & Wilcox, 2018). Although real estate management and property management are fundamentally distinct (Scarrett & Wilcox, 2018), this research employs these terms interchangeably to illustrate the approach taken by Nigerian Estate Surveying and Valuation firms in managing both long-term asset strategies and everyday operations (Olukolajo et al., 2021).

Property management broadly describes the organised oversight of a property and its facilities on behalf of the owner, encompassing routine responsibilities such as rent collection, maintenance, and occupant services, while increasingly extending toward proactive measures aimed at sustaining and enhancing the long-term value and performance of the asset (Muczyński, 2023). Knight (2013) categorized property management services as rent and services charge collection, lease management and building maintenance, advice on tenants' request to assign, sublet or undertake alterations. It also includes coordination of specialist services, advice on security, energy and insurance procurement; accurate, incisive and timely client reporting.

This is also corroborated by Cornerstone Real Estate Services (2014) which stressed that property management services include the following: Ensuring proper maintenance of all common area, building structure, mechanical systems and units are clean and presentable for leasing or sale purposes. It also involves coordination of move-ins and move-outs, management of all building financial including tenant rent collection and vendor payment, obtaining competitive bid for property maintenance and liability insurance on developments and monitor an annual budget aimed at reducing cost and maximizing services. Others are initiating and overseeing real estate.

In all cases, disputes are a natural part of human interaction and people in dispute, whether at the individual or group level, perceive that their goals or interests are contradicted by the goals or interests of the other party; and according to Bar-Tal (2000), outbreak of dispute is dependent on the appearance of particular perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and motivations, all of which must change for dispute to be resolved.

According to Ojielo (2001), conflicts arise from multiple causes and typically progress through several phases which begins with the warning stage, followed by the problem's emergence, escalation, violent confrontation, de-escalation, and finally, resolution. Oyetunji and Ajayi (2016) affirmed that dispute often arises due to misrepresentation, backbiting, and envy in real estate management.

According to Olukolajo *et al.* (2021), dispute is "an explicit strife that involves more than one party with differences in opinion, goals, values, and beliefs". Man's survival cannot be in obscurity; hence associating with others becomes imperative. Therefore, a dispute is unavoidable and very common when relating with others especially among owners and occupiers of land and landed properties (Oyeshola, 2005).

Kassab *et al*. (2010) affirmed that dispute remains a bone of contention in real estate with the probability of causing project failures and abandonment. Also, Patzak and Rattay (2012) posited that dispute is variation and conflicting opinion causing various forms of emotional involvement, and often impede successful real estate negotiation.

Mbazor and Ojo (2019) commented that land disputes as experienced in different parts of Nigeria have strong effect on rural and urban socio-economic development. Land disputes have disastrous and lifethreatening effects on individuals as well as on groups, communities and even nations. In real estate management, dispute often emerges as a result of difficult framework conditions (Olukolajo et al., 2021).

Thus, these statements have built a solid foundation to evaluate the effects of disputes in real estate management. By evaluating the effects of disputes in real estate management in the study area, it will help to understand the extent to which disputes can or has affected the stakeholders, socio- economic development as well as the property itself.

Okpaleke *et al.* (2014) noted that real estate disputes would hamper the associated returns and overall multiplier benefits to the economy when not well managed and resolved. An empirical study conducted by Okpaleke *et al*. (2014) shows that landlord and tenant dispute over outstanding rent and possession of a six (6) bedroom duplex, room B/Q in Ikeja CBD and Capital of Lagos State resulted in loss of rent to the sum of ₦2,547,850.00, covering court awarded but unpaid non market rent for three (3) years plus differential, damage to property and neglected repairs and wilful damage assessed at over ₦2,000,000.00, Unpaid utility bills i.e. electricity bill, water rate, tenement rate etc. This doesn't include the cost of litigation of ₦650, 000.00. From the result of this study, it can be concluded that dispute in real estate management attracts heavy financial implications especially on the part of the property owner. This cost will have an adverse effect on the financial projections of the manager.

Rahim (2023) posited that unresolved disputes negatively affect performance, satisfaction, and working relationships. Also, Lebovits and Hidalgo (2009) expressed that real estate involves many intertwined relationships between individuals of varying backgrounds, to which dispute can occur between the parties during transactions. Dispute can in this regard tear down trust and goodwill built by the parties over time which can result in bitterness and personal grievances.

Fisher and Collins (2019) explained in their research that rental and other income-generating properties experience an average of 10-15% reduction in value when there is an ongoing dispute. Also, Illankoon *et al*. (2022) found that real estate properties entangled in legal disputes experience value depreciation of about 20% compared to similar uncontested properties. Dispute in real estate management brings about encumbrance that reduce the value of properties. From the buyer's standpoint, properties in dispute are perceive to be inconvenient, uncertain and brings about questions on its profitability before proceeding with the transaction.

When there is dispute in real estate management, it can lead to abandonment and delayed maintenance especially when the cause of the dispute is a question of who is to carry out maintenance of a part or specific building component. As observed by Olanrewaju and Abdul-Aziz (2015), parties in dispute will halt every maintenance action on the property until the dispute is resolved. Refusal and unwillingness to carry out timely and sound maintenance will influence rapid deterioration of the property, reduce the useful life of the property and hasten the property into obsolescence.

Patzak and Rattay (2012) noted that conflict is considered a threat to life because they are known with negative emotions such as anger and hatred. Improper management of disputes could lead to an escalating response, ultimately leading to violence and long-term fission of society, leading to accumulation of animosity, hatred, loss of life, loss of properties, and prejudice (Olukolajo, 2012). Oyetunji and Ajayi (2016) affirmed that the outcomes of disputes can include criminal prosecution, property damage, financial and time losses, harm to landlords' assets, physical injuries to those involved, incidents of poisoning and death, loss of trust, increased noise and disorder, and overall discomfort for neighbouring residents.

When dispute arise in real estate management, it leads to disruption in the flow of management of the property. This disruption will therefore affect the proposed timeline set by the manager to achieve some set goals. During the period of dispute, energy and resources are expended on resolving dispute either through litigation or ADR leaving the objectives to be set aside and unattended to. It is more affirmed when Uff (2009) emphasized that disputes in property and construction projects tend to divert attention from planned outcomes, increase transaction costs, and hinder effective project delivery.

3.0 AREA OF THE STUDY

Akure is a city in south-western Nigeria, and is the capital of Ondo State. It was created in 1976 and located on longitude 7'20'N and at latitude 5' East of Greenwich meridian and has a total area of 332 square kilometres (Oni, 2008). The estimated population of the city is 744,371 (seven hundred and forty-four thousand, three hundred and seventy-one) in 2023. Akure which is located in south western Nigeria has two major local governments, Akure North and South which will be covered in entirety for this study. Akure has experienced rapid urbanisation in recent decades, resulting in increased demand for residential and commercial real estate, a surge in the number of registered estate surveying firms, and a commensurate rise in property-related disputes. The persistence of customary land tenure practices, boundary encroachments, landlord-tenant conflicts, and management failures have made dispute resolution a pressing concern for real estate practitioners in the city. Figure 1 shows the map of Ondo State indicating the location of Akure.

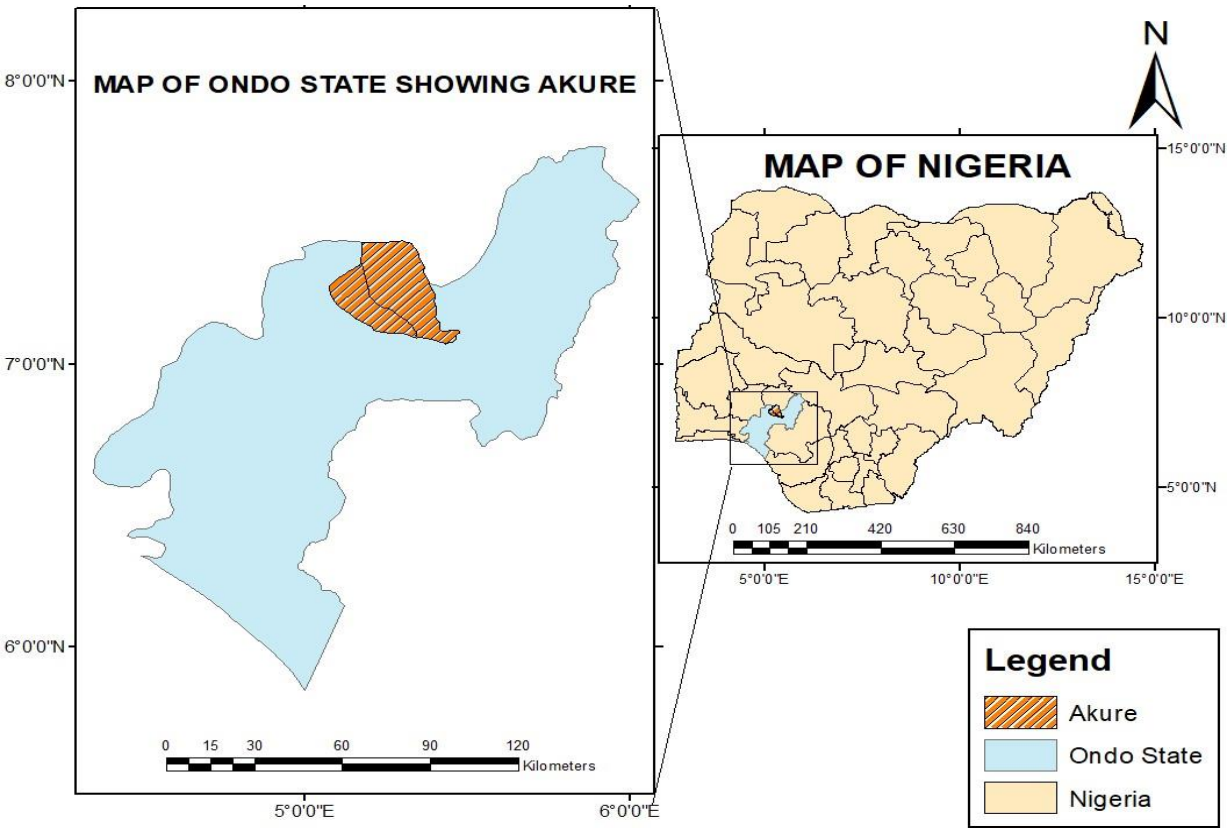


Figure 1: Map of Ondo State Showing the Study Area (Akure)
Source: Author's Field Survey, 2025

4.0 METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the systematic procedures used to collect data and generate knowledge through empirical investigation. According to Fasakin (2002), it encompasses the specific methods and strategies used in identifying, gathering, processing, and interpreting research data. This study adopted a survey research design, which is appropriate for studies seeking to measure the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of a defined population regarding a specific phenomenon (Babbie, 2007). Both primary and secondary data were utilised. Secondary data were sourced from journals, textbooks, and prior studies on dispute management in real estate. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to all thirty-two (32) registered Estate Surveying and Valuation firms operating in Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria, as listed in the official register of the Nigerian Institution of Estate Surveyors and Valuers (NIESV) at the time of the study.

As defined by Smith (2014), sample size represents the quantity of observations utilized for generating estimates pertaining to a specific population. It is important to note that the sample size is drawn from the sampling frame, which comprises a subset of subjects, events, or objects taken from a larger group referred to as the population or universe. A census approach was adopted given the manageable size of the target population. Out of the 32 questionnaires administered, 23 valid responses were retrieved, representing a 71.9% response rate. According to Babbie (2007), a response rate of 50% is acceptable, 60% is good, and 70% or above is excellent; the 71.9% achieved in this study is therefore considered adequate. The questionnaire was structured in two sections: Section A captured the demographic profile of respondents (designation, years of experience, firm size), while Section B assessed the effects of disputes in real estate management using a 5-point Likert scale: Very High (VH) = 5, High (H) = 4, Somewhat High (SH) = 3, Low (L) = 2, Very Low (VL) = 1. Respondents were drawn from principal partners and senior estate surveyors with direct experience of dispute management in their firms.

Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive analysis employed the Weighted Mean Score (WMS) and standard deviation (SD) to assess the magnitude of each identified effect of dispute. The WMS was computed using the formula: $WMS = \Sigma(f \times x) / N$, where f represents the frequency of responses, x the scale value, and N the total number of respondents. A grand mean (3.90) was derived as the mean of all individual weighted mean scores, serving as the decision threshold: effects with $WMS \geq 3.90$ were classified as high-perception effects (i.e., more probable and impactful), while those with $WMS < 3.90$ were classified as low-perception effects (i.e., less frequent but still significant). To provide inferential validation, a one-sample t-test was conducted for each identified effect to determine whether the observed mean scores differed significantly from the neutral midpoint (3.0) of the Likert scale. This test allowed for statistical confirmation of the significance of each effect beyond descriptive ranking. A significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was adopted. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 25.0.

5.0 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieval

This section presents analysed data collected for the study. The data are structured and analysed according to the research goals to uncover significant patterns, connections, and insights.

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieval

Category	Distributed Frequency	Distributed Percentage	Retrieved Frequency	Retrieved Percentage
Estate Surveying & Valuation Firms	32	100%	23	71.9%

Source: *Author's Field Survey, 2025*

Table 1 shows the distribution and retrieval of data for the study. The Table shows that out of thirtytwo (32) questionnaires administered to Estate Surveying and Valuation firms in Akure, a total of twenty-three (23) questionnaires were retrieved successfully representing (71.9%) of the sample size adopted for the study.

5.2 Effects of Disputes in Real Estate Management

Table 2 presents the effects of disputes in real estate management as perceived by respondents, ranked in descending order by weighted mean score. The grand mean of 3.90 was used as the decision threshold: effects with $WMS \geq 3.90$ are classified as high-perception effects (probable and frequent), while those below are low-perception effects (less frequent but still significant). T-test results confirming the statistical significance of each effect at the 0.05 level are also presented.

Table 2: Effects of Disputes in Real Estate Management

Effects of Dispute	VH (5)	H (4)	SH (3)	L (2)	VL (1)	WMS	Rank	SD	t-value	Sig.
Financial implications	13	8	0	2	0	4.39	1st	0.891	8.47	0.000
Degraded relationship	13	5	3	2	0	4.26	2nd	1.010	6.27	0.000
Threat to life & property	12	7	2	0	2	4.17	3rd	1.193	4.70	0.001
Unrealised objectives	5	10	6	2	0	3.78	4th	0.902	4.16	0.000
Property obsolescence	6	4	9	2	2	3.43	5th	1.237	1.58	0.129
Devaluation of property	3	9	6	3	2	3.35	6th	1.152	1.46	0.159
Grand Mean						**3.90**				

Source: *Author's Field Survey, 2025*

Financial implications emerged as the most severe effect of disputes in real estate management, with a WMS of 4.39, a standard deviation of 0.891, and a highly significant t-value ($t = 8.47$, $p < 0.001$). The relatively low standard deviation suggests strong consensus among respondents. This finding aligns with Olukolajo (2012), who noted that unresolved disputes in real estate frequently led to considerable financial strain on property owners through legal costs, unpaid rent, and reputational damage that diminishes income-generating potential. Fisher and Collins (2019) similarly demonstrated that prolonged disputes impose direct economic costs on all parties and suppress transaction activity in affected markets.

Degraded relationships ranked second with a WMS of 4.26 (SD = 1.010; $t = 6.27$, $p < 0.001$). The slightly higher standard deviation reflects more varied perceptions, possibly due to differences in the intensity and nature of disputes experienced by different firms. This finding is consistent with Rahim (2023) and Lebovits and Hidalgo (2009), whose study found that post-dispute relationships among real estate disputants were significantly diminished, with lasting negative effects on trust and cooperative behaviour. In the Nigerian context, where real estate transactions are often underpinned by personal and professional networks, relationship degradation represents a major operational risk.

Threat to life and property ranked third with a WMS of 4.17 (SD = 1.193; $t = 4.70$, $p = 0.001$). The higher variability suggests differing exposure to violent or high-risk disputes among respondents. This is consistent with the findings of Illankoon *et al*. (2022), who documented that real estate-related disputes in Nigeria frequently escalate to physical confrontations, building insecurity, and even kidnapping where formal ADR mechanisms are absent.

The three remaining effects which includes unrealised objectives (WMS = 3.78), property obsolescence (WMS = 3.43), and devaluation of property (WMS = 3.35) all fall below the grand mean threshold of 3.90 and were not found to be statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p = 0.129$ and $p = 0.159$, respectively). They are therefore classified as low-perception effects: less frequent in their occurrence but still meaningful consequences of dispute that warrant attention in comprehensive property management planning. Kassab *et al.* (2010) noted that property disputes, if left unresolved, can result in asset abandonment and functional obsolescence, consistent with these findings.

6.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary of Findings

The most impactful consequence observed was financial loss sustained from legal expenses and unpaid rent. Disputes also lead to the breakdown of relationships between property managers, landlords, and tenants which often result in bitterness and mistrust. In more severe cases, disputes posed threats to personal safety and the security of property. The findings from this study are not farfetched from the result of Olukolajo *et. al*. (2021) which states that real estate conflict inflicts significant financial

damage on the landlord and property manager who bears loss in substantial legal costs and also suffers from unpaid rent.

6.2 Conclusion

This study evaluated the effects of disputes on real estate management performance in Akure, Nigeria, revealing that disputes significantly hinder effective property management. The findings show that financial implications, degraded relationships, and threats to life and property are the most critical consequences of unresolved disputes. These outcomes not only weaken investor confidence but also disrupt management efficiency and the overall sustainability of real estate assets. The study concludes that effective dispute prevention and timely adoption of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms are essential to minimize financial losses, preserve stakeholder relationships, and enhance the long-term performance of real estate management in Akure and beyond.

6.3 Recommendations

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms should be institutionalised by real estate regulatory bodies and property management firms through incorporation of mediation and negotiation as initial steps to the dispute management in property management agreements. This will assist in minimising financial losses in terms of litigation, rent default and income disruption and also ensure that more and cheaper dispute resolution is achieved. The relationship-grounded practices of managing disputes at the estate surveying firms are to be adopted, and they can be enhanced by all the professional training of the practitioners in strengthening communication, conflict management and de-escalation skills. Furthermore, it is important to introduce clear safety and conflict-management guidelines so that the conflicts could be handled as early as possible and sent to the neutral mediators in the case of need, thus avoiding any further development of the conflict and safeguarding both the professional relationships and the property interests.

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