

Management of Conflicts in Senior High Schools in Central Region, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Conflict management in the Senior High Schools has become a critical issue which needs to be looked at by propounding new models to complement or replace entirely the school disciplinary committee system that has become the order of the day. Causes of conflict in the school system vary and ranges from religious cause through misapplied policy, lack of technical know-how in conflict management to representation of school leaders in the day- to- day administration of the school. The paper looks at management of conflict from different perspectives by discussing and analyzing the root causes and sources of school conflicts in the administration of schools in Senior High Schools in the Central Region of Ghana. The findings suggest that administration and management of Senior High School in the Central Region are disadvantaged by the increased rates of conflict situations and that also militate against the smooth running of school administration.

Keywords: Senior High School, Single Spine Salary Structure, School Management, Conflict Resolution

1. Introduction

Conflict has become inevitable in human existence and indeed a lot of institution, organization, and individuals have put in enough resources in order to curb such a phenomenon (Flippo, 1980). Harold (1998) supported this view by indicating that conflict is part of change and therefore inevitable. It is therefore not shocking news of high rate of conflict in the senior high schools. This study is paramount and timely due to the ongoing debate on the Single Spine Salary Structure (SSSS) that has been introduced by the Government of Ghana to streamline wages of public sector employees is creating conflict in the school system in Ghana. The partial implementation of SSSS after a long delay has become potential source of industrial conflicts. We argue in this paper that digging into the causes and effects will broaden the scope of educational administrators in dealing with conflicts in their areas of jurisdiction.

2. Statement of the Problem

The Ghanaian economy for the past four years has experienced low remuneration to workers hence the introduction of the single spine salary structure to correct such anomalies. The structure came with its own challenges creating disparity in salaries, coupled with high inflation in the economy has resulted in a great discomfort and industrial strikes in the country. School administration have agitated over this phenomenon of low salaries coupled with high tariffs on utilities of which teachers, parents and students have taken advantage to exhibit misbehaviour, anxiety, desperation when they come to the working environment. Teachers in the Central Region Senior High School have in a space of time demonstrated three good times (that is 2012 in November and in 2013 in February and August) against remuneration, bad condition of service and unconcerned attitude of Ministry of Education and for that matter Ghana Education Service.

In most cases conflict that do occur in the Senior High Schools are suppressed due to the traditional disciplinary committee put in place to arbitrate disciplinary problems in the school. There is lack of trust and confidence when conflict is between the teacher and student (the student is always a loser). This situation has dampened the general moral of students on one side and teachers on the other side. This phenomenon has affected the general performance. Encountering series of conflict situation without its accompanying strategies could be a devastating situation in schools. This assertion has been supported by United Nations International/ Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 1995) that "conflict when not constructively dealt with often exploded into violence".

School administrations have not lived up to expectations in resolving conflicts since most of these conflicts are believed to center around their autocratic leadership styles, negative personal attitudes and conflicts of interest, among others. We therefore argue that when there is peaceful co-existence in the school, higher productivity will be enhanced and the administrations, teachers and students will be in a better position to carry out their responsibilities without bitterness. The questions that guide this paper therefore include; why do conflicts occur in Senior High School systems in Ghana? Are school management trained to deal with the different conflicts that occur? and what is the role of the Ghana Education Service in school conflict management in Ghana?

3. Research Objective

The general objective of the research is to look at conflict resolution from another perspective; and to design a more appropriate conflict resolution mechanism for the education sector in Ghana, further from traditional civil conflicts, external aggression, and so on but school related conflicts resolution and its impact on the day to day administration of the school. More specifically, the paper seeks to;

- Establish the causes of conflicts in the Senior High Schools management in Ghana.
- Investigate whether school administrators are trained in conflict management skills.
- Understand the role Ghana Education Service plays in conflict management in Senior High Schools.

4. Review of Relevant Literature

The term management has been used in diverse ways to depicts different issues based on the context Henri Foyal used it as an academic discipline. This paper therefore adopts the definition by Sisk and William (1981) that sees management as a process of coordinating resources through the process of planning controlling, organizing, leading in order to accomplish the set goals and objectives. Management also involves some purposive coordination processes that are universal to all forms of group endeavors. Duncan (1975) mentions that effective coordination does not just happen; but is brought about by individuals who possess the knowledge and skills to synchronize the actions of numerous people and channel those towards a common goal. Managers are known to be peculiar people who oversee to the general accomplishment of organizational tasks and activities and their knowledge base and skills are derived broadly from the field of management (Caglio and Ditillo, 2008).

Management therefore, is composed of the various activities that involve the setting of goals, strategies to reach those goals, and the right decision making process to enable organization thrive in both internal and the external environment (du Plessis, 2007). Thamhim and Wilson (1947) explained the term conflict by looking at both positive and negative sides of it saying; Conflict is as a result of the behaviour of an individual or a group, which militates or hinders another group from accomplishing its set goals. As conflict may militate against attainment of organizational goal, if the outcome yields how dimension of growth and innovation, enhances decision making and improves teamwork, then we can say conflict has a positive impact. They continue to say conflict affect the accomplishment of organizational goals due to their attending stress, hostilities and other undesirable factors when it's vaguely handled. These views were shared by Rahim (1992) that, conflict as an interactive process is manifested in the incompatibility, disagreement or difference within or between social entities. From the foregoing, the term conflict could be explained as tensions within a social system. These tensions are observable looking at factors such as competition for scarce resources among departments, interpersonal relationship among members, lack of effective communication and poor organizational structure.

Conflict to an organization is synonymous with violence due to the characteristics both conflict and violence posses. United Nation International Children's Emergency Fund (1995) stated that conflict is not necessarily synonymous with "violence" and that conflicts inevitably occur between people. According to Kerzer (1998) on the issue of violence, stated that, conflict can occur with anyone over anything. This statement was collaborated by Seville (1997) stating that "it is not part of human nature to be violent and that violence is learned response to conflict and if violence can be learned, other responses are possible and can be learned as well. Whether conflict is synonymous to violence or not statement of Sisk and William (1951) cannot be under-estimate no one can give a definite definition to issues that concerns human endeavor.

Manicoe (1998) identified types of conflict to include; interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup, intra-group. He again identified various forms of conflict which include; horizon conflict, role conflict and vertical conflict. Owen (1987) stated that sources of conflict in organizations include competing for scarce resources, autonomy and goals divergence due to mission, vision and leadership ability exhibited by managers. According to Leas & Kittlaus cited in Ivancevich (1996) there are factors that contribute greatly to viable conflict in organizations and they include differences in goal setting, divergence in perception, overuse of expertise and work inter-dependency. According to Pondy (1969) five major levels of conflict should be acknowledged to enable managers become conscious of vulnerability of their employees. These include latent conflict, perceived conflict, felt conflict, manifest conflict and post conflict. According to Wright and Quincy (1951), conflict outcome could be positive since it is an evidence of life and vitality in an organization. To Cosier and Dalton, cited in Hellriegel (1992) condemns that conflict in organization can be a positive force. He mentioned that conflict in organization leads to low efficiency and effectiveness. Zikman (1992), comments that "effectively managed conflict can help

identify previously unidentified problems and attitudes, and can also help clarify uncertain and improve overall cooperation.

The researchers are of the view that conflict should not be seen to have only detrimental effects on organizational performance. The literature review so far has helped to establish that conflict exists in every endeavors of man and so where two or more people meet, there is likely to be conflict. Conflict Management Strategies is therefore paramount to curb any type of conflict to improve organizational performance.

5. Research Methods and Design

The researchers randomly selected some Senior High School in the Central Region from three Districts. The variables understudy comprises of school administrators, teachers and students. Primary and secondary data were collected for the purpose of this research. Questionnaire, interviews and observation (primary data) and documentation evidence (secondary data) constitute the data and data sources. Questionnaire use was principal due to confidentiality that needed to be observed and due to large sample the researchers needed to investigate. Public Senior High Schools in the Central Region at the time of the study were three hundred and fifty five (355). The researchers therefore selected a sample of thirty-six schools representing ten percent (10%) of the entire schools in the region.

6. Findings and Discussions

The researcher presents the major findings and discussions of data generated from both the primary and secondary sources. The presence of conflicts in schools in the central region and awareness of such conflicts by members of staff is undisputable. Considering the 55.3% positive responses and 28.6% negative responses to conflict awareness in the schools as indicated in Table 1 has been a proof that a reasonable percentage of human resources are aware of the occurrence of conflicts in their schools. Forty-nine persons (6.1%) gave no response.

Table 1: Respondents' Awareness Conflicts in their Schools

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	168	55.3
No	87	28.6
No response	49	16.1
Total	304	100

Sources: Fieldwork January, 2013

From Table 2, conflicts appeared to occur regularly to schools in central region. As pointed out by experts on conflict management, conflict in itself is not destructive provided it is well managed. The breakdown of responses is presented in Table 2. A total of 172 (56.6%) respondents have witnessed conflicts between 6 and 10 times in the last 5 years. Fifty-eight persons (19.1%) have witnessed conflicts between 3 to 5 times. Fifty one persons that they did not witness conflicts in the schools

Table 2: Frequency of conflict occurrence (from 2009- 2013)

Number of times	frequency	Percentage
0	4	1.3
1-2 times	51	16.8
3-5 times	58	19.1
6-10 times	172	56.6
Cannot recollect	19	6.3
Total	304	100

Sources: field work, January, 2013

Researchers collected showed that there were several types of conflicts in Senior High Schools in the central region. The types of conflicts identified are ranked as follows: inter-personal conflicts (34.7%), inter-union conflicts between staff and school administrators (20.9%), conflicts between labour and government (13.6%), others(i.e. students versus staff or students versus school administrators, students versus food vendors, conflict between parents and teachers) (13.6%). On a few occasions, there were cases between schools and the community members. Since inter-personal conflicts ranked the highest among the several types of conflicts that were identified in schools selected for the study, efforts should be made to address it. One of the ways to deal with the problem is to organize seminars for workers on how or relate with co-workers in a harmonious way and deal with differences without resulting in conflicts. This is important because regular occurrence of such conflicts will adversely affect productivity in schools.

Table 3 Types of conflicts that occurs

Response	Frequency	Percent
(1) Interpersonal conflict	150	34.7
(2) Conflict between labour and government	65	24.9
(3) Inter-union conflict (staff and school administration)	56	20.9
(4) Conflict between parents and teachers	33	19.5
TOTAL	304	100

The major causes within the school system in the Region. They are listed in order of their importance:

- Misunderstanding of motives
- Role conflicts
- Favoritism
- Indiscipline (disciplinary problem)
- Youthful exuberance
- Poor condition of service
- Partial implementation of the single spine salary structure approved by the government for workers
- Negligence of duty
- Personality clashes
- Inferiority/ superiority complex
- Forceful and compulsory retirement/ retrenchment to workers
- Administrative incompetence of school administrators
- Misappropriation and embezzlement of school funds by school administrators and P. T. A

Among the various factors that caused industrial conflicts among school workers in the central region were unimpressive conditions of service ranked highest. Many of those interviewed were of the opinion that there is a positive correlation between poor staff welfare and occurrences of conflicts. They believed that a good welfare package for the staff would go a long way to reduce the incidence of conflicts in schools. Governments at all levels in Ghana metropolitan municipal and district should endeavour to improve the conditions of service of teachers in the country not only as a measure to prevent or reduce conflicts in schools, but also as a measure to restore confidence and dignity to the teaching profession.

On the procedure for conflict management, the responses are quite disturbing as only 19.4% of the respondents affirmed that there existed laid-down procedures and mechanisms for conflict management and resolution in school should try to adopt mechanisms and strategies for managing and resolving conflicts. The current fire brigade approach used by most school administrators in the region cannot continue. Table 4 shows that majority of the teachers were often unable to cover the syllabus in a session. This is one of the effects of incessant strikes in public schools in Ghana.

Table4. Coverage of the Syllabus in a Session

response	frequency	Percentage
Always	45	14.8
Often	75	24.7
Hardly ever	141	46.4
Never	25	8.2
No response	18	5.9
Total	304	100

Source: Fieldwork January, 2013

Table 5: In servicing Training Courses in Conflict Management

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Always	8	2.6
Often	22	7.2
Hardly ever	42	13.8
Never	220	72.4
No response	12	3.9
Total	304	100

Source: Fieldwork, March 2013

Out of the 304 respondents on opportunity to attend conflict management courses, 220 (72.4%) indicated that they have never had any opportunity to attend such a course; 42 (13.8%) have hardly done so, while 22(7.2%) indicated that they have participated often, and only 8 (2.6%) indicated that they participated frequently, Twelve (3.9%) did not respond, it is pertinent that a course on conflict management should not only be introduced in the curricula for student teachers, but that it should be introduced in the curricula for student teachers and school administrators. Adequate knowledge in conflict management and resolution in schools will go a long way to sanitize the educational system in the country.

The Student Representative Council SRC provides opportunity for students to air their views on matters that could lead to conflicts in the school; thereby administrative problems are nipped in the bud. It is unfortunate that most of the respondents (78.6%) indicated that there were no such councils in their schools. It is suggested that school administrators in the state should consider introducing SRC in their school as part of conflict management strategies. The data collected confirmed that in many schools the students had little or no say in the running of their schools even in student related matters. Only 26.8% of the respondents indicated that students were allowed to have input in the running of their schools. School administrators should allow students to concern them. This is one of the modern management techniques-participative management. Such opportunity will be useful in the prevention of conflicts in schools in the state.

Depending on the nature of conflicts and the parties involved, various methods were used which included the use of disciplinary committees, comprise method, intervention of the school authority and elders in the community and intervention by colleagues. Sometimes the Ghana education service official's intervention has been called for. The interventions of the ministry of education included sending their officials to conflict ridden schools to investigate, mediate and bring about resolution. In some instances resolution took the forms of issuance of queries, dispersing the staff by posting all or some to other schools, demotion, reinstatement of wrongly dismissed workers or conversion of some dismissals to retirement; dismissal and sanctions of various degrees depending on the nature of the case as recommended by investigative panels. Where cases were between students and the staff, the Ministry of Education took up the mediation.

The consequences of the discussed conflicts on the school and the government have been regrettable. Part of the repercussions on schools was disruption of academic programmes, inadequate staffing as results of unplanned transfer, hostility, suspicion and withdrawal from active participation in school activities. In some cases results were withheld or cancelled. As a result of emergency transfer of subject teachers, qualified teachers were inequitably disturbed. In the final analysis, government suffers financial losses from closure of schools, while pupils and their parents suffer un-quantifiable losses. All of these have contributed in one way or the other to a steady decline in the quality of education in the state. Some students resorted to examination especially those that have led to school closure.

7. Recommendations

In line with the conflict situations prevailing in the schools of study, the following recommendations have been suggested to assist in resolving critical issues of conflicts in the schools:

The District Directorate of the Ghana Education Service should form conflict resolution teams in the district to assist schools adopt existing official conflict resolution strategies for resolving conflict in the primary schools before it worsens teaching and learning. Teachers, parents, school heads, pupils and the communities should be made aware of the long and short term negative effects of conflict on teaching and learning. This can be done through discussions at PTA meetings, durbars and symposia. In this regard, headteachers should be vigilant and effectively monitor teachers at work. They should sanction teachers who refuse to mark exercises done by their pupils because of existing conflict between them and the pupils. Such teachers should be counseled on the need to relate well with the pupils and their attention drawn to the fact that teachers and pupils are interdependent in the field of education.

The Guidance and Counseling Committees in the schools should be strengthened so that they can educate the pupils on better ways of handling conflict. School authorities should complement reward pupils' good behaviours and to encourage them to behave well in school. Peer mediation teams should be established with selected pupils who are well behaved and equipped with conflict resolution skills to help the schools handle interpersonal conflict. This group could be trained periodically by the district education office, civil society, or any community-based or non-governmental organisation which is interested in conflict management so that basic schools in the district would have relatively reduced conflict environment. It is also necessary for pupils to be educated on all the conflict resolution mechanisms in the schools and sanctions for certain offences. The pupils will trust the bodies and channel their grievances through them. This will help curb or reduce conflict in primary schools in the district. Conflict resolution bodies in some primary schools such as Disciplinary Committees and Guidance and Counseling Committee should be strengthened to reduce the spate of conflict in basic schools in the district so that the negative effects of conflict on teaching and learning will be reduced.

The Ministry of Education and the GES should increase the three periods allotted to Religious and Moral Education per week on the basic school timetable to five so that more time would be spent teaching moral values to inculcate a sense of social responsibility and responsiveness in the pupils. Effective moral and religious education will instill good neighbourliness and care for one another in them so they grow up with such values. Communication links between the schools and the parents of the pupils should be strengthened to reduce tension and conflict in the schools. Headteachers and teachers should be open to parents and encourage them to seek clarification on any information communicated to them by their children or wards but which they do not understand and should also explain to parents any claims or demands such as collection of monies made on them in connection with their awards.

Existing conflict resolution mechanisms in the schools should be revived so that parents would be educated on the proper ways of addressing their grievances. Parents need enough education on the essentials of government's interventions such as Capitation Grant and fCUBE policy and how far this goes as far as basic school education funding is concerned so that little demands for money will not create a conflict between them and the teachers. The school authorities should encourage parents to attend PTA meetings so that they would be abreast with information about the school. Headteachers should remove all barriers of communications and relate well with the parents so that they feel part of the school system. The Capitation Grant should be disbursed for its intended purpose only and should not be misapplied.

Note books, pens and materials that teachers need to discharge their obligatory duties such as preparation of lesson notes must be provided at the right time to reduce conflict between teachers and their heads.

The District Education Offices should post bursars or accounts clerks to all primary schools in the district to handle the finances of the school. This will help reduce or eliminate accountability problems and ease the tension that arises between teachers and their heads as a result of finances. The District Education Office should organize seminars and workshops aimed at improving good rapport between headteachers and their staff and building good working relations between them. GES should also organize workshops for headteachers every vacation to enable them acquire or improve their leadership skills and conflict resolution strategies so as to improve their managerial effectiveness. The facilitators of the workshops should do follow ups to ensure that whatever they have imparted are being implemented. These findings should be made available to the District Education Offices (DEO) and extracts published to make them accessible for usage

8. Conclusion

School administration has been adversely affected by lack of knowledge of conflict management. Most administrations handled conflicts by trial and error approach because there were no specific procedures and methods of managing conflicts. In the Senior High School system in the country students were not allowed to participate in decisions affecting them. Most students did not know the importance of a student representative council and they hardly knew how to protest against the school authority. The staff members on the other hand were not excluded from all kinds of conflict. Staff and students in conflict resolution rarely explored the use of dialogue as a resolution technique. Finally the issue of conflict management has reached the point where effective of relevant strategies be explored and employed.

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