Conflict and Conflict Resolution between Administrative and Teaching Staffs Selected Schools in Winneba: The Role of Effective Communication

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
               Corresponding Author: **Francis Justice Kwesi Agbofa**	Conflict is inevitable in our human society due to the continuous interaction between people. The same occurs between administrative and teaching staff in schools as a result of their close interaction. This study explored how effective communication could be employed to resolve conflicts between administrative and teaching staff in two selected private senior high schools in Winneba. The study employed mixed method approach with the exploratory design to analyze and interpreted the conflicts that arise between administrators and teachers. Quota, simple random and purposive sampling approaches were used to select the respondents. Questionnaires and semi-structured interview guide were used to collect data for the study. The findings of the study revealed that conflicts exist between the administrators and teachers in the schools and such arises due to problems of communication. Staff meetings are the major means of communication between these two groups but social media use is also becoming a popular means of communication. Effective communication in the form of dialogue and negotiation can best help to resolve the conflict between teachers and administrators in the schools. It was concluded that lack of effective communication, and limited avenues for teachers to express their grievances, as well as poor feedback result in conflicts in the schools. Regular interaction through intensifying staff meeting and one-to-one communication can help resolve school conflicts. It was therefore recommended that workshops on effective communication should be organized for teachers and administrative staff to improve on their communication skills.

I. INTRODUCTION

There is the likelihood of daily occurrence of conflicts in society due to the fact that humans are interacting. Due to a wide range of differences among people, the absence of conflict usually signals the absence of meaningful interaction. Conflict is neither good nor bad but the manner in which conflict is handled determines whether it will yield a constructive or destructive outcome (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000). Conflict is when one party perceive their interests are being opposed or negatively influenced by another (Mc Shane & Von Glinow, 2005). Robbins (1995) viewed conflict as a process where a person deliberately makes an effort to prevent efforts of another person with an opposing action, which results in frustrating the latter to achieve his/her goals or satisfy his interests. This is a clear indication that any action carried out by someone to prevent another from smoothly carrying out his or her activities may be termed as conflict.

The methods and strategies utilized in managing conflicts are referred to as conflict management; conflict management deals with strategies and processes that help to control or eliminate conflict (Botes, 2003; Aminu & Marfo, 2010). Communication has been cited by many as the most effective means of resolving conflict in any human institution. It involves using effective dialogue to calm tempers and ensure peaceful coexistence of humans in institutions. Robbins (2000) defines communication as transfer of information from a sender to a receiver with the information been understood by the receiver. Kehinde and Osibanjo (n.d) avers that to reduce organizational conflict, effective communication and the communication skills of the communicator are very crucial. Kamande (2006) found out that in public schools in Kenya, conflict over poor students' performance, students' indiscipline and low school development exist between teachers and administrators, and this is driven by lack of effective communication. Gyamfi

(2009) revealed that communication strategies such as media usage, stakeholder meetings and face to face communication are the best means of conflict resolution. Other strategies such as negotiations, collaborations, dialogue and reconciliation which are all embedded in communication are used to resolve conflicts.

With this, it is clear that communication is indeed a necessary tool for resolving and preventing conflict and that people tend to feel sidelined when they are not communicated to on what is going on in an institution. The emotions of people in such instances are likely to cause them to exhibit actions that have the potential to lead to conflicts. We take communication for granted and the magnitude of problems for marginalizing it is observed when communication fails to resolve conflicts. When used judiciously, peace is achieved, restored or maintained, resulting in high productivity and achievement of institutional goals. Despite communication is not the whole antidote to conflict but lack of communication can be disastrous.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Due to the rigorous and continuous interaction between administrators and teachers, it becomes difficult to point out or identify traces of conflict between them. It is surprising to note that in some schools or institutions poor performance of students, indiscipline, sabotage of school projects, unnecessary teacher transfers and underdevelopment is as a results of long standing conflict between the aforementioned factions. Administrators may feel they control the overall process of running the school while the teachers may also be of the thought that they should be given the space to work with little supervision. Any breach in the two ideas may result in conflict since one may feel his or her interest has been overridden. Teachers feel irritated when proceedings in the school are not communicated to them or when their inputs are not considered in the running of the school. All these conflicts are likely to arise due to poor or absence of communication. Tara and O'Hara (2014) said that an individual's success at work is greatly determined by one's social awareness skills, his or her emotional intelligence and communication which includes one's ability to motivate and influence others to empathize and develop relationships, to give honest feedback sensitively, to monitor self-behavior, read interpersonal situations and organizational politics, and to handle one's own emotions and those of others. When administrators are able to clearly communicate to teachers on whatever the situation or context is in the school and the reasons for what actions, as well as considering the feedback of the teachers in decision making, it serves as a sure way to roll back conflict. This is because, effective communication helps in clear passing of instructions and generation of feedback to create common understanding with among staff.

Arguments, quarrel, squabbles, and scuffles irrespective of what the instigating factor is lent from lack of effective communication. Most researchers such as Jones, George and Hill (2000) and others have studied effective communication as a tool for managing conflict in organizations but little is known of schools and precisely Ghanaian schools. This paper looked at this gap, and also inculcated feedback mechanisms in communication as a way for managing conflict between administrators and teachers in school.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The assessed the role of communication in resolving conflicts between teaching and administrative staff of selected schools. The study specifically:

1. Assess the nature of communication between the administrators and teachers of selected schools
2. Investigate the sources of conflict between the administrators and teachers of selected school
3. Examine the effects of effective communication in addressing conflicts between administrators and teachers of selected schools

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study employed both mixed methods approaches with the exploratory design to analyze conflicts that arises between administrators and teachers in two private senior high schools in Winneba, Ghana. The mixed method was used for this study after Creswell (2009) and Silverman (2005). According to Silverman (2005) it is argued that in choosing a method, everything depends on what we are trying to find out. No method of research, quantitative or qualitative, is intrinsically better than any other. Mixed methods utilizes the strengths of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell 2009). Malhotra (2004) argues that the objective of exploratory research is to search through a situation to provide insights and understanding. This design was considered appropriate because the researcher knew little about the issues under research. Exploratory design fits the mixed methods approach to research (Burns and Bush, 2006)

The population of the study included all the administrative and teaching staff of the selected schools. Zion Girls School had 27 teaching staff and 5 administrative staff, and Uncle Rich School had 17 teaching staff and 4 administrative staff including the headmasters in either school's case. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a sample of 48 respondents is ideal for a population of about 55 persons. As such, a total sample size of 48 was considered for the study. Quota, simple random and purposive sampling were considered for selecting the participants. The quota sampling was adopted to determine the number of respondents to be sampled from every category of staff, based on the percentage contribution of the category to the total population. In so doing, 24 and

15 teaching staff, and and 5 and 4 administrative staff were sampled from Zion Girls School and Uncle Rich School respectively. The simple random sampling technique was used to sample teaching staff, and purposive sampling was used to sample headmasters to the administrative class.

Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data as in the sense that the study was conducted in an academic setting where all the respondents could read and write. According to Orodho (2009), questionnaires also give the researcher the advantage of giving the respondents anonymity, and giving uniform questions to all respondents. Also semi- structured interview guide was used to collect in-depth information concerning the phenomenon under discussion from the headmasters. The collected data was coded and inputted into the SPSS version 20. The data was presented in tables and figures such as bar graph where necessary.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The section is developed to present the analyzed data that were gathered through questionnaire and semi- structured interview.

A. Demographic characteristics of respondents

The study sampled a total of 48 respondents with 36 males making up 75% and 12 females making up 25%. Most of the respondents (25%) were in the ages of 36- 40 whiles the least were those from 41 years and above making 8% of the total respondents. About 91.6% of the respondents were all first degree holders whilst the remaining 8.4% were Master's Degree holders. The respondents included 36 teachers without any position while the other 12 included headmasters, heads of departments, and administrators.

Table I: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Sex of respondents	Male	36	75
	Female	12	25
Age of respondents	21- 25	8	16.667
	26- 30	8	16.667
	31- 35	12	25
	36- 40	12	25
	41- 45	4	8.333
	Above 50	4	8.333
Highest Academic qualification	M. Ed	2	4.167
	B. Ed	44	91.667
	MPhil	2	4.167
Position in institution	Head of Department	4	8.333
	Teacher	36	75
	Other	8	16.667

Field data (2022)

B. Nature of Communication between administration and teaching staff

Information gathered from the respondents indicated that the major means of communication in the schools is through staff meetings, when all important issues are discussed. This gave the insight that until meetings are held, communication on formal matters is minimal within the school environment. The study again revealed that social media is becoming another popular means of communication between teachers and administrative staff. The social media platform that is popularly used in this case is whatsapp. It has been found that the only disadvantage with using social media platforms such as whatsapp is that, those who are not using whatsapp or fail to log onto the platform during certain moments may miss important information.

Due to the fact that meetings are the major means of communication, the researcher inquired from the respondents how often meetings are held within a period of one term. 76% of the respondents indicated that meetings are held twice in a term, with the remaining 24% expressing that meetings are held thrice or more. As school administrators officially meet their teachers on two to three times in a period of about 4 months, it is obviously too low a number of times to enhance effective communication.

To further understand the nature of communication in the schools, the respondents were asked to express how they view communication within the school. It has been established that 60% of the respondents asserted that the nature of communication was mutual, duplex, and friendly but the remaining 40% stated that meetings are formal and tend to assume a one-way flow. In one of the schools, an administrator indicated that:

> "Though there is a mutual relationship between us and the teachers, we give instructions and teachers are expected to follow the instructions".

There was a clear indication that even with what they define as mutual relationship, there is still a strict and or formal nature of communication between these two factions. This finding presupposes the need to ascertain whether the inputs of teachers are considered in decision making in the school. The same ratio found for the nature of communication, 60% is to 40% indicated for yes and no respectively. This was finding is meant to test the feedback mechanism used in the schools. It was obvious that the ideas of teachers are considered for decision making despite it is not encouraging considering the percentages given. In rating their interactions in the school, 52% of the respondents rated the nature of interaction as good (below 70%) whiles 48% said it was excellent (above 70%).

C. Sources of conflict between administration and teaching staff

To establish the sources of conflicts in the selected schools, the researcher began by inquiring from the teachers if they are happy with the nature of their interaction with the administrative staff. It was found that 56% of the teachers stated that they were happy with the nature of it, and 44% of the them have expressed that they aren't happy with the interaction. Those who expressed displeasure with the nature of their interactions did so on the account of reasons including the opinion that the school administrators at times only inform them of what decisions they have taken, and what they have done already but never involved them in the process. Though majority stated they were happy, they further described the interaction as normal, indicating that the this is not one they are satisfied with, despite some amount of satisfaction with it. This paints a clear picture that conflicts are likely to be in the undercover since teachers are not so much satisfied with the way their administrations interact with them. An administrator in one of the schools indicated that they do experience conflicts with teacher. He said:

> "When the office is on different wavelength with teachers who go wayward in terms of handling certain issues pertaining to teaching and learning"

It has been established that the way and manner in which information flow from the administrators to teachers and vice versa tends to cause intimidation on the part of teachers, and signs insolence on the part of administrators towards teachers. The teachers are of the preconception of being the masters in their classrooms so any form of control makes them feel that they are rendered incompetent hence breeding anger and hatred and consequently conflicts. Insufficiencies in communication as evidenced in the number of times the administration meets with teachers causes teachers to keep dissatisfactions and displeasure for long, resulting in hatreds and rumours which in the long run may spark a conflict. With the information established, a closer look at the situation revealed that respondents who said there is no conflict in the school are those who have been in the school for less than two years.

The study has found that the results of such conflicts include poor performance of duties, wasting of productive time, mistrust and suspicions, and poor student performance. There are also unnecessary dismissals and demotions if relevant teachers hold positions in the school. The study has also found that in conflict situations, there lack of support by affected teachers for programmes and activities brought up by the school administration. An administrator in one of the schools expressed that when there are issues of conflict, such issues are usually confronted and dealt with. He added that sometimes punitive measures are administered including suspensions when necessary. This agrees with what Kamande (2006) found in Kenya where he postulated that conflict witnessed or experienced in schools between teachers and administration was as a result of problems in communication.

D. Effect of effective communication in addressing conflict in the schools

Communication as it is known to be a likely cause of conflict can be a good medium of addressing a conflict when it is employed rightly. It stems from the angle that people should be given the opportunity and also have less (if there should be any) restriction to air their concerns and dissatisfaction. The other way round has been found in this study as just 42% of the respondents stated that they do communicate their dissatisfactions and concerns with the school administration. It is known that they do that through staff meetings, reporting through the scalar channel, and official writing but the staff meeting was the major means stated. The remaining 58% said they do not air their dissatisfaction but rather keep silent and harbour issues in them. One of the respondents stated that:

> "No positive outcome would come out of concerns expressed. Therefore, I do not need to say anything."

This affirms the fact that the nature of feedback in communication on issues communicated is poor which in a way signifies ineffective communication leading to conflict. With the establishment of the fact that there are conflicts in the studied schools despite they are not very evident, the study so explores the means through which conflict can be resolved. The respondents both the administrators including the headmasters, and teachers mentioned dialogue and negotiation as the most amicable means of responding peacefully to conflict. The study found 87.5% responding positive to dialogue with 12.5% opting for negotiation, to have come to this conclusion. It is worthy to note that both means of conflict resolution identified by the respondents are communication–related, hence the relevance of communication in conflict resolution. The same findings were revealed by Gyamfi (2009) who posited that strategies such as negotiations, collaborations, dialogue and reconciliation which are all embedded in communication are used in conflict resolution in conflict communities and societies in Ghana.

Table II: Best means through which conflict between teaching and administrative staff can be resolved

Means	Frequency	Percentage
Dialogue	42	87.5
Negotiation	6	12.5
Total	**48**	**100**

Field data (2022)

The researcher after getting to know that the best means of conflict resolution was effective communication inquired from the respondents the form of communication that can be resorted to in resolving conflict. Majority of the respondents (56%) stated meetings whilst the least form mentioned was internal memo which was 4%. This is in line with a study conducted by Kamande (2006) in Kenya where he established that in most schools, administrators use staff meetings to communicate with their teaching staff.

Table III: Form of communication that can be used to resolve conflict between teachers and administrative staff

Forms of communication	Frequency	Percentage
Direct talk	15.36	32
Meetings	26.88	56
Internal memo	1.92	4
Phone calls	3.84	8
Total	**48**	**100**

Field data (2022)

Indicating how communication can be used in addressing conflict, the respondents indicated that grievances should be welcomed and positive ways should be adopted in solving or resolving them. Again there should not be any form of intimidation or threat to those who always want to make their grievances known for redress as to enhance communication in schools. Furthermore, views of teachers when communicated should be taken into consideration and finally see them addressed.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can be concluded that nature of communication between teaching and administrative staff in the selected schools is friendly and mutual but not satisfactory and below excellence. Again, conflict actually exists between teachers and administrative staff in schools and the sources stems from lack of effective communication and limited avenues for teachers to make their grievances known. Also, social media platforms such as whatsapp is becoming a popular medium of communication among teachers and administrators in school. Intensifying staff meetings as well as rightly employing communication related tools such as dialogues and negotiations can help resolve conflicts in

schools existing between the teaching and administrative staff.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are drawn. Staff meetings should be intensified and other avenues such as SMS, phone calls and suggestion box should be created to enhance communication and aid in quick channeling of grievances. Teachers and administrators should be encouraged to use social media platform such as whatsapp as it is becoming popular as a means of communication. One-on-one communication should also be encouraged as it creates mutual friendship and enhances quick dissemination of information in schools. Workshop of effective communication should be organized for teachers and administrative staff to improve upon their communication skills which is also a step towards minimizing conflicts in our schools. Teachers should also be given some amount of autonomy in the exercise of their duties despite supervision munity. However, teachers should not see criticisms from administrations as a form of threat or intimidation but rather as a means of helping them to improve. Respect should also be upheld between both administrators and teachers in our schools.

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