



ASHESI UNIVERSITY

**THE EFFECT OF CONFLICT ON THE PERFORMANCE OF EMPLOYEES IN
TWO EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN GHANA**

By

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

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I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this thesis was supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of theses established by Ashesi University

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is an unavoidable part of every institution. Educational institutions are saddled with conflicts among employees and sometimes with management which invariably influence their overall output. At the workplace, it is important that measures are put in place to ensure employees are comfortable and happy in their work environment to function well. The purpose of this study is to explore how unresolved conflicts between employees in educational institutions affect productivity. This study identifies some causes of conflict in two educational institutions (universities) and suggests possible ways of effectively resolve them for improved sustainable productivity.

A qualitative research method was used, whereby semi structured interviews were conducted to collect data for analysis. The participants were asked certain question to determine the causes of conflict, and how they manage it. In analyzing the results, the responses were grouped into themes and then examined according to the questions asked during the interview. Based on the results, it was determined that a common cause of conflict in educational institutions is poor communication. With regards to managing conflict, it was determined that people prefer to talk to the other party and would only involve a third person if they are not able to solve the issue. Another reason they would also involve a third person is if the person is a colleague or an employer they are not friendly with. I recommend that superiors in educational institutions should be approachable, and should also provide a formal complaint process that employees can use when they have any issues.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Educational institutions in our society play a vital role in equipping students with the requisite knowledge, skills and the right attitudes via the curricula for healthy lifestyles. Accordingly, the responsibilities of educational institutions include shaping the attitudes of students for the real world by preparing them to deal or handle all manner of situations they may encounter in life, including courtesy and good manners. Also, lecturers in such institutions are required to influence and contribute to the development of society. In effect, educational institutions aim to make individuals useful members of society (Bahrami, 2018).

Just like any other corporate entity, educational institutions like the universities, have categories of employees with different roles and responsibilities and when played well, contribute to their effectiveness and growth. It is without doubt that these employees would not get along from time to time due to differences in perspectives, communication, values, personalities and experiences in life (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2006; Kudonoo, 2016). When such things happen, it is usually given the term conflict, because there is some disagreement between two employees or parties.

In the university, lecturers are expected to work closely with their heads of departments and with their teaching assistants. Unavoidably, conflicts spring up in these working relationships once a while because of the differences mentioned earlier on. According to Ghaffar (2009), school principals use the authoritative approach like pressurizing lecturers to complete specific tasks which can bring about conflict. Conflict

can also occur between a lecturer and a teaching assistant. And most importantly, conflict can occur within an individual. For example, a lecturer that is experiencing internal conflict might find it difficult to relate well with his/her students as well as effectively teach them in most cases.

According to Pia and Diez (2007), conflict is a disagreement between two parties. ‘Two parties’ in this context could mean individuals, institutions, countries, or even within oneself. There are various ways to manage conflict and the way it is handled makes it either positive or negative. Managing conflicts for positive results improves the relationship between colleagues, encourages innovation, creativity and new ideas, creates an environment of respect and change, provides a formal complaint process that can be used when there is conflict, amongst others (Kudonoo, Schroeder, & Boysen-Rotelli, 2012).

Ultimately, conflict management and resolution are vital in the workplace. There are four types of conflicts that occur in educational institutions. They are intragroup, intergroup, intrapersonal, interpersonal and inter-institutional conflict. Intergroup conflict occurs between groups within an institution. Intragroup conflict occurs within groups in an institution. Intrapersonal conflict is when an individual’s skills do not match their role in the institution. Interpersonal conflict is between individuals in the institution (Thakore, 2013). And inter institutional conflict is conflict between one institution and another (Isabu, 2017).

Sources of conflicts in institutions are becoming inexhaustible however, Isabu (2017) explains that, factors like poor communication, limited resources, overlapping

authority, role conflict and task inter-dependence are causes of conflict in educational institutions. The breakdown of conflict, including the causes and types in educational institutions, provides evidence that the topic of conflict is much deeper than we think and would require a deeper understanding to effectively manage it. However, the effects of conflict are dependent on the way they are treated, resolved or managed. Hence this study seeks to explore the effects of conflict on employees in two universities and the influence it has on their productivity.

1.2 Motivation

As a student of Ashesi University, I had an experience whereby a lecturer came to class and was very angry with us. He was obviously in a terrible mood because he got irritated instantly when we did not know the answer to a question, or when he found out that we did not read what he asked of us. This was not how he was on a normal day, there was something abnormal about the way he was behaving; he was clearly angry about something. This affected my focus in class because I found myself panicking out of fear that he would embarrass me like he was doing to my course mates. But on the bright side, I pushed myself to think on my feet and have the right answers to the questions he asked to prevent any form of embarrassment from him.

This experience made me curious as to what was going on with the lecturer, whether he was going through any internal struggles (facing personal struggles), or whether he had a disagreement with someone or a group of people. This created the interest to explore the effect of conflict on employees in the workplace. But I decided to focus on the universities because my experience occurred in the university. This study

seeks to find out how conflict of any form can affect employee performance and how it reflects in student performance and the institution.

1.3 Problem Statement

Conflict in the workplace is quite a problem for the parties involved, especially when it is not resolved. According to Bercovitch (2014), unresolved conflicts in institutions can lead to devastating results, which is not healthy for the institution and the individuals that are involved. When there is conflict within and between lecturers or between lecturers and university staff, it has a rippling effect on students and the university. For example, a lecturer may find it difficult to carry out specific tasks assigned to him/her by his/her head of department if there is some form of disagreement. Teaching assistants may not be able to provide students with the right information if they are not on good terms with the lecturers they are assisting.

Departmental or intergroup conflict occurs for example, if the Registry and the Information Technology department are not working in harmony to yield expected results students are affected because they may not be able to enroll online for classes. Ensuring healthy lecturer relations and improving technology is not the only way to improve lecturers' performances. The institutional climate is another factor that must be considered if universities want to improve performance. It must be conducive for employees to function to the best of their abilities, which would benefit the students and the school (Garcia, 2013).

Ongori (2009) explains that the sharing of limited resources is a major cause of conflict. When resources are scarce, and employees are competing for those resources, it

brings about disputes. When this happens, employees are not able to perform because they lack the necessary resources to perform their roles well. When there are not enough textbooks or teaching materials in universities, it makes it difficult for lecturers to prepare adequately for class and teach effectively, which can affect the students understanding of the course. On the other hand, when students fail to respect and appreciate the efforts made by their lecturers to equip them with the knowhow, they need to perform in the work world and general life, the teaching and learning process falls short of its essence. What then must management of educational institutions do to create a conducive environment for employees (lecturers and other staff) to increase productivity? This is the focus of this study.

1.4 The General Objective of The Research

The general objective of the research is to explore how unresolved conflict can negatively affect the productivity of an educational institution. The specific objectives explored are to find out the:

1. Causes of conflict in the two educational institutions under study.
2. Effect of conflict on employee performance in the two institutions.
3. Possible approaches that can be used to resolve conflicts in the two institutions to boost productivity and growth.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the causes of conflict in the two educational institutions under study?
2. How does conflict affect the performance of employees in the two educational institutions in Ghana?

3. What should these two institutions do to ensure effective conflict resolution for good human relations and improved productivity?

1.6 Significance of The Study

Conflict may arise as a result of the sort of work a person does, the people they work for or work with, or the environment in which they work. For example, a person working from home may have family issues which can affect the quality of work they provide. Another could be having workplace challenges in the form of personality clashes, lack of resources, work overload, hostile work environment among others. What mechanisms have educational institutions put in place to manage or resolve workplace conflicts to promote good human relations and effective teaching and learning. The outcome of this research may provide ideas educational institutions can leverage to focus on conflict, its causes and their effective resolution for improved productivity and growth.

Effective resolution or management of conflicts promote good interpersonal relationship which leads to good health. Employees of educational institutions will experience good health when their intrapersonal, interpersonal, role and other forms of conflict are resolved. When they realize that whatever discrepancies that crop up in the workplace can be amicably resolved to the benefit of all, they may have less stress related diseases that come about as a result of unresolved conflict. University students will also experience good relations with their lecturers and staff of the universities which leads to effective teaching and learning activities.

1.7 Scope of The Study

As stated earlier, this research explores the effect of conflict on the performance of employees, and the possible solutions that can be used to ensure effective conflict resolution. It pays attention to two educational institutions in Ghana. The two institutions are Ashesi University and Lancaster University. This is a deliberate choice because it is convenient for me as I am a student of Ashesi University and Lancaster University is close to where I live.

1.8 Overview of Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative methodology under which phenomenology will be used. Phenomenology bridges the gap in our understanding of a phenomenon by providing insight. This approach is used because the research seeks to explore conflict and conflict management in the workplace, which is often taken for granted (Astalin, 2013). The tool that will be used for data collection is semi-structured interviews. The population for the research is the employees of both Lancaster and Ashesi University. I will interview employees that work at administration, the lecturers, and faculty interns or teaching assistants.

1.9 Limitations of The Study

The possible limitation of this research is that it is time-consuming. As a student combining this research project with other academic work in the semester is challenging. Time factor also affected the 12 participants I interviewed within the period. As stated earlier, I had to focus on other courses while trying to interview participants. And the finding time to interview the participants was an issue because the interview time had to be convenient for my participants which meant I had to use my free time and study time.

Moreover, those who participated in the interviews might not have been genuine with their responses. Conclusions drawn from the data are based on their responses which may or may not be the true reflection of what is prevailing on the ground. Also, the outcome of the research, based on interview results of only 12 participants make findings not to be generalizable to a larger population.

1.10 Organization of The Study

This research consists of five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction which is made up of the background of the study, motivation, problem statement, research questions, the significance of the study, an overview of the methodology and the institution of the study. The second chapter covers the literature review. The third chapter examines the methodology, and the fourth chapter discusses the results. The fifth chapter is a summary of the four chapters, recommendations and conclusion.

1.11 Summary

The objective of the research is to explore how unresolved conflict can negatively affect the productivity of an educational institution. And this would be achieved by analyzing results that would be obtained by conducting interviews to answer the research questions as stated earlier.

The next chapter would shed light on the study to provide a deeper understanding. It also would discuss information that contributes to the relevance of the research and demonstrate its importance.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Conflict is a clash of ideas between two parties. We experience conflict every day of our lives, whether it is within ourselves or with the people around us. Concerning educational institutions, conflict occurs between teaching and non-teaching staff, between individuals or groups of employees, individuals or groups of employers, or individuals or groups of employees and employers. Even though there are several types of conflicts, there are specific types that occur within an educational institution and they are intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, and inter-institutional conflict.

In a situation where there is conflict, there will be an effect on the individuals involved which are the teaching, and non-teaching staff. And if these individuals are affected, there could be an effect on their performance at work, which will reflect in students' performance as well as the institutions performance. It is at this point that a conflict resolution process should be implemented to ensure that conflicts are resolved so that the employees and the school can benefit. To understand the several types of conflicts, some theories need to be discussed to give a better understanding of conflict, more importantly, in educational institutions. This section of the study is divided into subtopics, which are conflict theory, institutional conflict, and conflict resolution and management, to throw light on the research topic. The section will dive deeper into conflict to understand the causes by discussing some of the theories associated with it.

2.2.1 The Marxist Theory of Conflict

The topic of conflict is vast and more profound than we think. There are theories about conflict and how it affects society. The most popular theory is from that of Karl Max, which is the Marxist Theory of Conflict. Karl Marx's theory is associated with the two classes of society, stating that society is divided into the proletariat (lower class) and the bourgeoisie (upper class). There is always a struggle between these two groups of society, but the group with the financial muscle, which is the bourgeoisie, still has the upper hand (Folarin, 2013). According to Karl Marx's conflict theory, competition in society creates conflict because the two classes struggle for limited resources. And he defines the bourgeoisie as the ruling class and the proletariats as the subject class, stating that the ruling class exploits the subject class by taking ownership of property (Lyudmila, 2014).

This can be linked to conflict in educational institutions whereby conflict arises because of limited resources. When there are limited resources, lecturers are not able to teach effectively because they may lack the resources that would enable them to provide the students with a better understanding of the course. Limited human resource can also affect lecturers and other staff. If there are few lecturers, the work load on each lecturer would be more because they would have to take up other roles which can be stressful and may affect welfare. And in such situations, they may be paid less because management may not consider the extra roles they have to take. Limited resources also affect the students because they may not be able to have access to more information related to the course that is being taught. For example, the lack of textbooks for both the teachers and

students, would make teaching and learning very difficult. Also, lack of resources like technology can affect teaching and learning greatly.

2.2.2 Realist Theory of Conflict

This theory states that conflict is a result of man's selfishness because, as human beings, we put our interests first. This leads to competition for scarce resources because we are selfish human beings that want all or most of the limited resources (Folarin, 2013). Also, the theory states that people would compete with each other if the result of performing that task is money (Mutezo, 2015). This basically means that one main reason that would cause people to compete against each other is for money.

With regards to educational institutions, an example is when there is an issue between a lecturer and registry. Lecturers may have a problem with the time and day allocated for their classes because it may not be suitable for them, and they might complain to registry. But registry may release a timetable that favors everyone and so, they may not want to consider what the lecturers wants. This might cause the lecturers to call for classes on days or times that are not stated on the timetable. So due to such lecturers' actions, there might be issues between them and the registry.

2.2.3 Biological Theory of Conflict

This theory states that conflict in our human nature is passed on from our ancestral genes. It also explains that due to our ancestor's aggressive nature because of wars that happened in the past, we tend to have aggressive traits in our genes (Folarin, 2013). The classes in society can be linked to the concept of predator and prey whereby

the predator and prey are in conflict because of competition over essential resources such as food. So, in the case of human beings, the competition is over resources that have monetary outcomes (Marinoff, 2014).

With regards to educational institutions, this can be applied in the case of a head of department and a lecturer, a lecturer and a teaching assistant, amongst others. Some may use an authoritative approach to relate to their subordinates because of their position and this might bring about conflict because according to Weisbord, (2004), very normal human being wants to be treated fairly with dignity and respect. They want to have a say in decisions that affect them in order to get their commitment and ease in implementing them. The theories explain why conflict exists with the biological theory reminding us that it is a part of human nature and therefore, it cannot be avoided. And if it cannot be avoided, then it cannot be eliminated, but it must be appropriately managed by using effective conflict resolutions approaches.

2.3 Types of Conflict in Educational Institutions

Educational institutions are living systems that use scarce resources to perform tasks (Bercovitch, 2014). The keywords in this definition are limited resources. Where there are limited resources, there is conflict because there are disagreements on how scarce resources should be shared (Ongori, 2009). According to Garcia (2013), conflict is embedded in an institution's system. Competition for power, resources, jobs, among others lead to conflict, which can be destructive for the institution if not managed properly. Even though conflict is viewed as negative, it also has its positive side. This is

known as functional and dysfunctional conflict where functional conflict is positive and dysfunctional conflict is negative.

Functional conflict improves the performance of a group because arguments between group members brings about competition of ideas which causes them to arrive at more innovative decisions. Dysfunctional conflict reduces a group's performance because of competition between individual positions, which sets aside the interest of the business (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). When there is conflict in institutions, they are compelled to find innovative ways to solve them and create change. Therefore, conflict serves as a stimulant for change to occur (Bercovitch, 2014). Deetz and Stevenson (1986), also support this theory by stating that conflict is managed well when innovative solutions are implemented.

Conflict in educational institutions can be better understood by discussing the conflicts that take place in the workplace. The institutional conflict theory states that conflict is inevitable, and several conflicts occur in an institution (Mohamed, 2015). There are five types of conflict that occur in educational institutions; intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, and inter-institutional conflict. These five classifications provide an in-depth view of conflict in schools and some of their causes.

2.3.1 Intrapersonal conflict

This refers to the conflict that occurs within an individual. Lamb (2008), refers to this type of conflict as a struggle between oneself and the mind. An employee can experience this type of conflict if they are struggling with work. For example, a person can be nervous because of the fear of being incompetent to perform a particular task (Jokanović & Tomić, 2017). According to Nastase (2007), this type of conflict can also

be caused by the individual or the environment. If an individual is faced with situations that are against their principles or values, they experience this kind of conflict. For example, lecturers who are under paid, disrespected by the students they teach, and are looked down on by society, have difficulties in having good relationships with students and teaching effectively. Also, a teaching assistant who does not feel competent enough to be assisting the lecturer and students in a course, may find it difficult to perform well since they have no confidence in themselves.

2.3.2 Interpersonal conflict

This conflict can also be referred to as dyadic conflict (Rahim, 2002).

Interpersonal conflict refers to the conflict that occurs between two individuals. For example, a lecturer and a teaching assistant. It is evident in situations where the teaching assistant finds it difficult to submit to the tutelage of the lecturer, but want to have his/her own way without taking cognizance of his/her inexperience. This is a very common occurrence because it involves a clash of ideas, principles, and emotions (Jokanović & Tomić, 2017). Because we all have different personalities, backgrounds, or cultures, disagreements are likely to arise. The conflict between two people does not always mean violence; it can be implicit which means; it is not directly expressed. Giving a cold attitude or sharp remarks could indicate conflict (Folarin, 2013). A way to manage this kind of conflict is to have an open mind, which is the willingness to accept new ideas but without compromising one's values.

2.3.3 Intragroup conflict

This kind of conflict occurs between individuals within a group. Groups or departmental members in an educational institution may not be able to perform their tasks

to the best of their abilities if they cannot work together in harmony, resulting in rippling negative effect on overall performance of that educational institution. For example, conflict between staff in the information technology (IT) department can bring about a lot of problems. A school that uses technology in a lot of their operations must have an IT department member working together in harmony. If there are misunderstandings between them, there will be poor communication, leading to poor performance. For instance, poor functioning projectors can disrupt lessons, problems with online registration platform can affect students, poor functioning of online platforms to share academic resources as a result of conflict between employees in that department can disrupt students' studies, among others. According to Jokanović and Tomić (2017), conflict can help stimulate innovative ideas to meet objectives. But when it escalates, it needs to be properly managed.

2.3.4 Intergroup conflict

This conflict occurs between two or more groups or departments in educational institutions. For instance, the information technology department and the school's registry or the finance department and the human resources department. This kind of conflict can arise when there is competition between groups because of limited resources or overlapping boundaries. Other reasons that cause this kind of conflict to occur include the reward system, communication barriers, and role ambiguity (Bercovitch, 2014). Unlike the interpersonal conflict, intergroup conflict does not happen often. However, its occurrence is common in educational institutions, especially between departments that work closely to produce a particular result. a typical example is a university's registry that uses technology as a means for students to register for courses online and have

access to academic resources requires that the information technology (IT) department is reliable with no issues with the system. So, if there are issues between both departments, there will be poor communication and it will take a longer time to fix any technological issue which will affect both students and lecturers.

2.3.5 Inter-institutional conflict

This type of conflict occurs between institutions. Concerning educational institutions, a school can be in conflict with an institution, especially, an institution that they have partnered with. For example, Ashesi University is in partnership with a lot of institutions across Africa to host workshops to enable them to engage with the students. They are also in partnership with universities like Swarthmore College and College of Wooster to provide students with student exchange programs and study abroad opportunities. If Ashesi University starts to have issues with some of these institutions and they are not dealt with, the partnership can be dissolved. This can greatly affect the students because they would lose the opportunity of having to engage with potential employers. If they also have issue with the college they are in partnership with, students would lose the opportunity of partaking in student exchange programs or study abroad.

As stated earlier, there specific types that occur in educational institutions and there are there five basic types of conflicts that occur in educational institutions. There are other types that crop up in educational institutions. Examples are relationship conflict, task conflict, and process conflict. With the wide range of conflict types in educational institutions, managing them well, using the appropriate approaches is the key to a successful institution.

2.4 Causes of Conflict in Educational Institutions

There are several reasons why conflict occurs in educational institutions. The most obvious cause of conflict is the differences in personalities and beliefs. People come from different backgrounds and experiences that contribute to their beliefs. As stated earlier, one of the reasons why they occur is because of limited resources. Lack of resources such as technology, stationery, amongst others, can affect the teaching and learning process. Another cause is poor communication which causes employees to make incorrect assumptions leading to enriching the grapevine. When job roles are not communicated properly to the staff of the school, it may bring about conflict. Also, introducing an innovative idea that is not properly communicated to the employees of the school on how the idea will be implemented and be beneficial can result in a conflict (Isabu, 2017).

Another cause of conflict is task inter-dependence conflict. This is when conflict arises because the task of a person is dependent on the task of another person (Isabu, 2017). An example is when the work of a teaching assistant is dependent on the work of the lecturer they are assisting. If the lecturer does not teach properly, it would be difficult for teaching assistants to assist students with their work. Poor teaching also affects teaching assistants because they have to also sit in the class during lectures in order to understand the topics that are taught. Another example is when the work of a department is dependent on the work of another department. If the IT department does not work well, it would affect the registry department because students would not be able to register online for their classes. Stress is another source of conflict in educational institutions. When there is a lot of pressure on an employee, it turns into stress which affects the way the employee is able to function as they usually will and this can reduce productivity (Isa,

2015). A person who has a lot of roles (work overload) may feel pressured at some point. For example, a lecturer may be the patron of a club in the school, a capstone supervisor, and a lecturer for two courses with more than one cohort. Having these many roles can be stressful and can reduce the productivity of the lecturer. Lastly, roles and expectations are a source of conflict. The role is the behavior, quality of work and boundary within which an employee is expected to perform. If a person in the IT department does not understand his/her role, it might bring about conflict (Salleh & Adulpakdee, 2012)

There are other causes of conflicts that occur in institutions, but with regards to educational institutions, some of the causes of conflicts are limited resources, poor communication, task inter-dependence, stress, roles and expectations.

2.5 Conflict Resolution and Management

Conflict management and conflict resolution are two different things but go hand in hand. Conflict management prevents conflict from escalating into a situation that can go out of hand and not thrive anymore. And conflict resolution is reaching an amicable agreement between the two parties involved (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). With conflict resolution, managers must be able to recognize the level of conflict to ensure it is solved. It can be divided into two parts: conflict prevention and conflict resolution. Conflict prevention is inhibiting unnecessary conflict by exhibiting appropriate behavior. (Jokanović & Tomić, 2017). According to research, some conflict types are not resolvable but manageable because of the culture of the parties involved. For example, a study was done to determine which conflict types are more resolvable in the United States and Chinese cultures. The results stated that in both cultures, task conflict is more resolvable than relationship conflict (Zhang & Zhang, 2012).

A process that can be used to resolve conflict is mediation, which is a common form of conflict resolution. Mediation is a process by which a neutral third party facilitates the process of conflict resolution by helping parties explore innovative solutions to reach an agreement (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2006; Şimşek & Bölten, n.d.). There are advantages of mediation that make it appropriate to use. First, the mediation process is voluntary because the mediator does not determine which party involved is guilty or not. The mediation process is confidential, and the parties involved have the right to invite their lawyers who give them counsel concerning the process and its effectiveness but are not directly involved in the resolution process (Radulescu, 2012). Also, mediation is private, efficient, effective and costs less because disputes are resolved faster and can be done in a few sessions. Parties in dispute arrive at their own resolution and take control of their future dealings with one another (Stitt, 1998).

On the other hand, the theory about conflict management states that institutions should have conflict management systems in place to resolve conflicts (Ongori, 2009). Stitt's (1998) contribution to conflict management systems development in institutions earlier on suggests the use of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) systems to reduce, manage and resolve conflicts amicably. He defined ADR as "a spectrum of processes that can be used to resolve conflicts" (p. 14). According to him, the ADR spectrum of processes is made up of mediation, arbitration and negotiation, and several other processes, some of which are a combination of mediation, arbitration and negotiation. ADR systems in institutions are informal, apply equity, and encourage direct participation and communication between parties in conflict. Benefits of ADR abound and some of which are: reduction of time and cost in resolving conflicts, maintenance of

relationships, satisfactory outcomes, addressing emotional issues, avoidance of future conflicts among others (Stitt, 1998).

In resolving conflicts, one step that the individuals involved can be helped using the ADR approach is to enable them to understand there is conflict, and it is a problem because it can influence their performance at the workplace. Another step is to understand that, the people involved have different personalities or are different. Also, understanding the motive behind each person's action can help with effective conflict management (Mohamed, 2015). According to Thakore (2013), the purpose of conflict management is to contain any form of destruction during the management process, while trying to reach an agreement between the two parties.

2.5 Conclusion

The various articles provide evidence that conflict affects employees to an extent which translates into the performance of lecturers, staff, students and the institution. Moreover, they highlight the fact that conflict can have both a positive and negative effect on an individual or an institution. There are also several types which either occur internally or externally, and it is important that they are managed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed relevant information that provided a better understanding of the study. This chapter will determine research methods and tools that would be used to collect the data which would validate the information from the previous chapter.

This study aims to identify how conflict can affect employee performance by finding out the causes of conflict, and the possible solutions to ensure effective conflict resolution in two tertiary institutions in Ghana. The chapter looks at the methods and procedures used to collect and analyze data. This chapter consists of the research design, research scope, and data collection and analysis.

3.2 Research Design

The design of the study is based on qualitative research approach. This approach helps to provide an in-depth analysis of conflict and its effect. The qualitative approach to this research is appropriate because it provides a better description of the experiences of research participants. This makes it easier for readers to have an in-depth understanding of the viewpoint of participants and how it contributes to the importance of the research (Johnston & Vanderstoep, 2009). Even though we face conflicts every day, it is more profound than we think, and that is why it is difficult to resolve them. The qualitative research design provides a better understanding of the study is phenomenology.

Phenomenology helps us understand situations that we do not fully understand. It helps bridge gaps by providing insight on a topic or situation (Astalin, 2013). Regarding

the issue of conflict, phenomenological research can help provide a better understanding of the cause and effect of conflict on employees in the workplace (Johnston & Vanderstoep, 2009). An in-depth data collection and analysis can help readers have a better understanding of how, why, what and when conflict arises. Knowledge of this can bring about effective resolutions of conflict to ensure that employees are comfortable with the work environment so they can perform to the best of their abilities.

3.3 Research Scope

The study focuses on two tertiary institutions in Ghana, Ashesi University and Lancaster University Ghana. It was a deliberate choice because they were convenient locations to conduct my study. This is because I was a student at Ashesi University, and Lancaster University is near my home.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

The population used for the study was employees from Ashesi University and Lancaster University Ghana, And the sample frame was the employees that work at administration, the lecturers, and faculty interns, or teaching assistants. I interviewed 6 employees from each university, making a total of 12 participants. I used 6 from each university because my objective is to collect in-depth data for analysis to facilitate the understanding of conflict and its effect rather than making generalizations to a large population.

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Data Collection Tools/Instruments

In collecting data, I conducted semi-structured interviews. I decided to use semi-structured interviews because it allowed me to focus on specific themes related to the research, making it easier to compare the answers provided by the participants. Initially, I did not want to conduct interviews for the fear that the interviewees would not be honest about some issues at the workplace. But I finally decided to conduct the interviews because I realized that I would be able to get in-depth answers and also participants are likely to be honest if I already have a good relationship with them. The following questions were asked during the interview.

- How do you manage conflict?
- Tell me about a situation where you had to deal with a difficult person.
 - Was there a third party to help resolve the conflict between you and the person. Or did you have to cope?
 - If you did, how did you handle the situation?
- When you are working in a team, how do you deal with differences in opinions and personalities.
- Tell me about a situation where you had to deal with difficult teammates. And how did it affect the performance of the team?
- Tell me about a situation where you had a problem with a colleague or coworker.
 - What did you do to resolve the problem?
- Tell me about a situation where you had a problem with a colleague or coworker you were working with on a project.

- What did you do to resolve the problem?
- How did you handle a disagreement you had with your boss?
- How does conflict outside the workplace affect your performance at the workplace?
- How does conflict with coworkers affect your performance at the workplace?

3.5.2 Data collection procedure

For the interviews, I interviewed research participants in Ashesi University during the semester as a result, accessibility was no issue. I booked an appointment with them at their convenience for the interview sessions. I had to go to Lancaster University Ghana to interview the employees. As stated earlier, I sampled 2 employees from each department. For each interview, I spent a total of 1 hour and 30 minutes to interview each participant.

3.5.3 Data Preparation, Collation and Processing

During the interviews, I took down notes for each interviewee and recorded all that was being said. Before doing this, I asked for their consent. I compiled the notes I had for each interview, and in addition, I transcribed what was recorded. By doing this, it made it easier for me to analyze my data by categorizing them into themes. I also filtered my notes by taking out all irrelevant information. Apart from keeping a hard copy of the notes, I also kept a softcopy on my laptop and a backup on the cloud.

3.6 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data collected, I categorized the data into short phrases to represent themes. By doing this, I observed patterns that were words or phrases that were common in each interview. I then compared my findings to the literature I found to see if

there were any similarities or differences. I also compared to find out if there was any missing information; that is, information that I expected the interviewees to provide.

After doing all this, I linked the data to my research objectives to determine how relevant the data collected was for my study, and then summarized my data under each category to develop themes for my write-up.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

During the interviews, the employees were made aware that they would stay anonymous, which made them more comfortable to answer the questions truthfully. During the interviews, I asked the interviewees for their consent to record the interview. I also requested permission from management for both universities to know when it was the appropriate time to meet with the employees so I could interview them. The study participants were aware of their rights regarding the study. They knew they did not have to be involved if they did not want to. They knew they could stop participating at any time during the interview. The participants involved were also aware of my reasons for interviewing them. I gave them an insight into what my study was about before including them in the process.

3.9 Summary

Qualitative research method was used whereby semi-structured interviews were conducted. A sample frame of 6 employees from each university were used in the study. This was an appropriate sample size for the research method that was used. Data was collected and analyzed by categorizing responses to each interview question (words and phrases) into themes.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter analyzes the results as discussed in the previous chapter, and focuses on the findings that were obtained by interviewing employees from Ashesi University and Lancaster University Ghana. I interviewed 6 employees from each university, making a total of 12 participants. They included teaching assistants, lecturers, and administration staff. The data collected was based on how the participants manage conflict, the causes of conflict and how it affects their performance at the workplace. The aim of collecting this data was to achieve the objectives of this research and provide answers to the research questions. The responses were categorized into themes which made it easier to analyze and understand the findings. Based on the data collected, there were similarities in the responses of the participants from both Ashesi and Lancaster University Ghana.

4.1 Conflict Management

Participants were asked how they manage conflict to understand how employees in educational institutions manage conflict. The responses were based on whether it was interpersonal or intrapersonal conflict. 9 participants out of 12 stated that if it is interpersonal conflict, they would talk to the person to resolve it by working together to come up with a solution. Out of the 9 participants, 6 participants went on to say that if it does not work out, they would involve a third person. Just 3 participants stated that they would ignore the person and not bother to try and resolve it. When dealing with a difficult person, 7 participants stated that they would involve a third party to resolve it. And 5 participants stated they would only involve a third party if it was necessary. For

intrapersonal conflict, all the participants responded that confiding in a third party, especially someone close to them like a relative or a very good friend is the best option.

4.2 Performance at the Workplace

To determine how employees perform when there is conflict at the workplace, I asked them two questions concerning performance; *“How does conflict outside the workplace affect your performance at the workplace?”* and *“How does conflict with coworkers affect your performance at the workplace?”* For the first question, 10 participants stated that they can separate their work life from their personal life so, problems outside the workplace do not affect them. Only 2 participants stated that it would only affect them if the problem has to do with someone who is significant to them, for example a relative, close friend, etc. For the second question, 8 participants stated that it affects productivity if they must work directly with the person. But if they do not, then it does not affect them. And 4 participants said they would not focus on the conflict even if they are working directly with the person because they know it would affect their performance.

4.3 Conflict in Teamwork

To know how the participants work in teams, two questions were asked; *“When you are working in a team, how do you deal with different opinions and different personalities?”* and *“Tell me about a situation where you had to deal with difficult teammates. And how did it affect the performance of the team?”* For the first question, 10 participants stated that they respect the opinions of others and the fact that everyone is different so, they try to keep an open mind when working with others. 6 participants

stated that they try to be good listeners and contribute when necessary. And for the second question, 7 participants pointed out that they either try to do the work appointed to the difficult teammates, or they had to step up and ensured that everyone did their part. But 5 participants said they ignored those teammates because focusing on them will slow down the team and not add value to the work.

4.4 Causes of Conflict

Based on the questions that were asked during the interviews, the responses revealed what caused the conflict in the first place. I asked the participants about disagreements they had with their boss, and 9 participants stated that they were mostly misunderstandings due to lack of communication. Only 3 participants stated that some of their bosses mistreated them for no reason giving the impression that they were just authoritative or they did not like them. Questions with regards to teamwork revealed that some conflicts existed because teammates were not cooperating.

4.5 Analysis of Results

Analysis of the results was based on the questions asked to participants during the interview.

How do you manage conflict?

This question was asked to determine how participants generally manage conflict. However, it was divided into two parts; interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict. In dealing with interpersonal conflict, 9 participants stated that they would talk to the person to resolve the issue, and 6 participants out of the 9 said they would involve a third person if they are not able to resolve the issue. And the remaining 3 participants said they would

ignore the person. Based on these results, it shows that the way people solve their issues is dependent on the situation. During the interview, 4 participants stated that they would talk to the person to try and resolve the issue if it is a close friend or a family member. However, if the person is just someone they work with, they would involve a third person to prevent the problem from aggravating and to also quickly resolve the issue. This shows that a third person does not always need to be involved for a conflict to be resolved. Moreover, 2 participants highlighted the fact that they are able to resolve the issue with the person because the person understands that there is an issue and is willing to resolve the issue. This finding shows that people can resolve conflicts without the involvement of a third person if the other party is willing to resolve the conflict. This supports Mohammed's (2015) point which states that one of the steps used in ADR is to ensure that the parties involved understand that there is an issue. With regards to educational institutes, one participant stated that if the issue is with a coworker, they would involve their boss as the third to help resolve the issue. She went on to say that it is a faster way to solve the issue to get back on track because having issues with a coworker can affect students especially if she needs to work with the person to assist students.

For intrapersonal conflict, all the participants stated that they would involve a third party. This shows that people normally like to talk to someone they trust to help them come up with a solution to resolve their issues. During the interview, one participant stated that the person they talk to will depend on the situation. For example, if it is about relationship issues, she would talk to her mom about it, if it is work related, she might talk to a colleague about it, and so on.

How does conflict outside the workplace affect your performance at the workplace?

This question was asked to determine the extent to which conflict can affect the performance of the participants at the workplace. 10 participants stated that conflict outside the workplace would not affect them because they try to separate their personal lives from their working life. Only 2 participants stated that it would affect them if the person is significant to them. Thus, a family member or close friend. These results show that people try to separate their personal lives from their working life; although it is not easy to do so but they try their best. And this can be seen with the case of the two participants that stated that conflict affects them if it involves someone significant to them.

During the interview, one of the participants gave an example of a situation using his children. He stated that if his child is sick or his child's school call him because there is an issue, it would affect how he performs at the workplace because his mind would not be at peace due to the wellbeing of his child. He also stated that in this situation, he would ask for a leave to attend to his child because he would not be able to assist students with their academic work, which would affect the students greatly. This means that conflict outside the workplace can affect a person's performance at the workplace because it is not everyone that can entirely separate their personal lives from their working lives. And in an educational institution, the students will suffer because they are not able to get the full attention that is required from their academic advisor.

How does conflict with coworkers affect your performance at the workplace?

When participants were asked this question, 8 participants stated that it would affect their performance if they have to work directly with the person, while the remaining 4 participants stated that they would not focus on the conflict even if they are working directly with the person because they know it can affect their performance. The results show that conflict with a coworker can affect the performance of a person at the workplace. According to one participant, working directly with the person makes them very anxious and begins to think a lot. 2 participants stated that they almost quit their jobs because they had to work directly with the person, which made them very unhappy. Two participants highlighted on the fact that quitting a job because you cannot work with someone is a good decision you can make for yourself because most of your day is spent at the workplace and so it is important that you are happy with where you work and who you work with or work for. With regards to the 4 participants that stated that it would not affect their performance, it shows that some people like to keep things professional and it is easier when the person is not significant to them. One of the participants stated that it is normal to have a misunderstanding especially at a workplace. And it easier to ignore the person because they are just a colleague and nothing more so he does not see why he should let their actions affect how he functions at the workplace. He also stated that as a teaching assistant, if he lets the issue affect him, it would affect the way he relates with his students. This means that conflict can affect the performance of an employee in an educational institute which would also affect the students.

When you are working in a team, how do you deal with opinions and different personalities?

This question was asked to determine how people manage the different personalities and opinions they experience in a team. According to the results, 10 participants stated that they respect people's opinions and they try to tolerate people by understanding that we have different personalities. And 6 participants stated that they try to be good listeners and contribute when necessary. But during one of the interviews, a participant stated that they try to respect people and their opinions, but some people are always talking and do not give others the chance to contribute, and end up imposing their opinions on their teammates. This reveals the reason why as human beings we experience conflict all the time which is because we have different personalities and beliefs. This validates the point that employees would not get along from time to time due to differences in perspectives, miscommunication, values, personalities and experiences in life (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2006; Kudonoo, 2016).

Tell me about a situation where you had to deal with difficult teammates. And how did it affect the performance of the team?

In answering this question, 7 participants stated that they either tried to do the work appointed to the difficult teammates, or they ensured that everyone did their part. And the remaining 5 participants stated that they would ignore them because focusing on them will slow them down. The results reveal that some people prefer to ignore people that do not add value to whatever they are doing. In the earlier responses of participants to prior interview questions, some of the participants stated that they would just ignore

the person. This could mean that people find this as an easier solution especially if ignoring the person does not affect them. One participant said, *“Some people would just waste your time if you focus on them which can affect how your team performance. And in such situations, you would always have to give a report at the end, so if you are not useful there would be consequences.”* Therefore, all he must worry about is what he can do as an individual and how he can help the other teammates that are willing to do the work. This result provide evidence that how you solve an issue in a team will determine how your team performs. For example, focusing on the difficult teammate will slow the team down, but focusing on the work when there is even conflict can cause a team to produce good results. This supports the example that if lecturers and teaching assistants are not able to work in harmony, they would not be able to provide the students with the adequate knowledge and skills they need.

How did you handle a disagreement you had with your boss?

This question was deliberately asked to find out whether participants would approach a conflict differently because it is with their boss. According to the results, 9 participants stated that the conflicts they have had with their boss was due to a misunderstanding caused by lack of communication. And 3 participants stated that some of their bosses mistreated them for no reason giving the impression that they were just authoritative or they did not like them. One participant stated that when he had a different job in Ashesi University, he had a boss that did not like him and he did not understand why that was the case. But it was as though she hated him so much that she one time, embarrassed him in front of the students. So, it got to a point where he had to hide from her to avoid any embarrassments and this greatly affected his relationships with the

students because he was not able to assist them as his job required of him. Another participant stated that her boss is just unnecessarily strict and she believes that it is a common trait of most people in higher positions, so, she just ignores the ill treatment and does what she has to do. This supports Ghaffar's (2009) point that school principals or heads of departments use the authoritative approach like pressurizing lecturers to complete specific tasks which can bring about conflict.

4.6 Conclusion

Based on the results, it is evident that conflict arises in educational institutions and can affect the performance of employees depending on how they decide to manage the conflict. And if they do not resolve the conflict, it can affect the performance of the students especially if they have to work directly with the students.

The next chapter would highlight specific information that was analyzed in this chapter and make conclusions that would achieve the objective of the research by answering the research questions.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore how unresolved conflict can negatively affect the productivity of educational institutions. The research provides a deeper understanding of conflict in educational institutions and how it can affect the performance of employees and translate into the institution's performance. The qualitative research method was used and the type of qualitative research design employed was phenomenology which helps bridge gaps on the topic by the providing insight for better understanding. The general objectives of the research were to identify causes of conflict in the two educational institutions under study, identify the effect of conflict on employee performance in the two institutions, and to identify the possible approaches that can be used to resolve conflicts in the two institutions to boost productivity and growth.

5.2 Conclusion

Based on my results, the following conclusions can be made:

1. One of the best ways to resolve a conflict if a person wants to involve a third person is to involve someone they trust like a close friend or family member.
With regards to educational institutions, talking to an immediate boss will be the best option if the conflict is with a coworker. At least this way, the conflict can be resolved quickly.
2. One common cause of conflict between employees or an employee and an employer is poor communication.

3. When trying to resolve a conflict, it is important that the parties involved understand that there is an issue and are willing to solve the issue, because that is the first step to resolving the issue.
4. If an employee is going through a serious issue that is not work related, it is appropriate to take a leave from work to solve the issue. Because not taking a leave can affect performance, which will also affect students if the employee is working directly with students. If the employee works in a department like finance or IT, it can affect the educational institution. Even though most participants stated that they can separate their personal lives from their work, it is a very hard thing to do especially if the issue involves someone that is significant.
5. It is also best to ignore people that do not add value to your life. If an employee is in conflict with someone they do not directly work with, it is just best to ignore the person and focus on what has to be done.
6. Lastly, conflict is inevitable, therefore it has to be anticipated, and when it arises, should be handled appropriately.

5.3 Recommendations

Employees need to be comfortable at their workplaces in order to produce good results for the institution they work for. With regards to educational institutions, even though the study was focused on the employees, the recommendations are for the employers. Because as stated earlier, the outcome of this research may provide ideas educational institutions can leverage on to focus on conflict, its causes and effective resolutions for improved productivity and growth. Employers must ensure that there is effective communication at the workplace, including the fact that employees need to

know and understand what the role of their job is. Superiors, especially the immediate bosses should ensure that they are not unnecessarily strict because it makes them unapproachable and in effect, prevents employees from voicing out their issues.

Employers or immediate bosses should also ensure that everyone is treated fairly because employees need a safe environment to work well, and not have to come to work always unhappy because they know they are going to have a bad day. Lastly, employers should provide a formal complaint process that employees can use to resolve any issues they have.

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