

Workplace Conflicts and Perception of Quality Higher Education in Ghana

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Abstract: Conflicts as a complex reality are common in higher education settings. Unfortunately, little is known about their impact on perceptions of the quality of higher education. This study assessed the impact of structural and interpersonal conflicts on the perception of quality higher education. To obtain the data, the study used a cross-sectional survey research design. The study sampled 310 academic and administrative staff from three universities in Northern Ghana using a multi-stage sampling technique. The questionnaire was the primary data-gathering tool. The prevalence of conflicts and perception of quality in higher education were assessed using simple frequencies and percentages, while the structural equation modelling technique was used to investigate the complex relationship among structural conflicts, interpersonal conflicts, and perception of higher education quality. The results indicate that most workplace conflicts in higher education are structural in nature, arising from jurisdictional uncertainties, interdependence, and

authority relationships. The findings further indicate that structural and interpersonal conflicts have little influence on perceptions of quality higher education. Nevertheless, in terms of direction, structural conflicts have a positive link with the perception of quality higher education, whereas interpersonal conflicts have a negative relationship. It is hereby recommended that a cross-sectional survey on the influence of conflicts on effective teaching and learning in public universities in Ghana should be conducted.

Keywords: Workplace conflicts, Perception of quality, Higher education, Interpersonal conflicts, Structural conflicts.

1. Introduction

Conflicts are inherent disputes between individuals or groups (Jones, 2008). Bagshow (1998) contends that conflicts are an inevitable element of existence. He argued that conflicts are unavoidable when people struggle for employment, riches, power, recognition, and security. In recent years, the phenomenon has piqued the interest of authors and scholars. Many of these scholars (Ciuladiene & Kairiene, 2017; du Plessis & Cain, 2017; Sarpkaya, 2012; Sumera & Sumera, 2017; Bolton, 2016) have investigated the reasons for conflicts in schools. Some researchers (Barmao, 2012; Thapa, 2015) have investigated the influence of disputes at the workplace on staff morale and productivity levels. Others (Musah, 2007; Ghaffar, 2019; Okoth & Yambo, 2016; Opoku-Asare, Takyi, & Owusu-Mensah, 2015) have investigated how workplace conflicts are handled in educational institutions. Relatively little is known about the influence of workplace conflicts on quality perception in higher education. When it comes to the phenomena of workplace disputes, however, higher education, whose relevance is defined by the quality of its services, is not immune. According to Holton (2000), conflicts have existed in higher education for a long time. Anderson (2002) contends that conflicts at higher education institutions are unavoidable due to the enjoyment of intellectual freedom, freedom of speech, and unfettered thought.

The phenomenon of conflict appears to have an impact on quality service delivery in higher education (Holton, 2000). Researchers and educators have expressed concerns regarding the quality of higher education (Stukalina, 2011, Bruçaj, 2018; Kagondu & Marwa, 2017). They argue that higher learning institutions' capacity to promote economic growth and prosperity is declining in a number of developing countries owing to a range of constraints that prevent quality education at that stage. Hoodbhoy (1998) explains that Pakistan's system of education is in poor form relative to other third-world countries. The researcher blames the problem on violence and disciplinary behaviour in educational institutions. Mukhtar, Siengthai, and Islam (2012) argue that workplace

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conflicts have a detrimental impact on quality education. They go on to say that this quality requirement has ramifications for the country's human resource potential. The recommendations and conclusions of the authors appear to present conflict as something negative that should not be tolerated in higher education. However, not all conflicts are detrimental. Functional conflicts are those that have a beneficial influence on the growth of organisations (Barmao, 2012). These conflicts have the ability to boost productivity and push staff to discover creative solutions to issues. Conflicts that appear to be hazardous are dysfunctional conflicts (Bolton, 2016). Dysfunctional conflicts have a detrimental impact on organisational progress (Barmao, 2012). They may be hazardous and reduce productivity by interfering with people's ability to focus on their activities. Personality clashes and non-work-related reasons, such as different religious systems, might lead to these types of disagreements (Bolton, 2016). What sorts of conflict are deemed functional, and how much do they promote productivity and, more importantly, the perception of quality service delivery in higher education? 2. What sort of conflicts are deemed dysfunctional, and how do they affect perceptions of higher education? An attempt to seek answers to these questions necessitated the research study.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This research aimed to discover answers to the issues raised above. Thus, the study sought to determine whether the occurrence of workplace conflicts has anything to do with the perception of quality higher education. The study was especially interesting in light of the apparent lack of studies addressing the issue of disagreements at workplaces and perceptions of quality in higher education in Northern Ghana. Education is today considered a global commodity; therefore, there is the need to understand workplace conflict and its consequences on quality perception in higher education. This knowledge might go a long way toward identifying and mitigating the detrimental effects of workplace conflicts and thus support their quality improvement efforts.

2. Conceptual Framework of the Study.

Scholars and researchers have examined and described workplace conflict in a variety of ways. According to Rubin (1994), conflict is an interpersonal disagreement that occurs between people, groups, organisations, and nations. Wall and Callester (1995) argue that conflict occurs when people or organisations discover that they are being stopped from attaining their interests or that others are adversely impacting their interests. This is perhaps what Omodan (2021) referred to as Kenimani-Kenimatoni organisation practice which disrupts relationships. Wall and Callester (1995) further argue that conflicts arise as a result of disputes and discrepancies during interpersonal encounters.

When it comes to the prevalence of disputes, educational institutions are no exception. According to Holton (2000), conflicts have been a part of academic life since ancient times. Conflicts are unavoidable at higher education institutions due to what might be termed academic freedom, general freedom of expression, and unfettered thought (Anderson, 2002). Gmelch and Carrol (1991) contend that conflict is inevitable in educational institutions due to the intrinsic elements of academic freedom that the institutions are permitted to enjoy. Miklas and Kleiner (2003) argue that educational institutions, by their nature, foster conflict. Adeyemi & Adu (2011) explain that conflict is common in educational institutions since members are human with diverse demands and interests. Despite this seemingly prevalent occurrence of conflict in higher education, empirical research on the subject has not delved deeply into Ghanaian higher educational institutions. According to Anderson (2002), most research on organisational conflict has ignored academic contexts, despite the fact that universities and their academic departments are not immune to conflict. He observes that "conflict is inescapable in universities since academic freedom, unrestricted language, and thought are encouraged" (Anderson, 2002, p. 3). Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008) and Hearn and Anderson (2002) explain that little is known about the dynamics of conflict among academic staff in Ghana's higher educational institutions and its link with quality perception. By conventional wisdom, structural conflicts must have a negative impact on the perception of quality in higher education. This traditional belief, however, appears to be scientifically unproven.

The phrase "quality education" is sometimes difficult to define. Differences in perception of what constitutes quality in higher education are based mainly on the demands and preferences of distinct higher education clients (Murphy & Dyrenfurth, 2019). A certain program of study may be regarded as high-quality by one consumer in higher education, while another may regard it as substandard (Lemay, Johnson & Larsen, 2009). When looked at from the perspective of higher education and job industry relationship, researcher (Karapetrovic & Willborn, as cited in Allan, Clarke & Jopling, 2009; Tetteh, 2018) contend that educational quality has to do with graduates' capacity to meet the needs of employers. Higher education, however, provides a diverse range of products and services to its internal and external "clients" that go well beyond knowledge and job industry requirements (Murphy & Dyrenfurth, 2019). When industry and higher education perspectives on quality are deeply considered, the situation becomes even more difficult. When measuring quality, the industry focuses primarily on the needs of the consumer (students). On the other hand, the higher education atmosphere makes "focus on the client" impossible (Tetteh, 2018; Da Silva, 2003). Da Silva (2003) argues that higher education considers its customers to be more than just students, despite the fact that students constitute the obvious majority. The university system, for example, has several additional consumers in various aspects of its activities (Pham & Starkey, 2016; Teo, 2001). Higher education's multifaceted purpose implies diverse customers with varying requirements, interests, and expectations.

The university serves three primary purposes; they are involved in teaching, research, and community service (Tetteh, 2018; Clarke et al., 2009). Each of these sectors has clients with varying perspectives and expectations of higher education. Various units, departments, centres, schools, and faculties also serve various consumers within the university system. For example, the university's residential facilities cater nearly entirely for students as clients. Other clients are uninterested in or in contact with this area of the university. The graduate studies and research school supports students, teachers, and other external stakeholders such as research sponsors and the governmental scholarship secretariat. Thus, one of the greatest impediments to quality improvement efforts is the perceived difficulty in defining quality. This controversy is supported by empirical investigations. Students in higher education strongly see themselves as consumers and are hesitant to even recognise other possibly genuine customer groupings (Tetteh, 2018; Flanagan, Uyarra & Laranja, 2011; Clarke et al., 2009; Da Silva, 2003; Helms & Key, 1994). Tetteh (2018) has discovered that teachers are cautious to consider students seriously as clients. To explain why students are viewed as the only consumers, Sahney et al. (2004) credit students' perception of students being the only customers to shifting worldwide trends and societal ambitions, making education more like a product with students as its clients. Owlia, Aspin, and Wall (1997) conducted a survey with 124 participants and discovered that students were the most important consumers, followed by employers, society, professors, and families in decreasing order of significance. Researchers (Tetteh, 2018, Ho & Wearn; 1995) have proposed that higher education access is relatively significant to quality improvement initiatives. As a result, this study defines quality higher education as being fit for purpose and meeting the requirements and expectations of its diverse clients.

This study developed the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 2 based on the stated problem and an assessment of the literature. There are three constructions in the framework. They include Interpersonal conflicts, structural conflicts, and perceptions of quality in higher education. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model of the study.

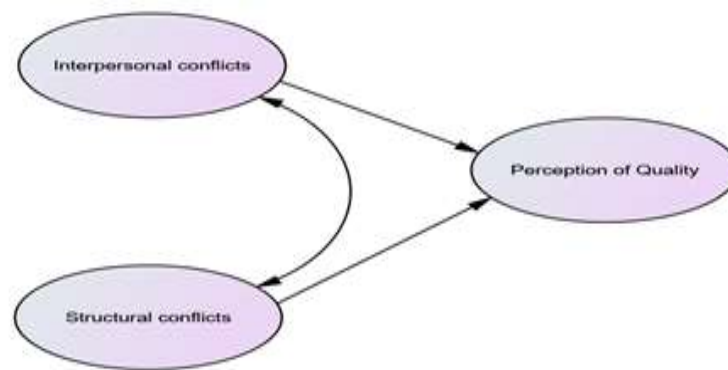


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Conflicts and Perception of Quality in Higher Education

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship among interpersonal and structural conflicts on one hand and perception of quality higher education on the other. The model suggests that there is covariance between interpersonal conflicts and structural conflicts. In other words, there is a mutual bi-directional relationship between the two. This is shown by a two-headed arrow connecting the two. The model also suggests that interpersonal conflict has a direct effect on the perception of quality higher education. This is illustrated by a one-headed arrow pointing from the interpersonal conflict to the perception of quality. Structural conflicts equally have a direct effect on the perception of quality higher education.

Research on workplace conflicts (Amason, 1996; Dana, 2001; Hussein & Al-Mamary, 2004; Mukhtar & Islam; 2011) suggests that conflicts positively and negatively affect worker productivity and perception of education quality. Mukhtar and Islam (2011) discover that conflict has an effect on students' perceptions of educational quality. But which component of conflict (structural or interpersonal) has the most impact on the sense of quality in higher education?

Structural conflict is created by forces outside of the parties involved in the disagreement (Mukhtar & Islam (2011)). These disputes tend to be caused by issues such as organisational changes, a chain of command, reporting systems, interdependence, limited physical resources, authority relationships, and jurisdictional ambiguity (Ciuladiene & Kairiene, 2017; Plessis & Cain, 2017). It may be claimed that if structural problems did not exist, the parties in structural disputes would have no motive to engage in conflict. However, it is possible to resolve these conflicts by recognising the structural issue and striving to alter it. Parties in this type of dispute may also be assisted in appreciating the external factors and constraints acting on them (Plessis & Cain, 2017). Parties' recognition that a disagreement has an external cause may persuade them to work together to solve the imposed problems. Solving challenges that cause structural tensions may lead to the people involved being more creative. In turn, innovation may contribute to quality improvements in higher education service delivery.

Interpersonal conflict appears to be the most common type of conflict that happens between two or more people. The participants in this disagreement may disagree on the appropriate method to handle challenges in their organisations (Hussein and Al-Mamar, 2019). This type of conflict can arise between a supervisor and his or her subordinate owing to disagreements over the organisation's aims and goals (Kinicki & Kreitner 2008). Personal hate, communication difficulties, and a lack of resources may be the root causes of these disputes (Whetten & Cameron, 2012).

According to empirical studies, structural or interpersonal conflicts appear to impact worker productivity and quality in higher education. The traditional perspective of conflicts is that they are bad and harmful phenomena that negatively impact organisations, particularly on quality service delivery (Kinickis & Kreitner, 2008). According to this viewpoint, conflicts should be avoided since they are detrimental to the growth and development of organisations. This is in consonance with Omodan (2019) that organisations should avoid any *politics of process* that could impede their productivities. According to Dana et al. (2001), conflicts cause psychological responses such as job discontent, loss of interest in work, absentmindedness to other things, and frustrations. These issues have a detrimental impact on higher education's impression of quality.

However, the human relations school of thought (1940-1970) has a distinct perspective. According to this school of thought, conflicts may positively affect productivity (Robbins, 2005). According to Rahim (1986), dealing with disputes determines whether the results are negative or good. Conflicts can motivate people to work harder and put forth more effort. According to Hussein and Al-Mamar (2019), in conflict circumstances, the individual uses his or her strengths, skills, and capabilities.

The study deals with two dimensions of conflicts; Interpersonal and organisational conflicts. The researcher intends to find out how each of the two affects the perception of quality in higher education. To put the study in its correct perspective, the following hypothesis has been set to guide the study:

2.1 Hypothesis

1. Structural conflict has no significant effect on perceived quality higher education.
2. Interpersonal conflict has no significant effect on perceived quality higher education.

3. Methodology

This section describes the approach used to gather data on the influence of workplace conflict on quality service delivery in higher education. The research paradigm, research design, study population, sample and sampling strategy, instrument employed, validity and reliability of the instrument, data collection processes, and analysis are all considered.

3.1 Research Paradigm

The study adopted the positivist paradigm in determining the influence of workplace conflicts on quality higher education. According to Comte (1856), experimentation, observation, and reason based on experience, which positivism is all about, should be the foundation for understanding human behaviour, and hence the only valid way of advancing knowledge and human understanding. Because the paradigm attempts to explain observations in terms of facts or measurable entities, it was chosen as the preferable worldview for this research (Fadhel, 2002). In furtherance of this, the study employed deductive reasoning, the formation of hypotheses, the testing of those hypotheses, the provision of operational definitions and mathematical equations, computations, extrapolations, and expressions. Therefore, predictions must be made to understand the causal links among the elements that explain quality education, and the possible effects of the explanatory factors on the dependent component must be controlled (quality higher education). The premise of this paradigm implies that in order to analyse a research topic, verifiable facts must be collected to support the theoretical framework of the study and allow the researcher to evaluate the hypotheses stated (Fadhel, 2002). Thus, the study relied on primary data by administering questionnaires on staff in the sampled universities. The research paradigm influenced the research design, which is explained below.

3.2 Research Design

The descriptive cross-sectional survey design was used to collect data in accordance with the research paradigm. This methodology was chosen because its application was congruent with the positivist research paradigm and the goal of the study, which was to determine the influence of workplace disputes on perceptions of quality higher education. The researcher was curious in the association between workplace conflicts and perceptions of service quality in higher education without manipulating the variables.

3.3. Population

A target population consists of members of a genuine group of people, events, or things from which a researcher wishes to generalise the findings of a study (Arthur, 2012; Gall et al., 2007). This study's population consisted of all teaching and non-teaching employees from the three public universities in Northern Ghana; University for Development Studies, C. K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences, and S.D. Dumbo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies are among them.

3.4. Sample and Sampling Procedure

A sample size of 310 employees was determined from a sample frame of 1,710 employees. It was based on the required accuracy with a confidence level of 95 per cent, as specified by the table of sample size determination (Gill et al., 2010). The number of participants from each university was determined as a percentage of the sample size. The sampled personnel at each of the universities was divided into two strata based on the designation. A list of all staff was compiled and divided into academic and administrative personnel. The study's administrative and academic employees were then sampled using the proportionate sampling approach.

3.5 Instrument

The data collection instrument utilised was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was in 4 main sections as follows:

- A. Background data of respondents
- B. Determinants of Structural conflicts
- C. Determinants of Interpersonal Conflict.
- D. Staff Perceptions of Quality Higher Education.

Sections B through C addressed the issue of conflicts in higher education. Section D focused on staff's perceptions of quality higher education. With the exception of the demographic characteristics, all items were answered on a Likert scale of strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Undecided (3) Agree (4), strongly agree (5). The instrument was arrived at through:

3.5.1 Literature Review on Conflicts and Perception of Quality

The researcher delved through research publications to select scales that were thought to be useful for measuring employee perceptions of service quality (Besterfield, 1994; Crosby, 1979; Betzl, 1969; Hampton, 1993). In this context, a modified version of the SEQUAL tool, which is commonly used by academics to undertake service quality studies (Kanakana, 2014), was adopted. SEQUAL is a quality framework used for assessing the quality of models and modelling languages. Conflicts in higher education literature also supplied useful material for quantifying the phenomena of conflicts, from which the research derived its scale.

3.5.2. Consultation with staff

When the staff of sampled universities were asked to reply to an open-ended questionnaire on their views regarding conflicts and perception of quality higher education, they were able to identify what they thought were the most critical concerns on the issues being researched. Staff at the pilot institution were requested to provide feedback on the draft versions of the questionnaire's collection of items. Their feedback and recommendations aided the researcher in reshaping the elements in the draft questionnaire.

3.6 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Validity is a crucial criterion for monitoring and judging the quality of research (Burns, 1999). As a result, it was vital to check the data and the instrument. The researcher confirmed that the instrument was content and construct valid. The validation procedure and processes were as follows:

3.6.1 Content Validity

To achieve this degree of validity, the study instrument was examined by specialists and lecturers of C. K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences. The items and identified scales were presented to the experts, who were then asked to categorise items according to the scales and score the quality of each item in terms of clarity, ambiguity, generality, and so on. They began by amending or rewording elements that were confusing or ambiguous. Items that were not useful were eliminated.

3.6.2 Pilot Study and Construct Validation

The instrument was piloted on a total of 106 Tamale Technical University staff as part of a pilot study. The 106-person sample had a mean age of 18.0 years and a standard deviation of 0.30 years. The questionnaires were given to the staff by the researcher. Staff completed the questionnaires in

the presence of the researcher. Following that, the questionnaires were collected, edited and construct validated.

The first step in the construct validation process was item analysis. A series of item analysis processes were followed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The purpose of this was to identify items that may be removed or recoded to improve the instrument's internal consistency. A special effort was made to improve internal consistency by focusing on items with low item remaining correlations (i.e. correlations between a certain item and the rest of the items excluding that item).

All items that decreased the alpha value had to be recorded. The item analysis method resulted in the recording of 9 of the 26 items (7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15). The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient increased from 0.72 to 0.896 when these nine items were recorded. Items recorded included those related to structural conflicts in higher education. Their first coding was on a 4-point Likert scale (Always, 4; Most of the Time, 3; Sometimes, 2; Hardly 1), which was distinct from the remainder of the 5-point Likert coding (Strongly agree, 5; Agree, 4, disagree, 3; strongly disagree, 2; Undecided, 1). This 24-item version with an alpha Cronbach coefficient of 0.896 formed the basis for the series of factor analyses described in the next section.

3.7 Factor Analysis

The questionnaire's 24 questions were evaluated using principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation. The factorability of the 24 objects was first investigated. Several well-known criteria for a correlation's factorability were applied. To begin, the determinant of the correlation matrix was found to be 0.004, indicating good multicollinearity (above the lower threshold of 0.0001, see Appendix A). Second, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .743, which was higher than the usually suggested threshold of .6, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($2(78) = 1119.087, p.05$). Finally, the diagonals of the anti-image correlation matrix were all above .5, confirming that each item had some common variation with the others. Given these general signs, factor analysis was found to be appropriate for all 24 components.

The researcher utilised the principle components since the major goal was to discover and compute composite scores for the characteristics underpinning excellent education and the phenomena of conflict rating scales. Initial Eigenvalues suggested that the three required components explained 24 per cent, 20 per cent, and 19 per cent of the variance, respectively. Varimax rotation of the factor loading matrix was used to investigate solutions for each of the three components. Following the investigation, the factor solution, which explained 64.6 per cent of the variance, was chosen due to: (a) its previous theoretical support; and (b) the 'levelling off' of Eigenvalues on the scree plot after three factors. Eleven items were removed in total because they did not contribute to a simple factor structure and did not fulfil the minimal requirements of having a primary factor loading of .4 or higher and no cross-loading of .3 or higher. On any factor, the "Role expectation" item did not load more than .3. The factor loadings for the item "incompatibility of aims" were between .3 and .4. "Reliable library services" showed factor loadings ranging from .3 to .4, while "Good interpersonal relationships and authority relations" had a factor loading of .53. In the last step, a principal components factor analysis of the remaining 13 items was performed using varimax rotation, with three factors accounting for 64.7 per cent of the variance.

Overall, the studies indicated that the three components (interpersonal conflicts, structural conflicts, and perceived quality) were most suitable for the model of workplace conflicts and perceived quality in higher education. These variables were reasonably consistent among themselves. Eleven of the twenty-four items used to assess these aspects were eliminated. After all inspections, the composite score data in the research had an essentially normal distribution, indicating that the data were well suited for parametric statistical analysis.

3.8 Data Collection Procedures

After the validation process, the research obtained ethical clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of C. K. Tadam University of Technology and Applied Science). After approval was granted, the researcher obtained a letter of introduction from C. K. Tadam University of Technology and Applied Sciences registrar. With this introductory letter, the researcher presented

himself to the various Universities. Following the approval and cooperation of the individual universities, the researcher commenced data collection in the sampled institutions with the assistance of some trained research assistants.

4. Results and Discussion

The purpose of the study, as indicated, was to determine the relationship between workplace conflicts and perception of quality higher education. Research data was collected by administering a questionnaire to the academic and non-academic staff of 3 universities in Northern Ghana. The data was inputted into SPSS software version 20 and analysed using simple frequencies and structural equation modelling. The results are presented as follows.

4.1 Respondents' Demographic Background

Results of the demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in this section. This section presents some background information about the respondents concerning their position, gender, religion, qualification, age, and years of experience.

4.1.1 Gender

The researcher sought to establish the gender of the respondents. The data was analysed using simple frequencies and presented and presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	162	78.6
Female	44	21.4
Total	206	100

Source: Field data, 2021

From Table 1, 78.6% of the respondents were males, whereas 21.4% were females. Thus, the majority of the respondents were males. This suggests that female participation in running the universities is still low.

4.1.2 Age Distribution

The researcher also sought to establish the age distribution of the respondents. Data were analysed using simple frequencies. The results are demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
18-25 years	14	6.8
26-35 years	68	33
36-45 years	112	54
Over 45 years	12	5.8
Total	206	100

Source: Field data, 2021

As can be seen in Table 2, the majority (54%) of the participants were aged between 36 and 45 years, followed by those aged between 26 to 35 years (29.2%), then by those between 18 and 25 years (6.8%). Respondents aged over 45 years formed the minority group with only (2.8%). This suggests that the workforce in the Universities sampled is of the youthful ages.

4.1.3 Highest Education Level Attained

The researcher sought to establish the respondents' highest education level, and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Education Level of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Diploma	33	16
Degree	47	22.8
Masters	65	31.6
PhD	35	17

Others	26	12.6
Total	206	100

Source: Field data, 2021

From table 3, all the respondents in the study had acquired formal education, albeit to higher academic levels. The majority (31.6%) held a university master’s degree, 22.8% had a university degree, and 16% had a diploma degree. This shows that the respondents in the study were well learned and thus would be able to comprehend and provide the relevant information sought by the study.

4.1.4 Work Experience

The researcher sought to establish the work experience of the respondents, and the findings are shown in table 4 below.

Table 4: Work Experience of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
1 - 5 years	45	21.8
6 - 10 years	102	49.5
11-15 years	33	16
Over 15 years	26	12.6
Total	206	100

Source: Field Data 2021

In Table 4, the overwhelming (49.5 per cent) of respondents had job experience ranging from 6 to 10 years, 21.8 per cent had work experience ranging from 1 to 5 years, and 12 per cent had work experience spanning more than 15 years. This indicates that the majority of respondents had extensive work experience at the university and were in a very excellent position to provide trustworthy information on the prevalence of conflicts at the university as well as their perception of quality higher education.

4.2 Prevalence of Conflicts

An element of the questionnaire gathered information on the occurrence of conflicts among academic and administrative staff at Northern Ghanaian universities. Thus, the conflicts were divided into two categories: structural conflicts and interpersonal conflicts. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was distributed to respondents. "Undecided," "strongly disagree," "disagree," "agree," and "strongly agree" were the replies. The analysis was done using simple frequencies. Table 5 summarises the responses.

Table 5: Prevalence of Conflicts in Higher Education

Category	Item	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)
<i>Structural Conflicts</i>	Jurisdictional ambiguities related	4.61	1.51
	Interdependence related	4.33	0.80
	Authority relations related	4.63	1.13
<i>Interpersonal conflicts</i>	Poor communication-related	4.57	0.82
	Lack of resources related	3.67	1.07
	Poor processes related	3.31	1.12
	Sense of mistrust related	4.45	1.33
	Incompatible personalities related	3.53	1.22

Source: Field Data 2021

As seen in Table 5, the majority of the disputes in the universities surveyed are structural in nature, stemming from jurisdictional uncertainties, dependency, and authority relationships. The findings

are consistent with those of Shahmohammadi (2014), Hakvoorta et al. (2018), and Valente and Lourenco (2020), who discovered interdependence, power/authority relationships, and jurisdictional uncertainties to be the primary drivers of workplace disputes in educational institutions. The factors behind these types of confrontations appear to be external to the persons involved. It thus appears that they result from how the various Universities are structured in terms of work relations and lines of reporting.

The results also show that most interpersonal conflicts result from communication problems. This response for communication problems had a Mean of = 4.57 and Standard Deviation = 0.82. Mistrust follows with M = 4.45, SD = 1.33. In the same vein, Barmao (2012), Antwi (2013), Sarpkaya (2012) found the communication gap to be a primary cause of interpersonal conflicts in educational institutions. Communication is the most crucial tool in the office, and when used properly, it has the potential to enhance productivity. However, if communication is not managed properly, it can lead to mistrust, unfavourable views, a sense of alienation, and demotivation. Mistrust exacerbates communication issues. This invariably leads to misunderstanding and conflict between bosses and their subordinates. As a result, productivity is undoubtedly low. To minimise communication-related disputes, concerted efforts should be undertaken to guarantee that information flows freely among workers in our educational institutions.

4.3 Perception of Quality in Higher Education

Respondents were asked to declare their view on several assertions about quality concerns in higher education once again. Their answers were graded on a 5-point Likert scale of undecided, strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Table 6 displays their replies as well as the findings of the analysis.

Table 6: Perception of Quality in Higher Education

Item	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)
Reliable internet services	3.61	1.51
Reliable administrative support services	4.33	0.80
Effective teaching and learning	4.63	1.13
Reliable library services	4.57	0.82
Good interpersonal relationship	3.67	1.07
Effective public relations	3.31	1.12
Quality facilities to support teaching & learning	4.45	1.33
Effective security services	3.53	1.22

The data in Table 6 shows that staff of the Universities in the Northern Region perceives administrative support services (M = 4.33, SD = 0.08), effective teaching and learning (M=4.63, SD = 1.13) facilities that support teaching and learning (M = 4.45, SD = 1.33) and library services (M = 4.57 SD = 0.82) to be of good quality. Effective security services, effective public relations, and reliable internet service appear to be of low quality, as perceived by respondents.

4.4 Workplace Conflict and Perception of quality Higher Education

The structural equation modelling framework was used in the study to examine the structural link between workplace conflicts and perception of quality in higher education. The SEM was utilised to respond to research question 3 concerning structural linkages. The researcher carried out the study using the structural equation modeling program SPSS Amos (Version 14) on a sample of 206 individuals. Since the data were normally distributed, a maximum likelihood estimation was used. The SPSS program version 20 was used to test the assumption of multivariate normality and linearity. There were no univariate or multivariate outliers found using box plots and Mahalanobis distance. The GFI = 0.926, the CFI = 0.942, the Tucker Lewis Fit (TLI) = 0.925, and the RMSEA = 0.05. According to further evidence, the CMIN/DF = 2.010 /51. These findings indicate that the measurement model gave a relatively good model fit and was appropriate for further investigation of the model outcomes. The results of the structural relationships are provided in Table 7.

Table 7: Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Direction of relationship	Construct	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Quality	<---	Interpersonal	-.045	.059	-.765	.444
Quality	<---	Structural	.011	.046	.244	.807
Interpersonal	<-->	Structural	.039	.053	.729	.466

Source: Field Data, 2021

The results show that interpersonal conflicts are negatively but insignificantly ($\beta = .045, p > 0.05$) related to the perception of quality higher education. However, the relationship between structural conflicts and perception of quality higher education is positive but also insignificant ($\beta = .011, p > 0.05$). The relationship between structural conflicts and interpersonal conflict was also positive but insignificant ($\beta = .039, p > 0.05$). The model analysis is also presented in figure 2.

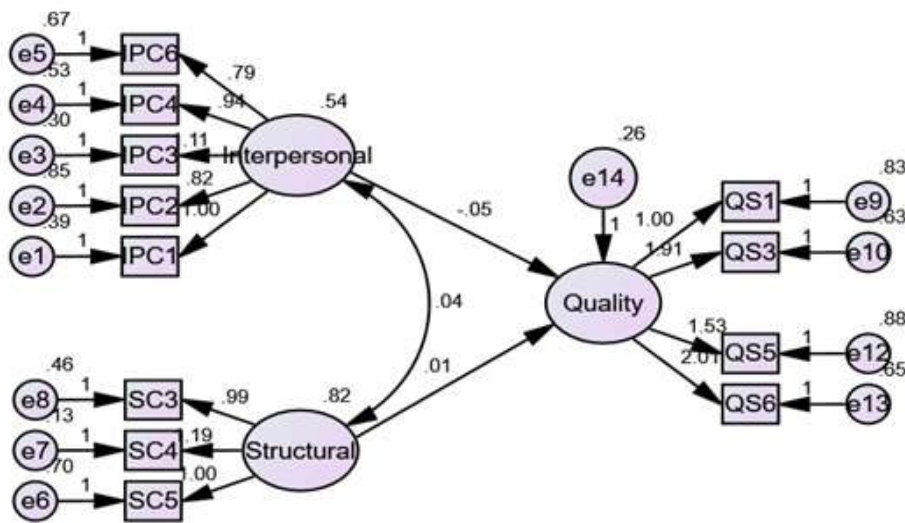


Figure 2: A Model of Work Place Conflict and Perception of Quality Higher Education

The structural relationships confirm the theoretical model's relationship among the three constructs; structural conflicts, interpersonal conflicts and perception of quality in higher education. However, the structural relationship among the constructs is insignificant, as portrayed by the p-value. With regard to structural conflicts, the result suggests that they are positively related to the perception of quality in higher education. The implication is that an increase in the perception of the prevalence of structural conflicts leads to an increase in the perception of quality in higher education. Those who claim that structural conflicts prevail also perceive quality in higher education to be good, suggesting that the prevalence of conflicts of this nature has a positive implication on the perception of quality in higher education. This is in line with Hussein and Al-Mamary (2019) contention that the phenomenon of conflicts has a positive implication on productivity and quality service delivery. The authors argue that conflicts stimulate individuals to exert more effort and to work hard. Some structural conflicts such as those related to interdependence apparently encourage people to be innovative enough to avoid depending too much. By doing so, work output increases and perception of quality also improves. Such a situation also stimulates individuals to use their abilities, skills, and talents to improve their perception of quality.

According to the results, interpersonal conflicts have a negative relationship with the perception of quality in higher education. Those who agree that interpersonal conflicts prevail in higher education also perceive quality in higher education to be of the lower side. This is expected because some conflicts have negative implications on the delivery of quality services in higher education. The causes of these types of conflicts are scarce resources, communication problems, personality

differences, lack of information, role incompatibility and stress (Whetten & Cameron, 2012). When not properly managed, these conflicts can lead to some psychological responses such as lack of interest in the job dissatisfaction and absentmindedness to other things (Amazon, 1996; Dana et al., 2001). The implication on worker productivity and perception of quality service delivery logically might be negative. Communication barriers between the public relations officer and the chief executive officer of a University may affect the University public relations, and this might fuel negative perceptions about quality service delivery within the university. Mukhtar and Islam (2019) find that communication barriers as a cause of conflicts are significantly ($p < 0.05$) and negatively related to the perceived quality of education. Communication-related causes of conflicts are mostly interpersonal conflicts.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that structural conflicts are the most prevalent in Universities in Northern Ghana. The most dominant interpersonal conflict type is communication-related conflict. Though the relationship is not significant, structural conflicts are positively related to the perception of conflicts, whereas interpersonal conflicts are negatively related to the perception of conflicts in higher education. Based on the above findings, the study recommends that constructive conflict resolution mechanisms should be adopted in the universities to resolve all emerging conflicts. Constructive conflict resolution may lead to parties thinking critically, and being innovative through that quality in general in higher education might be enhanced. The study further recommends that future research in these universities should focus on students' perception of service quality and their level of satisfaction.

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