

Head Teachers' Conflict Resolution Strategies in Public Basic Schools: A Descriptive Survey of the Nkwanta South Municipality, Ghana

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Abstract

This study investigated the sources of conflict and the strategies head teachers adopt to resolve them in public basic schools in the Nkwanta South Municipality of Ghana. The study was guided by Fiedler's (1964) Contingency Theory and utilised a quantitative methodology based on a descriptive survey design. The study targeted a population of 206 head teachers of public basic schools in the Municipality, from which 120 were selected through proportionate stratified sampling across education circuits to serve as the study sample. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 120 head teachers, of whom 103 returned valid responses, yielding a response rate of 85.8 per cent. Data were analysed using means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. The results revealed that institutional, work-related and leadership-related factors were the main sources of conflicts in public basic schools. Poor infrastructure and inadequate funding were the main institutional sources of conflict, while weak policy enforcement, misinterpretation of rules and poor communication were the main leadership-related conflict triggers. The study further revealed that collaboration was the most frequently used conflict resolution strategy, followed by avoidance and compromise. Drawing on the contingency theory, the study concluded that effective conflict resolution is dependent on situational factors and the head teachers' capacity to adjust their leadership responses to changing circumstances. The study recommends improved school infrastructure, timely release of funds and continuous training of head teachers in conflict management to promote cooperation and improve school climate in public basic schools.

Key Terms: Conflict management, head teachers, leadership strategies, basic schools, contingency theory.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Effective management of conflict is essential for effective teaching and learning in basic schools. A well-managed school environment, sustained by effective leadership, creates a culture of respect, tolerance and collaborative engagement among staff, which enhances the quality of teaching, learning and school administration. Effective conflict management therefore motivates school leaders and teachers to interact positively, strengthening mutual respect, cooperation and instructional effectiveness (Contreras, 2018). On the contrary, conflict can be harmful to teaching, learning and the general effectiveness of schooling (Opoku-Asare & Owusu-Mensah, 2015).

As a microcosm of society, schools are complex social systems, where conflict among stakeholders (management, teachers, pupils, parents and non-teaching staff) is inevitable due to competing interests, limited resources and diverse perspectives. According to Mulyasa (2005), conflicts occur at all levels, including intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, intra-organisational, and inter-organisational. Conflicts are stirred by the differences that exist between educational stakeholders during interaction. These differences include knowledge, intelligence, beliefs, and others (Amin, 2021). Conflict is an inherent aspect of school organisations, arising from diverse interests, limited resources, role ambiguities, communication breakdowns, and value differences among teachers, students, and administrators (Ertürk, 2022; Onyinyechi & Wichendu, 2021).

In Ghanaian public basic schools, conflict often takes the form of personal disagreements, disputes over management decisions, conflicts between teachers and students, and tensions between schools and their surrounding communities (Ampomah et al., 2020; Gyan & Tandoh-Offin, 2014). Hence, the traces of disputes in public basic schools, including those in Nkwanta South Municipality, concern clashes among stakeholders, including school heads, teachers, students, and parents. These conflicts often lead to a weakening in teacher morale and output, increased absenteeism, poor learning outcomes, and a largely destructive school environment. Again, such unresolved conflicts could dent group effort, decrease staff determination, upset instructional processes, and adversely affect school success (Emynorane et al., 2024; Valente & Lourenço, 2020).

The inevitability of conflicts in human organisations, including schools, brings into sharp focus the role of leaders such as head teachers in resolving conflicts among educational stakeholders. The head teacher is central to the effective implementation of a conducive learning environment that can enhance pupils' development through mediating, resolving conflicts, and shaping the behaviour of members of the school (Wulandari & Nugroho, 2020). In addition to identifying the sources of conflicts, head teachers are also obliged to devise effective strategies to resolve these issues (Istiqomah et al., 2024). This directly fosters a favourable school climate, boosts teacher morale, improves learning outcomes, and enhances the overall school effectiveness.

In Ghana, there are key policies that place a responsibility on head teachers to manage conflict in schools, thereby ensuring effective teaching and learning. Head teachers are expected to be the chief enforcers of the Ghana Education Service (GES) Code of Conduct (GES, 2017). The expectation that all parties follow these codes influences head teachers' approaches to conflict management in schools. The school governance frameworks, such as the role of School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), underscore the need for head teachers to engage these bodies to resolve conflicts,

especially those related to the community (Ghana Education Service, Ministry of Education, & International Labour Organization, 2012). Also, through the Safe-to-Learn and Child Protection Guidance policy, head teachers are to apply positive discipline and establish channels for reporting abuse and gender-based violence (Safe to Learn Coalition & UNICEF, 2023).

Notwithstanding the significance of operational solutions to conflicts in schools, the Nkwanta South Municipality of Ghana may be experiencing persistent challenges linked to inadequately managed conflicts in its basic schools, a pattern consistent with reports from other resource-constrained Ghanaian districts (Ampomah et al., 2020). Yet, many prevailing studies on educational leadership and conflict resolution seem to have focused on schools in urban areas or higher stages of education, and thus, frequently ignore the specific difficulties of public basic schools where resource limitations, cultural effects, and extreme teacher-pupil ratios may worsen conflicts. This knowledge gap impairs the capacity of policymakers and educational stakeholders to plan targeted mediations that respond to the unique needs of basic school leaders in such contexts and situations. Existing studies have also revealed that the head teachers' capacity to implement suitable conflict resolution approaches is crucial in creating a positive school environment, maintaining teacher morale and ensuring smooth administration of schools (Ampomah et al., 2020). Several studies have been conducted in Ghana to investigate sources of conflict in schools and ways in which school leaders address them (Amedome et al., 2024; Gyan & Tandoh-Offin, 2014; Sam, 2020; Sulley, 2023).

However, most of these studies were limited to senior high schools or urban education contexts, and the unique challenges of public basic schools have not been sufficiently studied. Public basic schools are governed by peculiar arrangements, serve younger pupils, and are characterised by acute resource constraints and high teacher-pupil ratios that may exacerbate conflict dynamics. As such, there is limited empirical evidence on conflict resolution in basic school contexts characterised by changing management systems, resource constraints and wide variation in the ages of students (Ghaffar, 2019). Furthermore, most of the existing Ghanaian studies have not systematically applied contingency leadership theory, which posits that the effectiveness of leadership strategies is contingent on situational context (Fiedler, 1964), creating a theoretical gap this study seeks to fill. This gap hampers policymakers and educational stakeholders in designing targeted interventions for the specific duties of heads of basic schools in such contexts.

Against this background, it is imperative to investigate the sources of conflict and examine the strategies employed by head teachers of public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality to resolve them. A thorough understanding of the types of conflicts head teachers face and the approaches they deploy will provide valuable insights into supporting leadership practice in the Municipality. Such a study will also inform policy and professional development programmes aimed at equipping head teachers with the competencies required to manage conflict, foster harmony, and improve the quality of basic education in the Nkwanta South Municipality. To this end, the study sought to identify the sources of conflict in public basic schools in the Nkwanta South Municipality and examine the strategies adopted by head teachers in managing these conflicts. In doing so, the study makes an original empirical contribution to the underexplored area of conflict management in public basic schools and extends the application of contingency theory to this specific educational context in Ghana.

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The study's findings will enrich the existing body of knowledge on educational leadership by providing deeper insights into conflict resolution strategies within public basic schools in Ghana. The findings will contribute to theory by exploring how head teachers adapt methods such as collaboration, compromise or avoidance within local socio-cultural and institutional contexts, thus contextualising broader conflict management theories. Practically, the study will provide head teachers, teachers, and stakeholders with effective conflict resolution techniques to reduce disruptions, enhance staff relationships, promote teamwork, and maintain positive school climates in the Nkwanta South Municipality. Also, the findings will help update education policy, which will serve as a guide for the Ghana Education Service and the National Teaching Council to propose and implement leadership training and professional development programmes that include modules for conflict resolution. Such a policy will align with the broader educational objectives of quality learning outcomes and effective school governance. Thus, this study is significant for theory, practice, and policy in public basic school leadership and conflict resolution in such schools in Ghana.

The following research questions guided the study:

- a. What are the sources of conflict in public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality?
- b. What conflict resolution strategies do head teachers of public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality employ?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This review examines key themes related to the theoretical framework, sources of conflict in schools, and the strategies head teachers employ to manage and resolve them. It aims to situate the study within existing academic debates while identifying gaps that the research intends to address.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in contingency theory, developed by Fred Fiedler in 1964. The theory is based on the premise that no single approach to organisational management is universally effective, as a leadership style that works well in one situation may prove ineffective under different circumstances (Fiedler, 1964). The theory posits that a manager's effectiveness is based on the interplay of task, relational, and situational factors. In other words, certain circumstances require different management approaches or strategies with a focus either on motivating for task completion or maintaining harmonious group relations. It can be summarised as an "it all depends" approach. The situation determines what management actions and approaches are appropriate. Managers with a contingency view adopt a flexible approach, using a range of theories and experiences, and consider various options when solving problems. From a contingency perspective, managers are tasked with determining which managerial approach is likely to be most effective in each situation. It recognises the extreme importance of individual manager performance in any given situation, and the contingency approach is highly dependent on the manager's experience and judgment in each organisational environment. In Fiedler's model, the leader's effectiveness is assessed through the Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC) scale, which determines whether the leader is primarily task-motivated or relationship-motivated. The theory further holds that the situational favourableness, determined by leader-member relations, task structure, and the leader's position power, moderates the relationship between leadership style and effectiveness.

The decision to base the study on this theory was informed by the fact that there is no one best strategy in resolving institutional conflict. This is further supported by Rahim's (2011) assertion that a strategy is

considered appropriate for a conflict situation if its use leads to an effective formulation and/or solution to a problem. The contingency theory is closely aligned with the focus of this study, particularly in explaining why head teachers cannot rely on a single conflict resolution strategy. The key constructs examined in this study, that is, collaboration strategy, compromise strategy, and avoidance strategy, represent the principal conflict management approaches that head teachers in the various basic schools in the Nkwanta South Municipality adopt to manage conflicts. The effectiveness of the collaboration strategy, compromise strategy, and avoidance strategy largely depends on the nature of head teachers and teachers in the school, the timeframe, and the situation of conflict the school finds itself in.

According to Fiedler (1964), there is a need for head teachers to identify and understand the nature of the conflict before choosing the appropriate strategy for conflict management. Additionally, the study adopted the contingency theory to explain the focus of the study, emphasising that head teachers, especially those in the Nkwanta South Municipality, face the task of determining which conflict resolution strategy is likely to be most effective in each conflict situation. For instance, Fiedler (1964) suggested that the effectiveness of head teachers is determined in each situation of conflict. The contingency approach is highly dependent on the experience and judgment of the headteacher in each school environment.

The Thomas–Kilmann conflict model, developed by Thomas and Kilmann (1974), identifies five strategies for managing conflict: collaboration, compromise, avoidance, competition, and accommodation. This study focuses on collaboration, compromise, and avoidance because these three are most consistent with the participatory governance norms embedded in Ghanaian basic education policy and with the contingency perspective adopted here (Rahim, 2011; Şafakoğulları, 2023). Collaboration is generally most appropriate where there is sufficient time, mutual trust, and where the outcome matters to both parties, as it seeks a solution that fully satisfies all sides. Compromise is better suited to situations where the parties hold comparable power and a timely, mutually acceptable outcome is needed, even if neither party is fully satisfied. Avoidance, while sometimes criticised for leaving underlying issues unresolved, can serve as a short-term, situational strategy that allows tensions to settle before more constructive engagement becomes possible. Competition and accommodation were excluded from the present study's scope because they are, respectively, less consistent with the collaborative, consensus-oriented ethos promoted in Ghana Education Service governance structures, and because they were less frequently reported as viable options by head teachers in preliminary engagements informing this study.

Conceptual and Empirical Review

Research on conflict in schools has consistently shown that disputes are a pervasive element of educational environments, involving pupils, teachers, head teachers, and even the wider community. Opoku-Asare and Owusu-Mensah (2015), in a study in Ghana, found that conflicts, both verbal and non-verbal, due to broken relationships between key stakeholders such as teachers, pupils, parents and head teachers are rife in school environments. Quayson-Monney et al. (2017) also acknowledged specific sources of school-based conflicts, including undesirable attitudes of teachers towards school activities, unfair leadership practices where head teachers favour certain groups, dictatorial or authoritarian leadership styles, and unhealthy competition among stakeholders. Other key sources of conflict in schools identified by Danso (2018) include indiscipline among teachers and pupils, discrimination by school heads, insufficient resources, and unclear communication flows. Thus, leadership practices, stakeholder actions, and resource sharing are critical in gaining insights into the backgrounds of conflict in schools. These patterns are echoed in studies conducted specifically in resource-constrained Ghanaian districts, such as

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Ampomah et al.'s (2020) study of conflict between head teachers and teachers in Ghanaian public basic schools, which shows how limited resources and strained staff relationships exacerbate leadership-related conflict, a context closely mirroring Nkwanta South Municipality.

Research findings from contexts other than Ghana offer further insights into sources of conflict in schools. For instance, the study on conflict in second-cycle schools by Khalid and Qian (2024) revealed that the constant incidence of conflict in those schools could largely be attributed to the non-existence of usually agreed frameworks for resolution. Their study also exposed that various schools embrace conflicting, ad hoc strategies, which are unreliable and unsuccessful in addressing the origin of conflict. Similarly, Shanka and Thuo (2017), examining government primary schools in Ethiopia, established that sources of school conflicts include false reports, lack of commitment, poor implementation of rules and regulations, poor communication, lack of leadership skills, lack of involvement in decision making, inferiority and superiority complex, favouritism in allocating positions and training opportunities, and lack of clarity in the educational training policies and guidelines. As such, they concluded that organisational, work-related, and leadership factors are the primary sources of conflict.

Şafakoğullari (2023) identified sources of conflict as organisational structure, role ambiguity, different value and belief systems, communication problems and resources, and further noted that the most common types of conflicts in educational organisations include administrator-teacher, teacher-student, teacher-teacher and student conflicts. Mapolisa and Tshabalala (2012) also posit that conflicts in schools are not isolated but rather endemic among educators. They identified scarce resources, struggle for resources, gossipmongering, poor communication, and staff incompetence as sources of conflict.

Research has also been done on the strategies used by school leaders in conflict resolution. Fajinmi and Oloyede (2025) emphasised the need for the head teachers' competency in conflict resolution and team building, stating that such skills are needed to establish a collaborative and productive school climate. Zohriah et al. (2023) further classified the conflict resolution strategies as proactive and reactive approaches. Şafakoğullari (2023) investigates different types and effectiveness of conflict management techniques in an educational context. The approaches identified include compromise, competition, collaboration, avoidance, and accommodation. The framework also recognises several factors that influence the management of conflict, including individual personality characteristics, cooperation, communication, trust, and leadership.

Practical techniques involving developing the capacity of students, teachers, and staff in diplomatic conflict resolution, and hasty practices such as resolving conflicts as they occur have been revealed in some studies (Mahvar et al., 2018; Rahayu et al., 2021; Sam, 2020). They further emphasise the role of school managers in positively resolving conflicts, even informally, as it fosters peace, originality and cooperation in schools. The findings corroborate the claim that conflict resolution in education is not only a reactive problem-solving process but also entails proactive leadership and structured interventions. Overall, the literature provides useful insights into the sources of conflict and the strategies school leaders use to resolve conflicts.

Generally, the literature illustrates important insights into both the sources of conflict and the strategies used by school leaders to resolve them. However, there remain outstanding gaps. First, most of the empirical evidence in Ghana was obtained from senior high schools (Amedome et al., 2024; Gyan &

Tandoh-Offin, 2014; Sam, 2020; Sulley, 2023), with much less attention afforded to public basic schools, despite the latter's distinct governance arrangements, younger pupils, and limited resources. In addition, most of the reviewed studies have not clearly applied the contingency leadership theory, which stresses that the effectiveness of leadership strategies depends on situational contexts (Fiedler, 1964). Furthermore, while the Thomas-Kilmann conflict model (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974) identifies five strategies, collaboration, compromise, avoidance, competition, and accommodation, existing Ghanaian studies rarely justify the specific selection of strategies examined. The present study focuses on collaboration, compromise, and avoidance as these represent the most constructive and contextually appropriate approaches for school leaders, consistent with the contingency perspective and the participatory governance norms embedded in Ghanaian education policy. In sum, the empirical gap lies in the limited attention paid to public basic schools relative to senior high schools, while the theoretical gap lies in the inconsistent and often superficial application of contingency theory to explain head teachers' strategy choices, gaps this study directly addresses by examining collaboration, compromise, and avoidance among basic-school head teachers in Nkwanta South Municipality through a contingency lens.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

In line with the positivist research paradigm, this study employed a quantitative research approach and descriptive survey design to objectively analyse head teachers' perspectives on the sources of conflicts and the strategies they use to resolve these conflicts in public basic schools within the Nkwanta South Municipality of Ghana, thereby enabling the identification of patterns and generalizable findings. All 206 head teachers of public basic schools in the Municipality were targeted for the study. However, to be eligible to participate in the study, a headteacher should have been in the present position for at least three years. A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed, with the education circuits in the Municipality serving as strata; within each circuit, eligible head teachers were selected in proportion to the circuit's share of the target population, yielding a total sample of 120 head teachers who were invited to respond to the questionnaire items. Nevertheless, 103 of them returned their questionnaire fully completed, indicating a response rate of 85.8 per cent.

A validated questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was self-developed by the researchers on the basis of the reviewed literature and comprised three sections: Section A captured respondents' demographic characteristics; Section B measured sources of conflict using institution-related, work-related, and leadership-related items; and Section C measured conflict resolution strategies using collaboration, compromise, and avoidance items. All items in Sections B and C were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This ensured that the items were relevant and clear to respondents (face), that the items comprehensively covered all facets of the conflict resolution strategies construct (content), and that the items measured the theoretical construct of head teachers' conflict-resolution strategies as assumed (construct) (Haik & Yassir, 2024; Roy et al., 2023). The internal consistency of the questionnaire was examined through a pilot study using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The sources of conflict items recorded an alpha value of 0.73, whereas the conflict resolution strategies items yielded a coefficient of 0.71. Since both coefficients were above the 0.70 minimum recommended by Cohen et al. (2018) and Stockemer (2019), the questionnaire was considered sufficiently reliable for the main study. For data analysis, frequencies and percentages were used to present demographic characteristics, while means and standard deviations were employed to summarise the sources of conflict and the strategies for resolving conflicts.

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Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, appropriate ethical principles were observed to protect the rights, privacy, and welfare of the participants. All participants were adequately informed about the study and consented to take part before their involvement. The study ensured the protection of respondents' identities and the confidentiality of the information they provided. Participation was based entirely on free choice, allowing participants to withdraw at any stage without repercussions, while their dignity and rights were respected throughout the research.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In line with the research questions, the analysis and results section presents the findings based on the demographic data, sources of conflict in public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality, and the conflict resolution strategies adopted by head teachers.

Demographic Variables

The analysis of demographic data was necessary to describe the sample's composition, ensure representativeness, provide context for interpreting the findings, and enable readers to understand the background against which the results were obtained. The demographic characteristics of the respondents examined include gender, age in years, academic qualification, and school level, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	49	47.6
Female	54	52.4
Total	103	100.0
<i>Age (years)</i>		
<31	0	0.0
31-40	35	34.0
41-50	49	47.6
51-60	19	18.4
Total	103	100.0
<i>Academic Qualification</i>		
Diploma	14	13.6
Bachelor's Degree	69	67.0
Master's Degree	20	19.4
Total	103	100.0
<i>School Level</i>		
Primary	59	57.3
Junior High School	44	42.7
Total	103	100.0

Note. Data from fieldwork conducted in 2023.

The results displayed in Table 1 uncovered a relatively equal gender distribution, indicating marginally more females (52.4%) than males (47.6%). With the age distribution of the respondents, the majority (47.6%) were between 40 and 49 years old, followed by 34.0 per cent aged 30–39 years, and 18.4 per cent

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aged 50 years and above. None of the respondents was below 30 years old. Concerning academic qualification, most respondents (67.0%) had obtained a bachelor's degree, while 19.4 per cent held a master's degree, with 13.6 per cent having a diploma. Ultimately, 57.3 per cent of the respondents were heads of primary schools, and 42.7 per cent were heads of junior high schools, revealing a sample mainly of mid-aged, degree-holding head teachers managing primary schools.

Sources of Conflict

This segment describes the causes of conflict identified by head teachers, stressing the factors that predominantly contribute to conflicts in basic schools in the Nkwanta South Municipality. The sources of conflict identified and used in this study are institution-related, work-related, and leadership-related within schools. The results are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Sources of Conflict

Type/Source of Conflict	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Institution Related</i>	<i>3.46</i>	<i>0.54</i>
Lack of provision of resources on time.	2.65	0.65
Unwise use and unfair allocation of resources.	2.12	0.49
Lack of adequate funding.	4.41	0.51
Poor infrastructure in the school.	4.66	0.52
<i>Work Related</i>	<i>2.99</i>	<i>0.59</i>
Teachers' refusal to prepare a lesson plan.	2.78	0.67
Low students' achievement.	4.11	0.47
Lateness and absenteeism among both teachers and students.	3.79	0.62
Lack of trust and co-operation among teachers.	1.82	0.66
Misunderstanding of educational policies.	3.10	0.60
Inadequate professional teaching competence among teachers.	2.31	0.52
<i>School Leadership Related</i>	<i>3.16</i>	<i>0.54</i>
Submission of misleading reports by teachers and other stakeholders.	2.14	0.62
Lack of implementation of school rules and regulations on the part of teachers.	4.66	0.47
Poor communication among teachers.	3.93	0.49
Inferiority complex among teachers.	2.34	0.52
Lack of commitment of the School Management Committee.	1.98	0.67
Dispute, gossip, dishonesty, and lack of respect among teachers	2.60	0.49
Misinterpretation of rules and regulations by teachers, department heads, and other leaders.	4.47	0.50

Note. Data from fieldwork conducted in 2023.

Results shown in Table 2 demonstrate that sources of conflict in public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality stemmed from institutional, work, and leadership-related factors. Institution-related conflicts were mainly due to poor infrastructure ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.52$) and inadequate funding ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.51$). Sources of work-related conflicts comprised low student achievement ($M=4.11$; $SD=0.47$), lateness and absenteeism ($M=3.79$; $SD=0.62$), and policy misunderstandings ($M=3.10$; $SD=0.60$). Leadership-related conflicts were due to failure to enforce rules ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.47$), misinterpretation of rules ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.50$).

= 0.50), and poor communication ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.49$). All the mean scores, with the exception of work-related sources of conflict, exceeded the 3.0 benchmark on the 5-point Likert scale calculated as $(1+2+3+4+5) \div 5 = 3.0$, suggesting that institution-related and leadership-related factors were perceived by the head teachers as significant sources of conflict in public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality.

The mean scores show that institution-related conflicts constituted the most prominent source of conflict in public basic schools within the Municipality ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.54$). This finding suggests that challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and limited financial resources contribute substantially to tensions between head teachers and teachers. School leadership-related conflicts ranked second in importance ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.54$), indicating that ineffective policy implementation, misunderstandings regarding school rules, and poor communication were also significant contributors to conflict within the schools. Although work-related factors ($M=2.99$; $SD=0.59$) recorded the lowest mean and fell slightly below the benchmark, they cannot be dismissed entirely, as issues such as absenteeism, poor student performance, and misunderstandings of educational policies still contributed to conflict dynamics. This trend hints that while resource and leadership challenges were the most compelling causes of conflicts, work-related challenges prevailed in the background, with institutional and leadership concerns further obstructing school management.

Head Teachers' Conflict Resolution Strategies

This section explores the approaches utilised by head teachers to address conflicts, stressing the strategies mostly implemented in handling conflicts in public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality. Three strategies for resolving conflicts, namely, the collaboration strategy, the compromise strategy, and the avoidance strategy, were employed in this study. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Head teachers' Conflict Resolution Strategies

Conflict Strategies	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Collaboration Strategy</i>	4.37	0.62
I seek teachers' opinions to find a solution to the problems.	4.32	0.65
I weigh my views and those of teachers to arrive at a solution.	4.38	0.49
I explore teachers' differences between teachers to identify a mutual solution to a problem.	4.54	0.50
I appreciate the information teachers provide during meetings.	4.45	0.50
I promote my own objectives and aspirations, as well as those of others.	4.78	0.67
I integrate various views to reach a collaborative decision.	4.12	0.90
I discuss all concerns openly.	4.39	0.84
I find mutually acceptable solutions to problems.	3.98	0.41
<i>Compromise Strategy</i>	3.23	0.59
I give up my desires in exchange for others to reach an agreement.	3.42	0.47
I insist that we both make a sacrifice.	2.64	0.62
I focus on conciliation to minimize differences between co-teachers.	3.62	0.66
I utilize a halfway approach to overcome deadlock.	2.50	0.60
I strive to find solutions to complex problems through compromise.	4.11	0.52
I prefer negotiation to reach an agreement	4.23	0.61
I try to adopt a middle ground in the solution to Problems	3.01	0.75
I forfeit my own needs to get out of complex Situations	2.31	0.51
<i>Avoidance Strategy</i>	3.47	0.65
I strive to maintain a pleasant working environment rather than creating tension.	4.54	0.62
Disagreed issues are avoided from being discussed in open meetings.	4.76	0.47
I refrain from raising critical issues that will cause division during meetings.	1.99	0.49
I avoid open discussion about mutual differences.	4.14	0.52
I keep my opinion to myself rather than imposing it on my colleagues.	1.69	0.67
I refrain from odd feelings during meetings.	4.12	0.87
I make differences look less severe.	3.02	0.92

Note. Data from fieldwork conducted in 2023.

From the results in Table 3, it could be said that head teachers of public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality implemented various strategies to resolve conflicts. However, collaboration ($M = 4.37$; $SD = 0.62$) was the predominantly used strategy, followed by avoidance ($M = 3.47$; $SD = 0.65$), showing circumstances where head teachers could delay conflict, reduce tension, or avoid issues to maintain brief harmony. Compromise strategy ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.59$) was also described, implying that head teachers sometimes depend on negotiation and shared compromise to resolve conflicts. All three conflict resolution strategies obtained mean values above the 3.0 benchmark on a 5-point Likert scale. Thus, head teachers of public basic schools in the Nkwanta South Municipality sufficiently apply these strategies identified and used for the study. The findings further depict that the head teachers do not depend on one strategy but use varied strategies to resolve conflicts. This highlights head teachers' flexibility and perception that changing school contexts call for different strategies to sustain stability and co-operation.

Discussion

Results gathered from the first research question prove that conflicts in public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality largely result from institutional, work-related, and leadership factors. Among institutional challenges, insufficient infrastructure and limited funding were identified as the most pressing concerns, confirming previous research findings that lack of resources worsens disputes as head teachers strive to meet expectations with very little assistance (Mapolisa & Tshabalala, 2012). Sources of work-related conflict such as low student achievement and high absenteeism among teachers or students further confirm previous claims that indiscipline and poor academic performance have contributed to a strain on teacher-leader relationships (Danso, 2018; Valente & Lourenço, 2020). Leadership-related conflicts, especially those attributed to poor implementation and misinterpretation of school rules, underscore the importance of effective communication and consistent application of policies in reducing conflict (Shanka & Thuo, 2017). The findings reveal institutional and leadership factors as more significant determinants of conflict occurrence in the public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality than work-related issues. Consequently, the findings require that policymakers and educational leaders in the Municipality consider interventions that address structural constraints, ensure accountability and build leadership capacity.

The results of the second research question provide important insights into the conflict resolution strategies used by head teachers of public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality. The resonance of collaboration reflects the value that head teachers place on participatory and inclusive leadership practices in conflict resolution. Head teachers promote openness of communication, teamwork and joint decision-making, recognising that effective conflict resolution comes from the building of confidence and relationships as well as collective responsibility amongst staff. This is in keeping with contemporary leadership theories that stress collaborative problem-solving as a route to professional harmony and school improvement. The secondary dependence on avoidance suggests that head teachers often opt not to confront head-on, perhaps to minimise tension or avoid escalation in unstable circumstances. Despite critique for leaving issues unresolved, avoidance may be an interim strategy to allow emotions to settle before constructive engagement can take place. However, interestingly, the avoidance subscale showed significant internal variation, with items like 'Disagreed issues are avoided from being discussed in open meetings' ($M=4.76$) scoring high, and items like 'I keep my opinion to myself rather than imposing it on my colleagues' ($M=1.69$) scoring significantly low. This split indicates that head teachers employ avoidance selectively, avoiding public confrontation but maintaining their opinions in private, rather than embracing a full avoidance stance. This subtlety may be an indication of socio-cultural expectations for maintaining public harmony within Ghanaian institutional contexts and needs further qualitative exploration.

The use of compromise demonstrates head teachers' willingness to promote mutual concessions, indicating flexibility in managing competing interests. This practical approach is particularly useful in resource-limited educational settings, where achieving mutually beneficial outcomes is often difficult. The findings align with research highlighting collaboration and compromise as crucial strategies for constructive conflict resolution in educational settings (Adeyemi & Aigbavboa, 2022; Uju et al., 2022).

The data show that all the techniques scored a mean above the 3.0 benchmark, which indicates that conflict management in educational institutions is not static but dynamic (Sam, 2020).

It is also important to note that the present study did not differentiate the use of strategies by demographic variables such as gender, academic qualification or school level. Future research should investigate whether there are systematic differences in the preference for collaboration, avoidance or compromise between male and female head teachers or those with different levels of qualification and experience. Head teachers deliberately use a range of strategies depending on the nature of the conflict, the actors involved and the broader school context. This flexibility demonstrates an understanding of the complexities of school leadership and a willingness to preserve stability, collaboration and order.

This finding reinforces Kakembo's (2025) assertion that good school leadership is not about conflict resolution but is about relationship management, collaboration, and the use of strategies that are relevant to the context to enhance organisational growth. The study's findings support Fiedler's (1964) contingency theory of leadership that the effectiveness of leadership depends on the situation and not the personality of the leader alone. The various sources of conflict identified, namely, lack of infrastructure, lack of funding, absenteeism, and poor enforcement of standards, demonstrate variations in task structure, leader-member relations, and position power within the school contexts. Head teachers who adapted their strategies to these varying situational conditions were more likely to achieve constructive outcomes, affirming Fiedler's central argument. Therefore, the findings confirm the contingency perspective: effective conflict resolution in public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality depends on situational awareness and the leader's capacity to adjust responses to emerging challenges.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: A key finding indicated that conflicts in public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality generally emanate from institutional-related, work-related, and leadership-related factors, with poor infrastructure, insufficient funding, absenteeism, low student performance, and ineffective enforcement of or misinterpretation of regulations being the most common issues. These findings underscore the complex interaction of resource limitations, staff behaviour, and leadership practices in shaping school dynamics. Resolving such issues requires sustained financial investment and quality leadership that motivates accountability, open communication, and collaborative problem-solving.

The study provides original empirical evidence on conflict resolution in public basic schools – an education level that has been underrepresented in Ghanaian educational leadership research – and offers a contextualised application of contingency theory to school-level conflict management. The study recommends the need to enhance the capacity of school leadership to develop a positive organisational culture that will prevent conflicts and improve overall performance of school administration. The study has some limitations, however, in that the findings are presented from one municipality, which might be limiting in terms of generalisation to other Ghanaian contexts; the cross-sectional design captures only a snapshot in time; and the use of self-reported questionnaire data may be susceptible to social desirability bias. Future research may employ mixed methods or longitudinal designs across multiple districts to deepen understanding of conflict dynamics in basic schools.

Recommendations: The Nkwanta South Municipal Education Directorate should focus on the rehabilitation of school infrastructure and the prompt release of capitation grants to schools. Since the major institutional sources of conflict identified were poor infrastructure ($M = 4.66$) and inadequate funding ($M = 4.41$), targeted investment in these two areas is crucial to reducing tension and improving the teaching and learning environment. In addition, the Ghana Education Service should design and

implement context-specific conflict management training programmes for head teachers in the Nkwanta South Municipality, focusing on policy interpretation and enforcement ($M = 4.47; 4.66$), communication skills ($M = 3.93$), and participatory decision-making. Such training will enable head teachers to apply rules consistently, minimise misunderstandings, and ensure transparency in school governance, thereby creating a peaceful and supportive school environment.

Furthermore, head teachers of public basic schools in Nkwanta South Municipality should be supported to develop situational leadership competence, that is, the ability to determine when collaboration, compromise, or avoidance is the most appropriate response to a given conflict. While collaboration ($M = 4.37$) was found to be the most effective strategy overall, the study confirms that no single approach is universally optimal. Professional development programmes should therefore equip head teachers to assess conflict contexts and apply strategies flexibly, consistent with the contingency theory framework underpinning this study.

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