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**Exploring Conflict Resolution through Communication in Tertiary  
Institutions in Ghana**



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## Exploring Conflict Resolution through Communication in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study investigates conflict resolution strategies within tertiary institutions in Ghana, specifically at Tamale Technical University (TaTu), emphasizing the role of communication. Recognizing conflict as an inevitable part of organizational life, the research seeks to understand its sources and to identify strategies for effective conflict management, thereby enhancing peace and productivity within academic environments.

**Methodology:** Guided by C. Wright Mills' modern conflict theory, which posits that social systems are shaped by power struggles and disparities in resource distribution, this study adopts a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology approach. Data was gathered through 12 in-depth interviews conducted with both teaching and non-teaching staff at TaTu in May 2023, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of participants' perspectives on the causes and resolution methods for conflicts within the institution.

**Findings:** The study identifies key sources of conflict at TaTu, including unequal resource allocation, competition for office space, interpersonal relationship issues, and ethical concerns. Strategies proposed to address these conflicts include equitable resource distribution, regular workshops and training sessions on conflict management, and enhanced communication practices through convocations and committee meetings. These findings highlight the importance of clear communication and equity in resource allocation in fostering a harmonious academic environment.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice, and Policy:** This study extends Mills' modern conflict theory by applying it within the specific context of Ghanaian tertiary institutions, thus providing insight into how perceived inequalities in power and resources contribute to institutional conflicts. Practically, the research advocates for the institutionalization of conflict resolution strategies within academic settings, promoting ongoing training and equitable practices. Policy-wise, the study supports implementing systematic approaches for conflict management within educational institutions to foster a stable and collaborative academic culture.

**Keywords:** *Communication, Conflict Management, Tertiary Institutions, Academic staff, administrative staff, Disagreement.*

## 1. Introduction

Conflict is a ubiquitous challenge in higher education institutions globally, creating complex issues that significantly impact the overall environment and productivity of academic communities (Ayala et al., 2023). Research indicates that conflicts on campuses are becoming increasingly prevalent, diverse, and intricate, contributing to a more challenging academic climate than in previous years (Khan et al., 2011). This trend is particularly evident in the Ghanaian university system, where a noticeable rise in industrial conflicts has disrupted the advancement of knowledge (Tan, 2020). The collaborative nature of universities, where diverse groups such as students, lecturers, and administrative staff must work together, makes these institutions especially prone to conflict. However, the organizational structure often impedes effective knowledge-sharing among stakeholders, exacerbating the potential for disputes (Valente et al., 2020).

Despite the extensive body of literature on conflict in higher education (Ciuladiene & Kairiene, 2017; du Plessis & Cain, 2017; Sarpkaya, 2012; Sumera & Sumera, 2017; Bolton, 2016), there is a noticeable gap in research specifically focused on the causes and resolution of conflicts in Ghanaian universities, particularly in regions like Tamale in Northern Ghana. While some studies have examined conflict management in tertiary institutions (Kiitam, McLay, & Pilli, 2016; Bawa et al., 2019; Ukata & Silas-Dikibo, 2020), they have not sufficiently addressed the root causes of conflicts or the strategies for resolving them. The handling of conflict is heavily influenced by communication, which plays a crucial role in conflict resolution by ensuring that all parties are informed and engaged in the process (Umoren, 2001; Nwofia, 2015). However, conflicts continue to arise, often leading to mistrust and animosity within academic communities, particularly in institutions in Northern Ghana.

In response to these gaps in the literature, this paper aims to explore the sources of conflict and the role of communication in conflict resolution at Tamale Technical University (TaTu) in Northern Ghana. By focusing on this institution, the study seeks to fill the existing knowledge gap and contribute to the broader understanding of conflict management practices in Ghanaian tertiary institutions. Given Tamale's significant role as a hub for education in Northern Ghana, this research will provide valuable insights that could enhance conflict resolution strategies not only at TaTu but also in other higher education institutions across the region. The findings of this study are expected to enrich the literature on conflict sources in tertiary institutions within the Ghanaian context, offering practical recommendations for administrators and managers to navigate and mitigate conflicts effectively.

## 2.0 Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinnings

Conflict in institutions of higher learning could arise for various reasons, including competition for resources, divergent ideologies, or power dynamics among different groups or individuals (Ukata et al., 2020). These disagreements may manifest in various ways, such as protests, physical or verbal altercations, or legal battles. Tertiary institutions, like any other organization, are not

immune to conflict. This is because conflict is expected in any situation where two or more people coexist to form an organization.

Based on the extensive range of academic specialties and roles, public universities are composed of many communities. The internal behavior of these institutions is a highly sophisticated organism shaped by numerous hands. This suggests that a variety of internal dynamics, logical principles, and practices impact university life (Zgambo, 2022). Universities are also affected by a variety of hurdles, restrictions, and demands from the external environment. Conflict is unavoidable since administration in university institutions is challenging and complex due to the interaction of internal and external factors.

### **2.1 Causes of Conflict in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana**

Competition for limited resources within universities, including funds for research, teaching, student services, staff compensation, and welfare, often leads to dissatisfaction and violence due to underfunding and deprivation (Zgambo, 2022). Conflicts arising from perceived goal incompatibility, such as differing interpretations between teachers and students, can impact learning outcomes (Alvesson & Jonsson, 2022; Johnson et al., 2020).

Autonomy and academic freedom issues arise when groups vie for control over certain domains, which can lead to conflicts (Lippert et al., 2019). University management behavior plays a crucial role in conflict resolution, influencing outcomes internally and externally (Chirikov, 2022). Role conflicts in universities stem from work interdependence, performance disparities, goal misalignments, status differences, and personal characteristics like communication styles and values (Michael & Mary, 2018).

Conflict sources in universities include personal behavior, structural issues, and communication factors (Hamayun et al., 2014). Structural sources include competition, hierarchy, stressful work environments, and organizational changes (Gmurzyński, 2021). Other conflict triggers include appointment processes, merit evaluation, appraisal systems, tenure decisions, inadequate resources, diversity challenges, and faculty-related issues (Sullivan, 2019).

Adeosun et al. (2014) identified perceptions, lack of teamwork, and unclear job roles as key causes of workplace conflicts in tertiary institutions. Din et al. (2017) highlighted intense conflict in public sector universities, with interpersonal conflicts more prevalent in this setting, while task conflicts were higher in private sector universities. Faculty in both sectors used integrating, compromising, and avoiding conflict resolution styles concurrently.

### **2.2 Possible Ways of Managing Conflicts in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana**

The progress of any society hinges on efficiently managing disputes, yet current circumstances in Ghana reveal a setback in this regard. Effectively handling conflicts in universities requires proactive and positive approaches to transform conflicts into catalysts for positive change (Ibrahim et al., 2022). Inappropriate conflict management can lead to delays, loss of interest, and systemic breakdowns (Pedersen et al., 2020).

Developing a positive communication approach and cultivating effective conflict negotiation skills are essential for resolving campus conflicts. By adopting systematic communication of grievances and employing skilled mediators with positive personalities, universities can effectively manage conflicts without impeding their goals (Martínez-López et al., 2022).

When addressing conflicts in schools, the school administrator or chief executive should demonstrate appropriate leadership styles, emphasizing supportive and participatory management behaviors. Agabe (2023) proposed three conflict resolution approaches—mediation, arbitration, and reconciliation—that universities can apply to settle disputes among stakeholders (Magagula, 2007; Ndum et al., 2013).

Conflicts significantly impact the delivery of higher education services, hindering economic development in many developing countries (Buchbinder & Newson, 2021). Researchers express concerns about the declining value of higher education due to obstacles in providing quality education, leading to institutional conflicts in tertiary institutions across African countries (Zahur et al., 2022). Idam (2020) focused on conflict management in Nigerian tertiary institutions, and Osakede et al. (2018) studied conflict management in Nigerian tertiary institutions, emphasizing stakeholder participation in decision-making and conflict resolution.

Bampoh-Addo and Ansah-Koi (2015) investigated conflict resolution in Ghanaian public universities, recommending adjustments to institutional approaches for resolving faculty promotion-related issues. They highlighted the importance of openness, fairness, honesty, independent bodies, clear guidelines, effective communication, and eliminating delays in faculty promotions to enhance conflict resolution in Ghana's public universities.

Theoretically, this paper adopted C. Wright Mills' modern conflict theory (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). According to Mills, social systems emerge from the struggle between persons with disparate goals and resources. Individuals and resources are influenced by these institutions as well as the society's "unequal distribution of power and resources" (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). Relating this theory to institutional conflict implies that the sources of conflict in most high institutions of learning in Ghana are a result of perceived inequalities distribution of power and resources.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Aim and Approach**

This study aims to explore conflict resolution through communication within tertiary institutions in Ghana. To achieve a deep understanding of the underlying causes of conflict, the study employed hermeneutic phenomenology, a qualitative research approach that constructs meaning through the interpretation of individuals' lived experiences (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). This approach posits that the root causes of conflict in tertiary institutions emerge from the interactions and conversations between people, reflecting their experiences that contribute to the generation of conflict (Abdulai, 2018).

#### **3.2 Research Design**



In addition to hermeneutic phenomenology, the study utilized a qualitative case study design, which is particularly suited for investigating complex phenomena within a specific context (Abubakari et al., 2021). A case study allows the researcher to examine a "closed system" (or multiple systems) over time, gathering detailed data from a variety of sources (Creswell, 2009). This method is useful for describing, explaining, or predicting events at the individual, group, or organizational levels (Yin, 2003). For this research, Tamale Technical University (TaTu) was selected as the case study to explore the root causes of conflict within tertiary institutions and to understand the phenomenon under investigation.

**Table 1: shows the Profile of Respondents/Representation of interview subjects**

<b>Study Subjects Code</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Department/Unit</b>
MD	M	Fashion and Design
AA	M	Accountancy
RM	F	Hospitality Management
AM	M	Registry
AB	F	Registry
BBM	M	Communication and Media Studies
HA	F	Accountancy
RA	F	Procurement and Logistic
HF	F	Build And Technology
BB	M	Accountancy

Source: Authors own design, 2024

### **3.3 Case Selection and Data Collection**

Tamale Technical University was chosen for this study because it recently transitioned from a polytechnic to university status, making it a relevant and underexplored case in the context of conflict in Ghanaian tertiary institutions. Unlike the University for Development Studies (UDS), which has been the focus of numerous studies on this topic, TaTu offers a fresh perspective on the issue. Prior to data collection, a letter of introduction was sent to TaTu, detailing the study's objectives, target participants, and requirements for participation. After receiving permission, 12 participants were purposively selected for the study. Purposive sampling, guided by the researcher's discretion, involved selecting participants from the broader population based on specific criteria (Neuman, 2014). Participants were drawn from both the academic and

administrative staff and had worked at TaTu for more than two years. Participation was voluntary, with individuals free to decide whether or not to take part.

The data collection took place in May 2023, with face-to-face interviews conducted at Tamale Technical University between May 12th and May 28th, 2023. A total of 12 interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview format, allowing for consistency in the questions posed while providing flexibility for in-depth exploration (Creswell, 2009). The interview guide was divided into two main sections: the first part focused on gathering demographic information about the participants, while the second part addressed the interview questions related to the causes of conflict and strategies for resolution.

#### 4.0 Analytical Approach

The transcribed interview data were analyzed using hermeneutic phenomenology, which emphasizes the importance of understanding individual human experiences (Van Manen, 1997). This analytical approach aims to uncover subtle nuances and seemingly insignificant aspects of experiences that are often overlooked. It enables researchers to interpret and assign meaning to how participants perceive and experience conflict, leading to a deeper understanding of the issue within the context of TaTu (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). This approach was instrumental in providing a comprehensive interpretation of conflict in the study area, contributing to a better understanding of the dynamics at play.

#### 5.0 Findings and Discussion

This section of the study covers the findings on the sources of conflict in tertiary institutions in Northern Ghana. The study was conducted to investigate academic staff opinions on conflict sources and resolution mechanisms at Tamale Metropolitan Tertiary institutions. Sources of institutional conflict and conflict resolution techniques emerged as the two main themes after data processing.

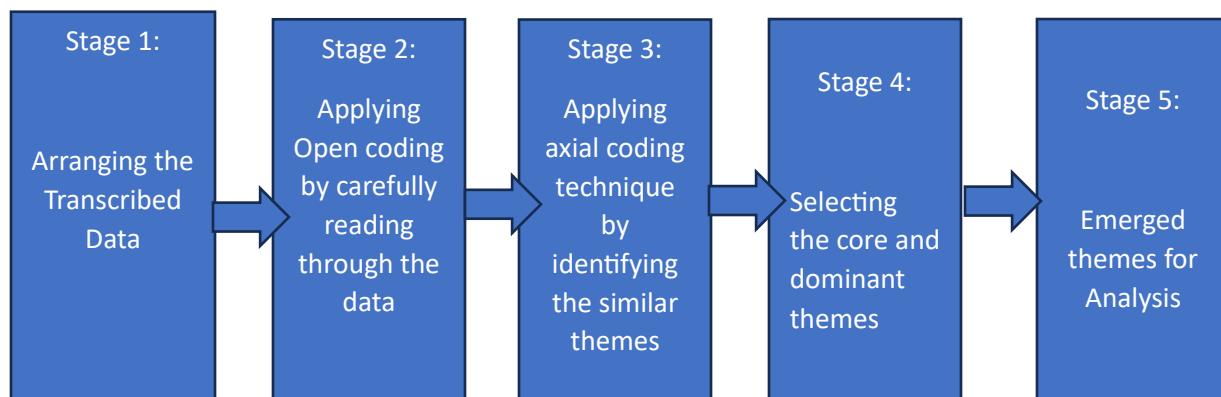


Figure 1. **Data Transformation Process**

The table below highlighted the major findings that this paper centered on. The findings were organized based on the themes the data presented.

**Table 2: Conflict Resolution Techniques**

No.	Sources of Institutional Conflict	Conflict Resolution Techniques
1.	Unequal resources allocation	Workshops and Training on Conflict Management abilities
2.	Competing for office space	Providing equal space to all workers
3.	Promotions of Faculty Staff	Rotation of positions so that everybody will have the opportunity
4.	Appointing people into the governing council are based on tribe or ethic and by extension political affiliation.	Sharing positions to qualify people irrespective their ethnic background

### 5.1 Sources of Conflict

The study revealed that participants identified several sources of conflict in Tamale Technical University. One significant conflict arose from the institution's decision to offer HND programs alongside technical programs, sparking tension between the technical school teachers and the non-technical teachers. This conflict ultimately resulted in a crisis and the subsequent separation of these two programs. During an office interaction, a participant elaborated on this situation, stating:

*Till date we still encounter those challenges where the institution is running technical programs and non-technical programs and the disparity in the social status of the lecturers' handling courses in those two areas is a worrying trend (Interviewee 10).*

According to the interview subject's point of view, one major source of conflict in the technical university had to do with resource allocation, where resources in terms of salary determination were not shared equally between the teaching and non-teaching staff. This means that conflict is very likely to occur in the Technical Universities in Ghana on the basis of status differences. In the context of Ghana, people tend to offer maximum respect to lecturers more than those who are particularly called teachers in the Technical Universities and society at large. In this case, conflict may usually stem from this worrying situation in most Technical Universities in Ghana as a result of disagreements over benefits, salary, and working conditions (Ikeda et al., 2005). In view of this, another participant added that;

*.....a registrar was pegged at the level of a professor and the experiences that a registrar needs to get to professorial level is different from what a teaching staff require and this situation was as unfair by the teaching staff of the technical university (Interviewee AB).*

Another participant put it this way:



*There is the situation in this University where even an assistant registrar has a well-furnished office while the senior lecturer operates from his car as his office, this is an unfair situation and how do you expect a lecturer to be effective with this sort of thing (Interviewee BBM).*

The perspectives expressed by the study participants shed light on role differential conflicts within Ghanaian universities, particularly at Tamale Technical University. This suggests a perceived hierarchy where administrative staff are deemed more valuable and can attain comparable ranks with academic staff through a shorter process. In contrast, academic staff, such as professors, undergoes a lengthier process and resource investment to achieve similar status. Some academic staff members find this situation concerning. This analysis aligns with Ejiogu's (1990) assertion that conflicts often arise due to hierarchical positions in organizational contexts. The case at the Technical University illustrates a clear instance of perceived goal incompatibility among workers (Alvesson & Jonsson, 2022). Additionally, it highlights a lack of office space for teaching staff at the institution, serving as a source of conflict at Tamale Technical University. A participant during the interviews was quick to add that:

*Another source of conflict in the Tamale technical University has to do with promotions of faculty staff. The way the promotion process is handled, and the bureaucratic process involved which normally causes delay in the promotion of faculty staff usually leads to agitation by faculty staff to demand what is due them (Interviewee AA)*

According to similar studies (Bampoh-Addo, 2022, & Ansah-Koi, 2015), these researchers discovered that there is a need for transparency, fairness, and honesty in faculty promotions, as well as clear guidelines on modalities in faculty promotions; effective communication in dealing with faculty promotions; and eliminating delays in faculty promotions, as ways to improve the resolution of promotion-related conflicts in Ghanaian public universities.

Closely related, in one of the interviews sessions, a respondent recounted a historically causes of conflict in Tamale Technical University, when a question was thrown at him. He recounted that.

*Historically, Northerners had link with the Hausa in Nigeria through the Trans-Saharan-Trade. Even the Yana was literate in terms of Arabic and the Europeans used the Dagombas as slaves. So, while the south people were being educated, the northerners were being enslaved. So, the Dagombas and the Gonjas did not like schooling because of their background, so by the time the Dagombas started schooling; they realized that all the key positions in the institution were occupied by other tribes, and they became uncomfortable. Not until 2004 when the institution had its first Dagomba Council Chairperson, all the other Council Chairpersons came from other tribes (Interviewee RA).*

The statement from the study participant highlighted the intensity of competition for positions, and if not adequately managed, it could escalate into violent conflicts. Moreover, it suggests that appointments to the governing council might be influenced by tribal or ethnic considerations,

extending to political affiliations. An analytically interesting observation is that the appointment of individuals from different tribes to key positions has the potential to spark conflict in Ghanaian universities. Notably, many universities in Ghana are led by individuals from the ethnic community of the respective university (Michael & Mary, 2018).

Another source of conflict in Tamale Technical University was the growth of the population of the University without a corresponding growth in allowances or condition of services. According to a participant during the interview session in his office at the Tamale Technical University explained:

*our main source of funds is the fees (85%) and the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFUND) but the number of the staff grew substantially over the period. For instance, the number of staff in the registry grew from 3-20 and as for the lectures, it cannot even be counted (Interviewee MD).*

Another concerning issue revealed during the interviews, acting as a subtle precursor to conflict, pertained to the economic well-being of workers. Some participants expressed discomfort regarding the institution's Internal Generated Fund (IGF), as it directly or indirectly affects their allowances and economic conditions. The expectation was that, with an increase in student admission, the conditions of service for workers or lecturers should also improve. The failure to meet this expectation could potentially lead to conflict.

Furthermore, our interview results indicated that relationships between lecturers and female students were another source of conflict in the Technical University. Against the backdrop of BBC's sex-for-grade documentary, which purportedly exposed some lecturers at the University of Ghana and the University of Lagos engaging in inappropriate behavior, this issue was raised during an interview session at the University. In response to this, participants were asked to share their experiences or encounters with female students. One of them lamented that:

*Everyman is susceptible to women influence though at various levels unless you are not a man (Interviewee 4).*

Another participant added that:

*It is always difficult dealing with this kind of conflict usually because there is always no ample evidence to support such claims and moreover the issue of who is telling the truth is also very paramount. Sometimes female students who are lazy want to take advantage of lecturers in order to get grades that they do not deserve and they initiate these relationships on one hand. Whilst on the other hand some lectures are also guilty of the issue even though it is very difficult to ascertain the truth on such matters (Interviewee 2).*

The above interview excerpts reveal other dimension of some related conflict at Tamale Technical University. It exposes the fact that, some lecturers are having romantic relationship with female students in the university in the name of sex for grades, which results in some lecturers having serious biff with the male students. These results point out that, some lecturers are in one way or

the other in conflict with their male students which can result in some degree of disrespect for the lecturers in question (Alvesson & Jonsson, 2022). That is not all, the analysis shows that, some lecturers are using female students as a weapon for what we called ‘pulling him down’ syndrome targeting some officials in the university. In view of this, a participant recounted his experience and said:

*some student ladies dressed seductively to lectures and even go to some lecturers’ offices. In this case if you not careful some people can frame story against you (Interviewee 12).*

This statement can be interpreted to mean that, workers in Tamale Technical University indeed use female students as a trap for their colleagues’ workers just in a bit to destroy their reputation. It implies that, in the context of Ghana tertiary institutions both academic and administrative staff are facing the issue of ladies being used against one another which create a fertile ground for conflict to grow.

#### Strategies of Conflict Resolution in Universities

Effective conflict resolution fosters motivation, boosts morale, and fosters both individual and organizational progress. Ineffective conflict management, on the other hand, leads to more conflict and has a negative impact on the institution. The interview data revealed the opinion of some participants on how best to contain and manage conflict within the university environment. In view of this a participant opines that:

*some other conflict management strategies are convocation meetings during which teaching staff could air their views and put forward their suggestions to management. Sometimes too training workshops on conflict management could be organized for faculty members to build their capacities (Interviewee 4).*

The view expressed suggests that, using a convocation meeting to address the grievances and disputes of staff is a good strategy to addressing conflict in universities (Gmurzyńska, 2021). It means, this platform will offer opportunity for perceived differences to be ironed out. The interview data also highlighted that, when universities at periodic intervals organize training workshops to sensitize staff on conflict management skills it can be a good way of resolving conflict. This is in consonance with the research findings of Din et al. (2012), which recommend the development of conflict management training programs tailored for faculty members and administrators.

Another participant also added that:

*the head should be ready to take all the bullets because these categories of lecturers are young with funny ideas and it was realized that, after convocation, tensions come down (Interviewee 3).*

This view also added to the analysis that, convocation is a good platform where many folds of conflict could be addressed.

Closely related to the strategies of conflict management strategies, a participant put that:

*One of the conflict management strategies for in this University is sharing positions to qualify people taking into consideration their ethnic background (Interviewee 8).*

The aforementioned interview results provided light on some of the study participant's viewpoints and opinions about conflict management practices at Tamale Technical University. According to the research participant, the university has a policy to the effect that, no ethnic group is allowed to occupy any key positions in the faculties and departments. In light of this, if positions are occupied by different tribe, it has the tendency to provoke conflict. The university should particularly be headed by someone from the Dagban kingdom. This practice is done by almost all the regions in Ghana. In connection to this, one participant also stated:

*Another strategy of resolving conflict in the University was rotation of positions so that everybody will have the opportunity to enjoy the social status and the incentives that come along with such positions (Interviewee 10).*

The submission also means that, the universities will be conflict free if management are fair when it comes to assigning positions to staff who are due for it. This is in harmony with Bampoh-Addo, and Ansah-Koi, (2015), they emphasized that there is a need for transparency, fairness, and honesty in professor promotions, as well as independent entities inside the university and clear criteria on teacher promotion processes. Regarding the data shown above, another participant added:

*Resources generated by the university are allocated equally based on criteria agreed by all so that one group will not feel cheated in the process (Interviewee 11)*

In the opinion of this study participant, it means that when management or leaders are very fair in their responsibility of sharing resources to people who deserve it could resolve many conflicts in the university. It also means that, the system should be allowed to work uninterrupted or manipulated in any way. Even when the resources are not enough to reach everybody at the same time, then it should be handled through proper negotiation (Fatile et al., 2011).

Apart from the internal conflict management strategies the university normal applied in many conflicts' situation. The university at some point settles conflict through the formal court system in Ghana. This came to light during the interview session when some participants recalled situation of conflicts which were resolved through court. In view of this, one participant succinctly put it this way:

*"I think most of conflicts in this University; especially some years back were settled through court. And it was good all the parties respect the court verdict" (Interviewee 3).*

Another participant added that;

*"I remember there was a time the employees of this university took management to court, the issue was that, some section of aggrieved lecturers sent management to over their allowances" (Interviewee 5).*

The above interview excerpts further give accounts of the conflict resolution strategies that the university uses in conflict situations. It means that, many universities in Ghana do settle conflicts between management and employees through the formal court system in a summonable way (Mutuku et al., 2022).

In line with this, an interview participant confirms the university using the formal court as a strategy to settle disputes among management and lecturers. The participant accounts that:

*“I remember there was a dispute between a lecturer and management over renewing the contract of retired lecturers, the person ended up sending management to court. The position of management was that, their services were no longer needed”* (Interviewee 10).

The statement above is a clear proof that, Tamale Technical University and possible other Universities Ghana are to a large extent uses the judicial system to resolve conflicts between management and employees.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

This paper explores the sources of conflict at tertiary institutions in Ghana, the case of Tamale Technical University. It can be said that, effective conflict management in universities requires proactive measures to address program disparities, promote fairness in resource allocation and promotions, acknowledge historical contexts, uphold ethical standards, and implement transparent conflict resolution strategies. By fostering a culture of fairness, transparency, and mutual respect, universities can navigate conflicts constructively and promote a conducive environment for academic excellence and organizational growth.

## **Recommendation**

Based on the findings, the study recommends conducting future research in universities to explore the underlying reasons for the utilization of female students as a tool for undermining colleagues, a phenomenon known as the "pull him down syndrome," in Ghanaian universities.

## **Declarations**

We declare that we have no any competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. We further declare that, no part of this piece applied generative artificial intelligence (AI) and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process. Finally, data-based set access is not applicable in this paper.

## **Ethical Approvals**

We sent out emails with thorough justifications of the study's objectives in an effort to get the study participants involved. The research was duly disclosed to Tamale Technical University before any correspondence was made with possible interview subjects. Before the we start the data interviews, we were granted permission to carry out the study based on the ethical approvals checked.

## **Consent to Participate**



To ensure confidentiality, anonymity, honesty, and respect for participants, the study's purpose was clearly communicated to all participants. Additionally, participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Consequently, individuals who expressed a willingness to take part in the study received written consent forms.

### **Consent to Publish**

The terms and conditions stated in the publication agreement are acknowledged, and we accept them. We therefore consent to the publication of this material by granting this authorization.

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