Conflict Management Strategies of Ave Maria School in the Greater Accra Region

Dr. Edison D. Pajibo¹ and Emmanuel Adjine²

¹Research Fellow, Centre for Educational Policy Studies, University of Education, Winneba
²University of Education, Winneba

Abstract
The purpose of the study was to investigate conflict situations, the frequency of their occurrence as well as how headmasters and teachers in the Ave Maria School of the Greater Accra Region exhibit skills in preventing and/or solving such conflicts. The population of the study consisted of headteachers and teachers. The study was a descriptive survey. Convenience sampling technique was used to select the three schools and teachers, whereas purposive sampling was used to select the three headmasters. The size of the sample was 83, comprising 80 teachers and departmental heads. A questionnaire of 39 items divided into three sections was used to collect data. Also, descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The study showed that conflicts such as competition for resources and lack of trust among members existed in the school; some occurred frequently while others were rare. However 100% of heads indicated that they attached great importance to conflict prevention while 70% of teachers stated that their teachers attached some importance to conflict prevention. Furthermore, the study revealed that headmasters often put strategies such as organizing regular meeting and treating every member fairly in place to manage conflicts when they do occur. The study recommended that there should be a discussion with heads and teachers to try and come to a compromise as well as accede to others in order to arrive at a formal and mutual agreement. It was again recommended that headmasters should be trained in the dynamics of resolving conflicts to enable them become versatile in their dealings with school issues so as to handle conflicts that come in order to bring about peace and enhance outputs.

Key words: Conflict, Management, Strategies

Introduction
The school is seen as a formal organization. Draft (1997) described formal organizations as possessing deliberately structured line of actions toward specific goals. According to Amofa (1999) and Agyeman (1986), members of a formal organization share common purposes, communicate intentions willingly towards the attainment of collectively established goals, objectives and aspirations. Asiedu-Akrofi (1978) illustrates this statement with the relationship existing between school buildings, pupils, teachers and educational officers, and the goal of promoting teaching and learning in the schools for the survival of communities. He looked at the willingness of the community to allow children to go to school and the understanding teachers have to impart specific knowledge, all these harmonized into a set of mutual and common aspirations.
Reasoning alongside Musaazi on the subject matter, Amofa, (1999) named the determinants of a formal organization as follows: definite population, definite territory, authority structure, social network of relations, unique culture and clearly defined objectives and purposes. In school situations, during normal school activities some of these determinants of formal organizations have the potential to either enhance or distort the performance of the school’s programmes. Examples of such formal acts as cited by Agyeman (1986) include the following:

- Individual modes of expression, activities and disposition towards issues, patterns or acts and aspiration not in line with educational aspirations.
- Non-conformity to defined goals, objectives and aspirations of the school by individuals or groups in the school.
- Development of cliques, attitudes, and actions based on individual’s behaviour needs and relevance of action, but not officially acceptable in the school.
- Disagreements and rancour raging amongst the human resources in the school (p.10).

For most people, conflict engenders a negative image. Whether operating within the family structure, a social situation, or the workplace, people see conflict as divisive and tend to avoid it. Managing conflict at school has been an age-old challenge for educators. Recently, attention has been drawn to the level of violence in schools and society. Initiating a conflict management programme can be a proactive way to address concerns about violence (Amuzu-Kpeglo, 2002). It is interesting to indicate that conflicts are a natural part of life and therefore, a natural part of school life. Learning to deal constructively with conflict is a life-skill need. It can also be argued that conflicts are not necessarily bad. Some of the progress humanity has made so far in our civilization is due to the way it manages conflict between nature and man. It is logical to presume that conflict sometimes releases energy at every level of human activity- energy that can produce positive and constructive results. Conflicts tend to have a motivational value: they drive or energize an individual to tackle a situation. To resolve a conflict one might explore different avenues which make one more knowledgeable. Conflicts also provide opportunities to test one’s own abilities.

Before a school is run, certain measures concerning curriculum, objectives, aims and missions, personnel, and teaching methods are structured to ensure the smooth operation of activities. Though these measures are put in place in some schools Kellett (2007) and Loo (2009) maintained that scarcity of resources (finances, equipment and facilities,), different attitudes, values or perceptions, lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities, lack of teamwork, poor communication, poor or inadequate organizational structures and disagreements about needs, goals, cultural factors, prejudices, outside influence, economic factors, family tension as well as priorities and interest in schools result in conflict. Similarly, Rahim (2002) and Amuzu-Kpeglo (2002) stated that types of behaviors, different personal values, governmental control and organizational values of cultures cause conflict in schools.

Relative to the theories of conflicts, these are significant to the role of the administrator, but they emanate primarily from fields such as business, sociology, and psychology, and not from communication or even education. It is relevant to add that conflict is difficult to define; or rather it is difficult to come to a consensus concerning the definition of this term. Crooks (1988), says that conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce resources, power, and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralized, injure, or eliminate the rivals. Draft (1997) states that conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur, an action
which is incompatible with another action prevents, obstructs, interferes with, injures, or in some way makes it less likely or less effective (p.156). Amidst these apparent vices, school administrators’ conflict management strategies and leadership direction are critical in preventing or managing conflicts.

In terms of the nature and causes of conflicts, many people have grown accustomed to believing that conflict is a negative event to be avoided in life. It is this belief that generates so much anger and violence in the world because people see conflict as something that needs to be stamped out of their lives. They choose to fight against what they perceive to be the causes of conflicts, without realizing that their actions only generate more negative conflict for themselves. The cycle of “force against force” continues until at one point someone loses (Loo, 2009). Although conflict is perceived as rather negative by most people, a number of comments have been made by Amuzu-Kpelgo on the nature of conflict, which recognizes some of the definite advantages that can be gained from conflict:

- Confronting the individual with him/herself
- Forcing reassessment of the position of the other party
- Redefining of roles and relationships
- Facilitating change
- Preventing stagnation

Implicit here, is the fact that although these are lofty points put forth by Amuzu-Kpelgo (2002), however, school authorities need to be cautious in harnessing them. For example, in redefining roles and relationships and in facilitating change, a school administrator must exhibit act and or diplomacy. The causes of conflict between individuals and groups are numerous. Some of the more predominant instigators of conflict are identified by Griffin, (2005) and these are – competition over limited resources, role ambiguity, communication obstacles, status and power differences, and task interdependence. Kellett (2007) and Bison (1988), also traced the major causes of organizational conflicts as the need to share scarce resources, differences in goals between units, interdependence of activities in organizations and differences in values or perceptions among organizational units. These instigators of conflict can gravely jeopardize instructional quality and effectiveness.

Regarding conflict management practices and strategies Bison (1988), states that preventive conflict management as a strategy is founded on the assumption that the outcomes of conflict may not be conducive to gaining the objectives of parties or of organizations. Kellett (2007), noted that preventive conflict management as encompasses the whole spectrum of understanding the dynamics of the potential for conflicts in people. Kellett does not explicitly point out the significance of such understanding. To the extent that he also uses the concept pre-care as synonymous with conflict prevention, it is deduced that he sees such understanding as essential in preventing conflict.

Literature relating to conflict management practices processes suggests a number of techniques to prevent conflict. The following are some of the techniques: collaboration, goal setting, appropriation of specific responsibilities, early identification of latent conflicts, exposure of differences before serious conflicts, establishing hot lines, modification of the work environment and practicing effective school management. Additionally, synthesizing the researches of Robbins (1999), Musaazi (1984), Robbins (1999) and Rahim (2002), one
sees five conflict management styles. The first conflict management style is that of managing the competitor of tough battle. This style is exemplified by the person who ambitiously realizes his/her goals at the expense of others. To the competitor, losing indicates weakness, while winning is indicative of strength. Winning is the competitor’s only goal. The second conflict management strategy is that of the collaborator or problem solver. This style de-emphasizes the significance of winning and losing. The collaborator’s goal is to help find mutually acceptable solutions to group members’ problems.

The third conflict management style is that of the compromiser or manoeuvring conciliator. This person works to help the group at the expense of the individual, as he/she sees everyone as standing to lose in a conflict. A situation of “giving in” frequently evolves (Rahim, 2002). The fourth conflict management style is called that of the “accommodator” or friendly helper. The possessor of this style is non-assertive. He/she neglects personal needs and goals to maintain an atmosphere of harmony within the group. Lastly, the fifth conflict management style is that of the “avoider” or “impersonal complier”. This person sees conflict as a totally negative entity and, therefore, removes himself/herself from the conflict by refusing to become involved (Asiedu-Akrofi, 1978).

Viewed from the perspectives above, school authorities need to take a lot of precautions in governing in order to handle school conflicts. The Ave Maria School has organized series of workshops and seminars to mitigate conflicts in the school, yet, the problem of conflict still persists (Ave Maria School PTA Report, 2010). For example, the Ave Maria PTA Report (2010) indicates that conflicts such as misunderstanding between heads and teachers, conflict among teachers and conflicts relating to headmaster siding with one party and neglecting the others exist in the school. Resultantly, these conflicts are apparently making educational administrators of the institution lose touch of their purpose of teaching and learning. The literature (Bison 1988; Kellett, 2007) seems to suggest that in order to find a lasting solution to these conflict situations systematic researches is needed. It is on this note that this study investigates into the nature and causes of conflict, and conflict management strategies of educational administrators in the Ave Maria School in the Greater Accra Region.

**Purpose of the Study**
The purpose of the study was investigate the conflict management strategies of heads of the Ave Maria School in the Greater Accra Region with the aim of finding lasting solution to the canker.

**Research Questions**
The following questions guided the study:

1. What factors lead to conflict situations in the Ave Maria School in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana?
2. What types of conflict exist in the Ave Maria School in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana?
3. What conflict management strategies are applied by school administrators in the Ave Maria School in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana?

**Significance**
This study will create the awareness that the occurrence of conflicts can be of benefit at times to the educational systems (particularly the Ave Maria School) operating in a country. Second, it will enlighten stakeholders about the need to manage conflict situations effectively to take advantage of the occurrence of conflict for organizational growth and development.
Again, it is believed that this study will provide educational administrators, such as heads and teachers, strategies for effectively handling conflicts in the school systems.

**Delimitation and Limitation**
The study is delimited to head teachers, heads of department, and other teachers who play administrative roles in the Ave Maria School in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. A major limitation of this study was the dearth of reference materials on the subject “conflict management strategies” at the KG, Primary and Junior High school levels in the country. The negative attitude of some heads of department and administrators towards responding to the study questionnaire also posed a challenge to the study as their non-responses created a data gap especially in terms of factors that lead to conflict in the school. In order to resolve the negative attitude of some of the respondents, the researcher painstakingly explained the objectives and benefits of the study to respondents who hitherto were refusing to cooperate.

**Methodology**

**Research Design**
The research design for this study was descriptive survey. Crooks (1988) noted that using survey as a research design allows the researcher to select a sample of interest (teachers and educational administrators) and administer questionnaire to collect information about a phenomena (e.g. conflict management strategies). These authors further acknowledged the fact that surveys are frequently used in educational research to describe attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and other forms of information because accurate information can be obtained from a large number of people with a small sample.

**Population and Sampling**
The population for the study consisted of all the headmasters and teachers in administrative position (mainly departmental heads) of the Ave Maria School. The school has KG, Primary and Junior High School Departments. The three departments produced a total population of 104 people, 3 headmasters and 101 teachers including heads of departments. All the three headmasters, three unit heads together with 80 of the teachers were sampled. A total of 83 participants constituted the sample size. The sample size consisted of 80 teachers and three heads and purposive sampling was used in selecting the three heads. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the three heads, two of home doubled as head of departments because the focus of the study was on school administrators and it was assumed that they had relevant and rich information relating to how conflict is managed. Convenience sampling technique was used to select the 80 teachers because they were available at the time of administering the instruments. Essentially, they were close at hand and convenient for the researchers.

**Instrument**
Data was obtained using a questionnaire. Basically, the structure of the questionnaire reflected the three main research questions relating to factors that accounted for conflict in the school, types of conflicts in the schools and conflict management strategies adopted by school heads.

**Validity and pre-testing of Research Instruments**
In order to ensure content validity of the instrument it was giving to professors in educational administration and management to peer review. Test and retest with two weeks interval was done at the St Benedicta International School which had similar characteristics as that of Ave Maria.
Maria School. This was done to establish the reliability (or otherwise the internal consistency) of the instruments. This was done using the Cronach Alpha Co-efficient which yielded a score of 0.08. This was an acceptable score. The core areas of the questionnaire were factors that lead to conflicts in the Ave Maria School, types of conflicts and conflict management strategies employed by school administrators. The questionnaire was administered by the researchers.

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistical tools involving the use of the percentage and standard deviation and mean were used in analyzing the data. This was aided by the use of the Statistical Product Service Solution (SPSS) computer software.

**Results and Discussion**

| Table 1: Factors that Lead to Conflict in the School (Responses from Teachers) (N=80) |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
|                                | N  | R  | O  | V  | M  | SD  |
| Unresolved communication problems | 36(45%) | 20(25%) | 16(20%) | 8(10%) | 1.95 | 0.11 |
| Lack of trust among members of others | 18(22.5%) | 30(37.5%) | 20(25%) | 12(15%) | 2.33 | 0.11 |
| Misinterpretation of the behavior of others | 10(12.5%) | 48(60%) | 12(15%) | 10(12.5%) | 2.28 | 0.09 |
| Conflicting goals/interests of individual teachers or groups | 18(22.5%) | 36(45%) | 10(12.5%) | 16(20%) | 2.30 | 0.11 |
| Improper decision-making by teachers or groups | 14(17.5%) | 44(55%) | 10(12.5%) | 12(15%) | 2.25 | 0.10 |
| Headmaster’s leadership style (autocratic, democratic, laissez faire) | 26(32.5%) | 32(40%) | 14(17.5%) | 8(10%) | 2.05 | 0.10 |
| Competition (each party trying to get what the other party wants) | 36(45%) | 18(22.5%) | 20(25%) | 6(7.5%) | 1.95 | 0.11 |

N= Never; R=Rarely; O=often; V=Very Often

The data in Table 1 shows that 36(45.0%) indicated that, unresolved communication never caused conflict whereas 8(10.0%) of them asserted that unresolved communication problem caused conflicts very often. “Rarely” was the response from another 20 (25.0%) of the respondents when questioned whether an issue of such nature could cause conflict, and 16 (20.0%) said it caused conflict often. The responses from the teachers indicated that conflict caused by unresolved communication problem rarely causes conflict in the school since the teachers have a mean of 1.95 with standard deviations of 0.11.

Again in Table 1, a majority, 30 (37.5%) of the teachers answered that lack of trust rarely occurs. Twelve (15.0%) said it causes conflict very often. However, an equal average of 18(22.5%) and 20(25.0%) said it “never” and “often” causes conflict, respectively. The data from teachers recorded a mean 2.33 (standard deviation 0.11) indicating that lack of trust among members rarely causes conflict. Additionally, data in Table 1 shows that misinterpretation of behavior rarely causes conflicts since 48 (60%) responded towards this line. Other respondents, 12(15.0%) agreed that it often causes conflicts. Rather interestingly, an equal percentage of 10(12.5%) each claimed it “never” and “very often” causes conflict. They had a mean of 2.28 (Standard deviation 0.09). The mean recorded by the teachers’ data implies that conflict caused by misinterpretation of other staff members’ behavior were rare.
Also, respondents agreed that conflict was rarely caused by conflicting goals and/or interests of groups of individual teachers. A total number 10 (12.5%) said it happens often, 16 (20.0%) agreed that it causes conflict “very often” and 18 (22.5%) indicated that group or individual goals never caused conflict whereas a majority of 36 (45.0%) said the occurrence of such conflict situation was rare. The teachers’ data had a mean of 2.30 with standard deviation of 0.11, meaning that the occurrence of such conflict was rare.

Generally, the outlook of the data on the first four variable, (unresolved communication, lack of trust, misinterpretation of behavior and conflicting goals either never caused conflicts or rarely caused conflicts was apparently due to the moral training teachers in Catholic schools had- that is to eschew all manner of vices that cause conflicts among Christian flocks. Agyman (1986) argues strongly that in smaller groups, religious virtues play a significant role in the avoidance conflicts. This usually is true for many religious private schools. The other variables (improper decision making, and heads’ leadership styles) recorded high percentages of 44 (55%) and 32 (40%) respectively indicative of the fact that conflicts were rarely caused by these. Regarding improper decision making, a mean of 2.25 and a standard deviation of 0.10 was recorded while for heads’ leadership styles had a mean of 2.05 and a standard deviation of 0.10, showing that these variables rarely caused conflicts. On the other hand, the item relating to competition among parties recorded a score of 36 (45%), mean of 1.95 and a standard deviation of 0.11. These show that competition was a rare cause of conflicts Analytically, as it relates to the variables of improper decision making and heads’ leadership styles; it could be that these rarely caused conflicts due to the fact that the heads practiced democratic leadership styles which allowed for participatory decision-making that suited the school, hence, the rare occurrence of conflicts. Amuzu-Kpeglo (2002) is of the view that when there is broad consensus on decisions taken as a result of participatory leadership styles, conflict situations are mitigated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict between headmasters and individual teachers</td>
<td>28(35.0%)</td>
<td>30(37.5%)</td>
<td>14(17.5%)</td>
<td>8(10%)</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict between headmaster and group of teachers</td>
<td>34(42.5%)</td>
<td>30(37.5%)</td>
<td>12(15%)</td>
<td>4(5%)</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Conflict among teachers or groups of teachers.</td>
<td>20(25%)</td>
<td>30(37.5%)</td>
<td>28(35%)</td>
<td>2(2.5%)</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict by different reward systems provided by the headmaster for various groups of teachers.</td>
<td>46(57.5%)</td>
<td>22(27.5%)</td>
<td>10(12.5%)</td>
<td>2(2.5%)</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict caused by headmaster siding with one party and neglecting the other.</td>
<td>50(62.5%)</td>
<td>22(27.5%)</td>
<td>8(10%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict caused by the headmaster trying to control the behavior of other members of staff.</td>
<td>24(30%)</td>
<td>32(40%)</td>
<td>22(27.5%)</td>
<td>2(2.5%)</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict caused by lackadaisical attitude of teachers towards school activities.</td>
<td>12(15%)</td>
<td>30(37.5%)</td>
<td>24(30%)</td>
<td>14(17.5%)</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict caused by unresolved existing conflict</td>
<td>38(47.5%)</td>
<td>20(25%)</td>
<td>16(20%)</td>
<td>6(7.5%)</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=Never Existed; R=Rarely happens; O=often happen; V=Very often
The data regarding the types of conflicts in the school in Table 2 are heavily skewed towards the left column particularly under the “Never” column. Specifically, it was shown that conflicts caused by headmasters siding with one party, 50(62.5%), conflict caused by different reward stems, 46(57.5%) and conflicts caused by unresolved existing conflicts “never” existed according to the respondents. These variables also had means of 1.48, 0.60 and 1.68, respectively and a standard deviation of 0.07, 0.09 and 0.11, implying that these generally were not the types of conflicts that existed in the schools. Understandably, one would indeed think that these could never be the types of conflict in a school setting where communication problems, problems of misinterpretation of behaviors and conflicting goals were minimal (see Table 1). Of equal significance is the fact that other underlying factors such as improper decision-making formats, inappropriate leadership styles (see Table 1) that could otherwise engender the types of conflicts in Table 2 rarely existed. This brings to the fore the argument of Griffin (2005) that when there is stability in the temperament of organizational workers due to proper decision-making variables and relevant leadership styles, conflicts are minimized.

The data in Table 2 on the other hand showed that the types of conflicts that often occurred in the school were those occurring among teachers, 28 (35%), conflict caused by lackadaisical attitudes of teachers 24(30%) and conflict caused by headmasters trying to control the behaviours of other staff. This is not surprising. Rationally, these are conflicts emanating from clash of characters and indiscipline. This is not surprising. Rahim (2002) posits that due to different levels of intelligence and upbringing, such types of conflicts do exist.

### Table 3: Conflict Management Strategies by Headmasters (Responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>LI</th>
<th>SI</th>
<th>GI</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delegates responsibilities freely or quickly</td>
<td>2(2.5%)</td>
<td>8(10%)</td>
<td>32(40%)</td>
<td>38(47.5%)</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness in dealing with all staff members (rewards &amp; punishment)</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>14(17.5%)</td>
<td>28(35%)</td>
<td>38(47.5%)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free flow of information to staff members</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>14(17.5%)</td>
<td>22(27.5%)</td>
<td>44(55%)</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular staff meeting</td>
<td>2(2.5%)</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>22(27.5%)</td>
<td>56(70%)</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes himself available for discussion on staff’s personal &amp; official problems/matters</td>
<td>2(2.5%)</td>
<td>12(15%)</td>
<td>24(30%)</td>
<td>42(52.5%)</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensures a transparent administration</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>18(22.5%)</td>
<td>32(40%)</td>
<td>30(37.5%)</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always encourages teamwork; involves all in decision-making.</td>
<td>2(2.5%)</td>
<td>22(27.5%)</td>
<td>28(35%)</td>
<td>28(35%)</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always avoids divide and rule tactics.</td>
<td>4(5%)</td>
<td>14(17.5%)</td>
<td>36(45%)</td>
<td>26(32.5%)</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole-heartedly welcomes feedbacks, criticism, suggestions and reports.</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>14(17.5%)</td>
<td>28(35%)</td>
<td>38(47.5%)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always quick to reward and punish where necessary (does not harbour things)</td>
<td>6(7.5%)</td>
<td>10(12.5%)</td>
<td>30(37.5%)</td>
<td>34(42.5%)</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NI=No importance, LI=little importance, SI=Small importance, GI=Great importance

---

Pajibo and Adjine
Data in Table 3 relates to teachers’ views on heads’ conflict management strategies. Nearly all the high scores in Table 3 are skewed to the extreme right column, especially for those label under great importance. For example, majority 56 (70%) of teachers indicated that the heads attached great importance to staff meeting as a conflict management strategies. The same could be said of other items such as delegating of responsibilities 38(47.5%); fairness in dealing with all staffs, 38(47.5%) free flow of information, 44(55.5%) and the head making himself available for discussion on school matters 42(52.5%). These collectively are semblance or evidence of effective and efficient administration that could apparently result from regular and productive staff meetings. Arguably, one would concur with Crooks (1988) that nothing creates better understanding than people meeting people in such gatherings such as staff meetings where points of convergence and divergence interface and are ironed out.

Other conflict management strategies which the teachers thought the heads adopted were encouragement of teamwork (mean=3.03) avoidance of “divide and rule” policies (m=3.05) and accommodating feedback and criticisms (mean=3.00). Certainly, these are administrative virtues that all heads must pursue if their school organizations are to survive, and achieve stability and excellence. Additionally, the cumulative effects of these will render teachers and other support staff to positively fall in line and jointly strive to achieve the vision and mission of their schools. Particularly of relevance, was the issue of delegation of responsibilities and teamwork which increase the self-confidence and self-esteem of workers.

Table 4: Heads’ Views on Conflict Management Strategies (N=3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>SI</th>
<th>NI</th>
<th>GI</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delegates freely or quickly</td>
<td>2(66.7%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1(33.3%)</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is fairness in dealing with all staff members (rewards &amp; punishment)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3(100%)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is free flow of information to staff members</td>
<td>1(33.3%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2(66.7%)</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is regular staff meeting.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3(100%)</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make yourself available for discussion on staff’s personal &amp; official problems/matters.</td>
<td>1(33.3%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2(66.7%)</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure a transparent administration</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3(100%)</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always encourage teamwork: involve all in decision-making.</td>
<td>1(33.3%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2(66.7%)</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always avoid divide and rule tactics.</td>
<td>2(66.7%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1(33.3%)</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole-heartedly welcome feedbacks, criticism, suggestions, reports etc.</td>
<td>1(33.3%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2(66.7%)</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: SI=Some importance. NI= No Importance; GI=Great Importance

Table 4 shows the types of conflict prevention techniques by headmasters as indicated by headmasters. Headmasters-respondents were subjected to the answering of questions as to the importance they attach to the prevention of conflict occurrence in the school. The respondents were to state whether they, attach some importance; “no importance” or “great importance” to statements stated in the questionnaire.

The data in Table 4 shows that majority of the heads attached great importance to issues such as fairness in dealings with staff 3(100%) regular staff meetings 3(100%) transparent
administration, 3(100%) free flow of information, 2 (66.7%) and 2(66.7%) for encouraging of feedbacks and criticisms. All these responses confirmed the teachers’ responses of heads’ conflict management strategies (see Table 3). Ideally, when heads portray theses conflict management characteristics they actually present themselves as lead figures in school organization (Amofa, 1999).

Items to which the head attached small importance were delegation of responsibilities and avoidance of divide and rule tactics. As it relates to delegation of responsibilities, a plausible explanation and one of the reasons cited in the literature is job insecurity. Robbins (2009) laments the fact that most heads in the Developing world think that the more they delegate responsibilities, the more they render their subordinates popular. Hence, delegation comes only as a last resort.

The results from teachers relating to mechanism/strategies adopted by heads in conflict prevention run contrary to heads’ who attached little importance. What could account for the difference could be that some of the teachers either did not grasp the full meaning of delegating responsibilities or the heads comprehended little what that meant. The differences in their opinions could therefore stem from the semantic understanding of the phrase “delegating of responsibilities.

Conclusions
Based on the results from the study, it can be concluded that conflicts existed in all departments and across departments in the school. This supports the fact that there is nothing more common than conflict occurrence in institutions. Conflicts in schools particularly, in the Ave Maria School occurred as a result of poor communication, non-acceptable punctually and regularity to school, poor staff delegation to duty, absence of annual assessment and dress code of staffs and pupils. Such conflicts can be prevented through staff having access to heads and heads giving recognition for teachers’ efforts, team work, and fairness when dealing with one another and these practice can be tried in other similar institutions.

The study further lends support to the fact that a better way in conflict resolution is through isolation/avoidance, persuasions, and imposition. To presume that any good administrator from a non-school setting would do well in a school setting is to betray a lack of recognition of the school as a unique organization meant to deal with matters of educational. The school is a unique and sensitive social organization which has goals of teaching and learning, research, and community development. It is not a profit-making venture. Therefore, professionally trained and competent personnel, that is, experts in education administration and management, must get on board so that decision-making in education will be based on facts and not feelings.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice
Based on the finding of the study, the following were recommended for policy and practice:

1. Headmasters/administrators of Ave Maria school should ensure and enhance conflict free schools. This can be achieved by organising regular workshops, seminars and/or in-service training on the dynamics of personnel management.

2. Administrators/Headmasters are to be encouraged to maintain the practices that have been put in place to avoid conflict in their schools. These practices are being fair in dealing with all staff members, organizing regular staff meetings, allowing
information to flow freely to all staff members and ensuring a transparent administration.
3. New headteachers/administrators to the school must be counseled by counselors or other personnel from the GES to emulate or improve upon the good footsteps of their predecessors
4. Teachers are to be trained to be proactive towards school activities in order to avoid conflict from occurring.
5. Since conflict is inevitable in schools, the Ghana Education Service should educate the school society on how to deal with conflict through regular in-service workshops.
6. School authority structure must be designed in way that would help information to flow easily and include teachers, pupils as well as parents as part of the administration.

References