STUDENTS-MANAGEMENT CONFLICTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN GHANA: A REVIEW OF THEIR NATURE IN UNIVERSITY FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES FROM 1999 TO 2009

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Abstract - This paper is on students-management conflicts in tertiary institutions in Ghana with particular focus on their nature in University for Development Studies from 1999 to 2009. Questionnaires and interview guides were the data collection tools employed and administered to 40 respondents. Data were analyzed qualitatively in narratives and with graphs, tables and matrices. The study found that: there was a (big class) structural gap between students and management; re-enforced by the autocratic/authoritarian leadership style of Management. Conflicts were high and worrying in the University. Conflicts between students and university management most frequently occurred and often took the nature of revolts, violent demonstrations, boycotts/attempted boycotts of classes/examinations, verbal assaults and physical attacks. The paper concluded that the nature of conflicts witnessed was often that of violence. We recommended that early conflict warning signs, often noticeable in their very nature should not be treated laggingly and reactively but proactively to lessen the nature they take in the end and that students' power in conflicts should not be down played.

Keywords - Conflicts, Students, Management, University, Tertiary Institutions, Nature

I. INTRODUCTION

Wall & Callister (1995: 517) defined conflict as "a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party". By this definition, the source of a conflict can either be real or imagined. Conflict in the university is a regular issue. Administrators, teachers, students, and parents hardly agree on issues concerning rules governing the school. These parties, particularly administrators and students, see one another as adversaries, not as those working toward a common goal, as is generally the case in other organizations. Conflict thus abounds in decisions administrators make about students (Bua et al, 2015:59). Consequentially, conflicts in the university organization are in a myriad forms. This is as a result of the many different stakeholder interactions that take place in the university environment. For instance, Awosusi (2005) identified conflicts in the university as taking the form of staff-management conflicts, students-management conflicts, staff-government conflicts, students-students conflict and staff-staff conflicts. On their contribution to the frequency of occurrence of different types of conflict in universities, Olaleye & Arogundade (2013) in their Conflict Management Strategies of University Administrators in South-West Nigeria, presented findings which are extensive enough and useful for this paper. Olaleye & Arogundade (2013) clearly outlined these conflicts experienced in the university environment, prominent among which are conflicts between academic and professional administrators, conflicts between non-teaching staff and the government, conflict between non-teaching staff and the professional administrator, inter-personal conflicts among students, conflict between students and the host community and most importantly, a combination of conflicts between academic staff and students and between students and the university administrators referred to in this paper as students-management conflicts. Accordingly, Jude-Iwuoha et al (2014) observed that most tertiary institutions in developing countries experience conflict either between the school administration and government, staff and school administration, among staff themselves or among staff and students.

The work of Jude-Iwuoha et al (2014), however, failed to mention as part of the conflicts in tertiary institution, students-management conflict. This is rightly so, if their use of staff is limited to and means employees. Adding to the discourse, Ada (2013:78) noted that "conflict can occur at the level of interpersonal, inter group/organization or intra-organizational relationship involving chief Executive (Vice chancellors, provost or rector) and the rest of the staff, the students the super-ordinate cadre, and the subordinates, the senior and the junior staff, the student and school authority, the community and the school". From the discussions this far, it is glaring that students-management conflicts are notably inherent in the university environment and worth equal attention. These researchers have firsthand experience that shows that in pursuit of its vision, University for Development Studies (UDS) was

intermittently obstructed by the recurrence of students-management conflicts that plagued it from 1999 to 2009. The UDS recorded students-management conflicts in the 1999/2000 academic year on Nyankpala Campus, 1999/2000, 2001/2002 and 2004/2005 academic years on Navrongo and 2005/2006 academic year and 2008/2009 academic year on Wa Campus and were of serious concern to University Management (UDS, 2009; 2011; Boateng, 2008). The focus of this paper therefore is to determine the nature of these students-management conflicts in the University for Development Studies from 1999 to 2009.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF UNIVERSITY CONFLICTS

Leadership Approach to the Analysis of Students-Management Conflicts

To better understand the relationship between students and management in the university community in the analysis of conflicts, it is important to take a look at the behavioural leadership style of administrators/managers. Three types of leadership styles: Democratic, Autocratic/Authoritarian and Laissez-Faire are identified by scholars such as (Blake & Monton, 1964; Liket, 1961). Explaining students-management conflicts in the light of the behavioural leadership approaches, Ajibade (2013) asserted that the democratic leaders/administrators often take into consideration the views of staff and students, encourage participation and are accessible. He however, argued that the autocratic/authoritarian leaders rely on one way communication, decide for staff and students and do more talking than listening. Autocratic leaders like to exercise their powers to the highest level possible. He further stated that laissez-faire leaders grant staff and students a high degree of independence to formulate their own goals and means of realizing them. Whereas democratic and laissez-faire leadership styles have their own weaknesses, autocratic/authoritarian leadership is worse. Unfortunately, this is the style mostly practiced by university administrators.

For instance, Ajibade (2013:67) noted that, Most of the heads of tertiary institutions, especially in Nigeria adopt authoritarian/autocratic leadership style by not listening to the yearning and aspiration of the students and are lackadaisical in terms of provision of amenities such as water, health facilities, etc. Acts, such as strain on the students' actualizing of their dreams or goals invariably result to crises situation in most of the tertiary institutions.

The power differentials between students and university management and the subsequent domination by authoritarian university management often lead to protest or rebellion against domination by the under-dogs.

Students-Management Conflicts in Universities

It has been observed that students-management conflicts are characterized by protests, revolts, unrests and violence, as well as frequent closure of schools (Adeyemi et al, 2010). Alabi (2002) noted that "a conflict situation is characterized by the inability of those concerned to iron out their differences and reach an agreement on issues of common interest. This inability manifests in one form of protest or the other such as strikes and other work–disruptions (slow-downs, planned absenteeism and sabotage)". Though this observation is made from a general view point, it particularly zeros down to the students situation which, in most cases, involves boycotts of classes and sabotage as in undermining the public image of management of the institution. Insubordination and physical attack, violent demonstration and in recent times, falsification and blackmailing through the media have also been glaring features of students conflicts with university management (Ada, 2013). Fatile & Adejuwon (2011) also intimated that, students-management conflicts are often chaotic and undermine many programmes aimed at enhancing and imparting knowledge and skills in the future human resources. They further observed that, as a result of mismanagement of conflict and weak school-based security mechanisms, many mild school conflicts have turned violent and some become unresolved and protracted.

III. METHODOLOGY

Study Locality

The University for Development Studies (UDS), established in 1992 was the targeted organization due to its distinctiveness. UDS is a Multi-Campus based covering three Regions of the country: the Northern Region, Upper East Region and the Upper West Region (UDS, 2016). UDS is the only University in Ghana that operates a trimester system with the third trimester devoted to community work. Also, it was the first public University in Ghana established to be autonomous without affiliation to another University. Notwithstanding its uniqueness, UDS over the years has witnessed a number of students-management conflicts, especially, between 1999 and 2009.

Research Design

This paper adopted the qualitative research design in the collection and analysis of data. This enabled the researchers to contextualize the problem which mooted the study. As noted by Creswell (2014), qualitative research design is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.

Selection of Research Participants

The study made use of 40 respondents drawn from the University fraternity. The study required the perspectives of various respondents. In view of this,

all available and willing respondents from diverse backgrounds were purposely selected. The student leaders were however, gotten through snow balling. Table 1 depicts the summary of the selected respondents

Type of respondent	Description of respondent	Number of respondents
Past Student leaders	Who were in office during the conflicts	12
Senior Hall Tutors	One from each campus where the conflicts occurred	4
Deans of Students	As were in the University during the conflicts	2
Vice Deans of Students	As were on the campuses of the conflicts during the period considered for the study	1
Deans-In- Charge of Campuses,	As were on the campuses of the conflicts during the period considered for the study	6
Faculty Officers of the Faculties-In-Charge	As were on the campuses of the conflicts during the period considered for the study	4
Registrars	As living Registrars who were in the University during the conflicts	2
Pro Vice Chancellors	As were in the University during the conflicts	3
Director of Works and Physical Development	As was in the University during the conflicts	1
University Librarian.	As was in the University during the conflicts	1
Campus Head of Security	As were on the campuses of the conflicts during the period considered for the study	3
A Retired Senior Police Officer	Knowledgeable in students oriented conflicts	1
Grant total		40

Table 1 Non Student respondents that added up to the sample size for the research
Source: Authors' construct, 2017

Techniques of Data Collection

This study made use of both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were gathered through interviews with the aid of audio recording device and survey questionnaire administration which Marshall & Rossman (1995:86) referred to as "supplemental data collection techniques" for qualitative studies. In all 40 separate face to face/telephone interviewing sections were held at different times for the selected respondents between November, 2016 and January, 2017.

Each interview session lasted averagely 45 minutes. To avoid any disappointment, a day or two prior to the interviews, the selected respondents were reminded of the appointment made. In line with the ethical issues upheld by social scientists, the consent of all the research participants was sought. Against the same ethical principle, all names used during the analysis of the data were invented.

Data Analysis

The qualitative approach of data analysis was employed in this paper. The raw data such as field notes were typed, interviews recorded with audio device were transcribed and carefully edited where necessary. Data were then arranged into coherent categories. Tables and charts were used in presenting the findings where appropriate.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Students and Management Relations in UDS from 1999 to 2009

The researchers sought to find out the relationship that existed between students and management of the University. From the student respondents' perspective across the campuses, the relationship that existed between students and management of the University during the period under review was not cordial. Over 75% of the respondents favoured this view. The views of management respondents on the same issue were not very different as 51% of them sided with the former; describing the relationship as antagonistic. There was a show of relationship imbalance.

A student interviewee had this to say:

From my experience, students had always been on the lower side of the divide in their relationship with management. Not only did management disrespect the views of students but as well tried to impose their views on students and expecting obedience in return. This was what often led to students' clashes with management (Interviews, January, 2017).

A management member corroborated this statement:

Students and management can never be on the same platform since they structurally belong to different

classes. Students may occasionally be contacted for their opinions on issues of concern to them but even then, final decisions about such matters are taken by management. If you give students the opportunity to influence such decisions, they will lead you astray (Interviews, January, 2017). Another management interviewee added spices to these statements by citing his colleague as saying it was the dog that wagged the tail and not the tail that wagged the dog. Philosophically said in simple terms but with a broad meaning that management being the dog needed to be in charge, otherwise they would lose control of the affairs of the University. These views confirmed the claim of (Bua et al, 2015:59) that administrators, teachers, students, and parents hardly agree on issues concerning rules governing the school and that "these parties, particularly administrators and students, perceive one another as adversaries, not as those working toward a common goal, as is generally the case in other organizations". This relationship as the findings revealed had implications for conflict since students and management did not see each other as pursuing a common course. Bua et al (2015:59) added in their claim that conflict thus abounds in decisions administrators make about students. The findings also confirmed Grace I. Scarborough's assertion that where the existing structures are tilted in favour of one group while putting the other(s) at a disadvantaged position, and where holders of certain powers or privileges are unwilling to acknowledge the rights of others to be different, there would be various levels of conflict (cited in Faleti, 2006).

The Class Structure between Students and Management of UDS

The paper sought to find out if indeed, there was a class structural gap created between students and management with inherent inequalities between them, particularly in relation to power and authority lines as some studies seemed to suggest. The responses were in the affirmative from both categories of respondents. On a likert scale of: strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree, no respondent of any category disagreed, strongly disagreed nor was uncertain. Seventy five percent of student respondents strongly agreed, while 25% agreed. On the part of management, 42.9% strongly agreed with 57.1% agreeing. Despite the divergence in the views of these two groups of respondents, one thing was still clear. They had some level of agreement to the existence of class structural gap between students and management with inherent inequalities between them. In this regard, a student respondent said, "there was a big gap between students and management. Sometimes you could not even greet a lecturer at a close range". A management respondent added that "there was distance between students and management in their relations despite that their leadership was often engaged by management" (Interviews, January, 2017).

The Behavioural Leadership Style(s) of University Management

An effort was made to find out the typical behavioural leadership style(s) of University Management during the time of the conflicts and the outcome is as in Figure 1.

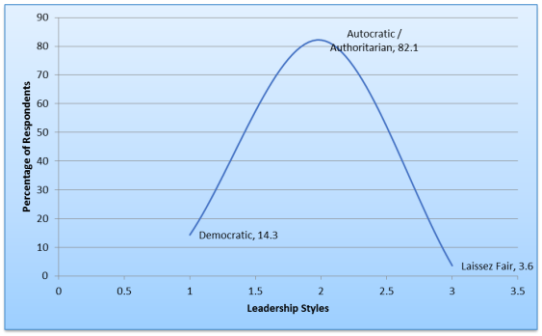

Figure 1: The Typical Behavioural Leadership Style(s) of University Management
Source: Field Survey, January, 2017

Findings of the study as in Figure 1 confirmed Ajibade's (2013:67) observation that most of the heads of tertiary institutions adopt authoritarian/autocratic leadership style by not listening to the yearning and aspiration of the students and are lackadaisical in terms of provision of amenities such as water, health facilities. From the responses of both students (91.9%) and management (82.1%), the typical behavioural leadership style(s) of University Management at the time was autocratic / authoritarian in nature. It was obvious therefore that, students had little say if any on some decisions that affected their wellbeing and this according to respondents, contributed significantly to the impasses between them and management. This is in line with Ajibade's (2013:67) observation that "acts as strain on the students' actualizing of their dreams or goals invariably result in crises situation in most of the tertiary institutions". In support of this, a management member, for instance, remarked,

The foundation Vice Chancellor, before the time of the conflicts was friendly, open and fair to students and so despite the limited resources, there was calm in the University. The second Vice Chancellor from 2001 to 2006 and the Ag, Vice Chancellor from 2006 to 2009 were repressive, dictatorial, confrontational and intimidating to students. These sparked student revolts in the University (Interviews, January, 2017).

Student respondents shared in this view. One student added that management was arrogant in their interaction with students.

Forms of Conflicts in UDS

This study revealed that the University for Development Studies from 1999 to 2009 witnessed a number of different forms of conflict with both internal and external dimensions as displayed in tables 2 and 3.

S/N	Form of conflict	Very frequently	Frequently	Moderately	Less frequently	Rarely	Total
		%					
1	Conflict between Academic and professional administrators	0	0	0	8.3	91.7	100
2	Conflict between Academic Staff and Government	75	16.7	8.3	0	0	100
3	Conflict between non-teaching staff and the professional administrators	0	0	0	8.3	91.7	100
4	Conflict between students and University management	100	0	0	0	0	100
5	Conflict between non-teaching staff and Government	50	16.7	16.7	16.7	0	100
6	Conflict between students and Government	33.3	33.3	25	8.3	0	100
7	Inter-personal conflict among staff	0	0	8.3	16.7	75	100
8	Inter-personal conflict among students	66.7	25	8.3	0	0	100
9	Conflict between academic staff and students	58.3	16.7	8.3	8.3	8.3	100
10	Conflict between students and the host communities	0	0	0	8.3	91.7	100
11	Conflict between Academic staff union and non-academic staff unions	0	0	0	8.3	91.7	100

Table 2 Students Responses on the Forms of Conflicts in UDS from 1999 to 2009
Source: Field Survey, January, 2017

S/N	Form of conflict	Very frequently	Frequently	Moderately	Less frequently	Rarely	Total
		%					
1	Conflict between Academic and professional administrators	0	0	0	7.1	92.9	100
2	Conflict between Academic Staff and Government	89.3	7.1	3.6	0	0	100
3	Conflict between non-teaching staff and the professional administrators	0	0	0	10.7	89.3	100
4	Conflict between students and University management	100	0	0	0	0	100
5	Conflict between non-teaching staff and Government	53.6	28.6	17.9	0	0	100
6	Conflict between students and Government	50	32.1	14.3	3.6	0	100
7	Inter-personal conflict among staff	0	0	0	7.1	92.9	100
8	Inter-personal conflict among	82.1	17.9	0	0	0	100

	students						
9	Conflict between academic staff and students	57.1	28.6	7.1	7.1	0	100
10	Conflict between students and the host communities	0	0	0	3.6	96.4	100
11	Conflict between Academic staff union and non-academic staff unions	0	0	0	3.6	96.4	100

Table 3 Management responses on the Forms of Conflicts in UDS from 1999
Source: Field Survey, January, 2017

Of the forms of conflicts in tables 2 and 3, respondents of the study, both students and management indicated that conflicts between students and university management most frequently occurred in the University from 1999 to 2009 as indicated by 100% of both respondent categories. This was followed by conflicts between academic staff and government; ranked by 75% student and 89.3% management respondents. Inter-personal conflicts among students came next. This was ranked as such by 66.7% and 82.1% student respondents respectively. The inter-personal conflicts among students were closely followed by conflicts between academic staff and students; rated accordingly by 58.3% and 57.1% of students and management respondents respectively. The rest of the forms of conflict were ranked low by respondents. Findings of the study fell in line with that of Olaleye & Arogundade (2013) in their study of "Conflict Management Strategies of University Administrators in South-West Nigeria" in terms of the types of conflict in the University. However, our findings contradicted their findings in terms of their frequency of occurrence. For instance, whereas our study found conflicts between students and the university management as the most frequently occurring conflict and for that matter ranked first out of 11, it was ranked 10th by Olaleye & Arogundade (2013) out of 11 types of conflicts found in their study. Also, Olaleye & Arogundade (2013) found conflicts between academic staff and students as the most frequently occurring conflicts in their study but this only took the 4th placed in our study. And for the rest of the conflict types found to have occurred in the University for Development Studies during the period studied, there was no correspondence in their frequency of occurrence in relation to the outcomes of Olaleye & Arogundade's (2013) study. This implies that the forms of conflicts that occur in Universities are not tailor-made but that could vary in their frequency of occurrence as in this case, depending on the peculiarity of given university environment.

Our findings established that conflicts between students and management in the University from 1999 to 2009 were high and more worrying than any other form of conflict. Up to 83.3% of student and 67.7% of management respondents were convinced of the conflicts being high and worrying in the University during the period. A management respondent had this to say:

There is nothing like small conflict. Every form of conflict is a source of worry so long as it is a distraction to the attainment of organizational goals. And so for me, I would say the conflicts between students and management in the University were frequent and worrying. For a number of times, the conflicts interrupted the smooth running of universities activities and brought the image of the University into disrepute in the public domain. This especially was the case with the 2008/2009 conflicts. Also, efforts made in resolving them could have been channeled into doing other things that would have been beneficial to the University. All these were sources of worry (Interviews, January, 2017).

It is worth mentioning also, that, whereas 16.7% of the student respondents thought the conflicts were very high and worrying, 32.1% of the management respondents noted that the conflicts were moderate and normal part of life in the University. None of the respondent from both categories however, agreed to the fact the conflicts were low and so of little concern or were they very low, negligible and of no concern. These findings corroborated the statements made by UDS (2009; 2011) that the recurrence of the students-management conflicts in the University from 1999 to 2009 remained a serious concern to the University Management.

The Nature of Students-Management Conflicts in UDS

On the nature of conflicts that occurred between students and management of the University from 1999 to 2009, the outcome for both student and management respondents showed similar trends as presented in Figure 2

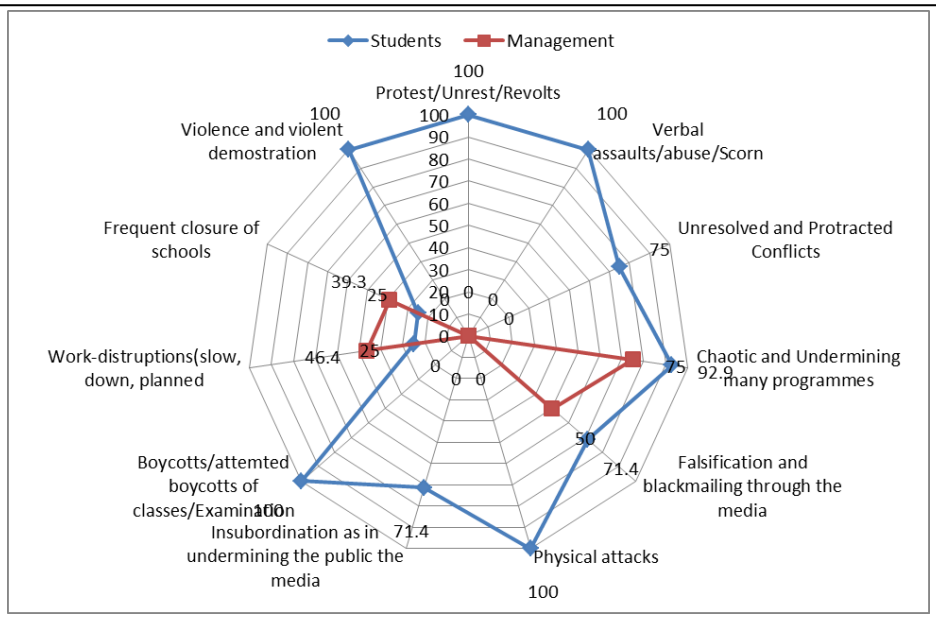

Figure 2 Respondents Views on the Nature of Students-Management Conflicts in UDS
Source: Field Survey, January, 2017

Figure 2 shows the nature of conflicts that occurred between students and management of the University during the period studied. Except for frequent closure of the University and the work–disruptions (slow-downs, planned absenteeism and sabotage), that were rated below 50%, the rest were rated 50% and above by both student and management respondents as being the nature of the students-management conflicts examined. The most pronounced of these included: protests/unrests/revolts, violence and violent demonstration, boycotts/attempted boycotts of classes/examination, verbal assaults/abuse/scorn, insubordination and physical attacks as pointed out by all respondents to the study. These findings were in consonance with the scholarly works of (Adeyemi et al, 2010; Alabi, 2002; Ada, 2013; Fatile & Adejuwon, 2011).

Findings of this study showed how severe the events were. A management interviewee said:
For the conflicts that we witnessed, there were serious student protests as students often demonstrated to press home their demands. Students assaulted and physically attacked authority in some instances. In one instance, students in support of a student who failed to do the TTFPP and was restrained from taking the proceeding trimester exams were refusing to write the exam also. Students hooted at a Dean, locked him up and later ousted him. Students heckled a pro-vice chancellor and even brought a cutlass after him. But for a timely intervention in whisking him away, he could have been lynched by the students. Again, students often disrupted classes and university activities during the conflicts (Interviews, January, 2017).

Intensity and Visibility of the Conflicts by Campus and by Programme
This study tried to find out if there was any link between programmes studied by students and incidences of conflict in terms of the intensity and visibility of the nature of the conflicts that occurred between students and management. The outcome, representing the collective views of both students and management is as in Table 3.

Campus	Dominant Programme	Not intensive and visible at all	Not so intensive and visible	Moderately intensive and visible	Intensive and visible	Highly intensive and visible	Total
		%					
Nyankpala Campus	Agricultural Sciences	2.5	22.5	75	0	0	100
Navrongo Campus (before	Humanities	0	0	5	95	0	100

2006)							
Navrongo Campus (after 2006)	Applied and Mathematical Sciences	22.5	50	27.5	0	0	100
Wa Campus	Humanities	0	0	0	95	5	100
Tamale Campus	Medical Sciences	0	27.5	72.5	0	0	100

Table 4 Intensity and Visibility of the Conflicts by Campus and by Programme in Percentages (Student and Management Respondents)
Source: Field Survey, January, 2017

The study established that, of the six conflicts studied, only two occurred involving students in the Physical Sciences. The rest occurred involving students in the Humanities. Thus, Table 3 showed that students-management conflicts were common among students in the Humanities than they were among those in the Sciences. For instance, 95% of our respondents felt the conflicts were intensive and visible among students of Humanities on Navrongo campus (before 2006) and Wa Campus. An additional 5% even believed the conflicts were highly intensive and visible in Wa among the Humanities students. The reverse was found to be the situation among students of the Physical Sciences on Nyankpala Campus, Tamale Campus and Navrongo Campus (after 2006). The campuses had 75%, 72.5% and 50% response rates as recording conflicts being moderately intensive and visible, not so intensive and visible and not intensive and visible at all respectively.

Respondents of our study attributed this situation to the fact that students in the Humanities got easily exposed to human behavioural lessons, actions and reactions that made them prone to conflicts as opposed to those in the Physical Sciences who related mostly with laboratory instruments that had little recourse to conflicts. It was further established that enrolment figures of students in the Physical Sciences had often been smaller than those in the Humanities. Therefore, the challenges faced by Physical Science students tend to be minimal and making them less prone to conflicts than those in the Humanities.

V. CONCLUSION

Conflicts are pervasive in organizations and sometimes could be violent. For the conflicts witnessed, there were serious student protests as students often demonstrated to press home their demands. From empirical data, this paper revealed that there were no good relations between students and management of the University for Development Studies from 1999 to 2009. There was a class structural gap between students and management; re-enforced by the behavioural leadership style of the University Management during the time which was autocratic/ authoritarian in nature. Conflicts were high and worrying in the University from 1999 to 2009. Among the conflicts witnessed, conflicts between students and university management most frequently occurred. The conflicts mostly took the nature of revolts, violent demonstrations, boycotts/attempted boycotts of classes/examination, verbal assaults and physical attacks and therefore were conclusively violent in nature.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations are made to this study. We recommend that efforts be made to build good relations between students and management of the University and bridge the structural gap between them, improve interactions and ensure peaceful co-existence between them. Also, the practice of democratic leadership style by management of the University is strongly recommended to enable students actively participate in university governance. Management should refrain from using threats and punishment to solicit potential behavioural changes from students and also avoid expressing disagreement in demeaning manner and/or suppressing students' interest with their power and authority.

The worrying nature of the conflicts should be recognized and efforts and commitment strongly made to resolve them. More so, efforts should be made to improve the general disciplinary situation between students and management in the University. Management should avoid being indifferent to students' concerns and for that matter conflicts and should not down play students' power in conflicts. Early conflict warning signs, often noticeable in their very nature should not be treated laggingly and reactively but proactively to lessen the nature they take in the end.

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