

TURBULENT TERRAINS: UNPACKING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHNIC CONFLICT AND BASIC EDUCATION IN EASTERN GHANA, LEARNING FROM NORTHERN GHANA'S EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of ethnic conflict on basic education in Eastern Ghana, drawing insights from experiences in Northern Ghana. Ethnic conflicts have posed significant challenges to educational activities in various regions, including Chereponi in Northern Ghana. The study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The research focuses on stakeholders in the education sector, including teachers, current students, School Management Committee (SMC) members, and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in the Eastern Ghana region. It explores the causes and nature of ethnic conflicts in Chereponi and the consequences of these conflicts on educational activities. Findings reveal that conflicts have led to school closures, increased absenteeism among teachers and students, teacher migration to other districts, disruptions of examinations, and violations of child rights.

The study underscores the need for proactive measures to mitigate the impact of ethnic conflicts on education in Eastern Ghana. It recommends that the Ministry of Youth and Local Government collaborate with indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and advocates for policies preventing warring factions from targeting educational facilities and personnel.

This research contributes to the understanding of the complex relationship between ethnic conflicts and education, shedding light on the unique challenges faced by educational institutions in Eastern Ghana. By drawing lessons from Northern Ghana's experiences, it offers valuable insights into conflict-sensitive educational policies and practices that can promote sustainable peace and educational development in the region.

Keywords: Ethnic conflict, basic education, educational activities, Northern Ghana, Eastern Ghana.

INTRODUCTION

From the biblical rebellious Adam and Eve through the murderous Cain, to the cunning Jacob; human society has evolved along with conflicts. Zartman (2019) believes that conflict is analogous to human society. This can hardly be disputed even though he offers a generic conceptualization of conflict. Conflicts necessary exists even in the most civilized of human societies; the nature of which may vary depending on the conflicting actors. In modern era, it would be difficult to erase the odious memories

of WWI through WWII to the Cold War, even though these seem to be eclipsed by modern conflict like those of Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leon, Yemen, Libya, Congo and Iraq.

Conflict is normal in every society but the normalcy of conflict should not destroy human lives or properties (Coser cited in Tseer, 2017).when conflicts take this trend, then there is a need to look for a sincere solution to halt such conflicts. From the Hobbesian Social contract, through the formation of the League of Nations to the institution of the United Nations, one could see sincere efforts by various agents and agencies of peace to stamp out conflicts and device a better way of human coexistence (Yaro and Tseer 2018). This is indicative of the fact that every human person needs peace and such peace can only be achieved in the absence of war. Adewoba (2009) found out that conflict is the struggle for resources in a society and that it occurs when two or more actors intermingle with one another in social interactions. Citing Aristotle, Justino (2010) argued that humans are social animals and there could be no human civilizations without social interactions; thus the inevitability of conflict in human societies. The extent to which the fear of dead can limit social interactions and possibly conflict is an area that could be further explored but the fact remains that social interactions are inevitable in human societies.I agree with Bircan et al (2016) that the pervasiveness of conflicts across the globe cannot be tied to just social and economic inequalities as suggested by many conflict theorists because these factors cannot explain conflicts like those of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levante (ISIL), Boko Haram and Al-quaeeda who seem to be fighting more of a religious war than economic or social inequality.

Conflicts were fought along geographical demarcations of states or nations, however, since the cold war; conflicts have been more internal than international. Wallentein (2010) differentiated conflicts as Inter-state, Intra-state and State formation. While the inter- state conflict refers to violence between states due to nation system infringement, the internal and state formation are basically due to civil and ethnic war on control over government, territorial conflicts or anti-colonial struggles. Of the internal conflicts, Africa has been the epicenter of internal wars since the end of the cold war. Mude (2017) finds that at present, of the 65 countries experiencing one form of conflicts or the other, Africa host over 70% of them. In countries like the Central African Republic (often there are armed clashes between Muslims and Christians), Democratic Republic of Congo (war against rebel groups), Egypt (war against Islamic militants of Islamic State branch), Libya (civil war), Mali (clashes between army and rebel groups), Mozambique (clashes with RENAMO rebels), Nigeria (war against islamist militants), Somalia (war against al-Shabaab islamist militants), Sudan (war against rebel groups in Darfur), South Sudan (clashes with rebel groups) women and children often bear the brunt of the conflicts.

Ghana has its fair share of conflicts characteristically taking the forms of coup d'états and interethnic confrontations over available resources like power, land, and mineral resources (Tseer et al, 2018). Ghana has witnessed four successful coup d'états and countless coup attempts since attaining independence from the British colonial rule in 1957 (Tonah, 2012). Apart from these coups, the country has experienced numerous inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts, chieftaincy conflicts and land related conflicts. Examples of such inter-ethnic conflicts are the prolonged conflicts between Peki and Tsito; Nkonya and Alavanyo in the Volta Region (Gati, 2008); Mamprusi and Kusasi in Bawku, in the Upper East Region; as well as Konkomba and Nanumba; and the Abudu and Andani in Dagbon, (Mahama,

2011) in the Northern Region of the Country. Gati (2008) argues that the causes of these conflicts are embedded in historical, socio-economic and political conditions, which motivate the protagonists in the early phases and in later conflict escalation. I share in this opinion but hold the view that ethnicity plays a considerable role and sometimes becomes a dominant factor in these internal conflicts. This can be further explored.

Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Ghana

Although conflicts are found everywhere in Ghana, the Northern region of Ghana is noted by many scholars as the hot bed of conflicts (Sulemana, 2012). Northern region consists of so many ethnic groups and the issues of ethnic identity, recognition, and competition for scarce resources coupled with weak state institutional control make it prone to violent conflicts (Adewoba, 2007).

Chereponi District is one of the six districts within the newly created North-East region. There have been several conflicts within this district. There have been conflicts between the Bimobas and the Mamprusis, the Mamprusis and the Konkombas and the Bimobas and the Konkombas. During any of these conflicts people are killed and displaced, properties destroyed and social life comes to a state of near comatose. The aftermath it is often even more devastating as people are traumatized, have no means of livelihood, no social relationships, are orphaned or widowed and completely cut off from their relatives.

The dominant ethnic groups in Chereponi are the Chokosis, the Bimobas, Konkombas and Mamprusis. All these have had long histories of inter-ethnic clashes with one another. In April, 2017, Chokosis and Bimobas locked horns with each other over who had the right to fish in the Kpembi River. Two people lost their lives, over five hundred (500) houses got burnt and many people were displaced (District Police Command, 2018).

In the ensuing year, the chokosis, this time, got involved with the Konkombas. It is noteworthy that the Konkombas as an ethnic group have been involved in a series of ethnic clashes within the Northern axis of Ghana. In 1981, the Konkombas fought with the Nanumbas in the Northern Region of Ghana (Sulemana, 2012). The Konkombas again fought with the Gonjas in 1991 and 1992 respectively (Adewoba, 2009). In 1994, the Konkombas fought a combined ethnic group of Dagomba, Gonja and Nanumba, all in the Northern Region of Ghana (Mahama, 2011). In December 2018, when the Konkombas took on the Chokosis, it was not surprising as the Konkombas have fought each and every one of their neighbors in the past. What came as a surprised, however, was the number of casualties involved. Over twenty-eight (28) people were killed in a single day; five hundred houses set ablaze and over half a million persons displaced (Konlan, December, 2018). This was uncharacteristic of communal clashes within the region.

Most conflicts in the Northern Ghana are characterized by the burning of houses, destruction of food crops and looting of animals. See for example (Adewoba, 2009, Mahama, 2011, Sulemana, 2012 and Tseer et al 2018) but the scale of destruction is often minimal as compared to the recent conflict between the Chokosis and the Mamprusis. Most of the conflicts too are often fought along ethnic lines. Geetz (1988 cited in Masole, 2011) suggested that there is a natural hatred among ethnic groups that causes

them to fight each other and that the practice is as old as humanity itself. This theory has however been eclipsed by modern ethnic conflict theories like instrumentalism and relative deprivation theories. The splurge of ethnic conflicts in the Northern axis has attracted some academic attention. Many researchers have tried to establish the causes of some of the conflicts. Sulemana (2012) investigated the causes and impacts of conflicts on Northern Ghana in general; Talton (2003) investigated the relationship between ethnic conflicts in Ghana and the British colonial Policy. Mahama (2011) concentrated his research on the Dagbon chieftaincy succession conflict which saw the murder of the Yaa-Naa Andani II in 2002. In spite of the several works done on conflicts in Ghana, no researcher has looked at the specific case of the Chokosi- Konkomba conflict and no study explored the impacts of such conflicts on educational activities within the Chereponi district. This is gap the study seeks to fill. The study addresses a number of questions: what are the causes of the conflict? What is the nature of the conflict? How does the conflict affect school activities? Answers to these questions will provide a framework for the discussion of policies that aim at conflict prevention and management in Chereponi District, Northern Ghana and Ghana as a whole.

METHODOLOGY

The Study Area Chereponi is one of the six districts in the newly created North-East Region of Ghana which was carved out of the Northern Region. It has a population of 53,394 with the youth consisting of over half of the total population (GSS, 2014). While some people are employed in the formal sector of the economy to work as district administrators, teachers, nurses and development practitioners, 87.4% of the people in Chereponi district are engaged in skilled agriculture, forestry and fishing (GSS, 2010). The district has over 84 basic schools and two Senior High Schools. Most of the children who are within the school going age are in school. Most of the people within the district appreciate the value of education and over 89% have completed at least a primary school (GSS, 2014).

Methods of Data Collection

Every researcher has a set of epistemological, ontological and axiological assumptions about what constitute knowledge, nature of existence and values (Sounders, 2019). These assumptions play out in the work of every researcher. The assumptions about the nature of reality and what can be known created a global debate in the research world and has brought about a variation of schools of thought in the research community such as positivism, constructivism, pragmatism, realism, naturalism and postmodernism (Creswell, 2017). Constructivists believe that reality is socially and culturally constructed through language and that humans give meaning to what they see and that the researcher is part not outside the reality he seeks to study; reality is not independent of the knower (Sounders, 2019). Positivism is the direct opposite of constructivism. They believe that reality is objective and measurable and that reality is independent of the knower. Pragmatism is a combination of both positivism and constructivism (Crossman, 2019). They believe reality is both constructed and discovered. What is important is that any knowledge should be able to add value to human existence. The research philosophy that was adopted for this study was the pragmatic research philosophy because the researcher believes that knowledge is both constructed and discovered. The adoption of the pragmatic research philosophy meant that the researcher had to adopt both deductive and inductive

theory development approaches. The Social Identity Theory and the Ethnic Security dilemma theory were employed to provide a frame work for deductive analysis while the data collected in the field provided the basis for inferences and induction

The research design that was adopted for the study was the cross-sectional design. This design is best used with the pragmatic philosophy because it allows for both quantitative and qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2013). A cross-sectional design meant that the mixed method research strategy had to be adopted to enable the researcher to collect both qualitative and quantitative data for the study. This made the strength of the study stronger than either quantitative alone or qualitative alone. Yin (2009) mentioned that the mixed method strategy necessarily goes with the pragmatic research philosophy because of the two levels of analysis that would be carried out. The mixed method which was descriptive, quantitative, explanatory and cross-sectional in nature (Yin, 2009) was adopted for this study because the researcher wanted the sample size to be as large as possible and in addition, the researcher also needed to interview key informants and interpret their perceptions, feelings attitudes about the conflicts and it affects educational activities. The target population for this study was limited to the stake holders of education in district because they had adequate knowledge about what constitute educational activities and how these are affected by the conflict. These included Teachers, current students, School Management Committee (SMC) members and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). Cockran's formula for sample size determination was used to calculate a sample size of one hundred and twenty respondents. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to to select the research participants. The target population was divided into four strata: teachers, students, School Management Committee and Parents Teachers Association. A quota of forty respondents was assigned to each stratum. Simple random sampling technique was used to select forty respondents from each stratum. In addition, the Chairman of the District Security Council, the Police Commander, the District Education Director, and the paramount chief of Chereponi were purposively selected due to their in-depth knowledge about the subject matter.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings Causes of the Conflict

The study made use of the multiple likert scale questions which require that we determine the internal consistency or reliability of our scale. The Cronbach's alpha (α) was run to access this consistency. The output tables below show our results.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on N of Items Standardized Items	
.777	.825	6

Source: Research Data, 2019

The reliability statistic table 1.1 provides the actual value for Cronbach's alpha of 0.894 which indicates a high level of internal consistency for our scale. This indicates that the responses given by respondents as captured by the scale are reliable enough for our analysis.

The Item-total Statistics Table 1.2 below presents the Cronbach's Alpha if 'Item Deleted' in the final column as shown above. It presents the value that Cronbach's alpha would be if that particular item was deleted from the scale.

We see that removal of any of the items will not result in significant improvement in the Cronbach's Alpha, hence there is no need removing any item from the list. We are therefore good to go with the use of our likert scale for our analysis.

Table 2: Item-Total Statistics

Item Deleted	Scale Mean if	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected if Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Struggle over Land and Water Resources	17.41	11.098	.516	.768	.751
Group Solidarity	17.38	10.785	.785	.858	.719
Poverty	17.61	10.736	.484	.461	.754
Ethnic Hatred	17.68	9.451	.746	.649	.693
Cultural Differences	19.36	9.567	.408	.310	.787
Political	18.06	8.313	.530	.482	.760

Table 3: Respondents' Opinion on the Causes of the Conflict

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Struggle Over Land and Water Resources	86 71.7%	15 12.5%	10 8.3%	17 14.2%	19 15.8%	120 100.0%
Group Solidarity	74 62.7%	38 31.7%	20 16.7%	12 10.0%	5 4.2%	120 100.0%
Poverty	67 54.2%	12 10.0%	14 11.7%	0 0.0%	17 14.2%	120 100.0%
Ethnic Hatred	45 37.5%	9 7.6%	15 12.7%	0 0.0%	20 16.9%	118 100.0%
Cultural Differences	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	24 20.0%	0 0.0%	59 49.2%	120 100.0%
Political Division	0 0.0%	5 4.2%	5 4.2%	82 68.3%	28 23.3%	120 100.0%

As indicated in table 1.3, eighty-six respondents, representing 71.1% and fifteen respondents, representing 12.5% of the total respondents agreed and strongly agreed that the main cause of the Chokosi-Konkomba conflict is the struggle for land and water bodies which are used for cultivation and fishing as compared to the 14.2% and 15.8% who disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. This means that land and water resources is a major cause of the conflict. A Key informant whom I refer to as informant A corroborates this when he says

“Over here land and water bodies always cause the problem. This year for instance it started with an argument between two people over who has the right over a particular piece of land...what started between the two people degenerated into a communal conflict between chokosis and Konkombas....last year it was about who has the right to fish in the Tombo river... competitions over these resources have generated so much unrest over here”

This finding corroborates the finding of Blench (2008) when he finds that many conflicts in Africa are resource based conflicts which are often centered on land and its resources, power, and mineral resources. Alao (2007) also finds that land is undoubtedly, the most important resource in Africa and is responsible for 80% of the rural conflicts in African Communities. He observes that Africans attach a special value to land. Land is seen as a sacred gift which must be transferred to successive generations over time. The possession of this inheritance is therefore very important that people are prepared to risk all out just maintaining or gaining possession of it. Bonne (2017) also finds that Africa’s most enduring conflicts stem from land ownership. She points out that the concept of the ‘son-of –the-soil’ has always cause conflicts between migrants and natives in African communities. While the migrants claim lands which they acquired during their stay, the natives believe that lands belong to them and no one has the right its claim apart from them. This have often cause clashes between autochthonous and heterochthonous communities. She concluded that until institutions which are mandated to administer land are strengthen, such conflicts will continue to emerge particularly in rural communities.

Another factor that came up strongly as the cause of the conflict was group solidarity. Seventyfour persons, representing 62.7% of the total respondents and thirty-eight persons representing 31.7% of the total respondents agreed and strongly agreed that group solidarity is one of the causes of the conflicts as compared to 10% and 4.2% of the respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. This means that group solidarity is a cause of the conflict. Those who agreed with the statement explained that ethnic groups readily rise up in defense of their ethnic members whenever there is a misunderstanding between the groups so this often escalates the conflict. This conforms to the theory of social identity which says that people form groups which they identify with and in return disregard the norms, beliefs and values of other groups and easily rise up in defense of in-group members whenever they are in trouble. Collins (2017) also identifies group solidarity as a cause of conflict. He defines group solidarity as emotional collectivity which arises from the feeling of oneness or personal connection to one another. He concludes that when groups are formed, they accuse other groups of atrocities and also believe their accusations and resolve to revenge such atrocities that are rumored to have been committed by the other group. This leads to attacks and counter attacks which culminate into real atrocities.

Poverty also came up strongly as a cause of conflict. Sixty-seven respondents, representing 54.2% of the total respondents agreed and twelve respondents, representing 10% of the total respondents strongly agreed to the statement that poverty was a cause of conflict as compared to 20% who strongly disagreed with the statement. This means that poverty is one of the causes of the conflict. A key informant whom I called Interviewee B corroborates this when he says:

“If not for poverty why anyone would be fighting over a small piece of land which cannot produce even a single bag of maize? My brother we poor and a poor man is an angry man so sometimes we are pushed to fight ourselves instead of fighting poverty”

This finding corroborates that of Quintero et al (2018) when they established a reciprocal causality between poverty and armed conflict in Antioquia- Colombia. Using an exploratory and non-parametric method, they found that most of the areas that were more impoverished in Antioquia recorded more violent conflicts than areas that were less impoverished and that t such areas became even more impoverished during the conflict years than areas that were not affected by the conflict. They therefore conclude that there is a reciprocal causation between conflict and poverty.

Ethnic hatred also received an overwhelming affirmation as one of the causes of the conflict during the survey. Forty-five respondents, representing 37.5% of the total respondents agreed and nine persons, representing 7.2% of the total respondents strongly agreed that ethnic hatred is one of the causes of the conflict as compare to 16.9% who disagreed with the statement. This means that ethnic hatred is a cause of the conflict. Those who agreed with the statement further explained that there has been a prolonged hatred between the Chokosis and the Konkombas caused by a prolonged history of conflictual relationship. So such histories are relived any time there is a misunderstanding. One of the key informant whom I refer to as Interviewee D corroborates this:

“We have been living here for long time. Our relationship has been that of cooperaton and conflicts. Whenever there is a misunderstanding, the tendency to relive the past experences of wars becomes inevitable as people are yet to swallow the atrocities committed against them. The spirit of vengeance still rages....”

This finding corroborates that of Kolas (2015) when he finds that ethnic rivalry is crucial to diagnosing the causes of many conflicts in Northeast India. Heavey (2017) also agrees that ethnic rivalry is the major source of conflicts in developing countries and that there is is general consensus in the academia that ethnicity is a causative factor of armed conflicts. The finding also conforms to the Theory of Ethnic Security Dilemma which states that when ethnic groups lose trust in the ability of their state to protect them, they rise in defense of their members due to the mistrust and hatred they have for the other ethnic groups.

Implication of the Conflict Educational Activities

To sample the opinions of respondents on the implication of the conflict on educational facilities, the study made use of multiple likert questions which require that we determine the internal consistency or reliability of our scale. The Cronbach’s alpha (α) was run to access this consistency. The output tables below show our results.

Table 4: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.819	.817	5

The reliability statistic table 1.4 provides the actual value for Cronbach's alpha of 0.894 which indicates a high level of internal consistency for our scale. This indicates that the responses given by respondents as captured by the scale are reliable enough for our analysis.

The Item-total Statistics Table 1.5 below presents the Cronbach's Alpha If Item Deleted' in the final column as shown above. It presents the value that Cronbach's alpha would be if that particular item was deleted from the scale.

We see that removal of any of the items will not result in significant improvement in the Cronbach's Alpha, hence there is no need removing any item from the list. We are therefore good to go with the use of our likert scale for our analysis.

Table 5: Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Closure of schools	11.74	8.210	.654	.517	.771
Absenteeism	11.37	9.091	.691	.543	.766
Movement of Teachers to other Districts	11.49	8.807	.673	.488	.767
Disruption of Examinations	11.94	6.862	.747	.587	.744
Recruitment of Students as Combatants	13.59	10.983	.344	.154	.846

Table 6: Effects of the Conflicts on Teaching and Learning Activities

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Closure of Schools	65 54.2%	12 10.0%	28 23.3%	12 10.0%	3 2.5%
Absenteeism	79 65.8%	17 14.2%	15 12.5%	0 0.0%	9 7.5%
Movement of Teachers to other Districts	69 57.5%	12 10.0%	27 22.5%	4 3.3%	8 6.7%
Disruption of Examinations	48 40.0%	23 19.2%	22 18.3%	17 14.2%	10 8.3%
Recruitment of Students as Combatant	83 69.2%	21 17.5%	16 13.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%

Source: Field Data, 2019

As indicated in table 1.6 above, sixty-five respondents, representing 54.2% of the total respondents agreed and 12 persons, representing 10% of the total respondents strongly agreed that schools were closed down during the conflict as compare to the 10% who disagree and 2.5% who strongly disagreed. This means that schools were closed down during the conflicts. The researcher also observed that all the GES schools in Tombu and Wenchiki area council were closed town. Only few schools in Chereponi township were open, but even those were poorly attended. The only two second cycle schools in the districts were also closed down. A senior education officer whom the researchers refer to as Interviewee E corroborates this by saying

“We have decided to close down all schools in the affected areas to allow pupils to join their parents as the situation is becoming more precarious. In the Ministry of Education, it is always safety first. We do not want to put children in harm’s way and as a result, the Ghana Education Service has directed that the schools remain closed until there is peace in Chereponi”

This finding is in conformity with that of UNESCO (2019) when it finds that nearly two million children are out of school due to conflicts in Western and Central Africa. Koet (2018) in a qualitative survey about the impact of conflict on education in Bunkpurugu-Yunyooo also finds that conflicts affects education through school closure, violence against teachers and students and general absenteeism due to the fear of dead.

Absenteeism also came up strongly as an effect of the conflict on educational activities. Seventy-nine respondents, representing 64.5% of the total respondents agreed and seventeen respondents, representing 14.2% of the total respondents strongly agreed that during conflicts, teachers and students absent themselves from school activities for the fear of being killed as compare to the 7.5% who disagreed with the statement. This means that absenteeism is a consequence of the Chokosi-Konkomba conflict in Chereponi. This finding corroborates that of Thapa (2015) when he finds that conflicts displaces students and teachers and increases the rate of absenteeism in schools thereby affecting teaching and learning activities.

Another impact of the conflict on educational activities which came up strongly during the survey was the voluntary transfer of teachers from Chereponi District to other districts within the same region. Sixty-nine respondents, representing 57.5% of the total respondents agreed that the conflict causes teachers to move or seek to be transferred to other districts as compare to 6.7% of the respondents who disagreed with the statement. This means that teachers' movement from the district to other district is facilitated by the conflict.

Records from the Chereponi District Education Directorate indicate that that over sixty-five teachers have taken transfers to other districts from May 2019 to January 2020. There were fifty-five others whose applications for voluntary transfer were still pending. This is an indication that most of the teachers would want to leave the district to other districts due to the conflict. Already Cheperoponi is classified as a deprived district with inadequate educational facilities. A shortage in the number of teachers will make the situation even more precarious.

It also emerged that the conflicts disrupted both internal and external examinations which were being conducted during the conflict period. Forty-eight respondents representing 40% of the total respondents strongly agreed to the statement that the conflict disrupted examinations, twenty other respondents, representing 18% of the conflict agreed to the statement as compare to the 14.2% and 6.7% who disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. The rest (18.5%) could not say if the conflict disrupted examinations or not. The overweighing opinion, however, is that conflict distracted examinations. Interviewee F corroborates this when he says *As you can see all our schools have been closed down, we have just 14 days to start the BECE, when we were preparing for our first mock, the conflict happened and so it was called off. When we reopened somewhere in January, we lost 4 weeks and we vacated very early. We stayed back and had some vacation classes, on the third week when we were expected to start the mock again this conflict resurfaced and now all the papers are locked up*

Interviewee G who is a student has this to say

"I left Chereponi on April 19, because it was not safe for me, our days were numbered to write the BECE, and to be frank, we are not prepared because of the conflict which has prevented us from writing our mock and learning effectively"

The researchers also observed that schools remained shut down even when it was left with just about two days to the commencement of the Basic Education School Certificate Examination which would enable the students get placement into various senior high schools across the country. The students who had lost over 30 days of teaching and learning were later made to sit for the examination under tight security. The deep variation in the percentage of passed students of 2019 badge from the previous badge of students shows how the conflicts affected students' performance. Records from the Cheroponi District Education Directorate show that the failure percentage in the 2019 BECE results increased by 45% as compared to previous year's results. The Chokosi-Konkomba conflict stood as the only explanatory variable for this differential.

Another aspect of the conflict which was identified as influencing educational activities is the recruitment of students as combatants during the conflict. Eighty-three respondents, representing

69.2% of the total respondents agreed that school children were recruited by both factions to go to the battle fields. No respondent disagree with statement and none remained neutral either. The statement received an overwhelming affirmation from all respondents. Interviewee H corroborated this *“During such conflicts all male children are mobilized to defend their people from being exterminated by the enemy. No discrimination is made between students or non-students; so far as you can handle a weapon, you are allowed to take part in the battle. Besides, in such times schools are mostly closed down”*

UNICEF (2015) observes that in many ethnic conflicts in Africa, children of school going age are recruited as soldiers or combatants. It finds that in South Sudan, children of the ages between 13-17 were recruited by both the Dinka and the Nuer ethnic groups to fight in battles, many of whom got killed. They conclude that in most ethnic conflict in Africa, boys, perceived by themselves and others as having a duty to protect their community and cattle in the face of frequent danger, have constantly participated in violence. This finding also conform to the Ethnic Security Dilemma Theory (Koufman, 1966) which posits that when the institutions of the state are weak and unable to ensure order, ethnic groups believe there is no authority to credibly limit options available to them and those of the other groups, they therefore resort to self-help situations. Unable to rely on their government, groups are forced to provide security to their own people.

Summary

The study set out to explore the impact of conflict on educational activities. The study employed a mixed method design where both qualitative and quantitative data was collected. The analysis of which revealed that:

- The Chokosi-Konkomba Conflict was caused by varied factors such as competition over land and water resources, ethnic hatred and group solidarity. These factors emerged strongly during the survey and interviews. The findings of other researchers in other jurisdictions were used as a form of triangulation.
- It was also revealed that the impact of the conflict on educational activities were school closures, absenteeism of both teachers and students, movement of teachers to other districts, disruption of examinations and child rights abuse. During the conflicts GES schools were shut down over a year so no academic activities took place during the period. Pupils remained at home with their parents for safety reasons.
- It was further revealed that before the total closure, teachers and students had started to avoid going to school due to the fear of being hit by stray bullets or being targeted by members of the other ethnic group.
- The Final year students who were set to sit for their mock examination in preparation for their BECE had it disrupted. Even the final examination was written under heavy security protection. The insecurity in the area caused many teachers to take transfers to other districts thereby depriving Chereponi of qualified teachers.

Conclusion

Northern Ghana is a host of many ethnic conflicts. Such conflicts are traceable to competitions over land and its resources, chieftaincy, political polarization and sometimes religion. The one between Chokosis and Konkombas in Chereponi was not different. There is a deep ethnic hatred between the two ethnic groups. Misunderstandings over land use, fishing rivers and the harvest of fruit trees often provide exit valves for deep rooted hatred caused by years of conflict relationship between the two ethnic groups.

The native-migrant relationship that exists in many communities within the district had often created disaffection between the Chokosis and the Konkombas. The Chokosis see the Konkombas as migrants and so have no rights to land except when given to them by the Chokosi chiefs. The Konkombas on the other hand, do not see themselves as migrants. This has often stirred up misunderstanding between the two ethnic groups.

The conflict always comes with different economic, social and humanitarian consequences. Education has always received a setback during any of such conflicts. In many instances, schools are closed down, teachers and students dispersed, academic calendar disrupted and teachers seek to move to nearby districts for safety. When this happens it takes months and or years before normalcy is restored. For instance, all schools that are under the Ghana Education Service were closed down in May last year and are yet to be reopened as at the time the survey was being conducted in January 2020. This affects academic activities in every aspect. In many instances also, children who were largely students are allowed to go into the battle field constituting a violation of child rights. Over all, the conflict negatively affects teaching and learning

Recommendations

The study recommends that the Ministry of Youth and Local Government may liaise with the National House of Chiefs and the Northern Regional House of Chiefs to employ the indigenous methods of conflict resolution within the district to resolve the conflict between the Chokosis and the Konkombas. The Lands Commission may like to collaborate with the Chereponi District Assembly and the traditional authority to clearly demarcate land so as to prevent instances of multiple land claims and land encroachment. This may reduce instances of clashes over lands.

The Government of Ghana may formulate policies that will forbid any warring factions from targeting educational facilities or education employees and students so as to prevent instances where communal clashes disrupt academic activities.

The Chereponi District Security Council may like to put in place early signal detection measures so as to be able to detect and prevent potential conflicts in order to avoid the social, economic and humanitarian consequences that necessarily come with conflict escalation.

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