

A Descriptive Phenomenology of Nature and Characteristics of Chieftaincy Succession Conflict: A Case of Akuapem Traditional Area, Ghana

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Abstract: The study focused on the nature and characteristics of the chieftaincy succession conflict in the Akuapem Traditional Area of Ghana. This study was anchored on an interpretivist philosophical viewpoint. Methodologically, the study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenology research design. Thirty-four (34) adults who have lived in the area for the past five years participated in the study. They included members of the traditional council, the Akuapem North Municipal Assembly, the royal gates to the paramountcy and others within the community. Participants were selected using extreme case, critical case and convenience sampling techniques. Data were collected with the use of interview guide, focus-group discussion and observation protocols. The data collected were analysed thematically in line with the research questions and emerged patterns from the dataset. The study found out that the dynamics of the conflict revolved around the nature and frames. The findings showed multiple causes that resulted in the exacerbation of the conflict. A major conclusion drawn from the study was that the chieftaincy institution in Akuapem is huddled with conflict which has complex dynamics and thus, has had multiple implications on the stability and development of the society. It is therefore recommended that all stakeholders to the institution are duly left to perform their duties without any intrusion from external parties or outsiders. Moreover, the grievances of these stakeholders should be addressed to ensure smooth running of the processes. This can be ensured by the traditional council of the area.

Keywords: Akwapem Traditional Area, Chieftaincy, Conflict, Ghana, Phenomenology, Succession

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1. Introduction

The debate about the relevance of traditional values to societal wellbeing has compelled anthropologists to posit a crucial distinction between “primitive” and “modern” societies [1]. Traditionally, Africans believe that societal values are the bedrock for development. Ideal chieftaincy beliefs and values are tied to development. The development of a society depends on several factors including the revered chieftaincy institutions [2]. Arguably, Ghana’s level of development has been achieved through the contributions of several important institutions or structures including chieftaincy. The importance of chieftaincy institution in the pre-colonial, colonial, independence and post-independence era of Ghana cannot be over emphasized. It was an epitome of organized governance in the pre-colonial era and thus, has proven effective in the political alterations of Ghana [3]. As a continuing traditional structure and practice, it is seen by many as a system that helps harmonize the country’s development and governance efforts. In the view of Awedoba, most chiefs in various communities have become agents

of development and thus, they are essential to contemporary local governance [4]. It is perhaps in this vein, that the institution has been significantly recognized legally in Ghana, making it a formidable foundation for her proper functioning in the society. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana acknowledges the chieftaincy institution in Articles 270 to 277. It states in article 270 (1) of Ghana's Constitution that "the institution of chieftaincy, together with its traditional councils as established by customary law and usage, is hereby guaranteed" [5].

The real importance of chieftaincy is valuable for the functioning of the society. In spite of this claim, it has been bred with issues that have strong implications for the stability and development of the country. A myriad of these issues has been widely reported. Chiefly, succession conflicts, corruption, land dispute, political interference, authority over resources, are some of the issues that the chieftaincy institution in Ghana is saddled with. Succession conflict seems to be a major chieftaincy concern that affects the stability of the institution and the society as a whole. It is a common experience in many parts of Ghana. According to Ahorsu, African states institutions' vulnerability to factionalism, negatively affects their stability and order [6]. The complex interplay between structural factors and specific agents of the society results in the perpetuation of conflicts that in most cases affects the stability.

The development implications of chieftaincy succession conflicts in Ghana are a major cause for worry and concern among Ghanaians. Awedoba provided instances of chieftaincy conflict in Ghana; chiefly, Ga-Mantse succession conflicts, the Anlo chieftaincy conflict, the Adoagyiri crises, the Tuabodom chieftaincy succession conflict, the Akyem-Swedru chieftaincy conflicts are some issues the country has been saddled with [4]. The numerous but unending conflicts within the institution contributes to the call by many to abolish it. Debrah *et al.*, assert that people are unlikely to compromise when they feel unfairly treated [7]. There seems to be no compromises from factions when it comes to chieftaincy succession conflict. Ahiave argued that the chieftaincy institution in Ghana has been bedeviled with numerous conflicts; hampering progress and for that matter, the institution is of no relevance in contemporary local governance. However, conflict is a social continuity and discontinuity that is located in the structures of human self and society [8]. Kokken and Sundell corroborated that, instances of succession have had momentous effects for conflict in a large portion of societies' history [9]. This assertion lends credence to issues of succession particularly, in chieftaincy.

Consequently, with conflict being a major problem in the institution, Eshun and Dankwa are of the view that, issues of recognition or derecognition, problems of eligibility of succession, influence of queen mothers and political interference contribute to the chieftaincy succession conflicts in most traditional areas [10]. These are not recent development and neither are they restricted to only one traditional area. By and large, almost all traditional areas have encountered one of these forms of issues or a majority of them during succession of chiefs. Whereas some have been successfully looked at and resolved, others tend to be protracted. Therefore, in lieu of the significance of the institution, experiences and recent studies characterize chieftaincy succession in Ghana with numerous issues particularly, conflicts which serve as potential source of instability. Chieftaincy succession issues thus, can be operationalized as problems or matters affecting the enstoolment or enskinment of a chief. In lieu to this, chieftaincy succession conflict is the disagreement between factions or groups within society(s) due to an enstoolment or enskinment of a chief.

The Akuapem Traditional Area, being one of the most noticeable and revered traditional areas in Ghana has over the years been engaged in a succession process for a new paramount chief after the demise of Oseadeeyo Nana Addo Dankwa III. It is a normal practice and accepted within the confines of tradition that the paramountcy of Akuapem Traditional Area rotates among three acceptable royal gates in Akropong-Akuapem. The Sakyiabea royal gate currently had the mandate to present a formidable person to succeed

the stool/throne. Not until 12th April, 2020 when a new chief was installed from the Sakyiabea royal gate, the Akuapem traditional throne for the paramountcy has been vacant since 2015. Events surrounding the installation and enstoolment as well as the legitimacy of the “enstooled paramount chief” is in contention. As such, experiences, empirical studies and reports in media suggest a succession conflict that results in social instability, creating a national concern. Chieftaincy succession conflicts are not of novelty, however, the one surrounding the chieftaincy succession in Akuapem have generated grave concerns within and outside the traditional area. Research has not documented rigorously, the issues involved in the chieftaincy succession conflict of Akuapem, and the challenges to the succession. It became expedient to conduct a study into the nature and characteristics of the chieftaincy succession conflict in the Akuapem Traditional Area of Ghana. The study is essential as it will provide relevant data that could be useful to address future occurrences around chieftaincy succession and strengthening the functioning of the institution.

The problem of the study arises from the fact that, the basic assumption of functionalism is that societal structures work together effectively and efficiently to ensure stability and development. Traditional structures, specifically the chieftaincy institution is said to work in order to harmonize the development and governance efforts in the country. To this end, the importance of the chieftaincy institution has not waned in most parts of Ghana despite the entrenchment of democratic rule and the expansion of state powers since the return to civilian rule in 1992. The institution serves as a formidable structure that contributes to the development and functioning of the society. Rightly put by Prah and Yeboah, the institution has been an important structure in the heat of all political alterations and aspects of the Ghanaian society. Many people still hold their traditional leaders in high esteem and support for the institution of chieftaincy remains high in most parts of the country [11]. This is particularly the case amongst highly established traditional societies such as the Ashanti, Mamprusi, Dagomba, Wala of Northern Ghana and the Akuapem.

The contest of chieftaincy position in many traditional areas is very competitive and thus, may possibly be attributed to instability of society. Meanwhile, societies have over the years developed procedures based on their customs and traditions through which a person is selected as a chief [12]. At the same time, the Chieftaincy Act, 2008 (Act 759) has outlined procedures and guidelines for kingmakers on the installation, enstoolment or enskinment and destoolment or deskinment of chiefs [13]. Despite the existing customary procedures and the legal provisions for the installation of a chief, the Akuapem chieftaincy experienced succession challenges which prolonged the installation of a paramount chief for about five years. The prolonged succession process suggests challenges of chieftaincy in the Akuapem Traditional Area as a result of succession conflict. Inhabitants of Akuapem Traditional Area are worried and concerned about the potential security, stability and development implications. There was therefore the need to examine the nature and characteristics of the chieftaincy succession conflict in the Akuapem Traditional Area of Ghana and its dynamics to the development in the area. These research questions guided the study:

- 1) What is the nature of the chieftaincy succession conflict in Akuapem Traditional Area?
- 2) What are the characteristics of the chieftaincy succession conflict in the Akuapem Traditional Area?

The study was delimited to the nature and characteristics of chieftaincy succession conflict. The study is further confined to the Akuapem Traditional Area in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

1.1. Literature Review and Theoretical Perspective

In studying chieftaincy succession conflict in Akuapem Traditional Area, the focus was to explore and understand the conflict hurled within the institution, which is presumed to be a structure that contributes to the functioning of the society, and the implications of conflict(s) on the society. In lieu of this, Merton's approach of Structural Functionalism Theory is employed to underpin the study [14].

Structural functionalism, which dates back to the 19th century highlights the interrelatedness of different structures, working together to promote homeostasis, thereby resulting in stability of the society. The theory, used in different fields and sectors has been popularized by functionalists. Noteworthy, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, and Radcliffe-Brown are important proponents of the theory in the functionalist perspective. The theory is used to understand the interrelatedness of social structures (organs) and how they function together to promote equilibrium in the society. Functionalism can be located within Anthropology, Sociology, Philosophy, Psychology and other Social Sciences discourse.

The basic assumption of the theory suggests the society to be a complex social system whose parts work together to promote stability. The theory establishes that the functioning of the society appears to be dependent on the society's structures (organs), working together for cohesion [15, 3]. The prevalent elements, institutions or structures have sociological functions hence, they are necessary for the maintenance of the society. Functionalists argue that social practices and institutions are said to have a functional role in sustaining the system as a whole [16]. Their source of argument may be based upon comparative analysis of different institutions and structures of the society working for the betterment of its people. Therefore, the theory focuses on relationships between various social institutions that make up the society or the system in its entirety. The society is viewed from a macro-level and thus, commits the organs of the system (the society) to fulfil social needs to ensure equilibrium. The society's groups (institutions/structures) are built on consensus and are mutually supportive.

Most functional approaches share one common element; an interest in relating one part to the other to promote stability and equilibrium of the society. Functionalists have thus, been criticized on many occasions. Noteworthy, their inability to account for change or contradictions in structures and conflicts, and ignorance of inequality, which usually causes tension and conflict are some of the criticisms levelled against the theory.

Meanwhile, Merton's approach of functionalism refutes the criticism of not giving room for change [15]. Social structures should be analyzed in terms of statics and dynamics [14, 15]. He made change central to research within a functionalists' paradigm. The concept of change in his approach is capitalized on the issues of tensions, conflicts, contradictions and sometimes strain within or between societal elements or structures. Recognizing the limitation to functional approaches, Merton cited in Dankwa *et al.*, asserted that not all structures perform functions that promote stability, there are others that can be dysfunctional or perhaps, have some dysfunctional elements, and there are others that serve multiple functions. In his approach, there are two types of functions; manifest functions which he described as the intended function of a structure; and latent function which are the unintended functions of a structure [14, 3]. Hence, dysfunctionality cannot be overruled in Merton's approach. Dysfunctional structures generate pressure for change within the society.

Consequently, dysfunctional elements in the structures also develop key issues for change which advertently, affects the stability of the society. This suggests structural inefficiencies that disrupt the society's stability. It can be contended that the stability of a society can be interrupted by conflicts that may erupt within structures. The chieftaincy succession conflict in Akuapem Traditional Area is studied using this theory as a lens. Elwell, therefore argued that in recognizing and examining the dysfunctional aspect of the structure and the society, we can explain the development and persistence of

alternatives [15]. This calls for the essence of the Merton's approach of structural functionalism in this study.

Relevance of the theory to this study is that the structural functionalism, particularly, Merton's approach contributes to social order by investigating nonconformity such as conflict and contradictions in the society. In the view of Loy and Booth, the deviance in the society points out an understanding of the disruption in the society which usually results in change within the structure or change of the structure [17]. The society is made of relevant institutions or structures of which chieftaincy is included. The social institutions or structures within the system provide mechanisms among the structures which contributes to the interrelatedness and predominantly mutually supporting elements of the structures within the system. These mechanisms operate to limit disruptions in the social structure and the social system as a whole. In the view of Elwell, the mechanisms are not always effective; the development, growth and accumulation of tension, conflict and contradictions within the social structure and the society, often cause procedural change within the structure and the social system [15]. Merton's structural functionalism therefore, identifies and analyzes the dysfunctions in the social structure and the system at large and examines how the dysfunctions contribute to instability of the society, how they are contained or reduced in the system as well as their contribution to change in the social structure and the system.

The theory is relevant in contemporary context as the society is seen to be made of relevant structures that contribute to spearhead development yet, are not entirely devoid of dysfunctionalities. As functional as the chieftaincy institution could be, it is also hurled with succession conflict as a dysfunctionality. The theory is therefore of relevance to underpinning the study of chieftaincy succession conflict in Akuapem Traditional Area. Understanding the dysfunctionality and its impacts of the structure and the society is necessary to working towards finding peace and promoting stability.

Juma and Mengistu on the report of the *"Nature and dynamics of conflict in Africa"* assessed peacebuilding capacity of African institutions. Their main argument centred on conflicts in Africa which has been shaped by diverse issues that posit different trends to the conflict situations in Africa. Juma and Mengistu argued that the sub-regions have certain characteristics that shape the dynamics of conflicts in its own locality [18]. Thus, in the quest to resolve conflict, understanding the issues and trends as well as the parties to the conflict in the specific areas should be prioritized. They argued that understanding these dynamics is critical to any effective intervention strategy. They assumed that beneath the conflict situations in Africa, there are issues and emerging trends that need to be understood and dealt with for any intervention to prevail. Juma and Mengistu argued that the crises and conflicts in Africa are accentuated by deep-rooted environmental problems related to resource access [18]. Their source of argument is based on the comparative analysis of conflict situations in Africa noteworthy, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, and Nigeria. Understanding the nature and dynamics of each conflict in the local sect gave significant clue as to the trends and issues of conflicts in some African countries. Yet, conflict still persists in Africa.

Ghana has been recognized as a relatively peaceful country which saw the country rank 6th on the 2015 Global Peace Index (GPI) among 44 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa. This suggests a relatively safe and stable country in the region. Meanwhile, there have been instances of conflicts in the country. Mayer in his publication on *"the dynamics of conflict resolution"* expounded that, there is an urgent need to understanding issues of conflict [19]. Key to his argument, Mayer postulated that effective handling of conflict is based on an understanding of its dynamics which includes the nature of the conflict [19]. Thus, providing a framework to understanding the dynamics of conflict situation creates a lens that promotes better focus to conflict. His argument is based on the assumption that conflict is natural, inevitable, necessary and normal; the problem is not the existence of

conflict but how we handle it. This calls for knowledge and skills in the nature of conflict and the need to prevent conflict in our society.

Conflict prevention continues to be an important focus of many conflict actors. It is argued by many that the society is a possible arena for conflict. It is thus, inevitable in the social life of man [6]. Human conditions have shown that conflicts abound in the complex social system. What has been a contention in scholarly works is the definition of conflict. However, the understanding of the concept is crucial to knowing its nature at hand as well as its associated issues. Conflicts in most literature have been discussed as a disagreement between people, however, there is a contention among scholars, on the nature of disagreement which should be viewed as conflict. As such, conflict has been expounded by many authors who have contributed to the extant literature on conflict. Noteworthy, Sulemana, Keator, and Obeng, belong to a group of authors who significantly expounded on conflict [20, 21, 22]. Their major viewpoint centred on the argument that; conflict is an escalation of dispute which was not resolved effectively.

Accordingly, Sulemana discussed that, conflict is a disagreement between two individuals or groups with opposing interests [20]. Gedzi in his discussion on conflict and dispute corroborated that conflict involve disagreements over incompatible issues among parties [23]. Not far from the discussions of Sulemana, and Gedzi, Obeng indicated that conflict is a disagreement between two or more people [20, 23, 22]. Their comments agrees that misunderstanding among individuals or groups over issues that results in incompatible interests is seen as conflict.

Interestingly, Keator argued that conflict is a severe form of dispute and thus, if left unchecked can escalate and cause devastations [21]. The argument of Keator is premised on the assumption that conflicts are based on non-negotiable terms in a lengthy period of time. In corroboration, if the negotiations of a simple disagreement do not meet the required agreement; it can escalate into a conflict which to Keator, is a severe form of any misunderstanding and may often last a longer period of time and usually becomes hard to negotiate [21]. The source of his argument is rooted in the analytical study of conflict literature noteworthy, Burton who argued on differences between conflict and dispute by contending that conflict is deeply rooted in issues that are not negotiable [24]. Therefore, the nature of conflicts is usually perceived to be highly tensed and can cause devastations. Hence, Obeng indicated that non-violent conflicts should be addressed effectively to avert any violence [22].

Scholars such as Keator and Burton distinguished conflicts from disputes [24]. Meanwhile, Gedzi argued that, conflict and dispute are based upon disagreement between two or more parties. Understanding of the conflict situation is based on the airing differences in its nature [23]. Gedzi sees that what many sees as disputes and conflicts are susceptible to similar resolution processes or methods. Thus, conflicts can be viewed to mean disputes since they all involve disagreements and possibly employ same methods of resolution.

Essentially, works on the nature of conflicts and disputes are relevant to the discourse of conflict dynamics and management as it helps provide an understanding to conflict situation. The consequences of conflicts in many societies have been very strong. One major argument is that even though conflict can cause distress, it can also function positively. The fact of the matter is that it can motivate people to change their situations. It is of importance to acknowledge the contributions of literature on the concept of conflict. The arguments of the extant literature clearly depict conflicts to be antonymous to dispute mainly due to their argument on the nature of the two concepts. Consequently, Gedzi who seemed to have commented on the synonymity of the two terms did not clearly affirm his position [23].

As some scholars may try to distinguish disagreement and thus differentiate conflict and dispute, the researchers therefore argue that conflict and disputes are synonymous. Thus, there is no clear-cut distinction between the two terms. As such conflict can be

operationalized as a biological interaction concomitant to disagreement. Having reviewed extant literature on the two terms it is highly acknowledged that conflict and disputes are two words of the same meaning. This is anchored on the position of exploring the conflict situation in the Akuapem Traditional Area as there is the possibility of the respondents of using the two concepts interchangeably.

Chieftaincy conflicts in Ghana has been an issue of great concerns. The chieftaincy institution is one of the most significant institutions or structures of the society that functions to promote stability and development. Despite its significance, the chieftaincy institution in Ghana has been argued as a potential source of conflict. Literature on chieftaincy conflict by many converge that, conflicts as a result of chieftaincy has been a major causative agent hampering progress and stability in many Ghanaian societies. Extant literature on chieftaincy conflict identifies power play and structural inefficiencies as key causal factors to many chieftaincy conflicts.

Ahorsu argued in his concept paper *"A post-structuralist approach to the Dagbon chieftaincy crisis in Northern Ghana"* that traditional structures and practices ambivalently play valuable roles in governance, security and development but often contribute potentially volatile fault lines engendering violent civil strife that undermine social cohesion [6]. His work is located within conflict management discourse which looked at the intractable conflict between the Abudu and the Andani families for royal supremacy and the dilemma confronting the relevance of chieftaincy in Ghana. He assumed that conflict has its traces in the cross-generational structural continuities of the society. It is believed that the transition of culture generationally bares structural lags that continue to inflame conflict situations in traditional societies.

Ahorsu argued that the sources and dynamics of the conflict studied are found in the dominant norms, values, traditions and common history of the society. Conflict in itself is an inevitable structure of the complex social system and thus, may bring about change, however, needs to be resolved before the system is destroyed [6]. Noteworthy, the recent chieftaincy conflict in Akuapem Traditional Area appeared to be resolved, yet, the installation and enstoolment of the new paramount chief was ensued with multiple confrontations from opposing parties. Recent development is yet to conclude that the issue has been resolved with furtherance of challenges to the legitimacy of the chief. Ahorsu indicated that, the struggle to become a chief may turn violent, when the historical, political, economic and social circumstances surrounding the establishment of the chieftaincy institution in a particular Traditional State becomes contested; when there is government involvement in support of one group against the other in a bid to serve their own interest, and when the rules of succession become unclear [6]. Aganah argued that chieftaincy conflicts are largely localized, with resulting effects felt in the traditional area. Yet, the conflict's social, political, economic ripples become felt beyond the conflict zone [25]. However, the rippling effect of the chieftaincy dispute in Akuapem on other communities is yet to be known.

Understanding conflicts, specifically chieftaincy conflict is an important activity to unravel the issues within the structure as well as resolve the dysfunctionality which eventually results in promoting cohesion or stability. The extant literature on conflicts and chieftaincy conflicts are of importance to achieving the feat of resolving or shaping the functionality of the chieftaincy institution and the society at large.

The convergence of traditional structures and practices harmonize the country's developmental and governance efforts as expounded by Ahorsu. They specifically promote and sharpen the institutional efforts in the countryside and informal sectors where the presence of bureaucratic institutions is limited [6]. However, with continuing conflict situations in the institution, many argue for its abolishment. It can be argued that conflict is an inevitable social aspect of life. It thus manifests in almost all walks of life. In many situations, conflicts have been a bane to development. However, some conflict situations have also engendered development in societies and thus, can be argued to be a

necessary evil. The arguments of extant literature in this section attest to the fact that conflict in any form or kind exists in a social order or organization. However, conflict if left unchecked can degenerate into worst scenarios that may undermine social cohesion. Noteworthy, the chieftaincy conflict in Akuapem Traditional Area between members of the Sakyiabea royal gate for royal supremacy in Okuapeman is one that stands to affect the stability of the traditional area. Meanwhile, extant literature has made it clear on the overwhelming effects of intractable conflicts. Yet, the conflict in Okuapeman lingers in spite of efforts made by main actors and external actors in resolving the conflict. Why has the chieftaincy conflict in Akuapem Traditional Area over the paramountcy still persist?

There is also the need to review literature on frames of conflict in society. Effective mitigation, management or resolution of conflicts requires the understanding of how parties to the conflict acknowledged and defined or framed it [26]. Burgess indicated that frames are cognitive frameworks or views that are used by people to help make sense of complex information and situations [27]. That is, individuals or groups establish meanings from situations and circumstances that one finds himself or herself. According to Kaufman and Smith, frames may drive participants' willingness to act, take a stand or join a group [28]. An understanding of the discussions on conflict frames by extant literature reveals that actors' participation in a conflict may be based on how the individual or groups perceive the conflict situation. In the view of Burgess, frames can significantly affect the intractability of a conflict by creating mutually incompatible interpretations of events [27]. Hence, the set of lenses and viewpoint used by parties connotes the development of frames that exist prior to conscious process of making decisions for the conflict. Burgess argued that an essential element in understanding conflict and conflict resolution is the acquaintance one makes with the conflict frames and how it affects its development [27].

Several authors and scholars have commented on different frames used by parties for their involvement in conflict. According to Issifu, an individual chooses his or her worldview that makes him or her distinct and so they identify themselves in a social identity category in order to enjoy certain values and opportunities [29]. The argument is corroborated by Burgess that, disputants view themselves as having particular identities in the context of a conflict situation [27]. Understanding the identity frames to the conflict gives clearer view to the dynamics of the conflict. Consequently, large amount of literature analyzes conflicts based on resources. Issifu argued that resources in a conflicted area becomes a key issue or frame for analyzing conflict situations. Social groups tend to struggle over limited resources [29].

Studies on frames of conflict are essential to understanding the development of conflict situations in traditional societies. Research have shown that conflict frames promote an understanding of why the conflict exist, what actions are important within the conflict and why parties act in the way they do. In the view of Burgess, frames act as sieves through which people analyze information to the conflict, determine their positions and take actions [27]. In spite of this argument, little or no information exist on frames of the conflict in Akuapem Traditional Area. It is therefore pertinent to explore the frames that contributes to the dynamism of the conflict in the area.

Conflicts emerge and bear certain characteristics as a result of a complex interplay between very specific structures and actors involved in the perpetuation the conflict. The overall discussion on the dynamics of the conflict raveled the necessity for exploring the nature, causes, and frames of the conflict. Arguably, it is important to understand the dynamics of conflict. It helps in adopting the approaches or mechanisms appropriate for resolving conflicts.

2. Materials and Methods

Qualitatively, the phenomenology research design was employed for this study. The qualitative approach offers the opportunity to effectively explore issues involved in the

study of the chieftaincy succession conflict in Akuapem Traditional Area. In the view of Berg and Howard, qualitative approach to research is based on the meanings, concepts, and descriptions social actors bring to a particular interaction [30]. Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, contended that a research design is a framework of strategies or methods of inquiry uniquely designed to fit the nature of the research and guide the conduct of the study. In this regard, the descriptive phenomenology design of the qualitative approach was employed for the study [31]. Specifically, the descriptive phenomenology design was applied as the case study to explore the issue based on its context thus, Akuapem Traditional Area. This design was adopted, as issues were looked at in context of the society.

Research setting is the Akuapem Traditional Area, in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Being the location under which the issue is studied, the traditional area is described as one of the most revered states in Ghana. The Akuapem Traditional Area covers a fairly large area, about 450 square kilometers, in the Eastern Region of Ghana. It comprises about 30 main towns and about 200 satellite towns, villages or suburbs. However, traditional governance system categorizes the traditional area into 17 traditional states under five main established divisions, with the highest traditional seat in Akropong-Akuapem in the Akuapem North Municipality.

It is important to establish that the traditional area of Akuapem transcends one municipality; it includes all the towns in the Akuapem North Municipality and the Okere District as well as fairly large part of the Akuapem South Municipality. The divisions have operated fairly effective and harmoniously for the stability and development of the state. However, occasional conflicts among the divisions and within the chieftaincy system contribute to several challenges of the traditional area. The Akuapem Traditional Area is populated largely by two ethnic groups, namely Akans and Guans, however, recent development in population issues have seen the area becoming more of a cosmopolitan [32]. Located within the tropical rain forest, the Akuapem Traditional Area is largely covered by a range of forest vegetation amidst humid weather. The lands of the traditional area are administered and protected by the traditional authorities and the municipal assembly.

Consequently, the proximity of the traditional area to the nation's capital and some major commercial nerves of the country allows socio-economic interaction between the traditional area and the neighbouring business hubs in terms of trade, movement of, and access to goods, services and larger market. The economy of Akuapem Traditional Area is based on three major activities: commerce, subsistence agriculture and small-scale industries. With the numerous states within the traditional area, several market days exist during which local agricultural products (such as crop vegetations, livestock, and poultry) as well as manufactured products and services are traded. The traditional area serves as an important commercial point for tourism within the country. In addition, agricultural activities are engaged in the traditional area. Noteworthy, crop production, livestock and poultry production are essential agricultural activities in the area. However, the agricultural businesses are not done on a very large scale. One-man and family-run businesses are also an important economic venture in the traditional area. These kinds of businesses are characterized by diverse small-scale industries; sawmill, weaving and dress making, animal feed production, hotels and restaurants, food joints and many more. The associated conflicts in the society can have long-term attributions to the economic development of the society.

The chieftaincy institution which is guaranteed in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana has been encapsulated in the traditional area together with the district and municipal authorities instituted by the State under the local government law (PNDC Law 207, 1988) to provide local administration. Chiefs, in the traditional area serve as custodians of customs and traditions in the area and thus, are held in high esteem by members of the traditional area. The dominant social structure of the area is made of both patrilineal social

structure of the Guans and the matrilineal structure of the Akans. Invariably, the paramountcy (Ofori Stool) of the Akuapem which is occupied by the Akan society make use of the matrilineal social structure. The paramountcy of Akuapem Traditional Area, by customs and tradition is occupied by three royal gates namely, Nketia Obuo royal family, Ama Ogyinae royal family and Sakyiabea royal family in a rotational manner. The Sakyiabea royal family currently has the mandate to provide the paramount chief for the traditional area. However, it is by this process of succession that has bred conflict in the Akuapem Traditional Area.

The population of the study included adult members of the Akuapem Traditional Area who have lived and experienced the conflict in the society for the past five (5) years. For the purpose of credible empirical study, obtaining adequate sample is fundamentally necessary. Providing enough and adequate data is crucial to credible empirical study. Yet, evidence from literature posits that there are no explicit rules for sampling in qualitative study [33]. However, most qualitative scholars argue that saturation of data is necessary and efficient for qualitative research. Therefore, the sample size for the study was determined by a point of saturation to the research. Out of the entire population for the study, thirty-four (34) participants were drawn to participate in the study. Thus, relevant data from participants were obtained till a point of saturation.

Essentially, the research sampled from among the population of Akuapem Traditional Area, adult members who have experienced the conflict in the past 5 years. Accordingly, three (3) members of the Akuapem Traditional Council, four (4) highly ranked members of the Akuapem North Municipal Assembly, nine (9) members from the three royal gates to the paramountcy, and eighteen (18) other adult members of the general populace in Akuapem were sampled.

Using extreme case sampling, the study included participants from the traditional council of the area and the Akuapem North Municipal Assembly. This is because; members of the traditional council and the municipal assembly were seen as people with high pedigree and may possess unique characteristics and relevant knowledge on the issue. Further, critical case sampling was employed to sample participants from the royal gates to the paramountcy. This sample provided possible diverse information or knowledge to the study by the participants. Subsequently, convenience sampling was employed to choose participants.

Instruments for data collection were semi-structured interview guide, focus group discussion and observation protocols. Trustworthiness was ensured in the study. Polit and Beck argued that trustworthiness is essential to ensuring confidence in data gathered, analyzed and interpreted. It also deals with the quality and relevance of the instrument and methods used for the study [34]. Trustworthiness issue of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability were adhered to in the study.

Ethically, the issues of anonymity and confidentiality was ensured by not disclosing the identity of respondents in any form. The identity of the respondents was devoid of any linkage with their personal responses.

Thematic analysis of data in qualitative study is employed in analyzing the field data. Barton posited that data analysis is the process of describing and interpreting data in relation to the research question under consideration in the study [35]. In categorizing the processed data for coding, themes were identified linking them to theoretical concepts and the emerged themes for analysis.

3. Findings and Discussions

In exploring the chieftaincy succession conflict in Akuapem Traditional Area, the study sought to uncover and understand the issue in terms of the dynamics in the chieftaincy conflict. Hence, it was pertinent to ask critical questions while exploring the conflict situation in Akuapem. This section presents and discusses the results obtained through administering the instruments and methods adopted for the study. The

discussion indicated how they interact with extant literature and the theory. The presentation and discussions are done under themes that emerged from the research questions and data obtained from the field study in the research setting. The dynamics of the conflict as a theme is further broken down into sub-themes for critical discussions and effective understanding of the conflict. Understanding conflict requires analysis of issues and relevant elements that drives and shapes it. The dynamics of a conflict explains how the variables in conflict change over the course of time. The dynamics revealed in the study underscored the understanding of conflict situation in Akuapem Traditional Area. In exploring the dynamics of the conflict, participants were interviewed on the causes, nature and frames of the conflict. The results in these variables interact to show a multiple but complex and complicated dynamics involved.

3.1. Nature of the Conflict

In understanding the dynamics involved in the chieftaincy succession conflict of Akuapem Traditional Area, the study sought to explore the nature of the conflict. Participants were engaged in questions that sought the length, frequency and trends of the conflict.

3.1.1. Length of the conflict

Participants were engaged in discussions to solicit for views that suggested the length of the conflict. Information gathered from participants revealed that the conflict in the Akuapem Traditional Area has been in existence for long. Meanwhile, most of the participants were unable to indicate the exact year the conflict started. Nonetheless, dataset from few participants attempted to provide the exact year the conflict started. It was realized that the conflict in the traditional area over the paramountcy has been in existence for about five (5) years. Some typical comments from the participants indicated that;

"The conflict has been in existence with two royals contending for the position of the paramount chief. This was after the demise of Oseadeeyo Nana Addo Dankwa III who died a little over 5 years now. So, I can say the installation process started in about 2017, where the conflict over who is the rightful heir started" (Field Data, 2021).

"...I cannot emphatically say the year which this started but I know the first court case which annulled the installation of Odehye Kwasi Akuffo lasted for three years and immediately they came back from the court, Odehye Kwadwo Kesse's installation was initiated which led to his position at the palace now. It was just recently that he celebrated his one-year anniversary. So, I think it's about 4-5 years now" (Field Data, 2021).

"I will say the conflict started from after the death of the former chief, Nana Addo Dankwa and there was the need for a successor. It was from that time the conflict started. It has been long" (Field Data, 2021).

"...after the two candidates were engaged in separate installation processes, one faction petitioned the Eastern Regional House of Chiefs. They contested the case in court for more than two years. Maybe three years because we are one year into the installation of Oseadeeyo Kwasi Akuffo III, when they got back from the court. This was done immediately they came back from court" (Field Data, 2021).

Participants enunciated that the succession conflict in Akuapem Traditional Area has been around for quite some time. Some of the participants indicated that it started around the year 2017. It implies that the conflict has lasted for about five years. They indicated that the chieftaincy succession conflict emanated after the demise of the late Oseadeeyo

Nana Addo Dankwa III, when traditional stakeholders responsible for the nomination, installation and enstoolment started engagement for the selection of a candidate to occupy the Oforikuma stool as the paramount chief. The length of the conflict, as argued by Keator is seen as an aspect of its nature [21]. Hence, the findings correspond with the study on conflict resolution in Dagbon by Ahiave that many chieftaincy conflicts occur over lengthy period of time [8].

3.1.2. Frequency of the conflict

Knowledge on frequency of the conflict became apparent in the study when I explored the nature of the chieftaincy succession conflict. The dataset from the study indicated that conflicts have persisted in the traditional area on different occasions. Therefore, the chieftaincy succession conflict is not a novel phenomenon. The stability of the society is always altered when these conflicts occur. Some comments from participants included:

“During the installation of Oseadeeyo Addo Dankwa III in the 70s, there was conflict. In that conflict, it started with some issues in the same Sakyiabea family and later became a conflict between two families” (Field Data, 2021).

“...in 1973 during the installation of Oseadeeyo Addo Dankwa III, there was conflict which was battled in court for some time just like this one. The ruling came somewhere in 1974. Per what I know it was a similar issue where the queen selected her nephew as the paramount chief but it became a conflict between families” (Field Data, 2021).

Participants indicated that conflicts particularly, one revolving the succession of paramount chiefs have been experienced by the traditional area before. Nonetheless, their comments indicated that the last conflict over the paramountcy before the current one was in the 1970s. This seems to suggest that the conflict over paramountcy position is not a novel situation. Nonetheless, the frequency of occurrence seems to be low. As against the previous succession conflict, the current issue seems to revolve around one family which has transcended to the whole traditional area. Other participants' comments indicated that relative conflicts have prevailed in the traditional area. One participant commented that:

“Oh...conflicts have occurred in this area on several occasion. Some on succession but most have been on boundary issues and one which the immediate past chief did well in resolving. That was, when some divisions wanted to break-away from the Akuapem area and form their own paramountcy” (Field Data, 2021).

The comment implies that aside the chieftaincy succession conflict, the traditional area has experienced other forms of ethnic conflicts over the past years. It thus confirms the assertion of Ahorsu that, conflict is inevitable in society [6]. Thus, the society and its accompanied institutions are seen as possible arena for conflict. Ahiave indicated in his study on Dagbon chieftaincy conflict that most ethnic conflicts recur across decades. The findings confirm the recurring nature of ethnic conflict in the traditional area [8]. Hence, the functionalists argued that the development of dysfunctionality (conflict) of social structures which affect its functioning and the stability of the society should be understood and perhaps develop alternatives to restore the society into equilibrium.

3.1.3. Trends of the conflict

The trends of the conflict were a pertinent issue that emerged in exploring nature of the conflict. It underscored the patterns or the directions of the conflict in the traditional area. It gave a clear understanding of how the conflict is manifested hence, its necessity

for analyses. I explored ways in which the issue is being contested and whether it has been violent or non-violent. Almost all the participants agreed that the issue of succession to the paramountcy has been contested using legal means. Some typical comments from participants included:

"The whole issue here was that the Aberewatia in the family said she was not informed about the process, so she didn't back what the queen did. That's why I said politics have been the key reason why this issue has gotten to this end and so it was last year that the Eastern Regional House of Chiefs gave their judgement on the issue. The judgement was that, the old process of installing the chief was nullified and that a new process was to be done. Earlier, there were some few confrontations before they took the whole thing to court" (Field Data, 2021).

"The Queen mother went for an appeal to overhaul the judgement of the Regional House of Chiefs at the National House of Chiefs. Meanwhile the other faction enstooled a different chief which was not right. So, because they did opposite of what the court said, they were caught in contempt of the court and was fined by the high court, in default would be jailed" (Field Data, 2021).

"...all I know is that when the first person was in the process of being enstooled, another process was initiated by a second group to install the second person. The first one was initiated by the queen and the second by the Banmuhene and some members of the kingmakers. In relative, the second group petitioned the Eastern Regional House of Chiefs first of which the ruling went in their favor. The ruling was to addressing the fact that the process, taken by the queen and her group was not right and so they should go through the right procedure. They returned here on Thursday, by Friday a new process has been initiated for the installation of a paramount chief by the second group. I understand all the divisional chiefs appended and swore to him. As to whether they also went through the right process or not is another issue for contention. What I have heard is that the queen too petitioned the high court and quite recently, the high court ruled against the newly installed one and some individuals who led the process, for the fact that what they did was contempt of court because the committee that sat on the case at the Regional House of chiefs has the power of a high court or so" (Field Data, 2021).

The patterns of contention in this conflict as expounded by participants indicated that the contestation has mostly been engaged in court. Participants indicated that the processes and the authority of some individuals in performing certain roles during succession were challenged by legal means. They indicated that one faction petitioned first petitioned the judicial committee of the Eastern Regional House of Chiefs which saw the annulment of an installation and enstoolment process. The comment showed that the ruling by the Judicial committee of the Eastern Regional House of Chiefs asked traditional stakeholders to start the installation and enstoolment whiles they undergo the right procedures. It was also indicated that the faction that seemed to have emerged victorious over the first court case engaged in another process of installing the chief which was challenged by the opposing faction in the high court. Comments from participants further indicated that there are other cases filed at different levels of the Judicial committee of the high court and the civil courts. This seems to suggest that the contestations of the issue have been one that hovers around legal tussling.

3.1.4. Characteristics of the conflict

Further comments by participants indicated the basic characteristics of the conflict; thus, being violent or non-violent. Participants who indicated that the conflict has been non-violent commented that:

“Here, it is usually difficult for violence to occur. Considering this conflict, it’s within the same family. It is not like a conflict between families or an inter-ethnic or inter-tribal conflict where deadly weapons are drawn for the engagement of conflict. Because this is a family thing, if you draw weapons, it means you will be killing your brother or sister. Again, there’s some form of connection among members of the community so, conflicts here don’t really turn out as violence” (Field Data, 2021).

“As for this community, violence doesn’t usually occur. Let me tell you something, what is happening now has effects on the community but I can tell you that no one has seriously got injured or experienced violence. Well, some are complaining about the force one faction used on them with the help of soldiers and police but for me I haven’t seen it. I know the conflict is being addressed in courts and apart from that I haven’t seen any serious fights in town. We all go to the court and whatever is said we take it and come home. So, I see the conflict not to be violent” (Field Data, 2021).

Participants’ responses suggests that the contestation over the paramountcy position has been non-violent. Yet, in Britannica indicated that even in non-violent conflicts, the use of tension, and unease confrontations are prevalent [16]. Participants seem to attribute their claim of non-violent nature in the conflict to family ties hence, violence rarely becomes the norm. These comments clearly suggest that their experiences in the conflict indicates no violence. Meanwhile, some participants indicated that there has been some tension in the community though it has low intensity. One typical comment of such argument included:

“The nature of the conflict, I will say is a bit violent. On some few occasions, I have seen people drawing weapons, people getting injured and this was even when the national security came to seize the palace; and also, people taking serious actions on words said to them in this conflict. We heard one faction, with the help of some soldiers ransacked some individuals’ houses while searching for some black stool” (Field Data, 2021).

The view of the participant indicated that there have been instances of violence in the conflict. This confirms my experience during an observation that occasional conflicts do occur as a result of the conflict in the area though it is with low intensity. This seems to suggest that there has been some violence as a result of a few confrontations by factions in the conflict nonetheless, the intensity of the violence seems to be low. Nonetheless, Obeng argued that non-violent conflict should be understood and addressed to avoid its escalation as a destructible instrument to the society [22]. The analyses of dataset on the nature of the conflict suggest the characteristics of the conflict in the traditional area. The discussions support the view that the nature of conflicts in most part of our societies reveal the general characteristics that shape the dynamics involved [18].

Ifeoma argued that the nature of a conflict affects the dynamics involved in the development and sustenance of the conflict [36]. Thus, with the numerous attempts to foster sustainable peace, understanding the nature informs the characteristics and the situations in the conflict which provides relevant knowledge for mitigating the situation [36]. The findings of the study argued that conflicts tend to manifest over a period of time. Hence, Keator, indicated that when it escalates, it often lasts for a longer period of time as has been experienced in the Akuapem Traditional Area [21]. Consequently, the frequency of conflicts in the traditional area was indicated in the findings as key to understanding the dynamics of the conflict. The findings confirm the argument by Obeng that conflicts can be either violent or non-violent, however, if non-violent conflicts are not managed properly, it has the potency of escalating to violent ones which could serve as a destructive mechanism to the society [22].

The theory of structural functionalism as employed in this study expounds that the society is made of relevant structures that work together for its stable existence. Yet, these structures, as established in Merton's approach of functionalism are hurled with dysfunctionalities that disrupt the cohesion and equilibrium of the society [15]. They argued that understanding the dysfunctionality is necessary to working towards finding peace and promoting stability. Merton's approach of functionalism was used as a lens to explore the exacerbation of the conflict in the traditional area. The findings of the study revealed the evolving trends and characteristics that shapes the conflict within the traditional area.

3.2. Frames of the Conflict

This section of the study explored conflict frames of actors involved in the contestations. Participants of the study were engaged in a discussion on how actors framed the conflict. The essence was to understand the lenses through which factions viewed the conflict situation. The frames significantly influence the participation of actors in the conflict. It thus, influence the dynamics involved in the conflict. Two basic frames, as would be discussed under this sub-section were identified.

3.2.1. Process/Procedures

Views from participants reflects that one of the lenses through which parties in the conflict understood or justified the existence of the contestation was on the processes or procedures used for the installation of the paramount chief. Parties to the conflict, as commented by participants engaged in opposing processes for the installation of the two candidates. The processes or procedural frames as indicated by participants necessitated the conflict in the traditional area. Some comments from participants included:

"All that we want is for the rightful thing to be done so that it does not affect us in the future. We have genuine procedures of enstooling the chief. That should be followed. We shouldn't set any wrong precedents for the future" (Field Data, 2021).

"We all cannot be chiefs in our areas. Again, it is based on how our ancestors established the nation that has made it possible to select or elect one person who would lead us in developing the society. It is the system we followed unlike the other people" (Field Data, 2021).

"This is not in the Ashanti Kingdom that the Queenmother can select and install someone at the same time. In Akuapem, it is not done that way and we won't accept that" (Field Data, 2021).

Participants' comments indicated that factions viewed the conflict from a procedural angle. The comments indicated that conflict parties engaged in divergent processes during the installations and thus became an issue for contention. Their comments continued to show that each faction believed their processes were right and thus, their oppositions did not engage in the right processes. In corroboration to the discussion, it was observed that some participants defended their factions' activities and individuals who performed these activities with passion. It implies that factions framed the conflict in a win-lose situation where either of them believed to have engaged in rightful processes as opposed to the other.

3.2.2. Justice and fairness

An apparent frame that became eminent during interviews with participants was the feeling of injustice and unfairness. Participants enunciated that, some individuals or

groups viewed the conflict to be as a means of fighting for justice and fairness. Examples of participants' views included:

"For the conflict, there are two sides which started within the family and now it is like a movement in the whole town. Each side has its own story. The stories could be said to suit themselves but what we all want is that one day we will wake up and see that everything has been settled and everything has been put to its place. It is not right for us to always fight ourselves but if justice is not served for all the atrocities, we won't rest. See, the Queen's house was burnt and the culprit was caught but he was released immediately without any further action taken by the police because there are unseen hands in this. The guy is still walking around and we are just quiet for this moment" (Field Data, 2021).

"First, it was the queen's car and house, later they started ransacking people's house with soldiers in the name of looking for some black stool. We talk of conflicts in this community but the security that came, has been in this town to protect some people. The queen that was even attacked don't have a single policeman guarding her but there's a combination of police and security for some people. What are you trying to tell us?" (Field Data, 2021).

"Most people in the community believe that the security personnel in the Akropong are protecting one faction and aiding them to attack others in their homes. That's a cry of unfairness. Again, both factions have had some negative confrontations which could have led to some arrests but I learnt the police in the community said if it's about this chieftaincy issue, it won't go anywhere" (Field Data, 2021).

Comments from participants indicated that factions viewed the conflict as a means of achieving justice and fairness in the traditional area. Participants' indications seem to suggest that the believe by one faction to be treated unfairly and unjustly called for the exacerbation of the conflict, which impacts on the functioning of the chieftaincy institution and perhaps the stability of the traditional. The justice and fairness frame, as found in the study of Dagbon conflict by Issifu is seen as a major lens used by actors [29]. It can therefore be said that the chieftaincy succession conflict is prolonged as a result of the feeling of injustice and unfairness.

The discussions on the frames of conflict confirms the argument of scholars such as Kaufman and Smith that cognitive psychology, communications and decision-making on conflict situations suggests that frames, which filter people's perceptions of a problem can affect conflict processes and outcomes. Frames of conflict significantly influence disputants' participation in conflict situations [28]. Thus, frames are used to define a situation and decide how to engage such situations [27]. The discussions confirm the argument of Burgess that conflicts tend to occur when the phenomenon is approached in a win-lose situation [27]. Actors engage in conflict to challenge what they see to be a threat to them and thus, frame the conflict in a manner that makes sense to their situation and how they interact [37].

The findings therefore confirm the experiences and extant literature that the exacerbation of conflicts is fueled by frames disputant hold over what seems right or superior in their view and the threat to their very existence. The frames by factions in the conflict as Elliot et al, argued, are based on their unique interests and mindset and thus affects the dynamics of the conflict. It has been argued that the exacerbation of the conflict would be a great problem to the society when a win-lose situation is framed for the processes of installing the paramount chief [28]. The argument of who engaged the "right processes" of enstooling the paramount chief was one lens through which factions viewed the conflict. The process frames reflect views about steps, decisions and participation in conflict and thus, factions in the conflict may be suspicious of efforts by their oppositions

to corrode the processes [28]. Many argued that justice is key to the development of peace and the functioning of the society [38].

Justice, as Montada indicated, seems to be a universal concern however, what is just and fair as against what is unjust and unfair is not universally shared and thus, the divergent views on it could breed social conflicts [39]. People are unlikely to compromise when they feel unfairly treated [7]. The frames adopted by factions expounds the dysfunctionality within the institution which thus may influence the homeostasis of the society [15]. Hence, understanding of the frames by factions was necessary to knowing the meaning they give for the existence of the conflict and thus the need for developing alternatives.

Elwell indicated that Merton's approach of functionalism stresses on the existence of two key functions of a structure, known as manifest functions and latent functions, however, it establishes that structures may sometimes be dysfunctional in the society or perhaps have some dysfunctional elements that may affect the functioning of the society [15]. Conflicts have been argued as a dysfunctional role of the chieftaincy institution hence, Ahiave argued that the chieftaincy institution in Ghana has been bedeviled with numerous conflicts; hampering progress and for that matter, the institution is of no relevance in contemporary local governance [8]. To understand the dysfunctionality and hence, work towards mitigation, frames of parties involved in the conflict was revealed by the findings.

4. Conclusions

Several conceptions exist on the nature of the conflict in Akuapem Traditional Area. Tensions and unease confrontations are prevalent even though the contestation is mainly engaged in a form of legal tussling. Conflicting parties framed the conflict in a manner that made sense to them and thus, exacerbated the situation. The conflict in Akuapem has complex dynamics with interrelated elements that revolves around ethnic, structural and political issues. Also, the installation and enstoolment of a paramount chief are engendered by key actors who perform dynamic roles. It becomes an issue when actors are denied their birth rites whiles 'outsiders' control or take over their rights. Consequently, when their grievances are left unchecked, it breeds conflicts.

5. Recommendations

It is therefore, recommended that all stakeholders to the installation are duly left to perform their duties without any intrusion from external parties or outsiders. Moreover, the grievances of these stakeholders should be addressed to ensure smooth running of the processes. This can be ensured by the traditional council of the area.

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