Conflict Management and Resolution Strategies Between the School Management Team and Teachers in Public Schools

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Abstract
While research on conflict management in public schools is readily available, less is known on how this phenomenon is addressed between the entire School Management Team (departmental heads(s), deputy principal(s) and principal) and teachers. This study proposes various strategies to deal with conflict, and thereby contributing to the domain of conflict management in public schools. Therefore, the aim of this empirical study was to investigate the significance of conflict management and resolution strategies between the school management team and teachers in public schools. Conflict is present in each organization, and the type of conflicts that surface in school differ, resulting in distinct aftermath. The study adopted a conceptual framework and was conducted at one school in the Motheo district, Bloemfontein, Free State Province, South Africa. This qualitative case study adopted an interpretivist research paradigm. The information was amassed through interviews with five participants, which were thematically analyzed. The findings revealed that conflict between the School Management Team (SMT) and teachers needs to be addressed to enhance an optimal school climate. Considering the findings, the study suggests that the conflict management skills of School Management Teams should receive immediate attention using training and workshops.

Key words: Conflict, Conflict Management, School Management Teams, Conflict Resolution.

Introduction

A school is considered an environment that comprises the coordination of relationships that transpire among individuals in society to frame a school community determined by organizational, personal, and practical components (Tapia-Fonllem et al., 2020). These functional components serve as the educational establishment, which provides uniqueness to the school as a place of teaching and learning (Tapia-Fonllem et al., 2020). In such a dynamic environment, conflict often poses serious concerns in school settings (Adams & Plaatjies, 2021).

Shanka and Thuo (2017) posit that, without reservation, conflict management takes the focal stage in creating a more secure, supportive, and productive learning and teaching environment. Nonetheless, conflict cannot cease in schools, as they are inherent to human beings, creating a fundamental part of their virtuous and passionate development. Conflict is considered a normal part of life, as it emerges from the

misconception that various components relate to perceptions or opinions that are opposing in nature (Ozyildirim & Kayikci, 2017). Naturally, conflict brings stress, disagreement, and discomfort in the workplace as it depresses and frustrates issues between the parties involved (Saiti, 2015). As a result, conflict can affect and destroy a sound teaching and learning ethos as it disrupts and decreases productivity in school.

Tang and Basheer (2017) point out that conflict resolution strategies are crucial as they entail decreasing, eradicating, or dissolving all embodiments and categories of conflict in a workplace. Conflict resolution provides strategies, incorporating methods to facilitate a positive and agreeable outcome. However, the current issue in many South African schools is that the SMT and teachers often ignore significant sources of conflict and fail to voice out all matters concerning viable management of this problem. This dynamic may be due to the rivalry of power and disagreement that defer the vision and mission of the school, as it results in a lack of solidarity and proficient teamwork (Hughes & Davidson, 2020). Research to address this challenge of conflict management, especially with a focus on SMT in South African schools, is scanty. This study aims to close this gap in current research by investigating Conflict management and resolution strategies between SMT and teachers in public schools. In South African schools, the SMT comprises the Principal, Deputy Principal and Head of Department (HOD).

Problem Statement

A school is where all diverse participating individuals are equivalent and prevalent regardless of their disparities. Unquestionably, the SMT and teachers should esteem each one's strengths and qualities (Mehrad, 2019). They need to build cooperative and safe environments and develop and create a pleasant social and psychological workplace influenced by a resolvable conflict for school advancement and self-improvement (Owam, 2018). To Naidoo (2019), all these party agencies must act deliberately, with respect, to coordinate their expert development and support the progress of associates. Moreover, they must cultivate a relationship as colleagues and sustain professional relationships. Calvert (2016) proposes that leaders create mentorships by sharing content, assessing each other's work and correcting mistakes. Maintaining all these approaches will empower SMTs and teachers to develop an awareness of self-confidence, self-discipline, cooperation, and the capacity to value everyone's worth.

In recent times though, this does not appear to be the case in some South African schools (see Adams & Plaatjies, 2021; Pretorius & Plaatjies, 2022). Alabu et al. (2020) proclaim that due to the diversity of schools in their organizational structures, schools have unique strengths and challenges within the education sector related to their ethos. These often lead to an array of challenges. For example, Khan et al. (2017) points out that conflict may be attributed to contrasting attitudes and perceptions, needs, values, tasks, lack of infrastructure, teaching supports, and differences deriving from competition amongst the power of leadership and qualifications. Consequently, emerging conflicts may arise daily (Alabu et al., 2020). If these dynamics are not attended to, it may hinder the operational dynamics of the school. Saiti (2015), for instance, claims that these may affect the educational process because there will be a decline in the motivation and accomplishment of staff and learners. In addition, it may lead to the absence of communication, stress, and regular absenteeism, which may harm human relations. Nkomo et al. (2020) say that these dynamics may decrease the time accessible for coordinated efforts among SMT and teachers for constructive planning and the advancement of creative solutions.

From the discussions above, it seems clear that the role of the SMT and teachers in conflict management and resolution is central to effective and efficient school management (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020). Most importantly, they must develop a method for conflict management and critically comprehend the leading causes of conflict. This study aims to identify the leading causes and types of conflict, as an understanding of these may help pinpoint and align the causes with specific strategies to be utilized by the SMT.

Research Aims and Objectives

Main Aim

To investigate conflict management resolution strategies between the SMT and teachers in public schools.

The objectives:

1. To identify and describe the causes of conflict between teachers and the SMT and teachers in public schools.
2. To identify and describe the types of conflict between SMTs and teachers in public schools.
3. To propose strategies for resolving conflict between the SMT and teachers.

Conceptual Framework

This research paper is steered by a conceptual framework, which incorporates relevant literature, as well as findings of previous research. Through this approach, we drew from the advice of Ravitch and Riggan (2017), who also alluded that conceptual framework hinge very much on the researcher's own empirical knowledge, convictions, obligations, and beliefs.

Conflict

According to Acemglu et al. (2020), conflict is defined from various points of view, and its meaning is a contrast in context, procedure, mediation, and measures. According to Leader Maynard (2019), conflict refers to a system of resistance, dispute, or disharmony rising within a distinctive or a collection when the belief or actions of one or more assembly followers are also countered by or intolerable to one or more followers of the group. The conflict concerns the opposite thinking and measures of separate entities, consequently ensuing in an antipathetic condition (Leader Maynard, 2019). When looking at conflict in schools, it should be noted that it takes different forms; for example, teachers seem unenthusiastic to obscure the SMT, and they do not follow authority or undertake further work. While SMT also acquires a commanding approach; for instance, they persuade teachers to the ongoing work of the school pursuit. Consequently, conflict may then be expressed as hostility and antagonism between staff in a workplace.

Conflict management

For Caputo et al. (2019), conflict management refers to the deliberate interference by leaders to restorative and urge favorable or obliging conflict and to settle, dominate or stop the detrimental conflict. Paunanthie (2018) states disagreement requires resolving harmful procedures through communication and compromise. It is regarded as the art of convincing two conflicting members to come to a workable infusion on a debatable issue to attain a central goal. It is considered the practice of recognizing and handling conflicts prudently, fairly, and efficiently amongst the dispute parties. In addition, conflict management is regarded as the exhaustion and eradication of all forms and essence of conflict in a workplace (Golynchik, 2018). In this study, conflict management refers to the action whereby the SMT and teachers work concurrently to build up a positive effect of conflict that is crucial while overcoming the negative results that may be devastating, using fair conflict resolution strategies.

Conflict resolution strategies

Conflict resolution can be defined as the idiomatic or validated process factions use to find a harmonious solution to their dispute. Different types of conflicts require unique techniques (Gomez & Taylor, 2018). The most common five widely accepted styles of resolving conflict developed are collaborating, competing, compromising, accommodating, and avoiding, as proposed by Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann. The conflict's importance and stakes can determine which approach will be the productive contingent (Tan et al., 2021). This study proposes that conflict resolution strategies can be adopted and applied by the SMT and teachers to help disentangle evolving conflict situations and dissent productively and even increase the organization by addressing main issues.

Literature Review

The causes of conflict between teachers and SMTs in public schools
Many studies articulated different sources of conflict. Ghaffar (in Mboya et al., 2019), Plunkett and Raymond (in Melke et al., 2013), and Ghaffar (2019) uncovered that the causes of battle contain a distribution of possessions, differences in objectives, the change in insights and principles, differences in the role essential, nature of effort events, solitary methods, and the phase of structural growth. On the other hand, Valente et al. (2020) express that causes of conflict relate to inadequate control conditions, asset or supply, disproportionate influence, and power; environmental, physical, or surrounding factors prevent collaboration and time pressure.

Researchers allude to various issues that may create conflict between SMTs and school teachers. Khan et al. (2017) warns against the absence of mutual respect in schools, which can be a catalyst for conflict between SMT and teachers. Naturally, if individuals are not approached with respect, equality, and dignity, the execution of personnel policies and practices may prompt conflict (Valente et al., 2020); this is expected because of the absenteeism of solidarity and joint meeting agreements. In addition, Khan et al. (2017) allude that conflicts are sometimes attributed to contrasting attitudes and perceptions, needs, values, tasks, lack of infrastructure, teaching aids, and differences deriving from competition amongst the power of leadership and qualifications.

Types of conflict between SMTs and teachers in public schools
School disputes are implanted in the perception that institutions are designed to reach targets by arising arrangements that entirely explain work obligations, jurisdiction, and additional logistic roles. Interestingly, the conflict between SMTs and teachers in public schools occurs at several levels. Many researchers, for example, Isabu (2017), Meleke (2013), and Shanka and Thuo (2017), consider that there are various types of conflict which include interpersonal conflict and intra-group conflict.

Inter-personal conflict
Firstly, as stated by George and Jones (cited in Isabu, 2017), inter-personal conflict is the conflict between independent members of an organization that transpire because of differences in their objectives and principles as it can be between the principal, deputy principal, heads of department, and teachers. This conflict occurs due to different work roles and workloads, individual differences in principles, goals and requirements, and individuals competing for assets, such as promotions or work tasks (Shanka & Thuo, 2017). There is a perceived competition over fundamental interests (content) and procedural interests between staff in public schools. On the other hand, Meleke (2013) states that interpersonal conflict is shaped in an organization due to the subsequent causes: conflict over limited possessions, the battle over aims, purposes, and standards, and conflicts over facts and opinions that oppose different points of view.

This conflict seems to be the most common, most documented in schools and powerful once slight information or skilful opinions are available to support classifying the suitable income to agree or work together (Roze des Ordons et al., 2021). The disputing parties are negligent by depicting poor time management, under- or overrating of expertise, and allocated duties that do not achieve many objectives, attentiveness, values, or abilities, lack of trust, and lack powerless and hinder production in school (Toksoy & Çetin, 2017). Therefore, this conflict needs to be resolved by SMTs and teachers through recovering exchange and liberated rise of information and ideas and shared resources aimed at the entire organizational workforce.

Intra-group conflict
Lastly, intra-group conflict arises amongst a cluster, squad, or unit (Suifan et al., 2019). Shanka and Thuo (2017) explain that intra-group conflict may transpire due to department disagreements concerning the group's objectives, purpose, or activities. For example, intra-group conflict may occur between the SMTs and teachers in different departments in schools. In this case, substantive or sentimental conflict is

developed upon intellectual disagreement or emotional reaction to the circumstance (Krajcsák, 2020). However, group structure and size, coherency and ideas, and exterior risks and their results are sometimes causes of intra-group conflict that must be attended to adequately through situational leadership style (Hussein & Al-Mamary, 2019).

Hussein and Al-Mamary (2019) opine that the situational leadership style will allow the SMTs and teachers to play their roles as leaders to have common aims and objectives to take the school's motion forward. Therefore, this type of conflict must be handled effectively between the principal, deputy principal, heads of department and teachers in different situations to avoid parties' relationships raging apart and resulting in a dysfunctional conflict that hinders organizational performance and leads to decreased productivity (Tulung et al., 2020).

Strategies to resolve the conflict between the SMT and teachers
Since disputes do arise in an association, there must be effective conflict resolution strategies for effective management. In this case, a feasible approach for handling conflict begins with examining the circumstances, followed by advancing a system.

Establishing a conducive environment via the different SMT members
Each public school aims to establish and develop an environment within which collaboration can be promoted. All various teams should cooperate effectively to accomplish and fulfil the school's vision and mission. Shahmohammadi (2014) contends that conflict organization limits the unfavourable consequences of conflict and endorses the positive results of conflict to improve education in a school. In contrast, Saiti (2015) states that school circumstances in pragmatic terms can be uncertain; school associates, especially principals, should comprehend the underlying foundations of any resistance. Furthermore, such resistance should be challenged adequately in a suitable method to establish a conducive educational environment. In addition, Okoth et al. (2016) explain that conflict management is an important section of the leader's influence. Besides other obligations, they need credible, distinctive qualities, scholastic capabilities, and occupation knowledge to suitably deal with the provocation of official administration (Dewi & Saputra, 2019).

Chandolia and Anastasiou (2020) point out that enacting managing affairs and resolving conflict is an ongoing activity for each school educator, principal, deputy principal and departmental head. Undeniably, the role of the deputy principal in conflict administration is to perform the same duty on behalf of the principal. However, the deputy principal must act as the mediator and chief negotiator. Rather than imposing a resolution towards the problem, it will reflect on the disputing parties to develop a solution to their problem (Ertürk, 2021). The HOD's role is to monitor the progress or relationship between the disputes after the peace negotiation; most importantly, the HOD must always be courteous of the problem and describe the effects of conflict towards both parties involved (Ertürk, 2021).

Stimulating the conflict
Valente et al. (2020) argue that conflict can stimulate advancements and inventive strategies in overcoming challenging affairs and improving work outcomes, and inspire associations to accomplish more significant levels of achievement. Although, Göksoy and Argon (2016) state that school conflicts positively and negatively impact association results. Irrespective of conflict's negative and positive impacts, Ghaffar (2019) states that conflict is often required because it helps raise and address issues, stimulates work to be in the most relevant state, and assists both parties. Contrastively, regarding the benefits of conflict, Göksoy and Argon (2016) strike that it assembles it conceivable to comprehend matters, seek and evolve new solutions, build a representative, and enrich the school environment.

Consequently, conflict management can contribute to constructing more extensive visions of specific situations and ensure rights and chances for all, irrespective of interpersonal differences. Raines (2018) indicates that conflict administration in schools may increase productivity by improving the standard of

decision-making under stress, reducing the amount of effort required due to pressure and encouraging an environment of the creative invention that can drive the organization forward.

Collaboration

Many researchers, such as Ghaffar (2019), Shahmohammadi (2014), and Thomas-Kilmann (in Riasi & Asadzadeh, 2015), indicate that there are essentially five strategies of conflict management, namely, collaboration, competing, avoidance, accommodation, and compromise. Collaboration is an approach that demands the process of negotiation, deliberation, and consultation between conflicting parties (Ghaffar, 2019). It is a problem-solving skill that requires the integration of each party's attentiveness as it is regarded as a win-win solution. This style promotes assertiveness and is useful when conflict revolves across different teams. It is effective because the disputing parties can openly discuss the conflicting issue and reach a commendatory solution. In such cases, the SMT and teachers must only act as the chief negotiator during disciplinary execution and ensure that they understand the roots of this problem from both parties' points of view.

Competing

Ghaffar (2019) notes that the competing strategy measures the drive to meet the expectations of one's attentiveness, notwithstanding its results on the other disputing party. This strategy is based on one party in the conflict resolution process taking a firm stand and making another party feel diminished. However, this strategy is considered aggressive, as it is not advisable to consider it in resolving the issue. The reason is that it may bring up sensitivities because it does not create a mutual understanding. In this regard, the SMT and teachers must focus on the problem and not every disputant personality because the focus should be on looking for a solution.

Avoidance

The avoidance strategy is considered the desire to withdraw from or defeat conflict. It is a personality attribute that tries to ignore violent demonstrations of injustice that may compound the situation (Ghaffar, 2019). This strategy does not address the root problem. From the researchers' view, if this strategy is used for significant issues, it will negatively impact the parties involved as conflict will grow if not addressed. The role of the SMT and teachers in this issue is to clearly explain to the disputants the effect of unresolved conflicts and their impacts on the school environment.

Accommodation

This strategy entails a process in which one disputant is willing to rank the rival party's interest above their own. This strategy occurs to maintain a relationship with the disputing opponent, keep the peace, and earn communal credit that can be utilized for recommendation later (Ghaffar, 2019). Without a doubt, this is a passive conflict resolution strategy where one party gives up on the problem, resulting in resentment toward the other party.

Compromise

This strategy includes the preparedness of each conflicting party to give up a portion. Its significance is to resolve conflict; each disputing part gives value to the conflict and not having a loser or winning but maintaining peace (Ghaffar, 2019). The SMT and teachers must provide insight towards the best way of resolving conflict and providing all the conflicting parties with an acceptable method of behaviour that will be tolerated in school.

From these discussions, in a nutshell, it can be deduced that managing conflict reduces adverse effects, which is critical in maintaining a balanced, productive school environment. Undoubtedly, each style is contingent upon the situation, and measuring an individual's inclinations towards a specific conflict resolution strategy is feasible. Therefore, considering that conflict is unavoidable, especially in a school

setting, the school principal, deputy principal, departmental heads, and teachers must be able to experience and view both the positive and negative potential of conflict.

Research Methodology

Research Paradigm
An interpretive research paradigm was utilized for the study. According to Wilson (1970, in Douglas, 2017, p.57), this philosophical lens "is anxious with understanding the world from the subjective experiences of independents". The interpretive research paradigm provided the opportunity to understand how the principal, deputy principal, HoD, and schoolteachers interpret and interact within their social environment. Also, it aimed to pay attention to and value what participants say and feel based on their lived experiences and how they make sense of the phenomena (conflict management) being researched.

Research Design
This study adopted a phenomenological design. According to Neubauer et al. (2019), phenomenology is a research procedure that mainly studies an individual's lived experience within the world. This design was deemed appropriate by the researchers as the aim was to understand better meanings attached by people- in this case, the SMT.

Research Approach
Mohajan (2018) describes the research approaches as plans or a course of action for research that spans from broad assumptions to in-depth information data collection, analysis, and interpretation methods. This study has adopted a qualitative research approach to obtain rich, in-depth descriptions of participants' feelings, opinions, and experiences and interprets the meaning of the volunteers' actions (Rahman, 2020). The approach, aligned with the aim of the study, was also deemed suitable because the participants selected (SMT and teachers) could provide rich, in-depth information about conflict management.

Study Group
Participants were decisively picked. According to Ghaljaie et al. (2017), the purposeful selection is the deliberate choice of participants based on their capability to interpret an identifiable matter. We utilized the non-possibility sampling technique, as it aligned well with the aim and objectives of the study. The five participants were recruited from a public school in Bloemfontein, Free State, Motheo district, and included two teachers, one head of department, one deputy principal, and one principal. Qualitative studies do not focus on the number of partakers as quantitative studies do. Thus, we conducted in-depth interviews with the participants by selecting such a small study group.

Data collection methods
We made use of Individual Interviews through Semi-structured questions. Dash and Pattnaik (2020) state that an interview is a conversation for collecting information. The participants were eager to volunteer in the study. Although the predetermined questions were prepared, we allowed room for probing or follow-up questions to elicit more in-depth responses. The semi-structured interview interrogation was as follows:
   1. What would you regard as possible causes of conflict between the SMT and teachers in public schools?
   2. What are the types of conflict between SMTs and teachers in school?
   3. What are the effects of conflict in the school?
   4. What are the challenges faced in dealing with conflict?
   5. How should conflicts be resolved between the SMT and teachers?

Ethical considerations
Research ethics is an organization of controlled ethics in methods as it serves as a guideline for research ethics specifying the fundamental models and principles of the research community (McKenna & Gray,

2018). As a result, obtaining permission to perform the research was necessary. Ethical clearance to conduct the research was secured from the Ethics committee of the University of the Free State; ethical clearance number: **UFS-HSD2017/1063/2908/21**. Secondly, permission was secured from the Free State Department of Education. Following ethics protocol, participation was voluntary, and there was no payment for partaking. The participants received adequate rights and protection throughout the interview. Participants signed a form of consent that gives the right or go ahead with the interview; however, participants were given the authority to withdraw their participation if they did not feel to continue with the interview.

Findings and Discussion

The data analysis was done following the conventional procedures in qualitative research data analysis. The data was captured during the interviews; recorded data were then transcribed and analyzed into themes, which were: Theme One: Causes of conflict between the SMT and teachers, Theme Two: Types of conflict between SMTs and teachers, Theme Three: the effects of conflict in schools, Theme four: challenges faced in managing conflict, and Theme five: conflict management and resolution skills.

Theme One: Causes of conflict between the SMT and teachers

The data demonstrated that the cause of conflict between the school management team and teachers is diverse and influenced by many factors. The following statement by Participant 2 (deputy principal) describes the cause of conflict between SMT and teachers:

> *"Lack of preparation by some teachers based on a weekly schedule, proper task planning, inadequate and unrealistic lesson plans and low achievement of school plans is one of the significant elements which bring conflicts in schools."*

From this finding, it seems that conflict situations arise because of poor work ethics among teachers, creating challenges in terms of crisis management. To support this notion, Abreu et al. (2020) state that the absence of organization frequently causes a group to jump from one crisis to the next. This view of ineffectiveness and absence of focus is worrying and can produce disagreements and less productivity. Furthermore, the poor execution of official responsibilities demonstrates a lack of diligence and may also be frustrating to the SMT.

Participants stated that most conflict arises from simple miscommunication, misinterpretations, accidental meanings, inadequate selections, vain patterns and position uncertainties. Participant 4 alludes to these issues:

> *"School deficiencies and ineffective communication patterns from the management to staff and information sharing among different departments results in conflict that sometimes becomes difficult to resolve."*

This finding is supported by Isabu (2017), stating that poor communication can result from different communication styles. Poor communication may cause staff members to make wrong assumptions and engage in low-level, unproductive activities such as gossip. In addition, ineffective communication may contribute to conflict, decrease productivity, trust, and negative staff spirit in the school. After all, this makes it difficult for teachers in the school to engage purposefully with each other.

The data showed that the principal struggles with the attitudes of teachers who do not understand the school's dynamics, leading to a breakdown in relationships and hampering the team's effective functioning. Participant 1 (Principal) explains that:

> *"Everyone amongst the staff members wants their opinion to be taken into consideration, and they don't necessarily have all the facts to make an informed decision. Also, when an informed decision has been made, it always gets questioned, and that breaks teamwork."*

The findings displayed are supported by Plunkett and Raymond (1994, in Melke, 2013). They exposed that the causes of conflict involve disagreements in aims, experiences, estimates, differences in the task conditions, nature of work activities and absence of statements. It also includes specific approaches and the

phase of organizational maturity. Furthermore, all these factors result in the inevitable conflict between the SMTs and teachers and defer a desirable school outcome.

Theme Two: Types of conflict between SMTs and teachers
Based on the participants' feedback, it can be deduced that different types of conflict occur between the SMTs and teachers. Participant 3 (HOD) points out that:

> *"There is Leadership conflict, as this conflict usually arises when the School Management Team have differences in a form of management, leadership styles, and clashing personalities in their different departments. In addition, some members of the SMTs are very appealing and easy to understand towards staff, while others act as bosses other than true leaders. This causes conflict between the SMT and teachers, and it attracts jealousy against the staff based on their differences."*

In line with this finding, Čiuladienė and Boboc (2020) state that different people in a workplace have different personalities, values, expectations, and attitudes toward problem-solving. From the response from Participant 3, it seems that some members of the SMT lack the application of productive leadership approaches, which also focus on valuing staff members' views on issues. Poor leadership styles and a traditional approach may promote conflict. Interesting to note that there is evidence of good working relationships displayed by members of the SMT. This approach employed by these leaders is the desired one for improved relations.

Participants also mentioned that there is evidence of interpersonal conflict that sometimes occurs between individuals within the school. Participant 4 alluded that:

> *"Interpersonal conflict is the most popular reason for conflicts between school the SMT and teachers, and it results in negative impact towards the teaching and learning environment, and it makes colleagues to perceive each other as interfering with the attainment of their own goals."*

This finding is congruent with the study conducted by Kipkemboi and Kipruto (2013), who emphasized that interpersonal conflicts are attracted to a workplace due to opposing labour roles and different workloads.

Theme Three: the effects of conflict in school
Although participants provided varied responses on the effects of conflict, the data have proven some serious, unwanted effects. Participants view conflict as something harmful, destructive, and generating hatred among colleagues. Participant 5, for instance, explains that:

> *"Conflict always brings upon forward negative effects, as it interferes with the normal functioning of intuitional processes. Also, it disrupts the effective functioning of educational processes and creates confusion and disorder. In fact, it is fundamentally inefficient."*

The seriousness of conflict situations is portrayed in no uncertain terms by Göksoy and Argon (2016, p.200): "Conflict affects the workplace negatively as it causes work disruptions, decrease in productivity, project failure, absenteeism, and physical, emotional, and mental disorder amongst staff."
In another view that warns about the devastating consequences of conflict in terms of the core business of schooling- teaching and learning- Participant 2 pointed out that:

> *"Conflict takes attention away from educational objectives or goals to the immediate conflict situation that needs to be resolved adequately during teaching and learning time, and it delays the educational process."*

Göksoy and Argon (2016) supported this viewpoint and highlighted that conflict hinders productivity and weakens cooperation. They add that such dynamics break team spirit and communication and form groups with ideologically like-minded people. Lips-Wiersman and Morris (2018) propose embracing unity with others instead.

However, one participant indicates that conflict in school also has positive effects. Participant 1 clarifies that:

> *"Conflict usually causes change and creates a better teaching and learning environment when it is resolved effectively. It activates people in the workplace to work on their desired goals. Most importantly, it acts as a form of communication between all the dispute parties that we not able to communicate professionally with each other, and it develops the broken mutual respect among colleagues."*

Göksoy and Argon (2016) supported this viewpoint and highlighted that conflict might also increase the quality of personnel's decisions, motivating them for creativity and innovation. It encourages interest and curiosity among staff members, reveals difficulties, and generates self-criticism and alternatives for transformation, predominantly when anger and tension can be expressed easily. It boosts the performance of individuals and groups. Behfar and Goldber (2015) adds that conflict handled in a manner that aims to establish an efficient space is being handled in a stimulated manner aimed at making decisions based on numerous perceptions.

Theme Four: Challenges faced in managing conflict

The data demonstrated significant challenges faced during conflict management, particularly by the members of the SMT as the chief negotiators and the disputing parties. Participant 2 stated that:

> *"The major challenge in conflict management is the resistance of the disputes parties to engage in new strategies to maintain peace, as they normally question everything. As a result, it is often difficult to demonstrate measures that will be taken to resolve conflict due to the difficulty of the disputes to engage purposefully."*

Participant 3 adds that:

> *"Maintaining peace that you don't basically understand the causes of it is difficult. Also, not having any policy force in authority to bring conflicting parties to the negotiation table based on their issue is a challenge. To add, the misbehaviour and use of strong words by disputants, and the disputes getting emotional and end up showing aggressive behaviour result in the matter not being resolved effectively and end up being postponed time and again is a challenge."*

To support this finding, Madalina (2016) states that most managers see conflict as a problem to be removed from their organization. The skills do not characterize this management barrier, but due to how the conflicting parties perform and their willingness to settle the issue. Cain and du Plessis (2013, p.29) warn that "dysfunctional is disruptive and can lead to the non-realizing of an organization's goals and the breakdown of relationships among colleagues".

Theme Five: conflict management and resolution skills

The participants recognize the value of managing conflict and adopting best resolution strategies that strengthen relations and develop confidence and flexibility between SMTs and teachers. Participants 3 and 5 propose that:

> *"Conflicts can be effectively resolved by bringing all involved entities into a problem-solving situation through integration and collaboration by finding out the root of conflict from all parties without being biased. In addition, proper conflict management creates an understanding of others and develops respect for diversity in school."*

In support of the strategy shared above, Shahmohammadi (2014) argues that addressing conflict should enable teachers and principals to appreciate the concepts and skills for preventing, managing, and resolving

conflicts in a non-violent manner. This approach thus creates a more supportive learning environment for schools where all students can flourish.

Participant 1 states:

> *"Efficient resolution strategies of conflicts that could lead to higher levels of team performance and subsequently to increased organizational efficiency is collaboration strategy, and the principal must act as the chief negotiator to ensure that a desirable goal is reached by all conflicting members being free to state their sides."*

Kofman (in Mboya et al., 2016) asserts that a collaboration strategy discloses people's partialities and constraints and connects everyone in creating results that go way beyond the initial choices. He further says that productive cooperation allows people to voice and recognize each other's needs and create new answers. Also, of utmost significance is that conflict should not be overlooked or left to vanish; it should be attended to without delay to stop it from becoming even worse (Bayar, 2016). The SMT, therefore, should take the lead in addressing the problem.

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

This investigation revealed that conflict in schools is a significant issue that frequently arises between the school management team and teachers. This study also showed that the participants recognize the diverse cause of conflict and that many factors influence its existence. The implication may be that conflict hampers relationships, cooperation, and the SMT and teachers' general morale. They cannot address it adequately due to power rivalry, particularly amongst the SMT. It is recommended that SMT members and teachers engage in professional development activities in understanding and dealing with the causes of conflict.

Secondly, this study proved that conflict occurs in different types and frequently between individuals in schools, particularly between SMTs and teachers. Therefore, it requires strong leadership, especially from the school principal as the overall leader. Principals should ensure that the roles and contributions of individuals and each department towards intuitional goals are identified. Also, a fair reward and compensation system should be framed by the SMT to enhance school effectiveness. Moreover, the school system must establish trust and effective communication instruments to enhance open interpersonal and intra-group relationships among staff members. Lastly, the influence of appropriate management of complete school conduct must be sustained.

Thirdly, findings showed that conflict has a negative impact that diverts attention away from educational objectives. As a result, both the SMT and teachers vent about frustrations of conflict and fail to view conflict as an opportunity for finding a creative solution to solve problems. This aspect should also be addressed in professional development sessions, and principals should focus more on this aspect as well. The fourth finding portrays that during conflict management, adverse challenges are faced with maintaining and resolving conflict. The implication is that there is no clear and considered corporate communication in school that can be used to avoid and resolve disputes and a clear policy followed by all parties when managing conflict. Both the SMT and teachers require a workshop in conflict management and strategies on how to deal with or resolve it in the best way to minimize the adverse effects of conflict and encourage a positive working environment. Lastly, the study demonstrates that participants recognize the value of managing conflict and adopting best resolution strategies that strengthen relations and develop workplace confidence. However, it seems complicated for the SMT and teachers to analyze the root of conflict and use the best approach to resolve conflict contingent upon the situation. Hence, conflict should not only be the sole responsibility of the principal but also of all teachers in the school.

Limitations of the Study

Any study has limitations, and this study was no exception. Due to the relatively small sample size, the findings may not adequately represent the broader group. This factor made it challenging to generalize the findings. Also, the small sample made saturation harder to achieve. The data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, access to the research site was problematic, and this factor also limited time with

and availability of the participants. This study was conducted in the South African school context, characterized by the stark realities of poverty and inequalities. Therefore, the issue of limited transferability may also be considered, specifically in relation to different educational contexts.

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