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Conflict Management Strategies Used by Early Grade Teachers: A Qualitative Approach

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p>History:</p> <p>Received: March 24, 2024 Accepted: April 16, 2024</p>	<p>This study presents the perceptions of teachers and head teachers toward the causes of conflict and effective strategies to resolve the conflict at preprimary schools. The research examined how conflicts are resolved by head teachers and teachers of preprimary schools. Primary data was collected through interviews with 6 head teachers and 20 teachers from purposively sampled preprimary schools. The results of the study revealed that conflicts are healthy for the institutes. Findings show that differences in beliefs between head teachers and teachers, management style, workload, dissatisfaction, lack of staff training, absence of reward systems for teachers, false information, lack of commitment, poor communication, lack of participation in decisions, and favoritism are the key causes that raised the conflicts between principal and teachers of preprimary schools. The research concludes that existing conflicts can be handled in preprimary schools by using the integrating, avoiding competing, compromising, and accommodating strategies.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">© 2024 The Authors, Published by WUM. This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Common Attribution Non Commercial 4.0</p>
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1. Introduction

According to Chen and Tjosvold (2002), Conflict contains situations in which differences are expressed by the persons in the procedure of accomplishing their desires and goals. It occurs when a variance among two or more persons requires a change in at least one individual to continue development. According to Alfa (2013), conflict is "a struggle for values, status, authority, and limited resources in which the goals of the concerned parties are not only to attain the desired values, but also to neutralize, damage, or eliminate the competitors. Differences in beliefs and attitudes are predictable between humans. While several persons or groups of people come into interaction to achieve their goals, the relationships might become incompatible, and that becomes the reason for conflict. It arises when people have various perceptions and points of view on the same issues. Adhiambo and Enose (2011), stated that conflict brings frustration due to unknown fear and it has an impact on the teaching process but if it is carefully investigated and managed, it creates healthy competition and a peaceful environment. According to Argon (2014), Conflicts between teachers and the head teacher arise often at any time in institutions. However, researchers contend that school administrators should have appropriate knowledge in order how conflict arises and how it can be

managed. According to Oboegbulem (2013), Conflicts arise in human interactions particularly those that take place in organizations due to diverse personalities.

Atif, A. M. (2014) detailed that conflicts frequently arise in educational sites due to the diversity of the workforce and disagreements between participants, staff, and learning authorities. These are not problematic, but they become when authority cannot handle or poorly manage the issues. There are many sources of conflict like limited resources, extra work, Communication problems, diversity in individuals' perceptions, and the environment of the institute. Ken (2010) stated that Conflict in institutes takes place in different practices as teachers are likely or unlikely to obey the head (principal) and do not like to admit extra work. Principals use their authority like he forces the teachers for extra work or activities. So, it creates a conflict between teachers and principals at any time. According to (Olubunmi, 2014) Conflict between teachers and the principal can result from a variety of factors, which can affect students' achievement, the quality of the workplace, and staff morale. It enhances energy, and better relationships, increases self-efficacy, and reduces stress. Conflicts are good as they provide help to address problems. It energizes people to work and assists those people to learn how they take advantage of their dissimilarities. According to Schermerhorn (2000), conflict can involve personal or group dissimilarities, struggles, and disagreements, and wildly arise at school head teachers have practiced with several difficulties of institute administration like financial issues, school facilities, and climate.

Conflict might be destructive if it brings results like poor communication, anxiety at the workplace, tension, and bad performance of staff (Bano, H. and Zia, S. 2013)). Due to the significance and benefits of conflict, investigators give a lot of attention to conflict-related issues. If struggles are appropriately handled, positive outcomes may accrue; relations are strengthened, identification of problems and resolutions and enhanced knowledge (Ramani & Zhimin, 2010). The ability to manage or resolve conflict is important for head teachers to smooth the running of the institute as they face numerous positive and undesirable community and cultural, environmental factors, and conflicts on which spend a lot of time. Karip, (2000) describes at institutes conflicts might occur due to several issues like division of work, resources of finance, classroom activities, prizes, penalties, assessment practices, usage of authority, permission of absences, negative individual attitudes, system of the scoring, matters about the legislation, pupil behaviors and attitudes, dress code, coursework, placements of staff members and the resources' distribution.

2. Literature Review

In a social system, when several people work together in such a way influence each other. This link among groups of people might lead to inconsistency while each has a wish for a similar benefit. Conflict is disagreement between approaches and views, desires and values, duties, and rules. It is dissimilarities that are generated from the competition, bad behavior, and feedback from employees (Alfa 2013).

Conflicts in organizations have been studied from several perspectives. For instance, Uchendu et al. (2013) noted that institutes alike other organizations, have diverse labor divisions, lines of authority in terms of the relationships between teachers and head teachers, guidelines and principles, and poor communication that can create conflicts. According to Ramani & Zhimin, (2010), the core causes of conflict include unfulfilled demands for security, needs, identity, acknowledgment, involvement, and autonomy. Any organization may experience conflict on a variety of levels. The following factors are the primary causes of interpersonal conflicts: 1) work positions and workloads; 2) individual diversity, goals, and desires; and 3) shortage of resources and completion for promotions. Due to disagreements or disagreements among staff members, objectives, functions, or actions conflict may occur.

Conflict in education settings appears often due to the existence of several workers, regarding the rules of the institute, authorities, students, and teachers. Teachers, students, and heads belong to different contexts and have different opinions and perceptions on different issues. So, conflict occurs

among them (Bua, Felix Terhile, Ada, Joan Nike, Akinde, Esther U, 2015). Conflict is expected among both tutors and pupils at institutes due to cultural differences, behavior, values, opinions, attitudes interests, desires, preferences, aims, and authority. This is a key issue faced by tutors, management, guidance tutors, and parents (Türnüklü, 2002).

Rahim (2002) stated that conflict cannot be avoided even in educational institutions. If conflict that occurs in institutions is not resolved, it will harm both the students and the teachers' performance and learning environment. Conflict arises in the institution due to diverse personalities, values, and inadequate resources. Different types of conflict exist in different contexts (Hoban, 2004). A personality conflict arises when an extremely energetic tutor works with a less intense tutor in a similar environment. Sometimes conflict arises due to personal values when there are divergent viewpoints or different interpretations of the same event (Peterson, 2001). Resources are typically limited in organizations, which leads to people fighting or competing for shares. This typically happens when multiple parties have differing agendas for managing limited resources & formulating policies. They combine sources of power, value, and the economy. Karip, E. (2000) stated conflict of interest arises "when all parties share a similar understanding of condition or situation, favors a distinct & perhaps incompatible resolution of the problem concerning also with the division of resources to solve the problem.

According to Fisher (2000) Sometimes the values conflict exists when different social entities have opposing views or beliefs on a certain matter. The conflict related to role and expectations indicates diversity and differences in responsibilities between individuals who are independent at the workplace. Daresh (2002) indicated that different persons have different responsibilities and want to do different jobs. The conflict related to roles or expectations happens when diverse individuals disagree on performing that role and employee conflict can arise because of differences in age, culture, ethics, and ideals. The best method to avoid conflict is probably to make sure there is good communication. Tshabalala. T. and, Mapolisa, T. 2013 stated that conflict can arise from insufficient and unnecessary communication, favoritism, and lack of proper polices. According to (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011) Conflict resolution is crucial because people devote a lot of their energy to the reactions of conflicts when they occur. Conflict resolution is necessary as some individuals have aggressive conflict and may suffer from psychological problems, including compromised immune systems, intoxication, and digestion disorders.

According to Hanson, E. M. (2003) by assertive communication, the speaker can maintain self-esteem, and protect their rights without hurting other people. Collaboration may play an important role in handling the conflict. Folger, (2021) claims that collaboration aims to take into account all of the crucial requirements of the major parties and create a plan of action that satisfies these needs—empathy is the skill to understand the experiences and emotions of another person. When you understand the point of view and emotions of others it increases the collaboration and provides help to resolve the conflicts. The most appreciated conflict resolution technique is active listening. Listening to conflict resolution helps to achieve crucial goals, and opens the entrance for sympathy and understanding. Sorensen (2017), specified the capacity to recognize and understand your feelings as well as other people is referred to as emotional intelligence. This ability is crucial for conflict management since it stops things from getting worse. It will be simpler to communicate with your adversary without provoking them if you can accurately read their feelings. When a conflict is ended, relationships among the parties involved don't essentially return to normal.

Tinsley and J.M. Brett (2001) indicated the best strategy for developing a strong connection after a fight is to open up lines of communication between the parties. This enables both parties to keep checks on one another and confirm that the agreement's terms are being followed. A history of open communication should make it simpler for participants to deal with obstacles without jeopardizing any gains they have made thus far. We can use different strategies to handle the conflicts at the preprimary school level like cooperating with people and trying to resolve the problem, which will help them to maintain good relationships. Afful-Broni (2012) specified Competing and compromising strategies can be used to satisfy others and give priority to their interests.

Accommodating and voiding diverse People also have good skills and techniques to resolve conflicts. So principals or heads of institutions must know about conflict that exists in their organizations and should know how to handle conflicts by using different skills and techniques at the time.

3. Methodology

A qualitative research design is employed for the study. The Population of the study consisted of 20 teachers and 6 Principals of local pre-primary Schools.

3.1 Data collection

The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and head teachers of local preprimary schools. The researcher gave an overview of the research before conducting the interview, and interviews were recorded on audio tape. The participants decided on the interview's schedule and date. The interview duration was 15 to 25 minutes. After completing the interviews of participants, the researcher carefully listened to all sessions of interviews and formed a summary. After completing the summary, an analysis of the data was done. The validity of the interview was done by the educational experts.

3.2 Data Analysis

Qualitative data was collected by interviews with the head teachers and teachers. After the completion of all interviews, the researcher listened to each interview carefully and formed a summary to note down the main points and responses from each question.

In the first step researcher carefully read the summary that was made during interviews to understand and highlight the major ideas. In the next step, the researcher identified main themes that can be used as major headings against responses of each statement by the respondents. After identifying and writing themes separately, the researcher developed a comprehensive description of the respondents' responses. In the end for representing the responses of the participants accurately, the researcher developed each statement theme, and data were presented by NVivo software.

4. Data Analysis Procedure

4.1 Transcription of data

For qualitative data analysis initially, the notes were prepared on the raw data that were obtained from head teachers and teachers audiotaped interviews, to draw the inclusive ideas. This process involves transcribing audio and reading through the notes and text. Secondly, perceived ideas from both relevant and raw data. This helped the researcher to get familiar with the data, to get the level of exactness. The data was organized systematically.

4.2 Initial Coding

After importing the MS Word file into NVivo software, the software organized the data systematically. All the responses regarding the same questions were gathered under one heading for analysis of data. After a thorough analysis of each statement, initial codes were drawn.

4.3 Axial Coding

The axial coding is the next step in thematic analysis. At this level, the initial codes were provided a border sense. The initial codes were fit together to make the final themes. Axial coding supports the grouping of initial codes, which leads to central themes. The following results and discussion of the semi-structured interviews are presented by NVivo software.

5. Results

The teachers and head teachers defined the conflicts as a disagreement between views, beliefs, differences of attitude, and ideas. All the respondents replied that they had experienced conflict in the organizations. So, it is vital to understand how the conflict would destroy or generate a positive and constructive environment for the work. Teachers described that favoritism and heads' poor performance lead to struggles or disagreements between teachers and heads of the institutions. This

mostly occurs when management fails to fulfill the demands of teachers related to performing the duties effectively. According to teachers and head teachers, several types of conflicts exist in institutes such as conflicts of individual interest, conflicts related to displaced, goals, the relationship of the head teacher with staff, unfair duties, and expectations or division of work.

Resources of Conflict Arising



Teachers and heads of the institutions were queried to state the source of conflicts that may arise in institutes. Teachers replied that the poor performance of the head led to conflicts between teachers and the head. The head teachers stated that the sources of conflict in the organization included the shortage of resources, such as teachers becoming aggressive due to limited classroom facilities and teaching materials. Teachers and heads both described that the lack of accommodation and communication skills, shortage of resources & limited classrooms for students, are the reasons for conflict. Teachers replied to the structure of the institute, lesson preparation and delivery of knowledge, poor performance, syllabus, favoritism of principal, different values and policies, lack of planning, distribution of work, teachers and head principal relations, play an important role for occurring the conflict.

How to handle the conflict



According to respondents, the conflicts are not good or bad it depends on how to handle them. They specified if we effectively handle the conflict, it can increase the efficiency and productivity of the organization. They further specified we cannot handle it properly; it might become a source of frustration between employees and hence can upset the administration of the institute. Teachers said the head teacher should manage the stress quickly and then try to identify the reasons for conflict by listening carefully, being honest, being friendly, and controlling the feelings and actions because when someone controls her/his emotions, he/she can think logically. They also stated the head teacher should be an active listener, dominate, and identify the cause of conflict to handle it effectively and logically at times. According to the head teacher conflicts might be controlled by collaborating, integrating, and effective conversation with collogues. One teacher replied that a head of the institution can handle the conflict by compromising, understanding, and accommodating. He can understand the employees' concerns and guide them to solve the problems. He should treat the

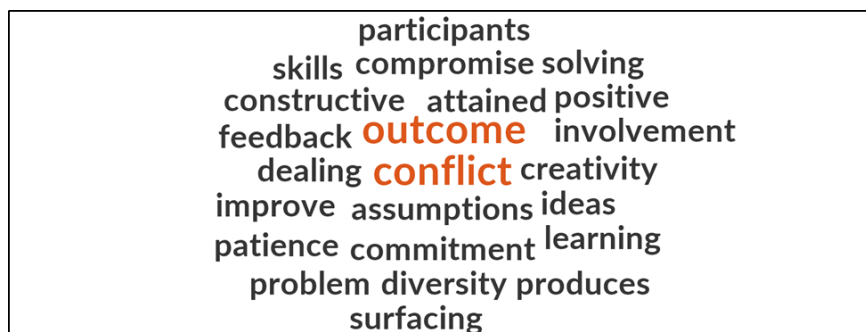
staff with love, and kindness and show empathy with employees where necessary. Expanding the sources of materials used in classroom activities is crucial to the teaching and learning process.

Conflict Management Strategies



According to principals you can choose the Competing, compromising, and avoiding strategies to resolve the conflicts as the compromising style is significant for the satisfaction of other interests. According to teachers, the accommodating and avoiding strategy may be used to handle conflict in the organization. One head teacher stated that the obliging and integrating strategies are effective in handling conflicts in the institution. He also mentioned the use of a compromising strategy for resolving the conflicts to provide satisfaction to each side member. Respondents stated the head can use the integrating strategy to deal with the conflicts as discussed with staff to resolve the problem. Respondents stated that there is a need for training based on individuals' needs, handling conflicts, and the latest technology to support the heads in updating the knowledge and system, increase team achievement, and enhance the institute's performance.

Outcomes related to conflict.



According to respondents' conflicts are never good or bad, it depends on how to handle them. They specified that if the conflict is handled properly, it might increase the productivity of the organization. They also point out that if the conflicts are mishandled, it can be the reason for frustration among individuals and hence might interrupt the administration of the school. According to teachers' conflict brings positive effects and results school conflicts lead to correct behaviors for learning, people realize their mistakes, generate new ideas, and provide help to find out the truth and resolve the conflict. Head teachers stated that conflicts outcome in communication between the team and enhance the commitment to constructive skills. It also enhances the quality of decision-making, motivation for improvement, and invention and encourages the staff to take an interest in solving the problem. A few teachers said that conflicts generate anger, lack of happiness, trust, and communication leads to negative beliefs, and feelings and decrease motivation. If conflict cannot be handled effectively it brings negative results like breaking the relationships among colleagues and waste of time effort and resources.

6. Discussion

According to study results the favoritism and heads' poor performance lead to struggles or disagreement between teachers and heads of the institutions. This mostly occurs when management fails to fulfill the demands of teachers related to performing the duties effectively. This finding line with the research outcomes of Rahman (2009), which showed that conflict occurs when institute administration fails to adequately provide the essential resources for conducting effective learning. Teachers and heads both described that the lack of accommodation and communication skills are the reasons for conflict. Tesema (2018) indicated the causes of conflicts are a shortage of resources & limited classrooms for students. Kreps (2011) stated few activities are effective in handling conflict conditions such as avoid to meet individually in conflict conditions because the alone person is not affected to handle the conflict, in fact wholly instituted performance must be affected to handle the conflicts

According to teachers, the accommodating and avoiding strategy may be used to handle conflict in the organization. Madziyire (2010) describes the conflicts that occur between individuals and institutes due to a high degree of affiliation and dissimilarities in job instructions and rules, and possibly resolve by using different practices like organizing, coordinating, avoiding, and compromising to resolve the conflict. The findings of the study indicated that principals tend to use avoiding, active listening, Competing, compromising, and integrating strategies to manage conflicts. As Rahim et al. (2002) claim, the integrating strategy in managing conflict allows for openness and exchange the information so that you can reach an effective solution that is acceptable for both parties Trutter (2003) says, that the avoiding strategy is not useful for the solution of conflict because the original reason of occurring the conflict remains. Study results indicate that conflicts are not good or bad it depends on how to handle them. They specified if we effectively handle the conflict, it can increase the efficiency and productivity of the organization the efficiency and productivity of the organization. Cherono (2009) stated that the principal of the school viewed the conflicts as both positive and negative in schools, while teachers only take it sometimes as positive or negative. Ratau John and Dingwe, (2011). Indicated all positive conflicts are beneficial for the improvement of education quality as functional conflicts support in production of active human resources for the learning and teaching environment. So, educational institutions play a vital part in producing skilled staff for the society. Griffin (2014) stated that conflict might improve communication skills as individuals feel they as part of the institution and have the right to give a voice to specific opinions because the conflicts are not good or bad it depends on how to handle them. He specified if we effectively handle the conflict, it can increase the productivity and performance of staff members.

7. Conclusion

Conflict in pre-primary institutes emerged due to shortage of or unfair resource allocation and inadequate infrastructure in schools; work (poor performance of school plans, work overload and dissatisfaction, ineffective teaching, tardiness, and absenteeism, intolerance among employees on the part of teachers, lack of accountability and responsibilities, ineffective implementation of education policies, lack of staff training, and absence of reward systems for teachers); and false information, lack of commitment, poor application of rules and principles, poor communication, insufficient management skills, lack of employees' participation in the decision, favoritism in assigning duties and providing opportunities for training, and unclear policies related to training). The head teachers have abilities to deal with problems in institutes and use different conflict-handling techniques. Additionally, they also know the reasons for conflict, increase resources, if opportunity for growth, and try to accept change. Further, heads try to build their leadership abilities, including knowing when they need to change leadership attitudes and style according to the situation and trying to include the educators in decision-making. Management rewards the teachers for best performance, trying to understand individual differences and create a safe learning environment. They should know the ways to create resources of funds and create an environment where educators teach and work collaboratively.

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