

Conflict Management and Its Impact on Teachers' Performance of Secondary Schools of Wolaita and Dawro Zones, South Ethiopia

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Abstract

Conflict is an essential and unavoidable human phenomenon because where there is human interaction; there is a likelihood of personal likes and dislikes. These agreements and disagreements among individuals and groups lead them to conflicts. Conflicts are neither constructive nor disruptive but the ways these are handled make them either positive or negative. Schools, like other human organizations, are prone to one or other type of conflict. Various conflict management strategies are adopted for handling conflict; the most important among these are, mediation, negotiation, avoidance, collaborating etc. The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of conflicts in schools, its causes and techniques adopted for the management of conflict in selected secondary schools of Wolaita and Dawro zones. Descriptive survey method was employed to collect data from ten selected schools of Wolaita and Dawro zones in South Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR). A literature study was also conducted. Besides both quantitative and qualitative research approaches using a questionnaire and interviews as data gathering techniques was applied. On the other hand, interviews were conducted with principals of relevant schools. Quantitative descriptive statistics were compiled as part of the empirical study. Findings were analyzed to identify how principals manage conflict in the schools. Conclusions drawn from the study show that principals do not manage conflict effectively and as a result it is on the rise in schools. Recommendations were made for the improvement of practice based on the findings.

Keywords: Conflict management, Teachers' performance and Secondary schools.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Change has affected many spheres of life in Ethiopia. One aspect that was seriously affected by the advent of the democratic era was an education system in which people interact. Schools are communities undergoing transformation and therefore conflict in education is a common occurrence. In most cases, the reason for such conflict lies is because education officials, teachers and school principals do not understand the new paradigm underlying and driving transformation and cannot adapt their work style accordingly. This may lead to conflict that may become imminent and inevitable (Steyn, de Klerk and du Plessis, 2003:114).

Communication barriers, role ambiguity, unclear expectations or rules, unresolved prior conflicts, conflicting interests, disagreement on task and content issues are some of the factors that can lead to conflict situations in schools. At the same time, competition for scarce resources, differences in values and inconsistencies among educators and learners may also bring about discord (Calitz, Fuglested and Lillejord, 2002:225).

In addition, Van der Westhuizen (1991:303) stipulates that conflict situations may develop in any organization such as schools where the management task of the principal is centred and directed. In most instances conflict is perceived to have negative and unsolvable implications and is therefore regarded as something unpleasant and disadvantageous to the parties involved.

Conflict is a frequent occurrence in the workplace. In fact, in an organizational setting conflict consumes "up to 20 percent of employees' time" (Song, Dryer, & Thieme, 2006, p. 341). Conflict occurs through the communication of a variety of issues including differences of opinion, procedural problems, and disagreements over approaches to work oriented tasks (Friedman, Tidd, Currall, & Tsai, 2000). Independent of the source, conflict has a value in promoting organizational change and conflict resolution is essential to the efficiency of any organization (Putnam, 1988; Putnam & Poole, 1987). Communication is the driving force behind conflict resolution and by exploring conflict management strategies; a greater insight into this type of communication can be obtained.

Conflict, on the one hand, may have a negative connotation because people associate it with destructiveness such as antagonism, poor relationships, loss of jobs, broken families, violence and war. This very human reaction leads to the avoidance of confrontation, which is a primary reason why conflict grows to destructive proportions especially if not managed or handled properly (Van der Bank, 1995:165).

Consequently, conflict is assumed to be a natural part of modern organization. The reason behind this is because it involves problem solving and decision-making, and is at times credited with positive effects upon the

organization. Accordingly, conflict will persist where irreconcilable differences occur. Disputes can develop on both the personal and organizational levels (Erasmus and Swart, 2000:367).

According to Toby (1999:6), there are specific reasons why functional conflict occurs, and these need not necessarily be seen as bad or destructive. Conflict can be significant as well as beneficial. It is beneficial when it indicates that a problem exists and so acts as a warning sign of potential problems. There are four aspects characterizing conflict that may be beneficial or functional. These are (Erasmus, et al,2000:367):

- Conflict is a general phenomenon of human existence, that is, to be human is to experience conflict.
- Conflict embraces a wide spectrum of social relationships.
- Conflict occurs because of incompatible interests between people, groups and organizations.
- There are diverse opinions, attitudes, outlooks and motives within any organization.

Context

Ethiopia have clearly articulated a progressive educational policy which is based on decentralized policy and considered multiculturalism in education. However, among the obstacles to implementation of this policy is the lack of skills and confidence in conflict management of many school principals.

In secondary schools, principals and teachers may be in conflict on issues pertaining to the school. For example, each group may blame the other for the breakdown in the culture of teaching and learning. Principals may claim that teachers are failing to do their jobs. Teachers on the other hand may complain that principals are incompetent and authoritarian. These instances result in conflicting situations (Peterson, 2004:37. As a result, the secondary school principal has to be skilful when working with such teachers/educators and learners.

Synthesis

When managed badly conflict may have both a negative and a positive impact at school. This may result in the destruction of self-esteem and damaged relationships amongst all the stakeholders. Furthermore, disputes in the school may also bring vulnerable moments of fear and anxiety to both educators and students/learners. All this is compounded by bad management. On the other hand, with effective management, conflict may encourage growth and understanding in the school's beliefs, values and culture. It may even open ways of viewing the schools as areas where empathy can be encouraged, opportunities found and healthy competition established. When conflict is functional, good results in the schools can be achieved and the entire schools framework will improve. In addition, schools will significantly benefit if principals effectively cultivate certain skills and attitudes towards effective conflict management, through knowledge, self-control and consistent implementation.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

For the purpose of this study it is necessary that school principals should perceive conflict management as a medium through which problems can be aired and new objectives and goals can be set. Without the necessary dispute management skills, principals in many schools find themselves in unfavorable conditions, which hamper teaching and learning in the schools. Hence, the following problem statement is formulated: How does lack of conflict management by principals affect Secondary Schools of wolaita and Daworo zones? To this end, the following research questions were investigated:

- What are the causes of conflict in schools?
- Which management principles may principals use to manage conflict?
- What are the roles of principals in handling conflict?
- What are the effects of conflicts on the performance of teachers?
- How can principals be assisted in managing conflict?

3. OBJECTIVES

Informed by the research questions, the objectives pursued for the research study are to qualify the problem statement and thus solve the research problem. Therefore, the general objective of the study is to understand how conflict and conflict management affect Secondary Schools of Wolaita and Daworo zones, and the following specific objectives were pursued:

- to determine causes of conflict in schools
- to identify management principles that principals can use to manage conflict
- to ascertain the roles of principals in handling conflict
- to identify the effect of conflict on the performance of teachers
- to provide guidelines that would assist principals in managing conflict in schools.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this section is to describe the design of the empirical investigation and the methodology used to investigate the research problem.

4.1 Research design

The research design is the visualization of the data and the problems associated with the employment of the data in the entire research project and the complete strategy of attack to deal with the central research problem (Leedy & Ormrod, 1997:157). Macmillan and Schumacher (1993:157) describe the research design as a plan for selecting subjects, research sites and data collection procedures to answer the research questions.

White (2002:165) indicates that the research design refers to the plan and structure of the investigation used to obtain evidence to answer the research question. The design describes the procedure(s) for the study, including when, from whom and under what conditions the data will be obtained. In other words, the research design indicates how the research is set up, what happens to the subjects and what methods of data collection are used. The research design that was used in this inquiry was a descriptive survey which was employed using questionnaires and interviews to gather data. Questions are more of closed ended and some open explanatory and descriptive.

In other instances, the researchers study two or more cases; often cases that are different in certain key ways are used to make comparisons, build theory or propose a generalized multiple or collective case study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:149).

In this study the researchers targeted ten senior secondary schools. The rationale was to establish how educators in secondary schools viewed conflict management by principals in their respective schools and to compare their views with the views of the principals in the same ten schools regarding conflict management. The assumption was that conflict is inevitable in organisations like a school and the researcher wanted to obtain in-depth knowledge about the schools in these two zones. The schools identified for participation are situated in different woredas of the two zones where some of the woredas are newly established and some schools are also founded in recent years.

The researchers have long experience in principal ships and teaching in these two zones has noticeable experience with conflicts in school yards. All the educator participants in the study were identified through the method of random selection. A total of one hundred and fifty educators were selected to participate in the study, and ten principals, one from the respective schools were included in the study purposively.

4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are two broad methodologies, which underpin research approaches: the quantitative and the qualitative. For the purpose of this study both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to explore the paradigm based on conflict and conflict management by principals in secondary schools. Macmillan et al (1993:45) describe methodology as the rubric under which the researcher indicates the subjects, instruments and procedures used in the study: that is, who, what and how?

In this case educators and principals in ten secondary schools were the subjects and questionnaires and interviews were the data gathering instruments used in the investigation.

4.2.1 Quantitative approaches

According to Vermeulen (1998:15), in quantitative research, studies are focused on specific questions or hypotheses that remain constant throughout the investigation and the analysis is undertaken by means of standardized statistical procedures. Quantitative research methods use designs, which maximize objectivity by using numbers, statistics and experimental control. It categorizes subjects according to how much of a characteristic they possess. The researcher prepared a questionnaire to be completed by the School level fifteen educators from both sex mixes with regard to conflict and conflict management in secondary schools.

4.2.1.1 Questionnaire method

Jacobs, Jaarsveld and Mollendorf (1991:253) define a questionnaire as a structured list containing relevant questions, statements or items on a specific subject that is submitted to a group of people or target group for their response or evaluation in order to obtain data for decision making in the study.

Questionnaires are designed to fulfill a specific research objective. The look of the questionnaire and the precision of expression required can account for the small return of questionnaires when they are sent to a given population (Leedy, 1997:192).

Henceforth, Vermeulen (1998:65) points out that sound planning is necessary for the compilation of a good questionnaire. Thus, the questionnaire in this study was designed with due consideration to introduction, format, content type of questions, length of questions and instructions.

Closed questions permit only certain responses. Analysis of results may be carried out easily. This type of question was employed as a data-gathering instrument (White, 2002:155). On the other hand, open-ended questions are used for complex questions that cannot be answered in a few simple categories but require detailed discussion (White 2002:155). In this study the questionnaire contained both closed questions and open-ended questions.

As regard the procedures for the administration of questionnaires and pre testing, before the final questionnaire was administered, a pilot study was conducted to ensure that respondents understood what was

required of them. Adjustments had to be made. A pilot study was conducted as a preliminary step to avoid errors. Its main objective was to detect possible weaknesses relating to ambiguity due to poor morphological formulations. The researcher was able to distribute one-hundred and fifty questionnaires to the selected schools. More than 90% questionnaires were returned to the researcher. This was done by the researcher with the assistance of the schools principals to ensure that all questionnaires were completed and returned in time.

4.2.2 Qualitative approach

Mason and Bramble (1997:447) describe qualitative research as a scholarly inquiry based on context and meaning, emphasizing such techniques as content analysis, observations and interviews using natural settings as much as possible. Merriam (1998:226) stipulates that the term, qualitative research, is often used interchangeably with naturalistic enquiry, interpretative research, field study, participative observation, inductive research, case study and ethnography.

In this study, interviews were used as an instrument for collecting data. Interviews are a direct method of obtaining information in a face-to-face situation. In order to gain more insight and a broader view on conflict management by principals in schools, interviews were considered to be an effective instrument for collecting data. Interviews were conducted with the principals of the ten schools under study. Questions and their sequence were planned in advance. Adjustments were made for specific circumstances and responses. A tape recorder was used to record respondents' responses. Follow up questions were asked when the researcher needed more clarity.

Appointments were made with the respective principals for conducting the interviews. Each respondent was given a different day and time for the interview during the second term of the school calendar in 2006 E.C. In this study, relevant statistical techniques, which include graphs, tables, and descriptive techniques, are used to present data. The techniques assisted the researcher to analyze and interpret the primary data.

4.3 Population and sample

Gay and Airasian (2000: 123) define a sample as one that is representative of the population from which it is selected. According to Bless and Higson (1995:87), the term population is the set of elements that the research focuses upon and to which the results obtained by testing the sample should be generalized. For the purpose of this study the population consisted of all secondary schools in the two zones.

4.3.1 Sampling procedure

The sample comprised ten secondary schools selected through random sampling from the population. Of the ten schools a total of one hundred and fifty educators and ten principals were represented. This included fifteen educators of each respective school. In addition to these ten principals of the respective schools were included in the study through interview. A schematic representation of the research population and sample is clearly shown in Table 3.1.

Table 4.1 Population

No of secondary schools in Wolaita and Dawro zones	No of participating schools	No of educator respondents per school	Grand total
	10	15	150
		No of principals for interview per school	
	10	1	10

5. Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of the Findings of the data

For the purpose of this study one set of questionnaires was administered for the one hundred and fifty educator(s). Questions were posed in a questionnaire and interviews were conducted with ten principals. Among the total of one hundred and fifty copies of questionnaires distributed, one hundred and twenty three questionnaire were returned and used for analysis of the data/ information obtained. A detailed analysis of important issues that impact directly on the respondent's perceptions and understanding of this investigation were considered. All percentages of the study have been rounded off to the nearest ten.

The sample consisted of 123 respondents for the questionnaire 76% of the respondents were males and 24% were females. This was important for the study because it indicated that there are more males than female educators in the sample from secondary schools. The gender distribution of the respondents is indicated in Table 2.

Table 5.2: Gender distribution of teachers in two zones

		Wolaita		Dawro		Total	Percent
		f	Percent	f	percent		
Gender of the respondent	Female	22	34	8	14	30	24
	Male	43	66	50	86	93	76
Total		65	100	58	100	123	100

According to Table 5.2, it can be inferred that males are in the majority. Based on the information gathered it becomes clear that there are more male educators in secondary schools.

5.3 Experience in years as an educator

The respondents were required to indicate their years of experience as educators.

Table 5.3 Experience in years

Work experience * Two zones in SNNPR							
		Wolaita		Dawro		Total	percent
		f	percent	f	percent		
Work experience	1-10	41	63	36	62	77	63
	11-20	18	28	9	16	27	22
	>=21	6	9	13	22	19	15
Total		65	100	58	100	123	100

According to Table 5.3, the empirical study revealed that 63% of the respondents who are secondary school educators have between one and 10 years of teaching experience. On the other hand, 22% of the respondents indicated that their teaching experience was between 11 and 20 years. Of the educators 15% indicated that they have 21 years and above teaching experience.

Table 5.3 shows that the majority of the educators have below 10 years of teaching experience, which indicates that most of them have low experience in conflict resolution. They are young and may be they may not handle problems that may arise between them and students and their colleagues. This is the reason why they most of the time refer to the principals, unit leaders or department heads cases which can be solved by themselves. The remaining 39% of teachers have long years of experience which should enable them to make a greater contribution toward conflict resolution by responding positively and more effective as well as being better educators. Inexperienced educators can learn a lot from experienced educators and the data obtained from the returned questionnaires should be valid.

5.4 Respondents' qualifications

The respondents were required to indicate their professional qualifications. In this regard 2.4% reported that they have a certificate, 8.1% have a diploma, with 84.6% indicating that they have a Bachelors Degree. 4.9 % on the other hand reported to be having a Masters Degree. The respondents' professional qualifications are summarized in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Qualification

Qualification	F	%
TTI certificate	3	2.4
Diploma	10	8.1
BA/BSc/BEEd	104	84.6
MA/MSc/MEd	6	4.9
Total	123	100.0

5.5 Current position at work

For the purpose of this study, the respondents were required to indicate their respective positions at work. It was found that 90.2% of the respondents were teachers. However, 9.8 % of the respondents indicated that they were administrative workers. The current position of the respondents is reflected in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5 Current positions at work

	Frequency	Percent
Teacher	111	90.2
Administrative worker	12	9.8
Total	123	100.0

5.6 Experience in current position

In the case of experience in current position, the respondents were required to indicate the number of years in their current positions. With regard to educators, 75 % of them indicated that they have one to ten years experience, while 17 % reported to have between eleven to twenty years of experience and 8% had more than twenty years of experience in their current position. In regard to administrative workers, 83% of them indicated that they have one to ten years of experience and 17% of the respondents indicated that they have more than 20 years of experience. The experience in current position of the respondents is shown in Table 4.5.

Table 5.6 Experiences in current position

Years of experience in current position * Current Position at work

		Current Position at work				Total	Percent
		Teacher		Admin/ worker			
		f	percent	f	percent		
Years of experience in current position	1-10	83	75	10	83	93	76
	11-20	19	17	0	0	19	15
	>=21	9	8	2	17	11	9
Total		111	100	12	100	123	100

The empirical study revealed that the majority of educators and administrative workers indicated that they have less than ten years experience in their current position. For example, some were found to have one, two years, others five years and still others seven years. Other educators about 15% have eleven to twenty years where as none of the administrative workers have experience between eleven to twenty years. 9 % of both educators and administrative workers have more than twenty years experience. The significance of the study is that most educators in the secondary schools are still inexperienced and need guidance from the experienced educators.

5.7 Management qualifications

In this section, the respondents were required to indicate their management qualifications. It was found that 83 (67%) of the respondents have no management qualifications. On the other hand, 40 (33%) indicated that they have further education in management with 23% having diploma and 23% having BA in education management while the other 5% have Masters degree in educational management qualifications out of the total 33%.

Table 5.7a Management qualifications

Do you have management qualification?

Two zones in SNNPR			Gender of the respondent		Total
			Female	Male	
Wolaita	Do you have management qualification	Yes	8	16	24
		No	14	27	41
	Total		22	43	65
Dawro	Do you have management qualification	Yes	3	13	16
		No	5	37	42
	Total		8	50	58
Total	Do you have management qualification	Yes	11	29	40
		No	19	64	83
	Total		30	93	123

Table 5.7b Type of qualifications and level in educational Management

Management qualifications	f	%
Diploma in Educational management	9	22.5
First degree in EdPM(BA)	9	22.5
Masters degree in EdPM	2	5
Others	20	50
Total	40	100

The empirical study revealed, as demonstrated in Table 5.7, that the majority of the respondents have no management qualifications, while others have a further diploma in education management and only a few of the respondents have B A in education management. The other respondents indicated that they have Masters degree in EdPM (MA) qualifications. The significance this has for the study is that most educators are at a disadvantage as far as occupying management positions in the schools concerned. It is also relevant to learn how to deal with conflict in all spheres of life.

5.8 RESPONSES OF EDUCATORS

In this section of the study the respondents were required to respond questionnaires. Their responses were with regard to conflict, management, conflict management and the role that principals play in conflict management. In this case, the educators responded in the following manner with regard to conflict.

5.8.1 Conflict

Educators as respondents were required to indicate whether conflict in a working environment is avoidable. Seventy seven (63) % of the respondents indicated that conflict is unavoidable while 46(37) % indicated that conflict is avoidable. The 37% of respondents, who showed that conflict is avoidable, feel that one has to walk

away from discord or pretend as though nothing has happened if there is a disagreement between two parties. Besides some of them seems they are not in a position to understand the concept of conflict as a general since their response to the question “if yes , support your answer” was it is possible to discuss and solve the conflict that occurred. Concerning the question ‘What causes conflict in their schools?’ respondents revealed that they felt that the cause of conflict in their schools are amongst others misunderstanding, lack of commitment, and inadequate communication, poor management, and differences in opinion. Some also said that it is student misbehavior, depriving benefit.

Again, the respondents were required to indicate how they deal with conflict in their schools. In this case they had to show whether they manage or avoid it. Seventy seven percent of the respondents indicated that they manage conflict while 23% indicated that they avoid it. This lead to the question what do educators think is the best way of dealing with conflict. It was found in their responses that they indicated that talking about the problem(s), solving the problem(s), identifying the problem(s), having open communication systems, coming to a compromise and finding a solution to the problem(s) are the best ways of dealing with conflict.

Educators were required to indicate whether they have ever been in a conflict with a colleague. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated they have been in conflict with a colleague, while 50% indicated the opposite. This implies that conflict is on the rise between educators in schools. The next question, whether educators did handle the conflict, had to be answered by either yes or no. It was found that the majority, 52 %, of the educators indicated that they did handled the conflict and that the conflict was resolved. This led to the next question, that how they solved the conflict in which they faced. Some of they said they avoided it, others suggested that through discussion with the principal and taking disciplinary measures, and the rest of the respondents indicated taking action as of the existing rules and regulations. However, 20% of the respondents indicated that conflict still exists and yet it was not solved. The significance of the study is that educators urgently need to acquire conflict management skills in order to learn how to deal with disputes.

In addition, the respondents were required to say whether conflict affects performance by answering yes or no. Almost all 92% of respondents replied that conflict does affect performance in schools. This led to the next question, if conflict does affect performance then in which way? They felt that conflict offers no assistance, affects teamwork, educators become demoralized and less committed thus waste working time , communication breaks down and there is no co-operation among the educators.

Regarding the question as to whether educators need to be trained in conflict management, 92% of educators said yes. To manage conflict they need to be trained to develop the right skills. They would then contribute positively to the smooth running of the school. In this case, educators enquired that conflict skills training is an urgent necessity.

5.8.2 Management

The respondents were required to indicate on the questionnaire whether management by principals in schools is effective and valuable to educators and other stakeholders.

Table 5.8 Management

Key scale – 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – agree, 4 – strongly agree

	The principal	1	2	3	4				
1	Determines the smooth running of the school	6	5	64	52	16	13	37	30
2	Establishes unity among role players	7	6	44	36	41	33	31	25
3	Leads the school well	29	24	46	37	41	33	7	6
4	Encourages educators in their work	23	19	43	35	49	40	8	7
5	Manages and lead by example	4	3	67	55	37	30	15	12
6	Communicates well with learners and educators	15	12	46	37	44	36	18	15
7	Encourages teaching and learning	12	10	40	33	49	40	22	18
8	Ensures that the workload is shared among all people in the school	13	11	61	50	35	28	14	11
9	Addresses problems positively	6	5	59	48	45	37	13	11
10	Empowers the school management team to manage	8	7	55	45	49	40	11	9
11	Uses good management skills in solving problems	13	11	65	53	28	23	17	14

With regard to management, educators responded differently to the schools management. According to Table 5.8 above, 57% of the educators responded by indicating that they disagree with the statement that the principals determine the smooth running of the schools. While 13 % of the respondents said that they agree, with another 30% replying that they strongly agree.

Regarding the establishment of unity among role players, educator’s responses were such that 42% of the respondents said that they disagree while 58% agreed on the matter. The majority of the respondents, 61%, indicated that they differed with the fact that the principals lead their schools well, whilst 39% agreed. Furthermore, 54% of the respondents answered that they disagree that principals encourage educators in their work, unlike 46%

who concurred.

On the question whether principals manage and lead by example, 58 % of the respondents replied that they disagree while 42% were in agreement. With regard to whether the principals communicate well with learners and educators, 49% of the respondents, varied with the statement while 51% of the educators agreed on the issue. Of the respondents, 43% endorse that the principal encourages both teaching and learning, while more than 57% of the educators differ.

The empirical study revealed that 11% of the respondents said that they disagree, with 50 % strongly disagreeing that principals ensure that the work load is shared among all people in the schools, unlike 11% of the educators who agree and 28% who strongly agree on the matter. The majority of the respondents, 53%, reported that principals do not address problems positively while 47% reported that they agree with the statement that they do. On the question whether principals empower schools management teams to manage, the majority of the educators, 52%, differ and 48% concur. Lastly, the empirical study revealed that 53% of the respondents disagree, while 11% strongly disagree that the principals use good management skills in solving problems. On the other hand, 23% replied that they are agree that principals use good management skills in solving problems, whilst 13% said that they strongly agree.

The significance of the study appears to be that educators in general are not happy with the management of principals in their respective schools. From the empirical study it can also be deduced that principals do not use management skills in running their schools. It is essential that principals use the management tasks, indicated in chapter 2, when applying management processes.

5.8.1 Conflict management

This section determines how the principal utilizes conflict management skills in managing conflict. The respondents gave the following responses to the nine given statements.

Table 5.8.1 Conflict management

Key scale : 1 = non-existent, 2 = uncertain, 3 = Lesser extent, 4 = Greater extent

The principal	1		2		3		4	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Involves all stakeholders in managing conflict	18	15	17	14	71	58	16	13
Communicates well with his subordinates	13	11	11	9	82	67	16	13
Does take sides in a conflict situation	9	7	13	11	46	37	54	44
Looks for fair solution in conflict situation	21	17	20	16	64	52	17	14
Acts as a mediator	20	16	18	15	70	57	14	11
Uses conflict management skills in finding a solution	16	13	25	20	63	51	18	15
Strives toward good interpersonal relationships with staff	11	9	15	12	81	66	15	12
is proactive in handling or managing conflict	17	14	21	17	75	61	9	7
Strives for a win-win situation in conflict management	34	28	16	13	62	50	10	8

According to Table 5.8.1, 58 % of the respondents said that they confirmed that the extent in which principals involve all stakeholders in managing conflict is less while 13% replied that the involvement of all stake holders in conflict management is high. Among the remaining 29% of the respondents 15% confirmed that principals do not involve all stakeholders while 14% were reported that they are uncertain about the involvement of stakeholders in conflict management in their schools. Of the respondents' 67% commented that the extent of communication with his subordinates is weak. 20% reported that principals do not communicate well with subordinates while 13% felt that they did.

Of the educators, 44% indicated that they endorse that principals do take sides in conflict situations while 18% did not. Furthermore, 37% of the respondents contend that to lesser extent principals take side in conflict situations. Furthermore, 33% of the respondents answered that they do not support that principals look for a fair solution in a conflict situation, while 52% concluded that the extent to which principals look for fair solutions in conflict situation is low, whereas only 14% concurred that they do look for fair solutions. 73% of the respondents indicated that principals do not act as a whole or acts to lesser extent as mediators in conflict situations while 15% are uncertain whether principals acts as mediator and 11% indicated that they did. Equally important, 64% of the educators reported that principals use to lesser extent conflict management skills to find solutions, while 15% indicated that they did. Of the respondents, 9% indicated that principals do not strive for good interpersonal relationships with their staff while 12% were uncertain. 66% said that the interpersonal relationship is not that much attractive with another, only 12% strongly agreeing.

Regarding whether principals are pro-active in handling conflict, 17% said that they are uncertain about the situation, 14% strongly disagree and another 61% endorsed the principals are pro-active to lesser extent. Meanwhile 41% of respondents were at variance with the statement that principals strive for a win- win situation in conflict management, while 40% agree and 8% strongly agree on the matter.

According to the responses it is evident that educators are not satisfied with how principals manage conflict

in their schools. This seems to demonstrate that it is imperative for principals to learn and know how to apply conflict management skills when managing disputes involving all stakeholders. Principals need to develop communication skills and conflict management skills and have good attitudes if they are to be effective (cf 2.7). In addition, principals need to also use conflict management styles.

5.8.2 The role of principals in conflict management

Table 5.8.2 Role of principals in conflict management

Question	Response	Frequency	Percent
Do your school principal have skills in managing conflict	Yes	46	38
	No	76	62
Is it necessary for the principal to arrange workshops on a conflict management	Yes	90	74
	No	32	26
Does the principal equip teachers with conflict management skills?	Yes	42	34
	No	80	66
Do you think the principal is to blame for most conflicts in the school?	Yes	68	56
	No	53	44

In this section of the study, the respondents were required to answer the questions in the questionnaire on the role of principals in conflict management. Here the respondents had to indicate yes or no, and then qualify their responses.

According to Table 5.8.2 above, 62% answered no to the question; *Do principals have skills in managing conflict?* The educators feel that principals do not act as mediators in conflict situations and do not apply good conflict management skills since most of them are not trained.

To the question: *What role should principals play in a conflict situation?* The response was that principals should play a leading role in the management of conflict by being mediators and problem solvers. They should take necessary disciplinary measures timely after giving advice and consulting the kebele education board and parent teacher association. Some respondents did not responded to this question. The next question concerned whether principals should arrange workshops on conflict management. This elicited the reply that 74% of the teachers answered that it is essential that workshops be arranged on conflict management so that educators can acquire the necessary skills in managing conflict.

The question: *Do principals equip educators with conflict management skills?* Of the respondents, 66 % gave negative answers. Those who indicated yes also feel that workshops and meetings should be arranged and motivational speakers invited to equip educators.

With regard to the question, *Are principals to blame for most conflict in the schools?* The majority feel that principals are to blame for most conflicts. Some believe that principals do not treat educators equally or with respect, principals take sides in conflict situations, they are not transparent and do not know how to communicate with their colleagues. Others feel that principals are not fault-finders and any other person in the school can also cause conflict, moreover they believe that principals are professionals and often good administrators.

To the question, *“How best can principals involve the community and other stakeholders?”* the response was that the best way to involve the community and other stakeholders is by calling meetings and arranging workshops involving all parties in decision making and enabling them to handle conflict in schools.

Other best practices in managing conflict, according to the respondents are to be open to one another, have respect for others, compromise, and be responsible and committed. It seems then that the principals have an active role to play in conflict management in their schools. In addition, they should always involve all other stakeholders in managing discordant situations and so ensure the smooth running of their schools.

Responses to interviews

Interviews were conducted with ten secondary schools principals. The principals concerned are from the ten sample schools of this study. The reason for conducting interviews was to compare the ten schools with regards to what factors cause conflict and investigate the role of principals in conflict management. The comparison was to enable a clear view with regards to the responses from educators and principals. Appointments were made in person with the relevant principals and questions for interviews were left with the interviewees. The ten principals are referred to as principals 1,2,3... and 10. (cf. Table 4.15 in Appendix B) From the findings in Table 4.15 the following inferences for the significance of the study may be outlined:

Q1. Conflict occurs to both educators, school(s) management teams and principals in a school situation, and all of them have had conflict with a colleague one way or the other.

Q2. All the principals of the schools have had their conflicts handled or managed and a solution found, unlike with educators who in their responses indicated that they avoid conflict and thus the conflict still exists. Conflict needs to be handled as soon as possible and not be left to be destructive.

Q3. All principals should try by every means to solve conflicts in the schools. They also need to organize workshops for educators on conflict so that they may also gain the necessary skills of handling conflict.

Q4. All the people involved in conflict should come together and identify the problem so that they can find a solution to the problem. This will enable them to acquire skills and gain knowledge to handle disputes.

Q5. Mostly people who do not follow the rules, regulations and policies in the school cause conflict. Communication breakdown and differences in opinion are other aspects that cause conflict. Nevertheless, according to the educators, students behavior, misunderstanding, lack of communication, poor management and differences of opinion partiality and siding one group or individual are the causes of conflict in schools.

Q6. The best way for principals to handle conflict is to manage it. In their management they need to use conflict management styles discussed in chapter two.

Refer to item 2.8. The best style to be used so that both parties are satisfied, that is the win-win or collaborative style.

Q7. It is of great importance that principals always involve all stakeholders for the effectiveness of conflict management, and thus create an atmosphere for functional conflict to exist in the schools.

Q8. Principals should speedily intervene when educators are in conflict, by calling them together and involving other stakeholders the problem can speedily be resolved. In doing so the necessary steps should be followed.

Q9. Principals need to always involve other stakeholders when handling conflict. This includes School management teams such as conflict resolution club or group, the educators, the KETB members and the community. By involving them, all parties will be satisfied with the outcome of the conflict.

Q10. Principals believe that the presence of conflict negatively affects performance in the schools. But they seem not to realize that sometimes conflict can be functional and thus can improve work performance and overcome staleness.

Q11. Conflict may affect performance in schools if it is left unattended and allowed to escalate. When people are not happy, they do not work together. Therefore, they become ineffective and arrogant. There, grapevines and gossip could develop that can destruct the normal relation between the management and teachers.

Q12. It is imperative that educators are trained in conflict management skills. It is the duty of every principal to communicate with the department of education regarding such training.

Q13. Other best practices suggested by the respondents for handling conflict are getting people to know each other well, involving others such as motivational speakers and church elders and to adhere to the rules by using formal organizations such as one to five.

6. Findings of the study summarized as follows;

6.1 Problem statement and research findings

With a view to determining the alignment of the problem statement in chapter 1 (cf.1.2) with the findings of this study (chapter 4), four questions were formulated and answered below: With reference to the statement of the problem presented in the first chapter of this investigation, the researcher holds the view that the aforementioned research problem has been solved satisfactorily. The problem statement of this research is formulated as follows: How does lack of effective conflict management by principals affect secondary schools performance?

Conflict has to be dealt with. One cannot avoid it by running away from it, ignoring it or denying it. One can even make quick apologies to pre-empt it. However, these actions do not resolve conflict successfully. The literature study discussed in chapter two, has clearly shown that conflict is not necessarily destructive but can be a useful tool in stimulating creative solutions to problems. It is therefore imperative that principals should acquire the necessary skills in order for them to successfully manage conflict.

It was also revealed in the literature study that although principals have a duty to accomplish their management tasks namely planning, organizing, leading and controlling. One of their important tasks is to know how to manage and deal with conflict in the school. Principals who manage conflict best are able to explore how conflict has arisen, how it has affected people and what is happening and how everyone involved can achieve a satisfactory outcome. Principals have a very important role to play in handling conflict and schools depend on the principal's ability to resolve discord.

The objectives of this study have to a large extent been achieved. These objectives are discussed as research questions.

Research question 1

What are the causes of conflict in schools?

It was established from the educators and principals in the study were caused by misunderstanding, not taking instructions, poor communication, and poor management skill. The educators further suggested that commitment, siding one and differences in opinion as other causes of conflict. Principals identified the following as causes of conflict: people who do not adhere to the rules, regulations, policies and communication problems and differences in opinion. In addition, (cf. 2.5) where literature clearly stipulates other potential causes of conflict among colleagues. These include objective inference, competition, personality differences, communication, and differences in perception.

Research question 2

What management principles do principals use to handle conflict?

It appears that the majority of principals are not using conflict management principles in managing conflict. According to the educators in this regard feel that principals are not running the schools well thus there is no unity among all role players. Furthermore, most principals do not encourage educators and learners resulting in poor communication and problems being addressed negatively. Some of them do not lead by example and take unilateral decisions. It is in this spirit that principals need to use proper management principles in handling conflict. Table 2.2 outlines management tasks/principles that need to be used by principals. If principals were to use these principles in their schools conflict would be alleviated.

Research question 3

What are the roles of principals in handling conflict?

It was found from the data obtained that principals are not sure of their roles in managing conflict. According to the responses of some educators and principals' it seems that there is a gap of knowledge in conflict and conflict management. Educators agree that principals do not have conflict management skills and require training. Furthermore, the most important role that principals should play is that of mediator and, problem solver when looking for fair solutions in discordant situations. Mediation is a process in which a third party enters a dispute between two parties for the purpose of assisting them in reaching an agreement.

A mediator can only suggest, recommend, and keep the parties talking in the hope of reaching a solution. A mediator does not have the power to impose an agreement on the parties. The mediation process provides parties with an effective structure and a set of ground rules for pursuing a negotiated solution to the problem. According to data, educators believe that principals should arrange workshops on conflict so as to equip educators with the necessary conflict management skills. Similarly principals also agree that workshops should be arranged to equip educators to mitigate conflicts that arise between them and students. Members of teacher association in the school and some members of the school management teams feel principals are to blame for most conflicts in their schools, the reasons being that principals take sides and are not transparent when dealing with disputes. It is therefore important that principals should arrange workshops and call meetings involving all participants when handling conflict. This should be done so that all stakeholders with conflict management skills can be actively involved in resolving conflict situations at schools.

Research question 4

How can principals be assisted in managing conflict?

Although principals have to accomplish tasks such as planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating school programs, one of their inherent and most important tasks is conflict resolution (Achoka 1990:44). Unlike other tasks, resolution of conflict cannot be planned for in advance. Nonetheless, the principal has to realize the potential of discord in all decision-making situations and must understand the ways for possibly resolving these difficult and challenging differences so as to avoid the collapse of the school. According to the data, it was found that most of the principals usually depend on themselves when resolving disputes in their schools. The principal should bear in mind that no single party could solve conflict. Conflict should be identified and resolved as soon as possible to minimize its' destructive effects. In so doing the following guidelines should be observed:

- Maintain as much communication as possible with any party whose ideas, interests, or attitudes appear to be in conflict with your own: do not postpone discussing the problem in the hope that it will go away - it will usually get worse
- Refrain from the temptation to talk about the person behind their back: do not try to build an army of opinion on your side: talk with the other person
- If there are signs of inter-departmental conflict, try to establish projects, on either neutral or sensitive subjects, in which individuals from the various departments will work together
- Try to avoid all the phenomena of the win-lose orientation, and above all try to see all sides of the dispute, remembering that most educators will only behave negatively if they are under threat or attack
- Try to avoid setting up conflict situations through the reward structure and, if they are already in the structure, change them (Everard, et al, 1990:96).

7. CONCLUSION

One of the most important issues regarding conflict is that it is inevitable in everyday life. Conflict cannot be regarded as a sign of incompetence; it is a legitimate aspect of human behavior. It is not only avoidable but also serves a useful function for stimulating creative solutions to problems. Conflict can have a positive or negative outcome, depending on how it is managed. For a principal to be effective in a school situation he/she needs to learn how to create positive conflict and how to manage negative conflict. Thus the need for training principals with conflict management skills is imperative.

The findings in this investigation reveal that principals are not managing conflict in their schools. This is because principals do not treat the educators justly, take sides in conflict situations, are not transparent and make

unilateral decisions. Because discord is not managed properly by principals educator performance is affected in the process and this creates low morale.

The research establishes that educators are not trained in conflict management; it is therefore the responsibility of both the principal and the Woreda Education Department to see to it that they are trained. This can only be done by arranging workshops and calling on people who specialize in conflict management to come and train the educators. Moreover, principals must use the appropriate conflict management styles when handling conflict. It is also evident from the findings that principals lack conflict management skills and worse they do not involve other interested parties in some schools when finding a solution in a conflict situation. Principals in addition, need to identify their roles in conflict situations. There is also a need for them to redirect their energies by being pro-active when managing conflict and involve the community at large.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

With regard to the findings from the literature study and analysis and interpretation of the data, the following recommendations are offered:

• Recommendation 1

Conflict plays a vital role in an organization like a school, Principals need to accept the fact that it is alive and well and there to stay. They need to understand that conflict must be dealt with rather than to be avoided.

• Recommendation 2

With regard to management, it is very important that principals should manage their schools by example and not have favorites within the school; for principals to be good managers they should use the following management functions namely planning, organizing, leading and controlling in the schools.

• Recommendation 3

Conflict needs to be managed rather than to be avoided; it is imperative that principals note that conflict management requires particular management skills; principals in collaboration with woreda education department and other concerned bodies should design proper plans to train educators and other management members and follow correct procedures in managing conflict in their schools

• Recommendation 4

Principals should be aware that they play a significant role in the management of their schools; they should always be on the alert if something goes wrong in the school and thus act as mediators in conflict situations; all interested parties should be involved.

9. FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research should be conducted in senior secondary schools regarding conflict between learners, educators and the school management using different data sources. It is therefore proposed that if such a study can be done, an ideal and conflict-free educational environment can be realized. It remains a fact that all situations where humans interact, conflict is inevitable.

10. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In view of the poor conflict management by principals in secondary Schools, it is clear, from the findings, that conflict remains rife in the schools. It is therefore proposed that the recommendations are implemented and all stakeholders are involved in the management of conflict.

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