

Head Teachers' Leadership Strategies for Conflict Resolution in Primary Schools at Kondoa District

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Abstract

This study assessed the strategies used by head teachers to resolve conflicts in primary schools within Kondoa district. The research examined two issues: the strategies used by the head teachers in conflict resolution and the identification of sources of conflict. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, survey questionnaires and documentary reviews. The participants were education officers, head teachers, teachers, and school committee members. Data were analyzed through regression analysis, and revealed that while communication skills did not significantly affect conflict resolution, collaborative and problem-solving skills showed significant positive associations. Problem-solving skills had a stronger impact ($\beta = 0.544$) than collaborative skills ($\beta = 0.216$), emphasizing their importance in resolving conflicts. Also, results showed that most of the head teachers lacked the necessary leadership skills to effectively handle conflicts, highlighting the importance of providing training and professional development opportunities focused on conflict resolution and management strategies. The sources of conflicts identified included conflicts of interest, shortage of teaching resources, and unequal distribution of power. The most common negotiations strategies used for conflict resolution were meetings, negotiations, and the use of older staff members. The study concluded that a significant number of head teachers in primary schools within Kondoa district lack the necessary leadership skills for effective conflict resolution. Hence, it is recommended that there should be leadership training, promotion of collaborative approaches, continuous professional development for head teachers, and diversification of conflict resolution and management strategies.

Keywords: Assessment, head teachers, leadership skills, strategies, conflict resolution

Introduction

In this era of globalisation, conflict resolution has become a contentious topic of discussion among scholars. Mostly, conflicts are rooted in disagreements among individuals or groups within an organisation and arise due to differing perceptions, beliefs, and goals (Calora, 2020). Conflict represents a clash between parties with conflicting objectives and viewpoints, where they perceive each other as hindrances to their goals as they face resource limitations in the workplace. Alabu, Kembo and Otara (2020) and Ahmad et al. (2021) affirmed that there has been a dramatic increase in assessing leadership skills employed to resolve conflicts in organisations. Researchers argue that there are no ways conflicts can be avoided between employers and/or employees in an organisation.

Within the school organisation structure, managers, particularly head teachers, play a pivotal role in maintaining stability and achieving organisational goals (Shonubi, 2012). Moreover, the head teacher is identified as a key cornerstone in the arch of school management, holding the steering wheel and influencing the overall functioning of the educational institution. However, research by Ignace (2014) and Nguvumali (2016) shows that head teachers in Tanzanian primary schools frequently lack a strong grasp of leadership strategies in conflict resolution. Despite the government's efforts to provide leadership training that includes conflict resolution and mediation, there is a shortfall in conflict resolution skills and strategies among school leaders (Lovan et al., 2017), contributing to ongoing conflicts (URT, 2013). Conflicts within primary schools, particularly in Kondoa District, present substantial hurdles to the educational system's efficacy. This gap in knowledge hampers efforts to develop targeted interventions and support mechanisms to mitigate conflicts, potentially affecting the quality of education and the well-being of students and staff members (Lacson et al. et al., 2024).

Research on conflict resolution strategies in many settings has been carried out by different scholars, but less has been conducted in Kondoa District. Moreover, the use of conflict resolution strategies in primary schools in Kondoa district has not been extensively studied (Sibajene, 2022; Ahmad et al., 2020; Okoye & Okeke-Okonkwo, 2020; Nkomo et al., 2020; Shanka & Thuo, 2017). This disparity emphasises the necessity of conducting this research to offer guidance for improving conflict resolution procedures in Kondoa District specifically in primary schools.

The Justification of the Study

The justification for understanding the leadership skills and strategies

employed by head teachers in primary schools in Kondoa District to resolve conflicts serves as the rationale for this study. This study also enables interventions to effectively improve and handling of conflicts and create environments that are favourable for teaching and learning. By raising students' performance and engagement, effective conflict resolution plays a great role in academic performance in primary schools. Additionally, it fosters environments for mutual respect and cooperation within the school, which is advantageous for the overall growth of staff, instructors, and students. Moreover, evidence-based policies that align practices with recognised leadership abilities can be informed by study insights, which will ultimately benefit the entire education system by promoting continual improvement in school management and administration. In addition to the arguments above, the study addressed the head teachers' leadership skills used in resolving conflicts, identified the sources of conflicts found within primary schools, and examined head teachers' leadership strategies used in resolving conflict in primary schools at Kondoa District.

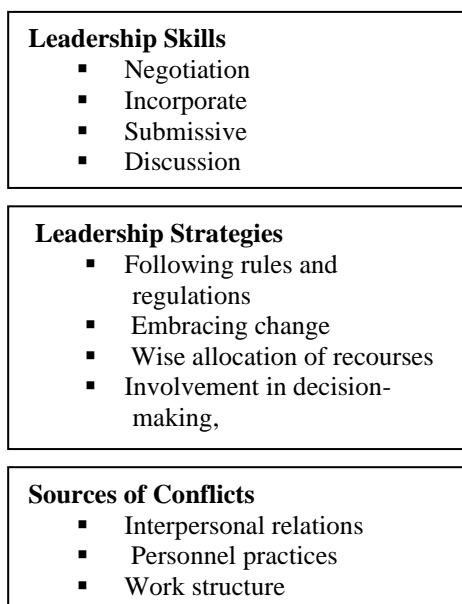
Theories Guiding the Study

The study draws upon the Human Relations Theory to guide its exploration of conflict resolution in primary schools within the context of Kondoa District. This theory, introduced by Professor Elton Mayo, emphasises the importance of valuing employees and their relationships as a means to enhance productivity and organisational effectiveness (Omolawal,2021). Within the realm of primary schools, the Human Relations Theory underscores the significance of recognising and appreciating individual teachers and staff, promoting positive group dynamics and relationships, and involving employees in decision-making processes. This approach aligns with the study's conceptual framework, highlighting the need for a relations-oriented leadership style that encourages teamwork, positive attitudes among employees, and participative management.

Implementing the principles of the Human Relations Theory can play a pivotal role in conflict prevention and resolution within primary schools. Schools can cultivate a harmonious and productive environment that supports educational objectives by valuing and respecting employees. Acknowledging the human elements within the school setting is essential for effective leadership and management, ultimately contributing to the institution's overall success. Therefore, the Human Relations Theory underscores the significance of human interactions and relationships in achieving productivity and minimising conflicts within primary schools.

Adopting a relations-oriented leadership approach and involving employees in decision-making processes are essential strategies for creating a positive work environment and improving overall performance, making this theory highly relevant for effective conflict resolution in primary schools

Independent Variables



Dependent Variables

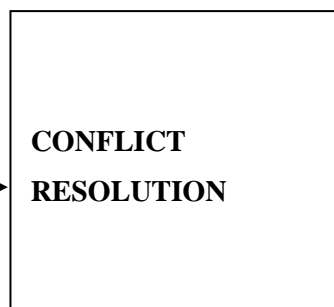


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher's thinking

The Research Methodology

Based on the nature of the study, pragmatism philosophy was used to guide the study. The study followed the pragmatism philosophy, recognising the importance of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This philosophy acknowledges that knowledge and inquiry can be derived from multiple sources, and it emphasises the practical application of research findings (Ryan, 2018; Tombs & Pugsley, 2020). Therefore, the pragmatist paradigm aligns with the research objectives, focusing on practical implications for educational leadership and providing a holistic view that acknowledges conflicts' diverse and dynamic nature within the school context. In addition, a cross-sectional descriptive design was employed, which involved collecting data from a diverse sample of individuals using both in-depth interviews and survey questionnaires at a specific point in time. This design was aligned with the research objective of gathering information about people's attitudes,

opinions, and various educational or social issues. According to Kombo and Orodho (2002), the descriptive design was particularly suitable for obtaining information about people's attitudes and opinions. This design allowed the researchers to investigate in detail and comprehensively describe the topic under study. By adopting a cross-sectional descriptive design, this study aimed to gain a deep understanding of the factors related to conflict resolution in primary schools. In line with this approach, the study employed a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. This study's primary data collection methods included a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews. The questionnaires were used to gather quantitative data, while the in-depth interviews used to gather qualitative data. The data collected through these methods were analyzed thematically. The study also conducted multiple regression analysis to examine the leadership skills employed by head teachers in resolving conflicts in primary schools in Kondoa District. The study participants were education stakeholders in Tanzania, specifically within the Kondoa District. The population of interest included district education officers, district academic officers, wards education officers, head teachers, teachers, pupils, and school committee members.

The study was limited to 144 respondents, who included 124 respondents for the questionnaires and 20 participants for interviews. Simple random sampling was used to select sub-samples from primary school teachers and committee members. The study employed purposive sampling, which refers to the selection of units based on personal judgment rather than randomization (Creswell, 2012). This study's purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of all head teachers from the 10 selected primary schools. A combination of purposive and stratified random sampling was used to select standard seven pupils based on their gender.

Four data collection techniques were used to gather information on head teachers' leadership skills in conflict resolution. The first one was the survey questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary reviews. The survey questionnaire was administered to teachers, school committee members, and head teachers, utilising a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions. This approach allowed for both quantitative and qualitative data collection, offering insights into the frequency and types of conflicts, satisfaction with current practices, and deeper contextual factors influencing conflict resolution. Secondly, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including education professionals such as district education officers and

head teachers. These interviews delved into personal opinions and provided nuanced insights into conflict resolution strategies, enriching the research with expert perspectives. Thirdly, focus group discussions (FGDs) were organised with teachers and school committee members, creating an interactive platform for participants to openly discuss their experiences and attitudes related to head teachers' effectiveness in conflict resolution. FGDs promoted rich, nuanced discussions and added depth to understanding leadership skills, common conflict sources, and resolution strategies. Creswell asserted that FGD allows for richness and flexibility in data collection and the extensive exploration of the research problem (Creswell, 2014). Lastly, documentary analysis was utilised to review official documents such as committee meeting minutes and attendance records from primary schools, offering objective, factual information that complemented the data obtained from interviews and FGDs. This method has equal significance as collecting first-hand data because it helps increase research effectiveness (Martins et al., 2018). These diverse data collection methods ensured a holistic and comprehensive evaluation of conflict resolution practices within the primary schools in Kondoa District in Tanzania.

Results and Discussion

Teachers' Leadership Skills Used to Resolve Conflicts in Primary Schools

The first objective of this study is to examine head teachers' leadership skills used to resolve conflicts in primary schools at Kondoa District. During the FGD, the researcher asked, "Can you share an example of a significant conflict situation you have encountered as a head teacher? How did you approach its resolution?" Participant H replied:

...certainly, we had a situation where two teachers disagreed with resource allocation. I initiated a mediation session, allowing both parties to express their concerns. We reached a solution that satisfied both teachers through open dialogue and compromise.

A participant, C, added:

... recently, in a conflict involving student discipline, I facilitated a restorative justice circle on May 12, 2023, where the student, teacher, and affected peers shared their feelings. This approach helped build empathy and led to a resolution that focused on learning and growth.

The researcher asked the participant, "What specific conflict resolution skills do you believe are effective in a primary school setting?" According to insights gathered during a FGD, Participant S mentioned:

...to my experience, fostering a culture of open communication is crucial. Additionally, I find that implementing peer mediation programmes among students helps them develop conflict resolution skills early on, reducing the need for teacher intervention.

Furthermore, Participant K shared that:

...we encourage teachers to use a 'win-win' approach, emphasising compromise and finding solutions that benefit everyone involved. This approach helps create a positive atmosphere and fosters a sense of community within the school.

The quotation above is consistent with the study by Ghaffar (2019), who suggests that general conflict management methods include a win-lose method, a lose-lose method, and a win-win method. In the win-lose method, one side wins and one side lose, and it includes using authority or power to suppress another party.

During an interview with head teacher M in school X, the researcher asked, "How do you communicate with teachers, staff, and parents about conflict resolution skills and efforts"? Headteacher M replied that:

...I ensure transparent communication by holding regular staff meetings where conflict resolution strategies are discussed. For parents, letters and parent-teacher meetings serve as platforms to share our approaches and seek their input.

Another perspective from Participant A, gathered during a focus group discussion, the participant had this to say:

...We utilise a digital platform for real-time communication with parents. This has proven effective in promptly addressing concerns and ensuring that everyone is informed about the conflict resolution processes in place.

Reflecting on an interview, the researcher asked the head teacher, G, "Can you provide an example of a time when effective communication played a crucial role in resolving a conflict within your school"? The Head teacher G, stated:

...we had a situation involving a miscommunication between a teacher and a parent regarding a student's performance. We resolved the conflict harmoniously by facilitating a meeting where both parties expressed their perspectives and clarifying the misunderstanding.

Also, the headteachers in schools A, G, H, and Y mentioned a similar approach, indicating that meetings are the main strategy they employ in resolving conflicts in their schools.

Moreover, during a focus group discussion, Participant F added:

...our school uses a 'feedback box' where teachers and parents can anonymously submit concerns. This tool promotes open communication,

and addressing these concerns collectively has prevented potential conflicts from escalating.

Exploring collaborative approaches during an interview, the researcher posed a question, “How do you involve other school stakeholders (teachers, parents, community members) in the conflict resolution process? Headteacher P replied:

...I believe in a team approach. When conflicts arise, I focus group discussions involving teachers, parents, and community members if necessary. This collaborative effort ensures diverse perspectives are considered in finding the best resolution.

The quotations above are consistent with the study by Gaol (2021), who asserted that the head of a school manages a school, which is an educational organisation including a collection of several individuals who play an important role in school management activities. Each individual has their own uniqueness and different motivations in the involvement of school management in accordance with their duties.

Another perspective gathered from a focus group discussion on November 18, 2023, came from Participant P, who added:

...our school has a conflict resolution committee consisting of representatives from various stakeholders. This committee meets regularly to discuss ongoing conflicts and propose solutions collaboratively.

Discussing collaborative leadership skills during an interview, the researcher asked the head teacher B, “In what ways do you encourage a collaborative approach to problem-solving among your staff? Head teacher B responded:

...team-building activities are essential for fostering a collaborative environment. By creating a culture where teachers feel comfortable sharing ideas and concerns, we empower them to address issues, enhancing our problem-solving capabilities collectively.

During a focus group discussion on November 19, 2023, Participant E added:

...we have monthly collaborative planning sessions where teachers can share successful strategies and discuss challenges they face. This not only fosters teamwork but also helps in proactively addressing potential conflicts before they escalate.

In line with the quotations above, a study by Olaleye and Arogundade (2017) supports the findings by asserting that the heads of schools use

stakeholder meetings and consultations at their schools on a regular basis to resolve issues and suggests that schools should provide training on conflict resolution tactics to aid in dispute resolution. The study implies that conflict management is mostly resolved by using staff meetings and consultation techniques, while training stands as the major principle of imparting knowledge to the heads of schools and teachers about the best method of resolving conflict.

Also, the study ran multiple regression analysis to examine the leadership skills employed by head teachers in resolving conflicts at primary schools in Kondoa District. Examining the regression coefficients further elucidates the specific contributions of each leadership skill to conflict resolution. While communication skills did not show a significant relationship with conflict resolution ($p = 0.366$), it is essential to note that communication skills still play a vital role in leadership effectiveness. The non-significant result suggests that other factors, such as collaborative and problem-solving skills, may have a more pronounced impact within the context of conflict resolution. Conversely, both collaborative and problem-solving skills demonstrated significant positive relationships with conflict resolution ($p = 0.009$ and $p < 0.001$, respectively). A higher coefficient for problem-solving skills (0.544) compared to collaborative skills (0.216) indicates that problem-solving skills have a relatively stronger association with conflict resolution. This suggests that head teachers who possess strong problem-solving abilities are better equipped to address conflicts effectively in primary schools.

Therefore, this regression analysis highlights the importance of collaborative and problem-solving skills in enhancing head teachers' effectiveness in resolving conflicts. While communication skills remain important in leadership, their direct impact on conflict resolution may be mediated by other factors. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of leadership in educational settings and emphasise the significance of targeted development programs to enhance leadership skills tailored to conflict resolution.

Sources of Conflicts Found Within Primary Schools in Kondoa District

Table 1: Presence of Conflicts at School

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Yes	112	90.3
No	12	9.7
Total	124	100.0

Source: Field data (2024)

Table 4.1 indicates the results from questionnaires; the researcher asked the respondents if there were any conflicts at school. Table 4.9 provides information on the presence of conflicts at school based on the responses received. The findings are as follows: Yes: 112 respondents, accounting for 90.3% of the total, reported the existence of conflicts at school. This indicates that a significant majority of the respondents acknowledge the occurrence of conflicts within the school environment. Only 12 respondents, comprising 9.7% of the total, stated that there were no conflicts at their school. This suggests that a small minority of the respondents perceive their school to be free from conflicts. These results are in line with the findings by Dingwe et al (2011), whose findings revealed that head teachers do not perceive conflict as an inevitable phenomenon that is real in any organisation. Furthermore, Onyango (2020) concluded that conflicts are inevitable in schools, and it is therefore important that they are managed well.

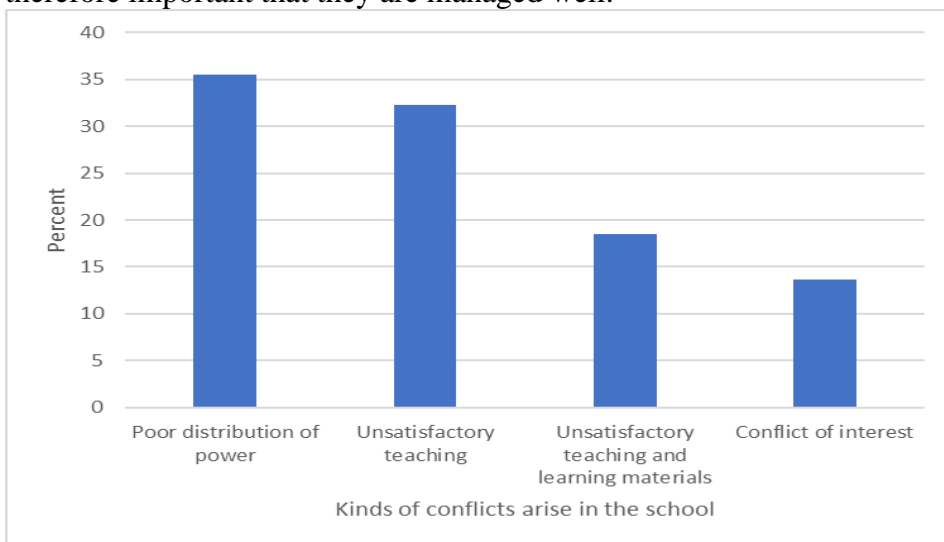


Figure 2: The Sources of Conflict in a School

Source: Field data (2024)

Figure 4.1 provides insights into the factors contributing to conflicts in school, as reported by the respondents. The findings show that about 35.5% of the respondents identified poor distribution of power as a significant factor leading to conflicts in the school. This suggests that issues related to authority, decision-making, and power dynamics within the school environment can contribute to tensions and conflicts. Unsatisfactory teaching about 32.3% of the respondents mentioned unsatisfactory teaching as a cause of conflicts. This implies that disagreements and conflicts may arise when teachers' performance or

instructional methods are perceived as inadequate or unsatisfactory by other stakeholders within the school community. About 18.5% of the respondents pointed out unsatisfactory teaching and learning materials as a factor contributing to conflicts. This suggests that deficiencies or inadequacies of educational resources and materials can lead to dissatisfaction and disagreements among teachers, students, and other school community members. About 13.7% of the respondents highlighted conflict of interest as a factor leading to conflicts in the school. This implies that competing interests, personal agendas, or conflicting priorities among different individuals or groups within the school can create tensions and disagreements. Therefore, these findings highlight the key sources of conflict as perceived by the respondents. Conflict of interest, lack of teaching resources and unequal distributions of power are all factors that can contribute to disagreements, tensions, and disputes within the school environment. Understanding these sources of conflict is worth implementing targeted strategies to mitigate and resolve conflicts effectively. Schools can work towards promoting transparency, fair resource allocation, and open communication channels to address these sources of conflict and foster a more harmonious and collaborative school atmosphere. These findings concur with the view by Asikhia (2010), who asserts that the reasons for conflict persistence include food problems, lack of enough teachers, poor learning environment, students' bad behaviour and lack of enough funds. Also, the findings concur with the study by Fakhri et al., (2021), who suggest that constraints to leadership in managing conflicts were in four categories, namely: lack of effective communication, ineffective leadership and management practices, and inequitable distribution of resources.

Correspondingly, during a focus group discussion, one ward education officer said:

... when the school internal quality assurance officer does the monitoring and evaluation of teaching, they find it very difficult to be blamed by the teachers, and some of the teachers see that the evaluation report is like it suggests them to be negligent to the head teacher. ...

Additionally, another educational officer G said:

...another source of conflict is from the head teachers themselves because they are not transparent about the school's income and use of the capitation grant. Others do not even call meetings to discuss the income. also, the teachers of the projects have not been transparent to students, and their fellow teachers are not cooperating; how many sacks have they harvested at the end of the day. The crops end without notice, a situation that creates conflicts for teachers and students. I think this is because for a while now, the head teachers have not had leadership training, so I

suggest that they be given leadership training seminars so that they can gain knowledge and skills for leading the school.

Similarly, during the interview session, the informant X claimed:

...as far as I can see, in every school, you cannot miss conflicts as many head teachers are appointed with low understanding and poor knowledge about management issues, so they do not know appropriate ways to resolve conflicts. You find some principals have bad relationships with their teachers, they don't know how to use good language for teachers, and they don't care about anything...

The quotation above concurs with the findings by Ignace (2014), who stated that school administrators lacked the knowledge and abilities necessary to resolve disagreements. It was also the case that school administrators used varied conflict resolution techniques. Mostly, the heads of schools reported that they had tried to manage disputes by utilising various techniques when it came to how effective the tactics were at resolving conflicts in the public secondary school.

Conclusion

The regression analysis conducted in this research intended to evaluate the relationship between leadership skills and conflict resolution in primary schools. The model demonstrated moderate predictive power, explaining 51.6% of the variability in conflict resolution scores and was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that at least one leadership skill significantly influenced conflict resolution. While communication skills did not show a significant relationship, collaborative and problem-solving skills exhibited significant positive associations, with problem-solving skills showing a stronger impact ($\beta = 0.544$) than collaborative skills ($\beta = 0.216$).

Furthermore, the study revealed the efficacy of mediation and restorative justice circles in fostering open dialogue, compromise, and personal growth, as exemplified by participants like H and C. Additionally, strategies such as promoting open communication and adopting a 'win-win' approach contribute significantly to creating positive school atmospheres, as highlighted by Participant S and K. Communication skills, whether transparent or technologically facilitated, have proven pivotal in conflict resolution, emphasising the crucial role of effective communication in preventing and resolving conflicts. Instances of clear communication shared by Headteacher G and Participant F underscore the importance of fostering an environment where concerns can be addressed promptly and transparently. Furthermore, collaborative leadership skills,

including stakeholder involvement through focus group discussions and committees, as well as team-building activities and collaborative planning sessions, reflect a proactive approach to cultivating a culture of collaborative problem-solving among staff.

Furthermore, the findings revealed the pervasive nature of conflicts, with a significant number of majorities acknowledging that conflict existence was common due to conflict of interest, lack of teaching resources, unequal distribution of power, communication challenges, and issues related to administrative transparency and leadership skills. Likewise, this study precisely examined the leadership strategies implemented by head teachers to discourse conflicts in primary schools located within the Kondo district. The research illuminated a spectrum of effective methodologies, encompassing negotiation, transparency, collaborative problem-solving, equitable power distribution, formal meetings, and the engagement of experienced staff members. These strategies play a pivotal role in fostering conflict resolution within the intricate dynamics of school settings.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed for administrative action to enhance conflict resolution skills in primary schools. These recommendations include the government of Tanzania enhancing head teachers' leadership skills through training, encouraging collaboration in conflict resolution, prioritizing financial transparency, and establishing clear communication channels to enhance conflict management and educational quality. Policy recommendations for conflict resolution in Primary Schools: Implement ongoing leadership development programs, establish formal mechanisms for collaborative problem-solving, ensure transparent resource allocation and foster open dialogue.

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