Exploration of the Strategies for Managing Teachers-school Heads' Conflicts in Public Secondary Schools in Nyamagana District, Mwanza Region

Misambo Mageni
St Augustine University of Tanzania
magenimisambo@gmail.com

and

Sr Felista Tangi
St Augustine University of Tanzania

Abstract

This study examined the strategies used to manage conflicts between teachers and school heads in public secondary schools in Nyamagana District, Mwanza Region. The study used a qualitative research approach, which was supported by a case study design. Interview method and documentary analysis were used to gather and generate the data in this study. The collected data were analysed by using thematic analysis to get verbatim from the study respondents. The study noted that heads of public secondary schools use a variety of strategies such as collaboration, avoiding, compromising, accommodating and reporting to manage conflicts between them and teachers in their respective schools in Nyamagana District. Finally, the study recommended that the government should provide seminars and workshops to heads of schools on improving conflict management strategies.

Keywords: Conflict, Public Secondary School, Strategies

1.0 Introduction

Any organization is made up of several individuals, let alone other organizational resources. Personality psychologists believe that each individual is unique. Similarly, Valente, Lourenco and Nemeth (2020)

are of the view that in the organization, every employee has a unique set of attitudes, needs, and perceptions (Valente, Lourenco & Nemeth, 2020). People's differences demonstrate that conflict cannot be eliminated because human beings have different preferences (Valente et al., 2020). Due to individual variations and interests, it is impossible to have a conflict-free environment. Nonetheless, if conflict is not resolved, it can result in disorder and organizational anarchy (Isabu, 2017).

Researchers contend that to bring about positive changes and limit any negative impact, teachers and school heads should have sufficient knowledge of how conflict happens and how they can manage it (Olubunmi, 2014; Uchendu, Anijaobi-Idem & Odigwe, 2013). That means if conflict management skills are missing, it is impossible to solve disputes that arise among school officials. A very important question one would raise is: what is a conflict? According to Aja (2013), conflict is a rivalry between two or more forces emerging either from the pursuit of incompatible aims or a class of competing beliefs. Considerable research has focused on conflict in organizations and its effects.

For instance, Oboegbulem and Alfa (2013) pointed out that conflicts are bound to arise in all human relationships, particularly those that take place in organizations due to the mix of personalities present. Struggle needs to be properly managed by instruction supervisors for it to become a force for good in the school administration. The top officials must have a broad understanding of conflict and be skilled at using conflict management skills to manage conflicts that arise in the school (Dewi et al., 2019). For instance, in the United States, principals and teachers are more likely to get involved in workplace disputes in the educational system because of their shared values (Wilson, 2011). Wilson (2011) noted that American managers are most likely to resort to the dominating style and integrating style in managing conflicts. On the

other hand, China and Australia adopt severe measures to end disputes as soon as they become aware of them, and they do it in a non-confrontational manner (Ma, 2007). Because Tanzania is never isolated from the rest of the world, this paper is interested in exploring the conflict management strategies adopted when conflicts arise between teachers and school heads in their respective areas of Nyamagana District.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

At the moment, disagreements between teachers and school heads receive greater attention from educational stakeholders. According to Msila's (2012) study on management and leadership, the majority of school heads are unaware of their roles as leaders, which could lead to countless confrontations. Conflict in educational institutions has been the subject of numerous studies, particularly in Tanzania, where the Nyamagana District cannot be isolated. It is from that said background that this paper focused on exploring the strategies used by the heads of public secondary schools to manage the conflicts between them and teachers in Nyamagana District, Mwanza Region, Tanzania.

2.0 Theory of Conflict by Karl Marx

For this study to underscore the school heads' strategies for managing conflicts in public secondary schools, the Conflict Theory, as proposed by Karl Marx, was applied. The theory states that, for conflicts to occur, there must be competition for limited resources and structural inequalities (Ndeche & Iroye, 2022). Competition exists as a result of scarcity of resources including material resources like money, property, commodities, leisure time, dominance, and social status, etc. On the other hand, structural inequalities indicate that the other class is left without being recognized and dominated, whereas the other class is

dominant. In so doing, the available resources are taken over by the dominant class. As a result, the dominated class starts initiating a struggle that may end up in a conflict.

Similarly, in secondary schools where resources for teachers are limited, differences in status prevail, competition for power overlaps the struggle for teaching and learning materials, and conflicts occur. The theory is relevant to this study as it plays a vital role in reminding teachers and school heads to make use of effective conflict management strategies such as accommodation, reporting and collaboration, etc. that can manage teachers-school heads' conflicts.

2.1 Strategies Used by School Heads to Manage Conflicts in Public Secondary Schools

A study carried out by Kalagbor and Nnokam (2015) in Harbour Harcourt Waterway State in Nigeria recognized the principal's and teachers' level of utilization of struggle administration procedures, collaboration, competing, compromising and maintaining a strategic distance from procedures on auxiliary students' clashes determination and their related results within the organization of schools. Furthermore, the researchers noted that principals' and teachers' level of utilization of coordination methodology, overwhelming technique, compromising strategy and dodging technique contributed to the students' strife. Principals utilized more collaboration and compromising methodologies than the instructors. Their dialogue uncovered that the principals preferred the joining methodologies since it may be a strategy that spurs understudies, and make them feel as portion of the school conjointly gives them a reasonable hearing. Besides, principals favoured integration procedure since it empowered them to play down.

Yegoh et al. (2017) conducted an inquiry about on collaboration struggle administration procedure in Kenya. The study surveyed the techniques for viable administration of strife in open auxiliary schools to 26 school principals, 104 board of administration individuals, 183 instructors and 370 understudies who were included within the ponder. Arbitrary and purposive inspecting methods were utilized to get the test. The information collection was done utilizing a self-made survey. Too clear measurements were utilised to dissect the information. The Framework Hypothesis by Ludwig Bertallanffy of the year 1968 was employed. The hypothesis states that a framework is made of routine connections and forbids the gathering of exercises or parts that shape an entirety. The discoveries uncovered that the collaboration strife management strategy was appraised as the finest methodology of tackling clashes in open auxiliary schools in Kenya as the methodology energized group work soul at work.

Dadi (2015) conducted a study on struggle administration techniques utilised. The study focused on the management strategies concerning Temeke Municipality. The study involved 11 head teachers, and 11 teachers from 11 purposively sampled primary schools in Temeke. The results unveiled those conflicts that exist in most of the selected primary schools with both constructive and destructive results. The study concludes that, in managing existing conflicts in primary schools, most head teachers tend to employ an integrating strategy, while teachers employ avoiding it.

Kaluma (2017) conducted a study on conflict management in secondary schools in Tanzania, particularly in Shinyanga Municipal Council. The study used a survey design where questionnaires, interviews and documents were used. The findings indicated that forcing strategy

(22.5%) was highly rated, followed by problem-solving (19.5%), withdrawal (11.7%), smoothing and compromising (9.2%), open discussion (8.3%) and accommodating (6.7%). Lastly, the results showed that the rest strategies to manage conflict are promoting negotiation among powerful groups (24.2%) and mediation with emerging party in involved in conflict resolving (18.3%). A study suggests that the school administration should establish a good communication network among groups to reduce tension.

3.0   Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach, which allowed collection and analysing the qualitative data. A qualitative research approach entails a means of exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribed to a social human problem (Creswell, 2014). The approach selected was deemed appropriate to describe conducting interviews and reviewing the documents that enabled the researcher to gather detailed information on strategies used by school heads to manage conflicts between them and teachers in their respective areas in the Nyamagana district. The study employed a case study design as the researcher focused on teachers and their bosses. The selected design was suitable since it allowed the researcher to collect in-depth information regarding conflicts that arise between school heads and teachers in the studied area.

Public secondary school teachers, District Teachers' Service Commission (TSC) Officers, District Secondary Education Officers (DSEOs) and heads of secondary schools were involved in this study. Out of thousand, two hundred seventy-nine (1279) respondents who were the target population of the study, only 38 respondents were considered in this qualitative study because it was never geared towards

generalizing the results. Therefore, 4 school heads, 32 public secondary school teachers, one TSC District Officer and a District Secondary Education Officer (DSEO) were deemed key informants in the study.

Data were analysed qualitatively by using thematic analysis. It was important to use such analysis because the interview conducted by the researcher brought about themes, which were generated by the respondents during data gathering. In general, the researcher employed the mentioned qualitative data analysis to ensure that the collected information was put in themes.

4.0   Findings
4.1   Prevalence of Conflicts between School Heads and Teachers in Nyamagana District

The researcher reviewed the disciplinary register in the TSC Office to determine the prevalent situation of conflicts in Nyamagana District by noting 32 cases, which were reported by the school heads and registered by TSC Officers as indicated in the table below.

Table 1: Numerous Cases Reported by School Heads to the TSC Office in Nyamagana District (N=37)

S/No	Year	Number of cases reported
1.	2019	05
2.	2020	18
3.	2021	09

 Source: Field Data, 2022.

The finding presented in the table above based on reported cases implies that in Nyamagana District, conflicts exist in secondary schools. This finding is in line with what Valente, Lourenco and Nemeth (2020) opine that conflicts cannot cease to exist because of the indifferences that

people have due to different opinions, interests, perceptions, values, education levels, and economic status of people.

In addition, Goksoy and Argon (2016) asserted that conflicts in schools affect the quality of the learning environment as well as the teachers' performance and indirectly the students' performance. This is a call for school heads and teachers to be knowledgeable to manage conflicts in their respective organizations. Similarly, through interviews conducted with school heads, it was avowed that in secondary schools' conflicts exist. The school heads indicated that some sources that flared up the conflicts include the indifferences they get when providing instructions to their subordinates. One school head said that:

> *Sometimes it may happen that as an in-charge of the school, I direct my subordinates to do certain tasks. When in a situation where I need to get the details, it may happen a subordinate resents cooperating. As a result, I may write a reprimand note to that teacher informing him or her to explain in written form the reasons why I should not take further action. When is reached this situation, the teacher becomes more furious as he or she knows that the matter is complicated and it might affect his or her teaching career. In my records, this situation has occurred twice in 2021* (Interview with School Head, School D, 30th May, 2022).

Another school head added that the prevalence of conflicts in school organizations is obvious due to the indifferences people have. During the interview, he said that:

> *It is difficult to avoid misunderstandings in the school organization. Even people from the same family get into misunderstandings due to indifferences they have such as interest, and needs, so to speak. I have many teachers from*

> *different backgrounds with different behaviours. Despite the present rules governing them on what to do, they are likely to stick to their beliefs, which increases the pressure of conflict in school* (Interview with School Head, School A, 30th May, 2022).

The foregoing quotation indicates that conflicts in secondary schools in Nyamagana District are prevalent. It also means that the indifferences people have to create conflicts or disagreements among themselves, especially when the common expectation is not met. This suggests that stringent measures should be taken to solve the conflicts. A total number of 32 teachers were also asked to state whether they were involved or just witnessed the occurrence of conflicts in their respective workplaces, and they responded as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Teachers who Were either Involved or Witnessed Conflicts in Public Secondary Schools in Nyamagana District (N=32)

S/N	Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Involved	08	25%
2.	Witnessed	24	75%

Source: Field Data, 2022

Furthermore, the researcher interviewed teachers to know their viewpoints towards conflicts that arise between them and school heads in their respective schools in Nyamagana District. In an interview, one teacher said: Madam [referring to the researcher], the situation might be very calm, but it happens that a school head distorts that calmness; that is where a conflict emerges. As human beings, we also need peace and don't want to be intervened in all matters (Interview with Teacher, School A, 1st June 2022). Similarly, another teacher added that:

> *What I see is that because of the indifferences, conflicts in schools may not end. Unless otherwise, the school changes either teachers or a head gets teachers. In the past few years, this school had a head that became furious even in small matters. For instance, he provided teachers with reprimands even when he differed with them on opinions. This brought about many conflicts, and teachers were not settled. Others preferred to be transferred to the interior schools to avoid him. Later on, that school head was transferred to the other school, which brought about the calmness in the school* (Interview with Teacher, School B, 1st June, 2022).

The foregoing excerpts indicate that sometimes school heads initiate conflicts in schools without understanding the effects of the conflicts. From the same excerpts, it might also indicate that the misuse of power among school heads creates conflicts between them and teachers because teachers feel mistreated and humiliated. As a result, they may resent to adhere to orders given; in so doing, the tension of conflict may affect even in academic performance of the learners in particular and school in general.

4.2   Strategies Used by the Heads of Public Secondary Schools to Manage Conflicts between them and Teachers

Under this section, the researcher intended to know the strategies heads of public secondary schools use in managing the conflicts between them and teachers. In interview with the District Secondary Education Officer (DSEO) concerning school headteachers conflicts and the strategies used to curb the conflicts, he commented:

> *Heads of public secondary schools are responsible for managing simple conflicts that do not abuse teachers' code of conduct. However, serious conflicts are supposed to be reported to the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) for*

further action. The TSC is mandated to judge teachers'
conflicts. However, the other officials may advise teachers
and heads of public secondary schools to perform their
duties and responsibilities by the public servants' code of
conduct (Interview with DSEO, 1ˢᵗ June, 2022).

The excerpt indicates that teachers are involved in conflict management at the initial stage at the school level. This also means that whenever conflicts happen in schools, teachers are required to take action, especially on simple conflicts that do not necessarily the TSC Officials to intervene. The researcher was eager to understand which strategies teachers know exactly that they are used by their heads of schools to mitigate conflicts whenever they happen in schools. Teachers explained a variety of strategies including avoiding, compromising, and accommodation and reporting.

In the interview conducted with teachers, one teacher thought that reporting was mostly used by teachers whenever the conflict arose. During the interview, the same teacher said that:

> *For me, the most common strategy used by my school head*
> *is reporting. This is because there are conflicts that involve*
> *the school head and teachers. When they happen to occur,*
> *we usually witness the Ward Education Officer [WEO]*
> *coming to school and discussing with u [teachers]. At some*
> *point, even the DSEO comes for intervention in case the*
> *WEO fails to solve the merged conflict* (Interview with
> Teacher, School C, 1ˢᵗ June, 2022).

In addition to that, another teacher who was interviewed said that:

> *I have seen avoidance kind of strategy being opted by our*
> *school head. When she quarrels with us [teachers], she can*
> *take some hours out of the office to avoid the conflicting*
> *persons. This helps at some point because those whose*

*views were in contrast to the head seem to be relaxed when
she is absent* (Interview with Teacher, School B, 1st June,
2022).

The study findings are in line with Ignace (2014) who noted that heads of schools employed different conflict management strategies in managing conflicts including avoidance style, collaborative style and compromising style of conflict management.

Nevertheless, Kalagbor and Nnokam (2015) distinguished strife administration techniques to be specific: collaboration, competing, compromising and maintaining a strategic distance from methodologies on auxiliary students' clash determination and their related results within the organization of schools. Principals favoured the integration technique since it empowered them to play down students' negative conduct and upgrade regulatory adequacy and students' scholarly performance. Moreover, the analysts included that, struggle evasion happens when one party in a potential struggle overlooks the clashing issues or denies the importance of the strife to his life. It may be a way.

Similarly , the study conducted by Yegoh et al. (2017) on collaboration conflict management strategy revealed that collaboration conflict management strategy was rated the best strategy for solving conflicts in public secondary schools in Kenya and thus the strategy encouraged team work spirit at work. Schools which employed this strategy had not experienced any unrest for the last 10 years.

However, the flexibility of the school heads in Nyamagana District when managing conflicts is needed. It is, therefore, better to apply various strategies in managing conflicts as each conflict management strategy may be useful in a particular area but not applicable in another situation.

One can succeed in handling a conflict in school X using compromise while the same strategy cannot be successful in school Y.

The study findings indicate that heads of public secondary schools in Nyamagana District use various strategies to manage conflicts, such as avoiding, reporting, accommodating, compromising and collaborating. These are the key strategies that can simply manage conflicts and bring positive effects to the organization. Furthermore, the researcher noted that most of the heads of public secondary schools use accommodating, compromising and collaboration as strategies for managing conflicts. During the interview with school heads, one of them explained that:

> *We, I and other school managers, want to clear all organizational conflicts within the organization. Involving both sides in conflict management is the best way of handling conflicts. It is rarely we report teachers' conflicts. However, we are required to solve them rather than reporting to others to avoid unfair decisions. Most teachers blame TSC as an organization that always does not solve teachers' conflicts, but it judges teachers. Under that circumstance, school heads try to solve teachers' conflicts within the organization through collaboration, compromising and accommodating* (Interview with School Head, School B, 1st June, 2022).

The findings collected through interviews reveal that various strategies are used by heads of schools in managing conflicts. And at some point, if the issue is very complicated, it is reported to the higher authority.

The study findings are related to what was discovered in the study by Isabu (2017) in Nigeria that accommodation, avoiding, collaborating and compromising among the strategies used in conflict management. To

him, accommodation occurs when the goals are compatible, but the interactions are not considered important to overall goal attainment. Also, avoidance is applied when the two parties to a conflict try to ignore the problem and do nothing to resolve the disagreement; it is often ineffective since the real source of the disagreement has not been addressed. The study findings noted that collaboration, as another strategy of conflict management, tends to come up with a way to resolve differences that leave them both better off while the case compromise strategy tends to take place when each party is concerned about not only its goal accomplishment but also the goal accomplishment of the other party and is willing to engage in a give and take exchange and make concessions until a reasonable resolution of the conflict is reached.

Also, in the Education Act No. 2 of 2012, on the importance of teachers attending and teaching their subjects, reminds the head teachers, head of schools or college principals to act on misconduct of teachers who escape their duties. Through the documentary review, the act states:

> *Few teachers used to leave students at school without any learning assistance or not teach the students even if these teachers are at school. Such behaviour is unethical as per teaching professional conduct as they break employment rules and regulations. This situation used to be entertained by some of the head teachers, heads of schools and teachers' college principals, who observe such teachers' misconduct and indiscipline behaviour without any reaction to ensure that, no more occurrence of such indiscipline behaviours.*

The quotation indicates that, the head of an institution used to ignore the immoral behaviours of some of the teachers and apply avoiding as a means of conflict management. Through this Act, the head of the

institution is required to take action immediately once the teacher breaks rules and regulations. In line with the above quotation, under documentary review of the standing orders, in section F of this document, rules of conduct and discipline of public servants, where teachers are included, are stipulated. In the same section, starting with rules of conduct on F.1 – office hours, it is noted that government offices throughout the country shall be open for public business during the following hours: All week days except Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays, from 7.30 am to 3.30 pm.

F.2 attendance register part (1) states that supervising officers should ensure that, public servants should report for duty on time and do not leave their offices before the official closing time. Also, prompt disciplinary action shall be taken against a public servant who reports late for duty and those who fail to observe the provision of this standing order. Also, the document proceeded: F.16 Absence from duty without permission: Under this part, it is stated that (1) where a public servant is absent from duty without leave or reasonable cause for a period exceeding five days, that public servant may be charged with a disciplinary offence of being absent without leave and punished by dismissal.

All the stated contraventions of the code of ethics and conduct for the public service, professional code of conduct, the public leadership code of ethics and therefore considered offences warranting summary proceedings. Through documentary review, it is therefore noted that decisions to be made by heads of schools or any other stakeholders in an education institution are indicated. Rules and regulations as stipulated in different official documents, including the standing orders, have to be

observed. This will help to minimize unnecessary conflicts among workers in an organization like schools.

5.0   Conclusion and Recommendations

Therefore, conflict existence is unavoidable, but we normally look at the results of the strategies applied to solve it. Conflicts can lead to positive impacts and sometimes can lead to negative impacts. Solving conflict is the best way of helping the organization to meet its goals of improving organization performance but not all conflicts are supposed to be solved by heads of schools. Normally, heads of schools need to solve only problems that affect the organizations and avoid conflicts that do not affect the organization.

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