



CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY ESWATINI SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN THE MANZINI REGION

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the conflict resolution strategies employed by Eswatini secondary school principals in the Manzini region. Seven (7) secondary school principals were sampled purposively, seventy (70) teachers were randomly selected, and fourteen (14) heads of departments were selected using convenience sampling. Data were collected using a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis. The findings revealed that secondary school principals did not allow teachers to handle school conflicts. Additionally, the findings showed that school principals were not using the open-door approach as a conflict resolution strategy. It was concluded that secondary school principals in Eswatini lacked knowledge in employing the effective conflict resolution strategies in their respective schools. A majority of them used the avoidance strategy thus worsening school conflicts. Therefore, the study suggested a need to sensitize school principals in conflict resolution strategies in their respective schools and organize regional workshops to help empower them to deal with conflicts in schools.

Keywords: Conflict, Resolution, Conflict Resolution Strategies, Principals.

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict is inevitable in organizations, Fabian and Terfa (2018), therefore claims that knowledge in effective conflict resolution is vital when it comes to school leadership. In a school setting, the school principal, teachers and students all come into the organization with different background, ideas and experiences (Akinnubi et al., 2012). Accordingly, the interaction of these people with different beliefs may lead to conflicts. This implies that no matter how peaceful a school can be, conflict is bound to happen. This was corroborated by Boucher (2013) who stated that the absent of conflicts in any organization would be unbelievable and impossible; it would be actually a clear indication that conflicts are suppressed. According to Evans (2016) conflicts in organizations are clearly not a problem; however, they may become problematic if they are poorly resolved. Therefore, there are different strategies that can be employed to resolve conflicts. These strategies include: compromising, avoidance, competing, collaborating, and accommodating (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Thus, considering the school principals' responsibilities of leading and managing schools, resolution of conflicts in schools can be challenging. Therefore, there is a need for school principals to be knowledgeable and skillful in handling conflicts.

Secondary school principal in Eswatini are faced with lack of knowledge in conflict resolution strategies (Hamid et al, 2015). This is a challenge because according to the Eswatini Teaching Service Commission Act of 1982, school principals are expected to manage conflicts at school level. Therefore, when conflict occurs in the schools, they are compelled to use their common sense or trial and error when dealing with school conflicts (Dlamini, 2011). This has led to a majority of secondary schools in the Manzini region to be on numerous school strikes. These school strikes in the region have resulted into poor academic performance as high as 73% in some secondary schools, (EMIS, 2018). Moreover, the Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini does not empower school principals in conflict resolution strategies. Maybe, if secondary school principals in Eswatini were given knowledge in conflict resolution strategies, school strikes and failure rate can be at minimum rate. Therefore, the study aimed at establishing the conflict resolution strategies employed by Eswatini secondary school principals in the Manzini region.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITURATURE

Conflict resolution strategies are obligatory elements that school principals can employ as a creative force for positive change in schools (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Therefore, it is crucial for school principals to be cognizant of conflict resolution strategies because conflicts are inevitable (Fabian & Terfa, 2018). School principals' knowledge in conflict resolution strategies may bring a harmonious academic environment in the school (Oboegbulem & Alpha, 2013). However, resolution of conflicts in school management and leadership is not given much attention as school principals in the sub Saharan region are not provided with pre-service training in conflict resolution, thus a majority of them lack knowledge in this field (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Evans, 2016). This was also attested by Dlamini (2011), who stated that school principals in Eswatini use their common sense or trial and error to deal with conflicts because they are not trained. This is a challenge school principals face because they have to deal with teachers who are professionals by virtue of their job, so one



cannot rely on past experience to resolve conflicts; hence the need to apply scientific methods on how to resolve conflicts in an effective way.

According to Morake et al., (2011), personal characteristics like age of the principal, qualifications and marital status can be vital elements in effective conflict resolutions. This is in corroboration with Akinnubi et al., (2012), who attested that knowledge in conflict resolution strategies alone is not enough, but personal characteristics like age, qualification, duration in service and marital status also play a vital role in the way a school principal will handle conflicts in a school. According to Morake et al., (2011) and Akinnubi et al., (2012), school conflicts cannot only be resolved by knowledge of conflict resolution strategies but also the personal characteristics of the school principal play a significant role in conflict resolution.

A host of authors identified effective conflict resolution strategies, these strategies include: compromising, avoidance, competing, collaborating and accommodating (Hoy & Miskel 2008; Jeremiah, 2013; Kipyego, 2013; Fabian & Terfa, 2018). However, solving conflicts using these stated strategies requires the identification of the cause of conflict (Mamoria & Gankar, 2008). This was also corroborated by Edert, Benson and William (2017), who also stated that cause-identification is an essential and proactive strategy in handling conflicts effectively. Edert et al., (2017) stated that cause-identification strategy is important when handling conflicts because it helps one to identify the source of the conflict first which then paves way of finding a solution acceptable to the conflicting parties. Nigerian secondary schools adopted this strategy when handling school conflicts and it brought about increase in students' academic activities and discipline (Edert et al., 2017). Therefore, not only knowledge of conflict resolution strategies can be effective in dealing with conflicts but cause-identification can be an added aspect for school principals to handle school conflicts in a more successful manner.

Furthermore, guidance and counseling was identified as one of the most important strategies in resolving conflicts in a school. Mudis and Yambo (2015) strongly believed that school principals need to pay much attention to guidance and counseling as these would be used as helping measures in successful conflict resolution. Therefore, it might be a responsibility of education and training ministries to make guidance and counseling compulsory in secondary schools. This can be effective because people who feel ill-treated would simply consult with their guidance and counseling personnel where they can voice their concern and in a way become calm instead of being aggressive which may lead to unnecessary conflicts. Therefore, if secondary schools in Eswatini can employ guidance and counseling more effectively when resolving conflicts, they can be in a better position to deal with conflicts in their schools. There is an urgent call for sub-Saharan school principals to handle school conflicts effectively as they tend to affect students' outcomes (Kipyego, 2013). However, this may seem far-fetched as school principals in this region assume headship position without a pre-service training. According to Bush and Oduro (2006), school principals in the sub-Saharan region do not receive any training for headship but they are selected and assumed to be capable based on their long service or their academic excellence. Therefore, when conflicts take place in the school, they fall short because they lack the necessary mechanisms due to lack of training.

Dlamini (2011) stated that most school principals especially in Eswatini resort to past experience or trial and error during school conflicts because policies and Acts are silent on conflict resolution in schools. Yet Bush and Oduro (2006) argued that the nature of leading and managing a school cannot be left to common sense nowadays. Lack of knowledge in conflict resolution strategies by sub Saharan school principals is worrying, yet the numbers of secondary schools in conflicts are escalating in this region (Wagude, 2015). Therefore, it is the responsibility of every government to reconsider empowerment of school principals in conflict resolution strategies. Hoy and Miskel (2008) recommended Thomas and Kilmann's theory of conflict resolution strategies as discussed below.

a) *Compromising*: this is a negotiating strategy that looks for a middle ground during conflict in order to search for solutions acceptable to both parties, (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Congruently, Jeremiah (2013) stated that leaders who choose to compromise, must ensure that both conflicting parties are at better or at least no worse position after the conflict has been resolved. However, Tshuma et al., (2016) observed that school principals do not compromise (negotiate) with teachers in settling conflicts but they use their administrative position. This practice worsens conflict occurrences in schools because teachers are not given opportunities to share their ideas on how a certain conflict issue could be handled.

b) *Avoidance*: this is a strategy of resolving conflict where mostly a leader turns into bureaucratic rule whenever conflicts surface (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). The purpose of this strategy is to ignore conflict and use secrecy as a tool to avoid confrontation. This strategy can also be used when the issue of conflict is minor or there are experts in the organization (school) who can solve it more effectively (Jeremiah, 2013). Fabian and Terfa (2018) argued that most managers in organizations use the avoidance strategy because they are not willing to be confronted. However, this strategy is best employed when a manager wants to cool-off conflicts temporarily while brainstorming on more effective strategies of handling that particular issue at hand (Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

c) *Competing*: in this strategy one party has to win while the other loses (Jeremiah, 2013). According to Hoy and Miskel (2008), this strategy is better employed when there is a need for quick and decisive action (emergency). However, Crossfield and Bourne (2018) noted that this strategy promotes humiliation as one has to lose and his/her adversary wins.

d) *Collaborating*: this is a strategy of conflict resolution where leaders try to work together with their staff members and maximize efficiency through cooperation (Atieno, Kiplagant & Yego, 2016). Hoy and Miskel (2008) refer to collaborating as a problem-solving approach. This strategy is more effective and can be relevant in a school setting because it encourages teamwork, sharing of ideas and confrontation of differences.

e) *Accommodating*: this is another strategy used to resolve conflicts. In this strategy; a leader who accommodates always puts people's needs first (Jeremiah, 2013). A leader also admits mistakes and takes responsibility towards them (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Accommodating is used by leaders who take their

relationship with staff members more important. Therefore, principals in schools must be people who enjoy learning from others, in that way they would be able to handle school conflicts in a more effective manner.

Few studies have however been conducted in Eswatini regarding conflict resolution strategies that schools principals employ to resolve conflicts in their schools. Additionally, there is very scanty information provided by the Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini on how school principals are empowered to deal with school conflicts. Therefore, the study aimed at investigating the conflict resolution strategies employed by Eswatini secondary school principals in the Manzini region. The specific research question was: What are the conflict resolution strategies employed by secondary school principals in the Manzini region?

Theoretical framework

The study was informed by the conflict resolution strategies' theory. This theory was developed by Thomas and Kilmann in 1976 (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). The theory states that during conflict, a leader has to choose an appropriate strategy to solve a particular conflict situation. This theory suggests five key strategies to deal with conflicts in organizations. These strategies include: *compromising, avoidance, competing, collaborating and accommodating*. This theory was deemed relevant to the study because it provides school principals with conflict resolution strategies to be employed during school conflicts. This theory tests how well school principals can resolve conflicts in schools and how knowledgeable they are when it comes to conflict resolution strategies. School principals' knowledge in conflict resolution strategies is crucial because it matches the conflict and the strategy that would be appropriate to the problem. This implies that when solving conflicts you selectively match the relevant strategy to the problem.

The theory also emphasizes the importance of studying the source of conflict first, this is because some conflicts can be dealt with before they can even surface as a conflict. Akinubi et al (2012) stated that it was important to know the source of the conflict first before resolving it. Therefore, in that way it becomes easy to match the situation with the most relevant conflict strategy. This implies that if school principals can identify the source of conflicts first, they would be in a better position to effectively apply these strategies to conflict resolution in their respective schools, thereby minimizing conflict explosion rate.

Conceptual framework

According to Orodho (2010) a conceptual framework is a model of presentation where a researcher represents the relationship between variables in the study and shows the relationship diagrammatically. The variables involved in the study were conceptualized using the conceptual model derived from Figure 1.

Figure 1: The model of conceptual framework for the study on the conflict resolution strategies employed by Eswatini secondary schools in the Manzini region.

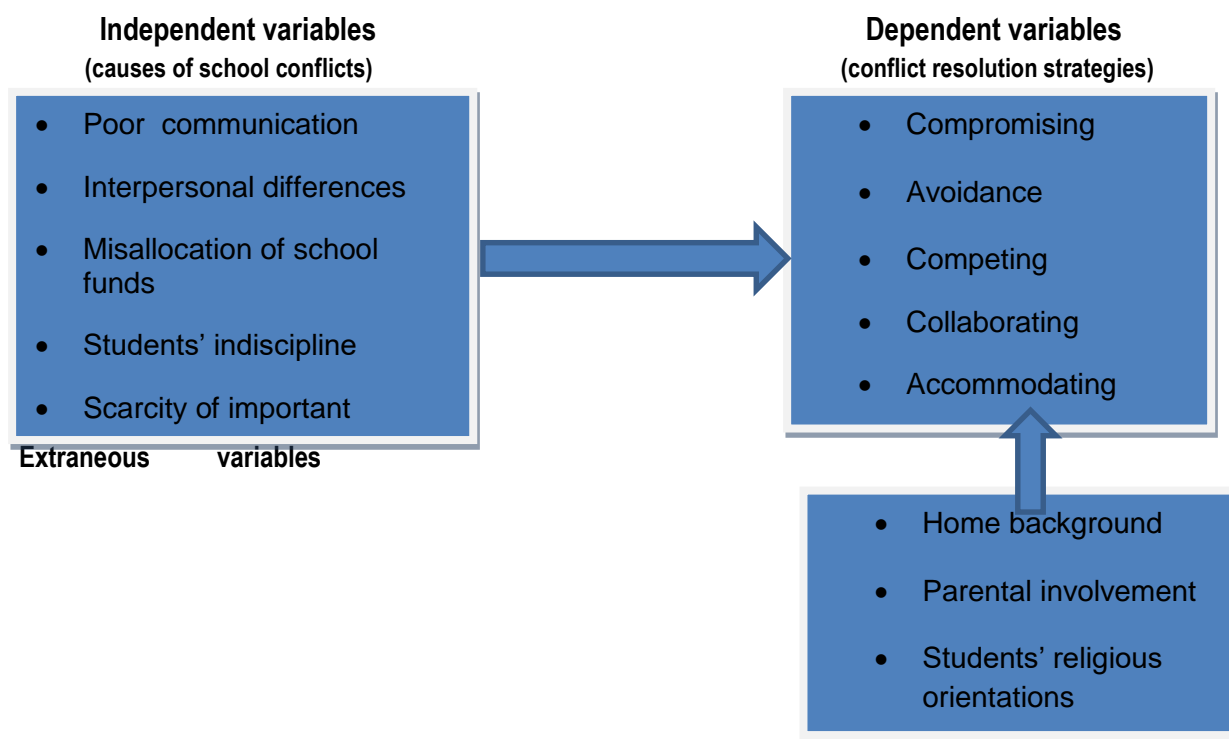


Figure 1 is adapted from reviewed literature on conflict resolution strategies in schools (2019)

In Figure 1 above, the independent variables were factors that caused conflicts in secondary schools. The causes of school conflicts include: poor communication, interpersonal differences, misallocation of school funds, students' indiscipline and scarcity of important resources. Therefore, these causes of conflicts required to be resolved by employing conflict resolution strategies, which are the dependent variables of the study. These dependent variables include: compromising, avoidance, competing, collaborating and accommodating. This implies that when there is conflict in the school caused by any of the independent variables, the school principal need to choose the appropriate strategy from the dependent variables. Therefore, this shows a relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables in the sense that if there is conflict in a school, the school principal needs to employ one of appropriate strategies to resolve that particular conflict. There are however other variables (extraneous variables) which are not the focus of the study.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a concurrent triangulation design was adopted. This design involves a single study where the researcher combines the quantitative and qualitative research methods (Creswell, 2008). Concurrent procedures allow the researcher to provide a comprehensive analysis of the problem at hand (Johnson &

Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This approach was employed because it validates the findings generated by each method through evidence produced by the other (Andrew, 2009). This design was appropriate because it allowed collection of all the data where a weakness of one method is supplemented by the strength of the other through triangulation (Choi & Park, 2005). In addition, the choice of concurrent triangulation was preferable for the study because it provided the researcher with detailed data on conflict resolution strategies secondary school principals employ in the Manzini region of Eswatini.

The participants

Seven (7) secondary schools in the Manzini region were purposively selected because the schools were believed to be reliable for the study (Patton 2002). A sample of (n=84; 39 males; 45 females) were selected. Therefore, seven (7) school principals were purposively selected, 63 teachers were randomly selected and 14 heads of departments were conveniently selected for the study. Table 1 presents participants' demographic information. Participants' selection was based on their age, professional qualification and experience on leadership position. The inclusion criteria were that a teacher must at least have had a Diploma in teaching and at least two years of teaching in secondary school. For school principals, they were expected to have a minimum of two years in leadership position.

Table 1: Principals, teachers and Heads of Departments' demographic data

Item		Frequency	%
1. Gender of respondents			
Principals	Male	5	71.4
	Female	2	28.6
Teachers:	Male	25	40
	Female	38	60
HODs	Male	9	64
	Female	5	36
2. Age of respondents			
Principals	20-30	0	0
	30-40	0	0
	41-50	3	43
	51-60	4	57
<i>Table1 ctd...</i>			
Teachers	20-30	20	31.7
	31-40	32	51
	41-50	07	11
	51-60	04	6.3



HODs	20-30	0	0
	31-40	2	14.3
	41-50	7	50
	51-60	5	35.7

3. Professional qualifications

Principals	Certificates	0	0
	Diploma	1	14
	Degree outside education	0	0
	Bachelors of education	2	29
	Master of education	4	57

Teacher	Certificates	0	0
	Diploma	11	17.5
	Degree outside education	14	22.2
	Bachelors of education	29	46
	Masters of education	9	14.3

HODs	Certificates	0	0
	Diploma	3	21
	Degree outside education	2	14
	Bachelors of education	5	36
	Masters of education	4	29

4. Experience of the respondents

Principals' experience in Leadership	0-5yrs	2	28.6
	6-10yr	3	42.8
	11-15yrs	2	28.6

Teachers' experience in Teaching	0-5yrs	15	23.8
	6-10yrs	22	35
	11-15yrs	12	19
	16-20yrs	8	12.6
	21-25yrs	5	8
	26-30yrs	1	1.6

Table1 ctd...

HODs' experience in the position	0-5yrs	3	21
	6-10yrs	7	50
	11-15yrs	4	29

Note: HODs = heads of departments

Data collection

The study used three data collection instruments that included questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions and it also adopted a mixed method. The researcher employed questionnaire because they enabled her to reach a large number of respondents within a short period of time (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2016). Seventy (70) teachers were given five point likert-scale questionnaire to fill, however only sixty-three (63) were returned for analysis. In this questionnaire respondents were expected to indicate their level of agreement: 'Strongly Agree': 'Agree': 'Neutral': 'Strongly Disagree': or 'Disagree' with the question items. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in English and participants also responded in English. Semi-structured interviews (face-to-face) were conducted with seven (7) school principals. The interviews created opportunities for school principals to explain the actual conflict resolution strategies they employed in their respective schools. Averagely, each interview lasted for about 30 minutes. Two (2) focus group discussions comprising of seven (7) heads of departments, one (1) from each school were conducted in one of the selected schools. These discussions were meant to supplement contributions given by school principals on face-to-face interviews and validate them with that from focus group discussions (Choi & Park, 2005). All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed for analysis.

Ethical considerations

Permission to conduct the study was granted by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in Eswatini. All participants signed consent forms and tape recording consent before the study was conducted. The researcher explained to the participants about their rights of participation that it was purely voluntary and they could withdraw during the course of inquiry. All semi-structured interviews were conducted in school principals' offices, focus group discussions were held in an unoccupied class. This was done for confidentiality and privacy purposes. No school or participants' name were identified, thus anonymity was ensured by assigning letters and numbers to participants and schools.

Validity and reliability

Validity means truthfulness of findings and conclusions of the study (Neuman, 2006). To ensure validity, the research instruments were presented to three lecturers who are experts in educational management and are well versed about Eswatini education system. The experts were requested to rank the level of question items to the objective of the study. Reliability measures the degree of accuracy in the measurements an instrument provides (Creswell, 2014). To ensure reliability, Cronbach's alpha was used to calculate the reliability of instruments. In addition, Cronbach's alpha was used because it is suitable for Likert-scale instruments (Amid, 2005). The researcher also conducted a pilot testing with two secondary schools, which were not included in the study but had similar characteristics with sampled schools. This helped the researcher to identify ambiguity in statements and poorly marked items.

Issues of trustworthiness

There are certain criteria that enhance trustworthiness in qualitative findings which were carefully considered. Credibility was ensured through accurate recorded interviews from school principals and heads of departments. Member checks with participants were done in this study to observe credibility and accuracy of

responses from each participant (Khan, 2014). The process of member checking gave the participants an opportunity to correct flaws from responses, comments and to interpret and solidify some of the findings. The researcher also ensured dependability by providing authentic information on how data was collected and also by accurate description of the results that ensured from the discussions.

Data analysis

Qualitative data were first analyzed then sorted and introduced into the Statistic Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.0 for analysis. Data were analyzed using the simple descriptive statistics in form of frequencies and percentages which were then represented in form of tables. For qualitative data, the researcher used content analysis steps laid down by Creswell (2014). This enabled the researcher to read and organize data. Data were then coded into similar themes and sub-themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of the study was to examine the conflict resolution strategies employed by Eswatini secondary school principals in the Manzini region. Quantitative findings are presented in table 2 and 3 below and qualitative findings are reported in table 4 and 5 below.

Tables 2: School principals' responses on employment of conflict resolution strategies in schools: n=(7)

Items	Agree	Not Agree	Disagree
Negotiate with teachers to settle school conflicts	6(86%)	-	1(14%)
Assign minor issue conflicts to teachers	7(100%)	-	-
Empower teachers to take decisions	5(71.4%)	-	2(28.6%)
Practice an open-door approach	7(100%)	-	-
Use a submissive and compliant approach	7(100%)	-	-

Table 3: Teachers' responses on school principals' employment of conflict resolution strategies in schools: n = (63)

Items	Agree	Not Agree	Disagree
My school principal negotiates with teachers to settle school conflicts	15(24%)	-	48(76%)
He/She assigns minor issue conflicts to teachers	39(62%)	5(8%)	19(30%)
He/She empowers teachers to take decisions	13(21%)	7(11%)	43(68%)
He/She practices an open-door approach	17(27%)	-	46(73%)
Uses of a submissive and compliant approach	15(24%)	-	48(76%)

Table 4: Theme and sub-themes from in-depth interview with school principals on CRS they employ

Theme	Sub-themes
Conflict resolution strategies employed by secondary school principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negotiating with teachers in settling school conflicts - Assigning minor issues conflicts too teachers. - Empowering teachers to take decisions. - Practicing an open-door approach - Using a submissive and compliant approach

Table 5: Theme and sub-themes from focus group discussion with HODs on CRS school principals employ

Theme	sub-themes
Conflict resolution strategies employed secondary school principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No negotiation with teachers to settle school conflicts by - Assigning minor issue conflicts to teachers - No empowering for teachers to take decisions - No practicing of an open-door approach - No using of a submissive and compliant approach

The study' objective sought to examine the conflict resolution strategies employed by Eswatini secondary school principals in the Mnzini region. Below were the five main items which were discussed.

Negotiating to settle school conflicts (compromising)

This question item sought to find out if school principals negotiated with teachers to settle school conflicts. A majority (86%) (ref, table 2) of school principals revealed that they negotiated with school teachers to settle school conflicts. Corroborating this, were verbal quotes from some of the school principals' interviews, they said:

In as much as I can use my administrative position to get things done, but I choose to negotiate with teachers to settle a certain conflict issue. This makes it easy for me to quickly resolve the conflict, (Male principal#3: 59 years old, from school C).

Negotiating is good but in most of the time as a school principal you have to use your administrative authority to get things done because at the end of the day you are the one accountable for what is taking place in the school not the teachers. However, I prefer to negotiate than using my position, (Male principal#3: 59 years old, from school C).



We rarely come into consensus with my teaching staff, therefore, negotiation is very difficult as nothing positive will come out. But I try to negotiate though it is not easy, (Female principal#5: 45 years old, from school E).

However, on the same aspect, (76%) (ref, table 3) of teachers disagreed that school principals negotiated with them to settle school conflicts. Heads of departments were also engaged in focus group discussions, they revealed that school principals do not negotiate with teachers to settle school conflicts but simply give orders on how they expect a certain conflict to be handled. Below are some examples of what they said:

School principals are not able to negotiate with teachers in settling school conflicts but they use their leadership position to get things done their way, (HOD#13: 49 years old male, from school F, FGDA).

One of the strategies to manage conflicts is by compromising, however school principals do not like to negotiate with teachers but simply come and order us round, (HOD#6: 59 years old female, from school C, FGDB).

My school principal is not good when it comes to negotiation, she does not believe that a teacher can suggest something that would be of benefit for the school. She gives her opinion and hers has to be used to handle a certain situation, (HOD#8: 38 years old male, from school D, FGDA).

The findings revealed the importance of negotiating when handling school conflicts. However, it was revealed that school principals were forced to use their positions when solving school conflicts without finding a middle ground. HODs exposed that school principals used their positions to give them orders on how a conflict issue should be handled. Yet when solving conflict situations, dictating should not be used as a way of handling conflicts because it perpetuates it to become grievances which further cause conflicts.

Assigning minor issue conflicts to teachers (avoidance)

Participating school principals were asked if they assigned minor issue conflicts to teachers. All school principals (100%) (ref, table 2) agreed that they assigned minor issue conflicts to teachers. This was also confirmed by a majority of teachers (62%) (ref, Table 3) who also agreed that school principals assigned minor issue conflicts to them. In addition, school principals who were engaged in a face-to-face interview clearly revealed that they paid no attention to minor issue conflicts. On the same aspect, heads of departments attested that school principals delegated minor issue conflicts to teachers or deputies. Below are some examples of verbal quotes from school principals and heads of departments:

I don't pay attention to minor conflicts but delegate other teachers to deal with them, (Male principal#3: 59 years old, from school C).

I hand over minor issue conflicts to other staff members because I believe they are not serious issues who can have negative results in the school, (Male principal#3: 59 years old, from school C).



In corroboration to the above narratives, some heads of departments said:

My school principal does not give attention to minor conflicts; he just delegates them to others to handle the issue, (HOD#13: 49 years old male, from school F, FGDA).

For minor issue conflicts, my school principal has a tendency of brushing it off and pretends as if nothing has happened, that helps him because some teachers seek unnecessary attention, (HOD#4: 52 years old male, from school B, FGDA).

From the findings, it was revealed that school principals are quite effective in resolving school conflicts through the use of avoidance strategy. However, this might imply that school principals use delegation to simply avoid responsibility. Therefore they push their duties to teachers to handle.

Empowering teachers to take decisions (competing)

Concerning empowerment, school principals were asked if they empowered teachers to take decisions during conflicts in schools. A majority (71.4%) (ref, table 2) of school principals agreed that they empowered teachers to take decisions during school conflicts. This was also confirmed by interviews held with them. Most of school principals stated that they empowered teachers to take decisions during school conflicts. Below are verbal quotes from some school principals:

I do believe in empowerment of teachers, therefore as a school principal I allow teachers to take decision so that they can learn many ways on how to manage conflicts. It is important that I involve them to take part in decision making, (Female principal#5: 45 years old, from school E).

When it has to do with classroom management, I allow teachers to make their own decision on how they want to run their classroom. But when it involves the whole school I am not free enough to involve them in taking decisions, (Male principal#1: 43 years old, from school A).

Teachers can't be trusted to make effective decisions that will benefit the school, so I do not believe in allowing them to make decisions however; I give them the benefits of doubts, (Male principal#6: 55 years old, from school F).

Contrary to this, a considerable number (86%) (ref, table 3) of teachers disagreed that school principals empowered them to take decisions during school conflict. This sentiment was also observed by heads of departments who verbally exposed that school principals do not consider them or teachers capable to make good decisions regarding how to handle conflict issues. Below are narratives from some HODs:

Even if it's time to take quick decision my school principal does not let us take decisions ourselves without her input, she claims to be the one who has to give an account should things go wrong, she does not believe we can do right all by ourselves, (HOD#11: 45 years old male, from school F, FGDB).

My school principal does not empower teachers to take decisions regarding school conflicts but decide to labor himself with the entire task of running the school and at the same time



taking decision for teachers. Yet empowering teachers to take decision would lessen his feverish work, (HOD#13: 49 years old male, from school F, FGDA).

For quite a number of times, we are not given the chance to prove ourselves that without the principal's involvement we can take constructive decisions, (HOD #2: 39 years old female, from school A, FGDB).

The findings showed that a majority of school principals do not empower teachers to take decisions during school conflicts. Yet managing a school calls for teamwork where a leader cannot make decisions without teachers' involvement. However, school principals seem to believe in dominance where a follower or employee is not allowed to exercise his/her ability in decision making. Yet, teaches to be given a chance to nurture their own power.

Practicing an open-door-approach (collaborating)

The researcher sought to find out if school principals were able to practice an open-door-approach to settle school conflicts. School principals (100%) (ref, table 2) agreed that they practiced an open-door-approach in settling conflicts in schools. This was also voiced out in interviews with them where they revealed that, practicing an open-door- approach was one of the strategies they used in settling conflicts in schools. Some had these to say:

When there is conflict in the school I allow everyone to share his/her idea on how it can be managed, we then find a solution of which everyone is part, (Male principal #7: 49 years old, from school F).

I respect every person's ideas because I cannot know everything. In addition, whenever my teachers have personal problems: they are free to share them with me so that we can find a solution. This promotes trust and builds a relationship between us. Everyone becomes free to voice something, (Male principal#3: 59 years old, from school C).

I allow my staff members to share ideas that would improve the school both academic and relationship wise. I allow them to ask teachers from other schools how they manage certain issues especially indiscipline then they share to us their findings, (Male principal#6: 55years old, from school F).

The findings revealed that school principals are able to use the open-door-approach as a strategy of resolving conflicts. However, teachers did not agree with this view as (73%) (ref, table 3) disagreed that school principals were able to practice an open-door-approach to settle school conflicts. This was also corroborated by heads of departments in focus group discussions, they stated that school principals do not implement ideas or views shared by teachers but just let them discuss ideas which will not be implemented. They expressed that this was a time-consuming strategy which does not promote ownership of implemented ideas in the school.



Sharing ideas in the school is a good culture and it creates a positive working environment, however, my school principal allows us to share ideas for the sake of discussing them not that those shared ideas will be implemented. This is just time-consuming. We don't feel any sense of belonging, (HOD#6: 59 years old female, school C, FGDB).

My school principal does not like to be told what to do but prefer to discuss pressing issues concerning the school with other people outside the school who give their views without knowing in mind the situation in the school, (HO#2: 39 years old female, from school A, FGDB).

Therefore, the findings pointed out that school principals are incompetent in solving conflicts using the open-door-approach, as they don't encourage shared decision making which every leader should employ to get desired goals in organizations.

A submissive and compliant approach (accommodating)

Participated school principals were further asked if school they effectively employed the submissive and compliant approach during school conflicts. All (100%) (ref, table 2) school principals agreed that they used a submissive and compliant approach to handle conflicts in schools. This is what some school principals had to say:

I do submit most of the times especially if the conflict has been caused by the administration I have no ground to be arrogant but to apologize to the teachers, student or parents, (Male principal#2: 57 years old, from school B).

If there is conflict among the teachers and the administration, like submission of official books, scheme books should be complete by the first two weeks of the first term, failure of which as an administrator I have power to take the matter to the regional education officer, in that way teachers are made to submit, (Male principal #1: 43 years old, from school A).

We make teachers to submit by following government policies. In the School Conduct Act, a teacher must be at the school 15 minutes before the start of the day. This helps us to minimize late coming, (Female principal#3: 45 years old, from school E).

Contrary, a majority (76%) (ref, table 3) of teachers disagreed that school principals use the submissive and compliant approach to settle school conflicts. This contradiction was further corroborated in focus group discussions where heads of departments uncovered that a majority of school principals do not use the submissive and compliant approach. But this strategy was used to force teachers to submit into school rules and regulations by means of frightening them to comply to the Ministry of Education and Training policies and Acts. Yet, the Ministry's policies and Acts are met for school principals to interpret them according to their school environment not as an instrument to be used against teachers. This is what some HODs said:



My head teacher forces us to submit to school customs by using policies. He follows unnecessary policies given by the Ministry of Education and Training for teachers conduct act. We are forced to sign a time book and indicate time of arrival and departure. Failing to do that, you are blamed of misconduct. Cases may go far as the REO and suspension, (HOD#9: 39 years old male, from school E, FGDB).

In my opinion, when managing school conflicts, the leader must be the one who submits not forcing teachers to submit. However, my school principal uses his authoritative power to make staff member to submit to him. This gives birth to conflicts and hatred in the school, (HOD#14: 56 years old male, from school G, FGDA).

Therefore, the findings revealed that school principals do not use the submissive and compliant approach. They used the submissive and compliant approach to force and scare teachers into submitting to their desires rather than as a strategy of resolving conflicts in schools.

DISCUSSION

The study findings revealed that a majority of school principals rarely negotiated with their teachers when settling school conflicts. Ironically, school principals pointed out that negotiation is very important in conflict resolution, but that they had fear in involving teachers in settling conflicts because they thought that teachers could not be trusted. They further acknowledged that the TSC Acts of 1982 required them to bring peace at schools. Teachers on the whole confirmed that school principals rarely negotiated with them in settling school conflicts, but they were mostly directed on what to do. This is in line with Tshuma, Ndlovu and Bhebhe (2016), who stated that school principals do not negotiate with teachers but use their administrative power to settle school conflicts. However, this contradicts compromise which is a key principle in effective conflict resolution as per Thomas and Kilman's theory of 1976.

School principals were found quite effective in using the avoidance strategy especially in resolving minor conflicts. For it was established that they assigned minor conflict issues to teachers to handle. According to Hoy and Miskel (2008), a leader assigns others to handle conflict when the issue is minor or avoids confrontation. This is in line with Fabian and Terfa (2018), who pointed out that most managers only use avoidance strategy because they avoid confrontation. However, whether it is meant to avoid responsibilities, school principals should be commended for employing avoidance since it is one of the recommended conflict resolution strategies. This affirms Thomas and Kilman's theory which recommends avoidance as one of the strategies that should be used in settling conflicts.

The Education sector policy of 2011 and 2018 is quite silent on empowerment of teachers especially in making decisions during school conflicts. From the study findings teachers revealed that they were not allowed to take decisions on conflict matters in their schools. This however, contradicts Follett (1940) who states that she believes in empowerment in the sense that employees should be given the opportunities to

nurture their own power in a work place. According to Follett, school principals should allow teachers to be involved in decision making. This would help in learning and encouraging them in making good decisions and teamwork. Lunenburg (2011) recommends that two minds are better than one, thus empowering teachers with knowledge on conflict resolution strategies can help a school principal applies appropriate strategies when conflict occurs in a school.

According Atieno et al, (2016) for the effective application of the collaborating strategy, school principals should allow teachers to share ideas and express themselves freely. This is in contradiction with the study findings. School principals were found using their own ideas in solving conflicts without teachers' knowledge. Actually, school principals used their authority to shove their will down teachers' throat. This is because it was the school principals' way always; they did not allow teachers to share their ideas. This means that they discouraged teamwork, yet teamwork is essential in an organization so that it realize its desired goals. Therefore, this maximizes conflicts in schools, yet according to the TSC Act of 1982, school principals should keep peace at schools.

Regarding submissive and compliant approach (accommodating), the finding showed that school principals do not submit to teachers but they force them to submit to them by using their authoritative position. Hoy and Miskel (2008), points out that people in power use their position to spin the truth to suit their desires. Additionally, the study findings revealed that school principals used conducts, Acts and policies from the Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini to scare teachers and make them submit to their desires. The findings refute Thomas and Kilman's theory of 1976, which states that accommodating, was one of the strategies to be employed when handling conflicts. Accommodating encourages the leader to put people's interest first. It also teaches leaders to acknowledge their mistakes and apology when there is a need. However, school principals use their positions and power to suppress subordinates instead of admitting mistakes.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the conflict resolution strategies employed by Eswatini secondary school principals in the Manzini region. Evidence from the study findings indicated that a majority of secondary school principals in the Manzini region were general not knowledgeable in conflict resolution strategies. For they were applying only one of the strategies which unfortunately made them to entirely abdicate their conflict resolution strategies responsibilities as the schools' chief executives.

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