

# An Investigation into the Reasons of Conflicts between Learners and Teachers: A Case of Three Selected Secondary Schools in Zambezi District

Mungulo Kuwema<sup>1</sup>, Malvern Kanyati<sup>2</sup>

Rockview University, Lusaka, Zambia

## Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the reasons of conflicts between learners and teachers. The objectives of the study were to identify the teachers' weakness in coming into conflicts with learners, to establish learners' weakness in coming into conflicts with teachers and to find out views from the community about the reasons of conflicts between learners and teachers. Data was collected from forty respondents from three selected secondary schools in Zambezi district. The study used descriptive survey design and data was collected using interviews, questionnaires and focus groups guides. Random sampling was used to determine the participant. The findings revealed that there are some conflicts between learners and teachers emanating from over socialization. The study therefore, recommends upholding of professionalism among teachers and well disciplined learners for quality education delivery.

**Keywords:** Reasons, Conflicts, Learner, Teachers

## INTRODUCTION

School conflicts is an occurrence that has been witnessed in most secondary schools. School conflicts disrupt school programs and lowers performance of the school. School conflicts occurs in different forms such as strikes, riots, unrests among others.

School conflict is defined as the disagreement between individuals or groups regarding ideas, interests, principles, and values within the school community, perceiving the parties their interests as excluded, although they may not be (Perez-Serrano and Perez-de-Guzman, 2011). Conflict is an essential and unavoidable human phenomenon because where there is human interaction, there is a likelihood of personal likes and dislikes. These agreements and disagreements among individuals and groups in the school sometimes lead to conflict. Conflicts are neither constructive non-disruptive but the ways these are handled in the school make them positive or negative (Isabu, 2017).

Conflict is inevitable. It results from the interplay of differences between people. Since people differ in many ways, in their cultural backgrounds and assumptions, their personal styles, their worldviews and perspectives, and their hopes and aspirations, there will frequently be places where they rub against each other. This is as true in school communities as in other places in the social world. Schools do not need to aim for an environment in which conflict is never manifest, so much as an environment in which conflict is handled and managed effectively, so that differences are respected, competing cultural perspectives are

valued, and individual learners and teachers are heard and included in the conversation—all so that educational activity can proceed.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Conflicts will continuously occur since they are essential to human nature and are obligatory for moral and emotional development and found in schools. Since conflict arises recurrently in schools, it follows that educators need to acclimatize at handling it positively. It's critical to deal with conflict head-on and find solutions that are both integrative and constructive while building cooperative connections. Thus, the study sought to investigate the causes of conflicts between learners and teachers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the causes of conflicts between learners and teachers in selected secondary schools in Zambezi district.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To identify the teachers' weakness in coming into conflicts with learners,
2. To establish learners' weakness in coming into conflicts with teachers and,
3. To find out views from the community about the common reasons of conflicts between learners and teachers.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Conflict theory states that tensions and conflicts arise when resources, status, and power are unevenly distributed between groups in society and that these conflicts become the engine for social change. In this context, Marx's conflict approach was developed in 19<sup>th</sup> century by Karl Marx (1818-83). Marx argued wealth and power were unequally distributed in society and sought to explain how one minority group in society maintained its dominance over the majority (working –class).

### **Significance of the Study**

These findings of the study is useful or helpful to Principals, Inspectors, Head teachers, Lectures and teachers in understanding the conflicts between learners and teachers and then, appreciate the role of staff and students in its promotion.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Schools are no longer for children; half the learners now in secondary schools are sexually mature. However, although sexual development is an important part of adolescence, it is often not seen as an integral part of schooling (Lindsay Geoff, 2013). Thompson (2015) observes that learners view schools as operating on assumption of distrust. The teachers have no faith in learners and they have no faith in teachers. The consequence of this distrust is a self-fulfilling prophecy in learners. Kings (2014) made another important contribution to distrust viewed by learners between them and authority. The result of this study showed that poor communication between staff and learners, failure to provide learners with opportunities to exercise responsibility, failure to interpret the reasons and purpose of the school rules by the authority and failure to be trusted as human beings who are sensible, trigger reasons of conflicts between learners and teachers.

When people share common environments, the development of conflicts is inevitable, and it could be argued that this is perfectly normal. In fact, it is not possible to imagine a conflict-free organization, since every organization is made up of people with different ideas, thoughts, and emotions. Therefore, it is normal for rivalry, dispute, and conflicting needs and goals to emerge, when people are required to work and coexist with other stakeholders of an organization. Conflicts are inherent in the life of individuals, teams, and organizations, and this should be expected, because conflicts are associated with interaction. The concept of conflict has existed since the dawn of humanity. The issue of conflicts has dominated organizational life since the 1970s, especially in the United States, followed by its spread all over the world (Doğan, 2016). According to Tjosvold (2017), conflicts play a key part in organizational thinking, supervision, performance, and management. In this context, it has been acknowledged that conflicts are part of everyday organizational life

Various definitions of the concept of conflict are provided in literature. According to these definitions, conflict can be described as a dispute that emerges on either a personal or team level, and affects negatively the fulfilment of the social, psychological, and physical needs of individuals, as it is argued by Eren and Peker & Aytürk (as it cited in Yaraş & Gündüzalp, 2021). Although there is no single definition that is commonly accepted by researchers, the concept of interdependence among individuals and/or groups of individuals should be taken into consideration, since it is essential for conflict to occur (Deutsch, 2013; Manesis, Vlachou, & Mitropoulou, 2019; Rahim, 2001; Robbins, 2014). Actually, conflict is a difference in goals among individuals, groups of individuals, and organizations (Hocker & Wilnat, 2015). It is an interactive situation that is based on differences among individuals and groups of individuals (Shahin, 2019). Therefore, conflict is a social phenomenon that is experienced as a result of dispute that arises in the context of interpersonal relationships (Rahim, 2013). At organizational level (workplace environment), conflicts are attributed to differences or disagreements that refer to attitudes and opinions and views, as well as needs and values, roles and tactics, conflicting interests in a project/task, and also disputes that are caused by rivalry, errors/mistakes or ignorance, and negative behaviours and reactions of organizational stakeholders, as well as absenteeism, excessive complaining, etc. (Saiti, 2015). In more detail, in schools, negative situations that are due to the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of families, students, support staff, principals, and teachers, and which emerge during the fulfilment of pre-set goals, are the basis of organizational conflicts, according to İnandı, Tunç, and Gündüz (as it is cited in Yaraş & Gündüzalp, 2021).

### **Research Design**

The study implored a descriptive design that adopted a qualitative method. This allowed for more flexible strategies of data collection in order to answer the research questions (Musonda, 2019).

### **Research Sites**

The study was strictly carried out in Zambezi district of North Western Province. The population target was all the secondary schools in Zambezi.

### **Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure**

The study was carried out on 40 participants. These included 22 learners, 6 teachers, 6 community members and 6 school managers from Blue, Orange and White selected secondary schools in Zambezi.

**Data Analysis**

The research data was analyzed qualitatively as semi structured interviews and questionnaires were used as data collection instruments. Thematic approach was used, where data analysis started with the categorization of themes from the semi structured interviews and questionnaire (Smith, 2013).

**Ethical Issues**

The researcher got permission from the community members, the District Education Board Secretary and school authorities. The respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the data collected and pseudo names were used in the study.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Table 1: Records compiled from the answers in the questionnaires and interviews.**

SUSPECTED REASON OF CONFLICT	NUMBER FOR	NUMBER AGAINST	PERCENTAGE FOR (%)	PERCENTAGE AGAINST (%)
Teachers having love affairs with female learners	30	08	85	10
Learners having love with female teachers.	05	35	05	90
Teaching his/her age mates	35	10	75	25
Drinking from the same places with learners	25	15	63	38
Having too much knowledge of teachers' private life	28	12	60	30
Teachers having showdowns with learners	20	20	50	50

**Source:** Field data

The study reviewed that, there were more people about (85%) who agreed or rotted for the idea that teachers have love affairs with female pupils while only few (10%) were against.

The reason as to whether pupils had love with female teachers was rotted against by most interviewed people (90%). Only a hand full rotted for.

There are more teachers teaching their age mates (75%) and (25%) rotted against (i.e. old teachers)

There are a good number of teachers drinking together from the same places with pupils (63%) and only a few were against.

Pupils have too much knowledge of their teachers' private affairs (60%) than those who rotted against.

On teachers having showdowns with pupils, the scores were (50%): (50%) who rotted for and/or against.

The research which sought to find out the reasons of conflicts between learners and teachers was carried out at Blue, Orange and White schools in Zambezi district and below are some of the points of conflicts the researcher got from the interviews and questionnaires.

**Male teachers having relationships with female learners**

Most female learners in secondary school have reached adolescence stage. During this stage, they would want to experience love affairs with people older than them because they find the boys with whom they are classmates, childish and inexperienced. To this, some girls may try to entice their male teachers who in turn, will get trapped. When this gets to the knowledge of the boys, they lose respect towards their teachers and conflicts arise.

**Male learners having relationships with female teachers**

In agreement with the saying which gives: Love is blind; Love conquers all, some young female teachers straight from college may surprisingly fall in love with some older boys in grade 12, especially if the boy is from a well-to-do family. When this comes to the knowledge of many learners, they turn their teachers into objects and that if they can manage to compete with teachers for a girl-friend, what more if they were in employment? Male teachers will definitely react very sharply to this. They will, rust out at both the female teachers and boys. The boys, helped by their girls, would treat the reaction as an act of open jealousy and conflicts arise.

**Teacher teaching his/her age mates**

Unlike in the past when most teachers would be older than almost all the learners, nowadays, teachers, especially straight from college may be young. Naturally, antagonism between the older learners and the young teachers arises. Older learners would argue: what can these young men or ladies tell/teach us? On the other hand, young teachers would argue: Are we responsible for your late completing of school? These results into a spiral of conflicts

**Drinking from the same places with learners**

Whenever a teacher steps into a drinking place where learners are also present, learners would run away. Alternatively, if they have got money, learners would buy beer for their teachers. If this habit continues, learners lose respect for their teachers by denouncing them at school to their fellow learners saying: we buy beer for him/them; he/they is/are cash-strapped. In cases where the teacher does not know the learner and the learners are aware that the teacher does not know them, they don't run away but rather continue to drink. The look at what type of beer that being drunk by their teachers, learners may look down upon him, denouncing to their fellow learners at school. Some teachers may be hated by learners for being tough on the learners found in drinking places. Later conflicts start.

**Learners having too much knowledge of teachers' private life**

If learners know too much about their teachers' private life, especially the negative things about their teachers, conflicts arise. For instance, a teacher known for drinking too much or having a lot of relationships with girls would in no way be listened to whenever he talks against issues of sex and beer to the learners.

**Teachers having showdowns with their learners in class**

Some teachers may try to embarrass their learners in the presence of their girl friend or boyfriends. This, to some learners would take lightly. They may retort and conflicts arise.

### **Poor communication network**

Poor communication network is highly rated as one of the main causes of conflict in schools (Iwuagwu, 2011). School principals who introduce innovation without first educating the teachers and students of the nature and foreseen benefits of the innovation in the school cannot expect genuine cooperation and participation from them. And this can lead to conflict. Also, when decisions are not disseminated effectively, sources of conflict can this be created for or by teachers and students.

According to Awuor (2008) fixed rules, lacks of dialogues and authoritative administration increases unrest cases of the students thus this leads to school conflict which affects performance whether individually as a learner and the school.

According to Johdi and Apitree (2012) the provision of resources in schools they are not equitably shared among learners and teachers thus leading to student and teachers fight for those scarce resources leading to school conflict. According to Mubika and Thodiana (2010) school consists of different staff members who have different beliefs values, age, cultural background, goals and attitudes so different personal conflicts leads to school conflict because every individual fight to be recognized as a winner at different levels of their understanding.

### **CONCLUSION**

Indiscipline among learners in secondary schools is influenced by poor parenting of the learner or individual stress. According to Gangelos (2017) said that these factors causing learners to become irresponsible to their behaviours does leads to disrespectful behaviours and this calls for teachers to stop them from those behaviours. Conflict is a common problem among the lifestyle of people and therefore it is part and parcel of life. According to Platinum (2014) school managers should find a way of solving a conflict because it has an impact according to how it is approached and the resolutions. Conflicts arise because of the following issues; needs not met, poor communication, lack of compromise, prejudice, intolerance, ignorance, lack of empathy, lack of resources, beliefs and power struggles. Conflict occurs in every school. If handled effectively, conflict can create a good learning experience. If handled ineffectively, conflict can quickly escalate to physical and emotional violence.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The ministry of education should provide induction workshops for newly appointed Deputy Head teachers to equip them with managerial skills to enable them handle conflict among learners and teachers.
2. School strategic plans policies on discipline management should be enhanced with the help of the Guidance and Counseling department for behavior modification.
3. Code of conduct procedures and professionalism guidelines and documents should be availed to teachers. Also, school regulation policies should be made known to every learner to have a disciplined environment.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Argyropoulou, E. (2018). Conflict management at school unit. Investigation of principals' and educators' perceptions of primary education at third district of Athens (Post Graduate Thesis). Patras, Greece: Hellenic Open University (in Greek).
2. Awan, A. G., & Anjum, K. (2015). Cost of high employees turnover rate in oil industry of Pakistan. Information and Knowledge Management.

3. Cain, G., & du Plessis, A. (2013). Teachers' perceptions of the consequences of interpersonal conflict: a case study in three primary schools. *Problems of Management in the 21st Century*.
4. Catana, L. (2015). Conflicts between teachers: Causes and effects (conference paper). In *Proceedings of Central and Eastern European Conference "New Approaches in Social and Humanistic Sciences"* at Chişinău, Republic of Moldo.
5. Choi, Y. J., & Lee, K. H. (2014). The Influence of Teachers' Development and Organizational Conflicts on School Organizational Efficiency. *Journal of Fisheries and Marine Sciences Education*.
6. De Dreu, C. K. (2018). The virtue and vice of workplace conflict: Food for (pessimistic) thought. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*.
7. De Dreu, C. K., & Van de Vliert, E. (Eds.). (2017). *Using conflict in organizations*. Sage.
8. Dogan, S. (2016). Conflicts management model in school: A mixed design study. *Journal of Education and Learning*.
9. Deutsch, M. (2013). *The resolution of conflict: Constructive and destructive processes*. Boston, MS, USA: Yale University Press.
10. Everard, K. B., & Morris, G. (2019). *Effective Educational Management*. Patras, Greece: Hellenic Open University (in Greek).
11. Fassoulis, K. (2016, May). The creative communication as a tool of conflict management in a school environment. In *Proceedings of the 3rd Greek Conference of the EMIEKEK on "Critical and creative thought in education: Theory and Practice"* (p.p.14-16). Athens, Greece (in Greek)
12. Filippou, D. (2016). Conflicts among educators and principals of primary education and the role of principal in conflicts management: Investigation of conflicts during the secret ballot of educators' boards for the election of school units' principals (Post Graduate Thesis). Patras, Greece: Hellenic Open University (in Greek).