

Challenges And Strategies of Conflict Management in Secondary Schools

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Abstract: This paper discusses the challenges and strategies of conflict management in secondary schools. The school is an institution that brings together diverse identities. The school as a social system is filled with diverse personalities, rules, and values and is full of conflicts, problems, and differences between the different individuals that make up the school (students, teachers, staff, and parents). It is therefore essential for proper management of conflicts that may arise so that harmony and respect will be present in the school. Ending school conflict is impossible, since they are intrinsic to the human being, being an integral part of their development and the interpersonal relationships, they experience daily. Learning to live with school conflict requires creating attitudes of openness, interest in differences, and respect for diversity, teaching how to recognize injustice, taking measures to overcome it, resolving differences constructively, and moving from conflict situations to reconciliations. So, it is essential that the initial and continuous training of teachers encompasses conflict management, providing them with tools so that they can resolve the conflicts they experience in the class and school in general.

Keywords: Conflicts, conflict management, strategies, challenges

Introduction

Conflict management involves recognizing, addressing, and resolving conflicts or disagreements among individuals or groups. It encompasses the ability to sensibly and fairly handle conflicts, dealing with differences in opinions, needs, goals, and objectives. Conflict management is a valuable tool employed to address disagreements and prevent misunderstandings within an organization. It encompasses techniques for identifying problems and offering solutions to resolve issues. The process aims to reduce tension and effectively address any arising conflicts. Conflict management involves efforts to prevent, limit, contain, or resolve conflicts that could potentially escalate to violence while pursuing organizational goals. By handling conflicts fairly and efficiently, it helps regulate communication issues among colleagues, reduces workplace tension, improves productivity, and mitigates negative effects without eliminating conflict. (Robbins, 2005).

According to Aghedo (2011), conflict management is the practice of efficiently, sensibly, and fairly identifying and handling workplace issues. It's a process that involves finding, making decisions, and taking action to reach the best solution for resolving uncertain conditions. Managers engage in conflict management to minimize

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conflicts to the lowest possible stage, and acquiring this skill takes time and consistent practice. Conflict management, as described by Aghedo (2011), occurs in three stages: pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict. It is a skill that ensures organizational turnover and productivity remain high while satisfying the interests of staff and workers. Conflict management serves as a set of tools to prevent, resolve, and address disputes or arguments before they escalate into active conflicts. Rather than eradicating conflicts, it focuses on limiting, mitigating, and containing them. In essence, conflict management is both a tool and a skill applied to creatively and respectfully handle disputes, quarrels, and misunderstandings among people within an organization, ultimately promoting effective communication.

Conflict management emphasizes the dual function of assertiveness and empathy. Assertiveness involves standing your ground with confidence and advocating for what you believe in. It means expressing your needs, opinions, and boundaries without being aggressive or passive. Assertive communication helps maintain self-respect and ensures your voice is heard. Empathy is the ability to put others first by understanding their feelings and perspectives. It involves actively listening, showing compassion, and recognizing the emotions of others. Empathy fosters better relationships and promotes a supportive environment. In all, conflict management serves as a mechanism to resolve common organizational issues involving people, recognizing that life is all about interactions that may lead to conflicts.

Conflict is an inherent part of human interaction, and its occurrence in schools can significantly impact the overall learning environment. It is crucial to gain a comprehensive understanding of conflict management theories, principles, and practical strategies to foster a positive and harmonious atmosphere conducive to effective teaching and learning. This paper, therefore, was discussed under the following subheadings:

- Concept of Conflict Management
- School Conflicts and Management
- The Need for Conflict Management in Schools
- Causes of Conflict in Schools
- Challenges of Conflict Management in Secondary Schools
- Strategies of Conflict Management in Secondary Schools
- Conclusion
- Recommendations

Concept of Conflict Management

Conflict management is the process carried out within an organization to address and resolve conflicts between two or more parties. It serves as a negotiation mechanism to handle issues or disagreements that may arise among employees, between employees and employers, managers and directors, superiors and subordinates, and so on. For this technique to function effectively in any human-involved organization there must be a focus on preventing and resolving issues to achieve expected goals. These issues are commonly referred to as conflicts. Chinwokwu (2013) defines conflict as friction arising from interactions among two or more individuals. Conflict is viewed as an expressed struggle between at least two independent parties. These parties perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their objectives. Essentially, conflict arises when interests clash. Conflicts could be internal or external conflict: Internal conflict refers to the inner struggle affecting an individual's mental and emotional state. External conflict deals with external forces surrounding an individual.

Conflict could arise as a result of individual differences and characteristics disagreements about opinions, ideas, and various factors. Conflict also can arise from opposing needs among individuals with diverse backgrounds who come together to achieve a common goal or purpose. The level of comprehension and understanding between people plays a significant role in determining whether conflict emerges. Other causes are differences in attitudes, beliefs, and values incompatibility when actions by one or more individuals hinder someone else's desired actions, doubt, suspicion, and interference. A lack of desired respect can escalate into conflict. Unpleasant conditions within an organization, such as clashes of interest and values, can fuel conflict. When individual or group needs are not met, conflict can also emerge.

School Conflicts and Management

Conflict in schools encompasses disagreements among students, student groups, and between students and teachers regarding ideas, interests, principles, and values within the school community and environment. There are various perspectives on school conflict. For example, Yusuf (2022) views conflict as a situation where two or more students in a classroom experience tension, disagreement, or hostility. He noted that unmanaged conflict negatively impacts the learning environment and academic activities. Shahmohammadi (2014) defines school conflict as unacceptable behavioural problems and abnormalities within the school environment. In Shahmohammadi (2014), conflict is described as an expression of hostility, antagonism, and misunderstanding between students and staff members. School conflict management involves processes, tools, and skills aimed at creatively and respectfully reducing disagreements and managing disputes within a school. It emphasizes collaborative resolution through effective communication, including active listening and assertive speaking.

The Need for Conflict Management in Schools

Conflict management in schools is necessary to ensure that any issue that may arise as a result of individual interest which is inevitable will help to provide an atmosphere for the following reasons:

Creating a Positive School Climate: Conflict management contributes to establishing a positive and nurturing school climate. By addressing conflicts promptly and effectively, schools foster an environment where students feel safe, respected, and valued. A positive school climate enhances student well-being, engagement, and overall academic performance.

Enhancing Learning Opportunities: Conflict management provides students with valuable learning opportunities. By teaching conflict resolution skills, students develop crucial life skills such as communication, problem-solving, empathy, and collaboration. These skills not only help them manage conflicts effectively but also prepare them for future personal and professional relationships.

Bullying and Violence: Conflict management plays a vital role in preventing and addressing bullying and violence within schools. By promoting open communication, empathy, and conflict resolution strategies, schools can create an environment where students are less likely to engage in aggressive or harmful behaviour. Conflict management programs contribute to reducing incidents of bullying and violence, ensuring a safe and secondary learning environment.

Building Positive Relationships: Conflict management fosters positive relationships among students, between students and teachers, and among staff members. By addressing conflicts constructively, schools promote understanding, respect, and empathy, which form the foundation of healthy relationships. Positive relationships enhance student engagement, motivation, and a sense of belonging within the school community. Owan V.J., (2018).

Developing Social and Emotional Skills: Conflict management supports the social and emotional development of students. By addressing conflicts and providing opportunities for reflection and resolution, students learn to

manage their emotions, understand others' perspectives, and develop resilience. Ezeugbor C.O, (2015). These skills are crucial for their personal growth, mental well-being, and success in both academic and personal endeavours.

Promoting Inclusion and Diversity: Conflict management in schools addresses conflicts arising from cultural differences, stereotypes, or biases. By promoting inclusive practices and resolving conflicts related to diversity, schools create an environment where all students feel accepted and valued. Conflict management encourages dialogue, empathy, and the appreciation of diverse perspectives, fostering an inclusive school culture.

Parent and Community Engagement: Conflict management in schools involves engaging parents, guardians, and the wider society.

Causes of Conflict in Schools

Conflicts in school can occur when a party perceives that others are frustrated or about to, struggle or context between people with opposite needs. Conflict is therefore used to express or express misunderstanding, disagreement, and hostility among people. Abdulgafar K.O. (2020). Conflict in schools can occur for the following reasons:

Communication and Miscommunication: Inadequate communication or miscommunication can escalate conflicts in schools. Misunderstandings between students, between students and teachers, or among staff members can lead to conflicts that could have been resolved through effective communication. Aina O.S. (2022).

Lack of Conflict Resolution Skills: Students and even some teachers may lack the necessary conflict resolution skills to handle conflicts constructively. Conflict management programmes and training that teach negotiation, problem-solving, empathy, and communication skills can empower individuals to address conflicts effectively. Integrating conflict resolution education into the school curriculum can help equip students with lifelong conflict management skills. Isabu M.O. (2017).

Lack of organizational Support and Structures: Schools need to have supportive structures and policies in place to effectively manage conflicts. Adequate resources, such as trained mediators or counsellors, should be available to address conflicts promptly and fairly. Establishing clear conflict resolution procedures, including reporting mechanisms and disciplinary actions, can provide a framework for managing conflicts consistently and equitably.

Parental Involvement and Expectations: Conflicts involving students often extend beyond the school environment, involving parents or guardians. Involving parents in conflict resolution processes can be essential for understanding the context and resolving conflicts effectively. However, challenges may arise due to varying expectations, communication gaps, or conflicting viewpoints. Encouraging parental involvement and fostering positive parent-school relationships are crucial for successful conflict management.

Challenges of Conflict Management in Schools

The following are some of the challenges of conflict management in schools

Power Imbalances: Power imbalances between students and teachers or among staff members can complicate conflict management efforts. Students may feel hesitant to voice their concerns or may perceive teachers as having more authority, which can hinder open communication and collaborative problem-solving. Similarly, conflicts among staff members can arise from differences in power dynamics or conflicting interests, making it challenging to achieve equitable resolutions.

Emotional Intensity: Conflict situations in schools can be emotionally charged, especially when they involve bullying, discrimination, or deeply rooted interpersonal issues. Emotional intensity can hinder effective communication and problem-solving. It can escalate conflicts, leading to heightened emotions, strained relationships, and potential disciplinary issues.

Limited Resources: Schools often face resource limitations, including time, personnel, and financial constraints, which can impact conflict management efforts. Insufficient availability of trained mediators, counsellors, or conflict resolution programs can hinder the timely and effective resolution of conflicts. The lack of resources may also limit the implementation of preventive measures, such as conflict resolution training or restorative justice programmes. L. Westmaas (2022).

Cultural and Diversity Issues: Schools are diverse environments, and conflicts may arise from cultural differences, misunderstandings, or biases. Cultural and diversity issues can pose challenges to conflict management, as they require culturally sensitive approaches and a nuanced understanding of different perspectives. Addressing conflicts related to diversity and promoting inclusivity necessitates ongoing education and awareness efforts.

Limited Training and Skills: Students, teachers, and even some administrators may lack the necessary conflict resolution skills and training. Without proper training, individuals may struggle to effectively manage conflicts, leading to prolonged or unresolved disputes. Providing comprehensive conflict resolution training to all stakeholders is essential for building the skills needed to address conflicts constructively.

Parental Involvement and Support: Engaging parents or guardians in conflict management processes can be challenging. Conflicts involving students often extend beyond the school setting, and parental involvement is crucial for understanding the context and resolving conflicts holistically. However, challenges may arise due to varying expectations, limited parental availability, or communication gaps. Building positive parent-school relationships and effective communication channels are essential for successful conflict management.

Resistance to Change: Implementing conflict management initiatives may face resistance from stakeholders who are accustomed to traditional disciplinary approaches or who perceive conflict management as time-consuming or ineffective. Overcoming resistance to change and fostering a school culture that values and embraces conflict resolution requires consistent communication, training, and leadership support.

Strategies for Conflict Management in Schools

Conflict in secondary schools cannot be completely eradicated but school managers are expected to provide some strategy to utilize conflict for the actualization of educational goals Onyinyechi O. (2021). The following are some strategies for conflict management in schools.

Effective communication: This is crucial in conflict management, encouraging open dialogue and active listening helps individuals express their concerns, understand different perspectives, and find common ground. Schools can facilitate communication through regular meetings, mediation sessions, and establishing channels for feedback and dialogue. Owan V.J. (2018).

Mediation and negotiation: This involves a neutral third party facilitating a conversation between conflicting parties, encouraging them to find mutually acceptable solutions. Negotiation involves finding compromises and reaching an agreement through discussions. Trained mediators or counsellors can assist in facilitating these processes and guiding the parties toward resolution.

Conflict resolution skills: Schools can teach conflict resolution skills to students, teachers, and staff members. These skills include active listening, empathy, problem-solving, negotiation, and nonviolent communication. By equipping individuals with these skills, they are better prepared to manage conflicts constructively.

Restorative practices focus on repairing the harm caused by conflicts and rebuilding relationships. It involves bringing together those involved in a conflict to discuss the impact of their actions, understand each other's perspectives, and work towards reconciliation. Workshops, conferences, and other restorative techniques can be used to foster empathy, accountability, and understanding.

Peer mediation programmes involve trained student mediators who help their peers resolve conflicts. This approach empowers students to take responsibility for conflict resolution and promotes a sense of ownership and shared responsibility within the school community.

Policies and procedures should be clearly stated and put in place to address conflicts and provide guidelines for resolving them. Respect, fairness, and the well-being of all parties involved should be emphasized.

Prevention and proactive measures are as important as conflict resolution. Schools can promote conflict management by fostering a positive school culture, teaching social-emotional skills, and creating opportunities for collaboration and teamwork.

Conclusion

Conflict, an inherent aspect of human interaction, significantly impacts the learning environment within schools. To create a positive and harmonious atmosphere conducive to effective teaching and learning, educators must grasp conflict management theories, principles, and practical strategies. Living with school conflict necessitates cultivating attitudes of openness, respect for diversity, and the ability to recognize injustice. Teachers should be equipped with tools to resolve conflicts constructively, fostering reconciliation. Rather than fixating on various conflict types, the focus should shift toward implementing effective management techniques. Properly handled conflicts can enhance educational goals and align with student expectations. Conflicts are interrelated so it is important and advisable not to focus so much on the various types of conflict but to ensure that actual management techniques are taken to defuse and reduce conflict in schools. When conflict is properly handled, it may improve the attainment of educational goals and objectives in line with meeting some aspects of student-expended citations.

Recommendations

The school environment cannot be free from conflict. It is therefore important for the educational system to ensure that proper planning is carried out for human, material and time resources to be made available in carrying out a detailed, effective and efficient programme as regards conflict management in schools. This process of conflict management will be functional if the following is put in place.

The school board or authority should ensure that teachers' and students' rights are respected by promptly mediating when there is a conflict between them.

The board should ensure that conflict management professionals are constantly trained and retrained to deal with their emotions to enable them to carry out their duties effectively and fairly.

The government, ministry, school owners, conflict managers, teachers and parents should ensure that required and relevant resources are made available as of when due to ensure effective conflict management in schools. These resources should include acquired conflict managers' skills, manpower from government/ministries, financial support from government and the community and relevant equipment and facilities needed to resolve conflict.

To ensure positive results in conflict management, the school board/authority should provide conflict management policies to minimize conflict in the school.

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