

Managing School Conflict through Effective Leadership: Best Practices in Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

The issue of student conflict has become a significant concern in secondary schools, as it directly affects student behavior, school climate, and academic performance. This study explored the school leaders' perceptions about students conflicts at secondary level and leadership strategies and practices used to manage these. It will identify the challenges faced by school leaders in managing student conflict. A qualitative research design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of school leaders' perspectives and practices. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews from 24 participants, including principals, vice principals, and head teachers working in secondary schools. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which led to the identification of key themes related to the nature, causes, prevention, and management of student conflict. The findings reveal that student conflict is a multi-dimensional phenomenon influenced by communication gaps, emotional immaturity, peer pressure, academic stress, and family-related factors. It also highlights the need for training programs for school leaders and teachers, strengthening counseling services, and promoting stakeholder collaboration to improve conflict management practices. The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of the relationship between leadership and student conflict management and provide valuable implications for educational leaders, policymakers, and practitioners.

Keywords: Leadership, Conflict Management, Secondary Schools, Educational Leadership, Student Conflict, School Discipline, Conflict Resolution

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the foundation of organizational and school effectiveness. It involves persuading and guiding others towards the achievement of an objective. In schools, leadership is significant in managing people and resources and in creating a climate that supports students' academic and personal growth. Vision and stability foster collaboration and teamwork among school leaders. Leadership plays a major role in school culture and climate because it relies on student and teacher behaviour and school success. At that, school administrators must provide clear expectations, be fair in their policies and procedures, and lead by example to show students and teachers how to behave (Northouse, 2019; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020). Bush (2008) conducted a study and found that school leadership is a key factor in achieving quality education and student outcomes. Effective leaders are also needed to assist and guide teachers and other staff to perform their duties effectively. The education system depends on teachers as the front-line, but they can only perform as well as the support, leadership, and management they receive from principals and other school leaders.

One of the most important issues regarding school leadership is conflict management. The principal's position is so significant that a school's performance is frequently associated with the principal's

personality and leadership style. Good leadership can transform an unsuccessful school into a successful one, and vice versa (Parera, 2015). Student-teacher conflicts in schools may lead to poor relationships and an unpleasant learning atmosphere. This may be particularly difficult for school leaders in schools prone to conflict. Their leadership style influences how a school leader responds to conflict. Some leaders view conflict as something to be avoided or eliminated, while others see it as an opportunity to resolve issues, enhance relationships, and effect change (Corvette, 2007). These views affect whether conflict is seen as an obstacle to school improvement or an opportunity for growth and development (Corvette, 2007). Conflicts are not always negative; they are dependent on leadership actions. Effectively managed conflict can benefit school performance, with high-performing schools often using it as a learning opportunity. It is impossible to avoid conflict, so a measure of school success is in how conflict is handled and resolved (Larasati & Raharja, 2020). When school leaders proactively manage conflict, it can be an opportunity for growth. Good conflict management helps resolve issues and build stronger bonds between students, teachers and school leaders. In the end, the school leaders' success in handling conflict is a measure of school effectiveness and contributes to educational success (Bush, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2020)

Statement of the Problem

Controlling student conflict is a big problem in secondary schools. Students' unique personalities, backgrounds, peer pressure, and emotional maturity often lead them to disagree, fight, bully, and engage in other destructive behaviors. While school principals have various approaches to managing these issues, the problems persist, so many of these methods might not work. Controlling student conflicts is the responsibility of school administrators, especially principals. The greater participation of students in violent and unhealthy behaviors is concerning, and it has distracted students from academic activities. This was a possible reason for a decline in educational quality, as students were unable to focus on their studies. This underscores the importance of school leaders to handle student conflict. Although the role of leadership in student conflict has been recognized as important, past studies have largely focused on theoretical frameworks and quantitative measures of school performance, paying little attention to school leaders' experiences and perspectives. Qualitative studies examining principals' and school administrators' knowledge of student conflict, the practices they employ in the school setting, and the challenges they face in coping with it are lacking. This shows that a qualitative study is necessary to investigate student leadership in conflict at secondary schools.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore school leaders' perceptions of student conflict in secondary schools.
2. To examine the leadership strategies and practices used to manage student conflict in secondary schools.
3. To identify the challenges faced by school leaders in managing student conflict.
4. To explore how leadership approaches to conflict management influence school climate and student behavior.

Research Questions

1. How do school leaders perceive student conflict in secondary schools?
2. What leadership strategies and practices are used by school leaders to manage student conflict in secondary schools?
3. What challenges do school leaders face in managing student conflict in secondary schools?

4. How do leadership approaches to conflict management influence school climate and student behavior?

Significance of the Study

This study may be important, as student conflict continues to be an issue in secondary schools and affects students' academic, behavioral, and school climate outcomes. The study examines school leaders' approaches to conflict management, offering insights into leadership strategies that help maintain school discipline and promote a positive, healthy learning environment. This study may be useful to school leaders and principals, as it provides guidance on addressing student conflict and other issues. Insight into various leadership styles and their effects on conflict management may support school leaders to reflect on and refine their own leadership practices. This may help develop more consistent, equitable and productive ways of responding to student conflict. The research may also benefit teachers, as leadership in conflict management affects classroom management and teacher-student relationships. Effective conflict management may minimize classroom disruption and enhance the teaching and learning environment. Similarly, students may benefit from a more harmonious school environment where conflicts are managed effectively, leading to improved behaviour and well-being. Additionally, this study may add to the body of research by providing a qualitative understanding of the role of leadership in the conflict management of secondary school students. The results may be used to guide educational policy and training providers in developing leadership training and policies that prioritize conflict management. The study may inform improvements in school leadership and the effectiveness of secondary education.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In secondary schools, leadership can be defined as the ability of school principals and administrators to influence students, teachers, and staff to uphold order and discipline in a productive learning environment. Good leadership is characterized by decision-making, communication, policy enforcement, and supervision of behavior. Leadership is particularly relevant to student conflict because leaders can influence expectations for behavior, procedures for conflict resolution, and demonstrate proper interpersonal behavior. Effective leadership by principals can help them to avoid the escalation, promote impartiality, and foster credibility among stakeholders. As such, there is a need for leadership intervention to control behavior and encourage constructive resolution. The engagement of student leaders in promoting, upholding, and restoring discipline among students is crucial to supporting effective discipline practices in schools (Kibet et al., 2012). Conflicts can take the form of verbal, physical, bullying, social ostracism, or group rivalry. Since secondary school students are at a critical stage of emotional and psychological development, conflicts are easily undermined, which can impair academic performance, school attendance, and students' overall well-being.

The concept of leadership is also one of the pillars in the conceptualization of student conflict management in secondary schools. In the context of this study, leadership is not viewed as a general organizational phenomenon, but a process through which school leaders can influence the prevention, control and resolution of student conflict. School heads and administrators have a significant influence on conflict management in secondary schools because their leadership style is associated with how they manage conflict. Northouse sees leadership as a process that includes getting people to achieve common goals (Northouse, 2019). The leadership of the secondary school in the area of education plays a prime role in influencing institutional discipline, student behavior, and the learning environment. Secondary schools are not the same as primary institutions owing to the developmental nature of students, the high academic stress, intricate peer relationships and the freedom of behavior. Therefore, leadership in secondary schools must adopt intentional approaches to addressing student conflict in an effective and orderly manner. Educational leadership aims to enhance teaching and learning outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020). The leadership style is decisive in determining how student conflict is resolved in secondary schools. Although leadership can be defined as the ability to

influence and guide, leadership style is the way and manner in which a person exercises power, makes decisions, and sustains relationships. Regarding student conflict management, the leadership style of school principals plays a crucial role in school discipline, conflict resolution, and the school climate. School management and decision-making are influenced by different leadership styles (Northouse, 2019).

Conflict is an unavoidable part of social interaction, especially in an institutional setting like a secondary school, where people with different personalities, backgrounds, and interests interact on a daily basis. Conflict in this study is specifically discussed in terms of student conflicts in high school and the issue of conflict in relation to leadership practices geared towards managing it. To analyze how school leaders interpret, regulate, and resolve student conflicts, it is important to understand the conceptual basis of conflict. Conflict management in secondary schools refers to the methodologies, strategies, and leadership practices used to prevent, control, and resolve conflicts among students. Specifically in this research, conflict management is addressed, focusing on how school leaders address student conflict to maintain school discipline, safety, and a healthy school climate. Conflict management does not only revolve around responding to behavioral occurrences; it also involves active leadership, well-designed policies, intervention through collaboration, and prevention systems. Conflict management refers to the measures used to address disputes effectively (Rahim, 2011). Leveraging leadership to address student conflict in secondary schools is key to ensuring discipline, safety, and a productive learning environment. Although conflict is a normal phenomenon in adolescent social contexts, how it is handled is greatly influenced by the leadership practices of school principals and administrators. The question of whether student conflict leads to institutional instability or is used to provide a behavioral development and social learning opportunity lies with leadership. School leaders have the duty to ensure order and resolve conflicts (Fullan, 2014). Leadership practices for handling student conflict have a significant impact on the school climate as a whole in secondary schools. School climate can be defined as the overall perceptions of safety, relationships, discipline, and institutional order in the learning context. As a result of effective leadership practices that manage student conflict positively, the school climate becomes sound, favourable, and conducive to learning. On the other hand, poor conflict management undermines discipline, heightens tension, and impairs academic performance. The empirical research provides evidence of the utility of leadership practice in student conflict management in high schools. Despite the rich literature on educational leadership and student discipline, when considered separately, only a few studies have directly investigated the relationship between both leadership styles and management of student conflicts in secondary schools. In this sub-section, the present study is framed within the context of the analysis of relevant international and national studies to determine its role in the overall academic discourse. Previous research suggests that leadership can significantly affect student behavior (Marzano et al., 2005).

Research Gap

The literature review on the theoretical and empirical aspects reveal that while significant studies have been carried out on educational leadership and discipline in schools, there are few studies that have investigated the particular role of educational leadership in discipline control of conflict among students in secondary schools. Most of the available literature on leadership and student's behaviour was undertaken without exploring the direct effect of leadership practices on conflict resolution in schools in detail. The available literature has addressed leadership and school management individually (Bush, 2008). International literature has focused on the positive influence of transformational and participative leadership on school climate and school discipline. Yet, most studies have been quantitative, emphasizing statistical correlations rather than the lived experiences and decision-making processes of school leaders. Consequently, the limited knowledge of how principals perceive student conflict, what issues they face, and how situational factors impact their leadership behaviors remains. Few studies have examined leadership in conflict management among students (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Research Design

The present study is based on qualitative research design. Qualitative research focuses on understanding human experiences, behaviors, and perceptions in depth rather than quantitatively (Creswell, 2014). This study design suits the present research, as the study addresses leadership in student conflict management. It is not possible to explain this phenomenon solely in terms of numbers or statistics. It involves close observations of the thoughts, experiences, and practices of school leaders. The design is best suited to the investigation of complex social issues, such as student conflict and leadership behaviour (Merriam, 2009).

The study follows an interpretive research paradigm, as it aims to understand the meanings and experiences of the research participants (Schwandt, 2015). This paradigm is significant because it enables the researcher to examine how school leaders perceive student conflict and respond to it in practice. It helps us understand how they make decisions, the struggles they go through, and the logic behind their actions. The interpretive paradigm is especially helpful for analyzing real-life experiences in the educational context (Merriam, 2009).

Population and Sampling Technique: This study population comprises school leaders employed in secondary schools. This includes: Principals, Vice principals, Head teachers. These people are directly involved in handling student conflict and school discipline. (Fullan, 2014). Therefore, they were the most pertinent individuals to be included in this study. The population was also restricted to secondary schools, since students at this level are more likely to be affected by conflict related to adolescence, emotional development, and increased social contact. They are suitable as they are leaders and can be studied to understand the conflict management practices (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Purposive sampling was used in this research. Participants are selected based on their relevant knowledge and experience with the research topic. The participants were chosen according to the following criteria: They were required to teach in secondary schools. They have to be in a leadership role (principal, vice principal, head teacher). They should be experienced in handling student conflict. The researcher initially selected appropriate schools and got the consent of the school authorities. Then, the potential participants were contacted individually and informed about the study's purpose. No one was forced to participate in the research; only those who volunteered were included (Creswell, 2014).

This study includes a sample of about 25-30 secondary school heads. This is the right sample size to use in qualitative research, since the emphasis is not on the volume of data but on detailed, in-depth information. Fewer participants will enable the researcher to delve more deeply into participants' experiences. Data saturation is used to determine the sample size in qualitative research, but not the quantity of data (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006). The participants were interviewed until adequate information was obtained and no new ideas emerged. This level is referred to as data saturation, which implies that the sample size is sufficient.

Research Instrument: The tool for data collection in this research is an interview protocol. An interview protocol is a structured document that the researcher follows to conduct interviews in a consistent, uniform way. It ensures that all participants receive the same questions, while also being flexible. The interview guide contains: Main questions based on research objectives. Probing questions to delve deeper by asking questions and last Interview instructions. This helps maintain consistency and ensures that all relevant data is gathered from the participants.

Ethical Considerations: Ethics are fundamental for research, particularly when dealing with people. All the ethical considerations were taken into account in this study so that the safety, privacy and dignity of the participants are maintained. Participants were informed of the research and their data was to be used for research purposes (Creswell, 2014). Firstly, the participants were given information and thus they gave consent to participate in the interviews. The purpose of the study, nature of

participation and use of the data were clearly explained by the researcher. The subjects may be recruited voluntarily. Secondly, the research was conducted in secret. No names of subjects and schools were given. Their names were not given but their codes or pseudonyms were. Thirdly, the privacy of the participants was ensured. Interviews were held in a safe and private setting with no pressure placed on the interviewees to speak. Fourth, it was a voluntary study. All participants were able to drop out of the study at any time without repercussions. Lastly, the researcher was respectful and professional towards the research process. The respondents were listened to and treated with respect, and their opinions and experiences were valued. The above ethical considerations facilitated the research in an appropriate and ethical manner. Confidentiality and anonymity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) were assured to participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study collected data by semi-structured interviews. A qualitative method of collecting data is semi-structured interviews, in which the researcher formulates a series of guiding questions beforehand but also leaves room for creativity during the interview. This implies that researchers can pose additional questions based on participants' responses. This approach is flexible and, at the same time, focuses on research questions (Kvale, 2007). Semi-structured interviews also offer the possibility to study participants' experiences in detail (Creswell, 2014).

The interviews contained predetermined questions about: Knowledge of conflict among students, leadership approaches to conflict management, difficulties of school leaders, effects of conflict management on the school environment.

This approach helped gather rich, meaningful data aligned with the research objectives. It is a common qualitative research methodology applicable to gathering rich, descriptive data (Merriam, 2009).

The data collection was conducted in a systematic and well-organized way to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the data.

To carry out the research, the permission of the relevant school authorities was obtained first. The researcher personally visited the selected secondary school to elaborate on the purpose of the research and distributed a permission letter. Once the approval had been received, possible participants were identified who were principals, vice principals, and head teachers. The interviews were conducted professionally and respectfully to obtain the reliable data (Creswell, 2014).

Thematic analysis was used to interpret information from semi-structured interviews and is a popular qualitative research method for defining patterns and meanings in texts. The use of thematic analysis was suitable in this study because it enables the researcher to cluster thousands of qualitative data into meaningful themes. Thematic analysis will be used to identify common themes, behaviours and strategies for dealing with student conflict, as the focus of the research is on school leaders' experiences and perceptions of this.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The results are discussed question by question to ensure clarity and compliance with the objectives of research. In each part, the participants' answers are provided, with corresponding quotations, followed by the interpretation and analysis.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted among 24 participants, who included principals, vice-principals and head teachers who had a first-hand experience in dealing with student conflicts.

- *What is your understanding of student conflict in a secondary school context?*

The responses of the respondents demonstrate that student conflict in secondary schools is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon. Many participants viewed the miscommunication and misunderstanding among students as the result of conflict. Participant (3) indicated that: "Students conflict when they cannot understand one another and express their emotions appropriately". Another respondent provided a similar explanation, saying that: "The majority of conflicts occur because of a lack of communication and understanding; thus, communication is important for preventing conflict".

It is a Minor verbal conflict and misunderstanding, or more serious exclusion, bullying, or physical confrontation " (P-7).

Furthermore, many respondents associated student conflict with disciplinary and behavioral issues. Respondent (5) claimed that the primary source of conflict between students was related to poor discipline and behavior at school, and respondent (9) claimed that conflict was caused by the fact that students do not respect each other and do not follow rules. These responses indicate that a significant contributor to student conflict is a lack of discipline and respect.

Moreover, many participants saw peer relations and social interactions as the cause of student conflict. Participant (14) reported that *most conflicts among students are related to friendships and peer groups*, but participant (18) reported that *students get involved in conflicts because of peer pressure*. This means that peer pressure and group dynamics are major causes of student conflict at the secondary level.

Many participants also noted emotional factors as a cause of conflict.

Moreover, a few participants attributed student conflict to adolescent development. Participant (20) elaborated that

"the conflict is normal at this age, since students are still in the process of emotional and social development, and thus conflict should not always be seen negatively, but as a process students undergo in their development".

Additionally, some participants mentioned external influences such as family background and academic stress. For example, Participant (6) said that "family background influences student behavior and brings conflict in school".

Surprisingly, other participants offered more insights by viewing conflict as a positive, productive process. Participant (22) said that *"conflict is a means through which students express their emotional and psychological needs"*.

Overall, the findings show that the issue of student conflict is not a unidimensional phenomenon but is pre-determined by a complex of communication failures, emotional impact, peer associations, behavioral problems, and developmental changes. The replies also show that conflict is a challenge in school, but that can be a learning and growth experience as long as it is managed.

- *What do you think are the most frequently occurring student conflicts in your school?*

The respondents demonstrate that there are various categories of student conflicts in secondary schools; nevertheless, verbal, social, and, to a lesser degree, physical conflicts are the most widespread. Most participants also stressed that verbal disputes are the most common, as students tend to argue, tease, and use unsuitable language. For example, one participant (4) said that *"the majority of conflicts are verbal: students quarrel or use cruel words against one another"*. Besides verbal conflicts, most participants emphasized that social or relational conflicts were very common among students. These are exclusion, group rivalry, friendship problems and misunderstandings in peer groups. Participant (13) cited that *"most conflicts occur due to friendship and group problems"*.

In general, the results show that the most widespread conflicts among students in secondary schools are verbal and social, but physical conflicts are less common but more severe. These findings indicate that the majority of conflicts begin at either a relational or a communication level and could escalate unless addressed promptly.

- *What are the primary areas of conflict between students in the secondary schools in your experience?*

The reactions of the participants suggest that a blend of personal, social, and environmental factors contributes to student conflict in secondary schools. Many participants cited peer pressure and social influence as significant factors in conflict. Indicatively, Participant (22) mentioned that *“students are very much affected by their friends and tend to get involved in conflicts due to peer pressure”*, whereas Participant (23) said that *“group dynamics and peer influence are significant factors in causing conflict between students”*. These reactions imply that the communication amongst students in peer groups plays a major role in conflict formation. Moreover, emotional aspects and immaturity were also common among the respondents. Respondent (24) said that *“students are emotionally immature and unable to control their anger”*, and participant (1) said that *“conflict occurs because students respond immediately without reflecting”*. This indicates that poor self-control and emotional instability are the factors which contribute to student conflict. Moreover, communication anomalies and misconceptions were also cited as key factors. As an example, Participant (2) clarified that *“most of the conflicts occur due to misunderstanding between students”*. In addition, some participants identified the influence of family background and external environment. Participant (4) said that *“students carry their issues from home to school, which influences their behavior”*, and participant (5) said that *“the home environment is a strong factor that influences students' attitudes”*. This demonstrates that other factors contribute to conflict outside the school.

- *What are your strategies or approaches to avoid student conflict?*

The participants' responses indicate that school leaders employ diverse preventive measures to reduce student conflict in secondary schools. Most participants noted the need to foster a positive, respectful school climate. For example, participant (8) said that *“we are building a positive environment in which students respect one another”*. Moreover, many participants mentioned awareness, guidance, and counseling as preventive measures. Respondent (10) added that *“we teach students and sensitize them to the effects of conflict”*. Moreover, some of the participants highlighted the need to identify and intervene early. For example, participant (12) mentioned that *“we attempt to fix our problems early when they are not serious”*. In addition, a few participants mentioned the importance of the rules, discipline, and classroom management. Participant (14) elaborated that *“clear rules and strict discipline can aid in preventing conflict”*. Besides this, cooperation among teachers, parents, and school staff was also identified as a major strategy. Indicatively, Participant (16) mentioned that *“we engage parents and teachers in collaborative conflict prevention, meaning that joint efforts are more useful in controlling student behavior”*.

Figure 1. A Conceptual Model of Student Conflict in Secondary Schools.

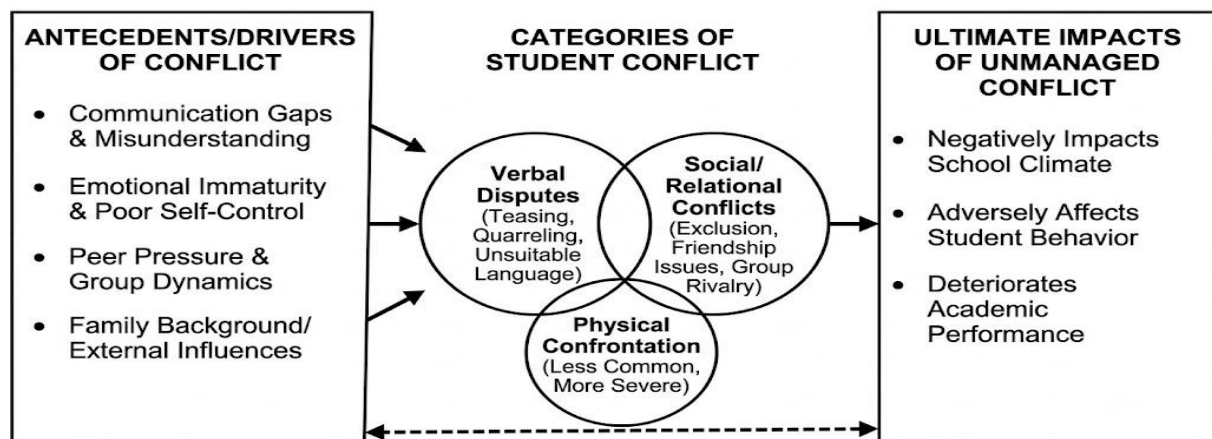


Figure 1. A Conceptual Model of **Student Conflict** in Secondary Schools.

- *What do teachers, counselors, or parents do to help you deal with student conflict?*

The responses of the respondents underscore the idea that student conflict management is a team effort among teachers, counselors, and parents. Most interviewees highlighted the significance of teachers as the initial point of contact for detecting and resolving conflicts. Indicatively, participant (16) wrote *“that teachers observe any change in student behavior and identify conflicts at an early stage”*. Besides the teachers, numerous participants emphasized the role of counselors, who provide students with emotional and psychological support. Participant (18) described *“how counselors help students become aware of their emotions and guide them toward positive behavior”*, but participant (19) explained that, *“during counseling sessions, students learn to manage anger and resolve conflicts peacefully”*. This demonstrates that counselors play a significant role by addressing the emotional side of conflict and facilitating more effective coping mechanisms with students. Moreover, several participants highlighted the role of parents in addressing students conflict. For example, participant (20) mentioned that *“parents are informed about their children's behavior and are consulted in case of conflict resolution”*.

- *What is an example of a student dispute that your leadership style helped solve?*

When dealing with student conflicts, school administrators tend to use peaceful, equal-tempered, and student-focused strategies to effectively address them. Most participants gave examples of how they have stepped in by listening to both parties and ensuring that the decisions made are fair. For example, participant (23) said that *“he called both the students, heard their views, and made them see each other”*, and participant (24) said that *“by giving them equal opportunity to speak, the problem was addressed amicably”*. These answers show that active listening and being unbiased are important aspects of effective leadership in conflict management. Moreover, some respondents pointed out the use of counseling and guidance as an effective strategy. Respondent (1) spoke of *“how he would guide the students and make them see their wrong (rather than punish them)”*, and participant (2) said that *through counseling, the students would realize what they did, and they would accept solving the problem*. This implies that rehabilitative and therapeutic measures are better than punitive measures. Moreover, some participants noted the role of mediation and conflict discussion. As an example, participant (3) mentioned that *“I organized a meeting during which both students talked about the problem publicly and came to a shared solution”*. In addition, some participants mentioned that the inclusion of teachers or parents as well was another contributor to the success of conflict resolution. Participant (5) mentioned that *“the problem was successfully addressed with the assistance of teachers and parents, and that joint work reinforced the process of resolving the problem”*.

- *What are your difficulties in addressing student conflict in your school?*

Participants' responses: School leaders face several challenges. One of the most frequently reported difficulties is a lack of parental cooperation. To illustrate, participant (6) explained that, when parents fail to cooperate and protect their children even when they are on the wrong side, then, participant (6) continued, explaining that it is hard to resolve conflicts effectively in the absence of parental support. These reactions indicate that a lack of parental involvement complicates conflict management and reduces its effectiveness. Additionally, some respondents cited the same fights among the same learners. Indicatively, participant (10) stated that some students are known to engage in conflicts time and again, and participant (11) added that it is hard to maintain discipline due to constant conflicts. Such reactions indicate the challenge of attaining long-lasting behavior change. Moreover, the lack of resources and inability to access counseling places have been identified as significant issues. Participant (12) indicated that due to scarce resources to offer solutions to all the problems of students, the quality of conflict management is affected by the number of counselors. Overall, the data indicate that student conflict management is a complex process influenced by factors such as a lack of parental support, behavioral issues, recurring conflicts, inadequate resources, and workload. These issues make it more challenging to help school leaders develop effective, coherent conflict management practices.

- *What impact do limited resources, student behavior or parental involvement have on conflict management?*

The answers given by the participants suggest that the lack of resources and the behavior of students and their parents are significant factors influencing the effectiveness of conflict management in secondary schools. Most participants have pointed out that the lack of resources, in particular the absence of trained counselors and support staff, limits their ability to resolve conflicts. For example, participant (13) mentioned that, due to the lack of counseling staff, it is difficult to effectively address all learners, whereas participant (14) mentioned that, due to the shortage of counseling personnel, it is hard to address all learners effectively. These responses indicate that a lack of resources makes proper and prompt intervention impossible. In addition, it was discovered that student behavior was a major determinant of conflict management. Most of the participants explained that it is difficult to resolve a conflict when aggressive, non-cooperative or emotionally unstable students are involved. Participant (15) further explained that students' unwillingness to listen and cooperate makes conflict management quite challenging, but participant (16) added that negative attitudes and frequent student misbehavior accompany this. This is evidenced by participant (17) noting that it is easy to resolve conflicts when parents are on our side, and participant (18) stating that it is difficult to resolve conflicts without the cooperation of parents on our side. With these responses, parental support plays a critical role in bringing uniformity between school and home. In most instances, the outcomes suggest that conflict management largely relies on available resources, student conduct, and parental involvement.

- *Are there scenarios in which managing conflict proves to be especially challenging?*

The participants' answers suggest that conflict management is especially challenging in certain circumstances in secondary schools. Most of the participants indicated that it is more difficult to deal with conflicts with aggressive or emotionally unstable students. For example, participant (19) said that *"it is very hard when students are extremely aggressive and cannot listen"*, whereas participant (20) added that *"emotionally reactive students complicate the situation"*. These reactions indicate that the level of emotion and loss of control comprises a substantial portion of the complications in dealing with conflicts. Moreover, several participants noted that conflicts between two or more students or groups are more complex. Participant (21) elaborated that, *"in the case of group issues, there are many students with different points of view, which makes it hard to deal with"*. Participant (23) said that *"if a conflict is not addressed early, it becomes serious and can only be resolved later, indicating the significance of early intervention"*. In addition, parental non-cooperation and external influences were also cited as reasons that complicate the conflict management. Respondent (24) said that *"when*

parents fail to support the school, it becomes more difficult to solve problems effectively, meaning that external support is essential for effective problem-solving”.

- *How, in your opinion, does effective conflict management contribute to the overall school climate?*

The participants' answers show that the overall school climate is positively affected by effective conflict management. Most participants noted that conflicts handled properly will create a safe, peaceful, and supportive environment for both students and staff. To illustrate, Participant (1) said that *“proper conflict management ensures a peaceful and secure atmosphere in the school”* and Participant (2) said that *“when conflict management is done appropriately, students feel more secure and comfortable”*. All these reactions indicate that adequate conflict management increases feelings of security in the school. Moreover, a number of participants emphasized that effective conflict management can enhance relationships among students and between students and teachers. Participant (3) described *“how resolving conflicts can help develop stronger relationships and better understanding among participants”*. Participant (5) said that *“when conflicts are handled properly, students will act more responsibly, and another student added that it would decrease the number of conflicts and make students more disciplined”*. Such reactions indicate that conflict management is critical to maintaining order and consistency in the school setting. The relationship between conflict management and academic performance was indicated by the respondent (6), who said that *“in a conflict-free environment, students can concentrate more on studies”*.

- *What is the impact of leadership practices on conflict management regarding student behavior and discipline?*

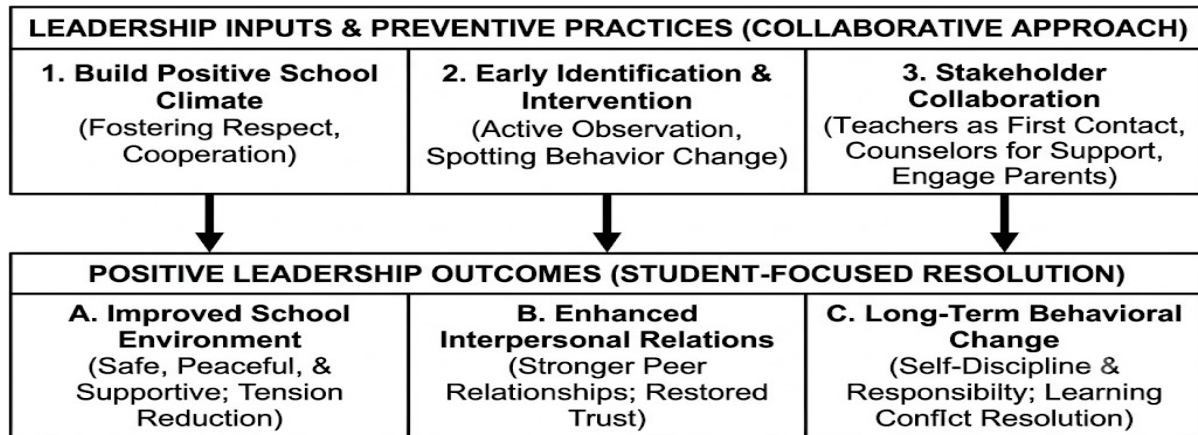
The head teachers answers reveal that leadership practices in conflict management play a key role in student behavior and discipline in secondary schools. The majority of respondents stated that reasoned, uniform, and nurturing leadership styles help improve student behavior. To explain this, participant (7) wrote that fair and consistent leadership makes the students more responsible and stick to the rules, whereas participant (8) wrote that positive leadership makes the students act responsibly and obey the rules. The implication of these reactions is that the type of leadership has a direct effect on students' attitudes and behavior. In addition, participants shared a significant focus on the idea that leadership practices based on guidance, rather than punishment, lead to more successful behavioral outcomes. Participant (9) said that *“when we lead students rather than punish them, they realize they made mistakes and work towards a better situation”*, but participant (10) said that *“supportive leadership helps students develop self-discipline. It states that constructive, student-centered approaches would be more appropriate to alter long-term behavior”*. Moreover, other respondents observed that effective conflict management reduces recurring misbehavior and promotes a positive culture of behavior. The respondent (12) identified the learning aspect of conflict resolution and stated that when conflicts are managed properly, students would learn to do the same in the future.

- *What have you observed in the school environment after you have resolved the serious conflicts?*

The participants' responses indicate that resolving major conflicts would yield significant benefits for the school environment as a whole. The majority of participants emphasized that after conflict resolution, the school atmosphere is less tense and more balanced. For example, participant (13) wrote that, *“following the resolution of major conflicts, the atmosphere at the school calms down and students are more relaxed”*, whereas participant (14) wrote that *“the overall atmosphere at the school improves noticeably”*. Such answers indicate that the ability to resolve conflicts is a part of a feeling of stability and emotional comfort in the school. Moreover, many participants noted that relations with and cooperation among students had also improved. According to participant (15), *“the students gain a better understanding and begin to work with one another”*, and participant (16) explained that *“conflict resolution will aid in restoring trust amongst the students”*. This implies that not only does conflict resolution solve the problem, but it also enhances interpersonal relationships. In addition, some of the participants identified positive student behavior and discipline. For example, Participant

(17) said that “*students will be more responsible and will not make the same mistakes again*”; another participant said that “*discipline will improve once the major conflicts are over*”. These reactions indicate that conflict resolution has a long-term effect on students' behavior.

Figure 2. Leadership Best Practices for Conflict Management and Positive Outcomes.



CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The results of the current research are a solid contribution to the existing theories of educational leadership and conflict management. Among the biggest lessons of the study is that student conflict is not an abnormality or something to avoid; it is a normal result of social interaction, especially during adolescence. This is in line with the perception that conflict, when dealt with efficiently, can be one of the components of learning and self-growth (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). One of the most important aspects of the dialogue is leadership. This is effectively illustrated in the study: leadership is not restricted to imposing discipline but also to the ability to establish an environment where conflict can be resolved in a constructive manner. With transparent, fair, and supportive leaders, there is a better chance of resolving the conflict and attaining a positive school climate. This is in line with the transformational leadership theory that focuses on the significance of motivation, communication, and relationship-building (Northouse, 2019).

This study concludes that student conflict is an inherent part of the school environment at the secondary school level, but its impact is extremely reliant on the manner of its management. Leadership skills are very important in ensuring that conflict is not a disruptive factor, but an opportunity to learn and develop. Fair, understanding and collaborative policies embraced by school leaders are more effective when it comes to conflict management and in encouraging positive behavior among students. The paper observes that the issue of conflict management is not just about maintaining discipline but also aiding in the learning, communication, and emotional growth of students. The leadership style of the principal also plays a vital role in effectively managing conflicts in a school setting. Principals who maintain positive relationships with teachers and staff are less likely to encounter conflicts within the school. Those who adopt a democratic leadership approach tend to be more successful in handling conflicts that arise in schools. Furthermore, principals in public schools demonstrated greater effectiveness and efficiency in conflict resolution when compared to their counterparts in private schools. In contrast, principals of private schools were more inclined towards laissez-faire leadership and competitive approaches to conflict management.

Recommendations

Recommendation by the study is that school should concentrate on the creation of positive and respectful environment that helps students feel safe and valued. Such an atmosphere will lessen the chances of conflict and create healthy relationships among students. Intensification should also be applied to the school-based counseling services since emotional support is one of the areas that can be

used to prevent and resolve conflict. They must provide professional training on conflict management to teachers in order to resolve issues at the classroom level. Regular communication and interaction with the parents should be employed to improve their participation as the continuity of the home environment with the school is very critical towards the shaping of student behavior. Clear and consistent policies on discipline and management of conflicts in schools to enhance fairness and transparency should also be clear.

Future Research Recommendations

The study can be further developed by conducting further research and utilizing a larger sample population and other learning environments. There is also an opportunity to investigate the opinions of students to know more about the conflict. Additionally, cross-sectional research in other schools or contexts may be useful to explain the contextual impact on the conflict management habits. Mixed methods could also contribute the validity of the findings.

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