

**EVALUATING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT
TEAM IN MANAGING TEACHERS CONFLICT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY
SCHOOLS IN BUNDA TOWN COUNCIL**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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CERTIFICATION

The undersigned certifies that they have read and hereby recommends for acceptance by the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) a dissertation entitled "*Evaluating the Strategies Employed by School Management Teams in Managing Conflicts among Teachers in Public Secondary Schools in Bunda Town Council*" in partial fulfillment of the requirements for award of the Degree of Master of Education in Administration, Planning, and Policy Studies (MED-APPS) of the Open University of Tanzania.

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DECLARATION

I, **Charles Robert**, declare that, the work presented in this dissertation is original. It has never been presented to any other University or Institution. Where other people's works have been used, references have been provided. It is in this regard that I declare this work is originally mine. It is hereby presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Masters of Education in Administration, Planning, and Policy Studies (MED-APPS) of the Open University of Tanzania.

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Signature

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Date

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all those who have supported me throughout this academic journey. First and foremost, I dedicate this work to my supervisors, Dr Edgar Nderego and Dr Patrick Manyengo, whose guidance, wisdom, and encouragement have been invaluable. Their mentorship has been a source of inspiration and strength. I also dedicate this study to parents, my Mother Agnes Simuda Mayani whose unwavering support and love continue to inspire me, and to the loving memory of my father Somba Robert Mangh'yakenda who installed in me the value of hard work and perseverance. I also dedicate this study to my beloved wife, Lilian Kamando Mbalilo, whose unwavering love, patience, and support motivated me through the challenges of this journey. To my children, whose understanding and encouragement brightened my days and reminded me of the importance of hard work and dedication.

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the strategies employed by School Management Teams (SMTs) in managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council. The study adopted a qualitative approach and a case study design. It was guided by three research objectives: (i) to identify the common causes of conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools, (ii) to assess the strategies employed by SMTs in resolving conflicts among teachers, and (iii) to examine the challenges faced by SMTs in managing such conflicts. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. 49 participants were involved in the study, including 35 teachers, 1 TSC officer, 1 TSEO, and 12 SMT members. The researcher ensured the study's trustworthiness by addressing credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. The findings revealed that unequal workload distribution, favouritism, unfair treatment and personality differences were the main causes of conflict. Additionally, open communication, conflict mediation and arbitration, professional development workshops, and collaboration were identified as the main strategies used by SMTs. The study recommended that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, along with local government authorities, develop clear, written guidelines for teaching allocation and administrative and extracurricular responsibilities to help reduce conflicts among teachers.

Key Words: *Strategies, School Management Team, and Conflicts.*

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

EFA	Education for All
FPG	Frank Porter Graham
OUT	Open University of Tanzania
RAS	Regional Administrative Secretary
SMT	School Management Teams
TC	Town Council
TSC	Teachers Service Commission
TSEO	Town Secondary Education Officer
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study evaluated the strategies employed by the school management team (SMT) in managing teachers' conflicts in secondary schools in Bunda Town Council. Therefore, this chapter covered the following subsections: introduction, background to the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, general objectives, specific objectives, significance of the study, scope and delimitation of the study, limitation of the study and organization.

1.2 Background to the study

The School Management Team (SMT) plays a critical role in ensuring the smooth functioning and success of secondary schools. Comprising principals, deputy principals, department heads, and senior teachers, the SMT is responsible for strategic planning, decision-making, and overseeing the daily operations of the school. One of the key functions of the SMT is to ensure that the school adheres to educational policies, fosters an environment conducive to learning, and addresses student and staff needs. The SMT also works to maintain discipline, promote professional development among teachers, and ensure that the curriculum is delivered effectively. According to Bush (2014), the SMT serves as the link between policy formulation at the district or national level and implementation at the school level, making it crucial for translating educational reforms into practice.

Furthermore, the SMT is tasked with building a positive school culture that promotes academic excellence and student well-being. By fostering collaboration among staff

members and engaging with parents and the wider community, the SMT ensures that the school remains accountable and transparent in its operations. Effective SMTs also manage resources efficiently, ensuring that budgets, facilities, and technology are used to enhance teaching and learning. Thus, the SMT is essential in driving a school's vision and mission while promoting a high standard of education and operational excellence (Bush, 2014).

Conflict is an inherent aspect of school management, and its presence should not be viewed solely as a negative force. Ngwenya (2024) emphasizes that conflict can stimulate creative and innovative thinking, thereby enhancing organizational growth and performance. This perspective suggests that, when managed effectively, conflict can serve as a catalyst for positive change within educational institutions (Angela, 2014). Unresolved conflicts can lead to reduced staff morale, hinder effective teaching, and create a toxic atmosphere that affects students' academic progress. Conflict management encourages open communication and mutual respect, helping teachers focus on their roles in education (Angela, 2014).

Conflict is an inherent aspect of human interaction, particularly within complex organizations such as educational institutions. Teacher conflicts in U.S.A. schools have escalated in recent years, manifesting in various forms such as harassment, threats, and physical violence. A 2024 survey revealed that 65% of teachers reported experiencing at least one incident of verbal harassment or threatening behavior from a student, while 42% reported instances of physical violence (Randall, 2024). These figures represent a significant increase compared to previous years, indicating a troubling trend in educator safety and well-being (Randall, 2024). The impact of

these conflicts extends beyond personal safety concerns. Approximately 44% of K–12 teachers reported feeling burned out often or always, with 37% anticipating leaving their current school within the next four years (Peck, 2025). Furthermore, 18% indicated plans to leave the profession entirely, which could result in a significant exodus of educators by 2028. This anticipated turnover exacerbates existing challenges in teacher recruitment and retention, particularly in high-poverty and high-conflict districts.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, researchers have documented different conflict scenarios in this region; for example, Lukman (2021) reported that the existence of conflicts in some learning institutions in South Africa followed increased fees, considering the inflation rates due to the increased operating costs, which caused the misunderstanding between teachers themselves and the community. Additionally, in Nigeria, Williams (2017) reported that there are a variety of factors contributing to conflicts, including poor leadership, poor communication, a poor learning environment, lack of funds, and student misbehaviour. It was noted that these conflicts had the following impacts if they remained unchecked: hostility among the school community, teachers' dropout, negative impact on academic performance, damage to school properties, and distortion of school image. Furthermore, in Kenya, a study by Kilonzo and Ivita (2019) reported that perceptions, communication problems, authority structures and differences in attitudes are sources of conflicts among secondary school teachers in Kenya. Also, the researcher noted that the trends of conflicts in secondary schools with the teachers were high, indicating that the service delivery in secondary is low and unimpressive.

In Tanzania, conflicts in public secondary schools have been regularly occurring in many schools but differ from one school to another depending on the extent to which conflicts occurred or were addressed. For example, the study conducted in Temeke municipality revealed the existence of conflicts in schools, as it is indicated that about 45% of teachers do have conflicts with heads of schools because of the poor academic performance of their schools (Tinde, 2015).

The study by Angela (2014) also revealed that 84.4% of school conflicts are caused by a lack of proper communication with teachers in Kinondoni municipality; improper communication between the heads of schools and teachers has been influencing regular conflicts in some of the schools, and some heads of schools employed wrong managerial skills in handling conflicts, leading to a lack of transparency of school budgets in terms of income and expenditure (Kipyego, 2013).

Many conflicts in the field of education have been reported in various regions; for example, Ekpang (2021) reported the conflict between teachers and watchmen in one of the public secondary schools in the Arusha district, which negatively affected the work performance and the right of students to learn in the safe environment. Additionally, in 2013, there was a conflict between the administration and students at Mzumbe secondary schools and Morogoro Lutheran Junior Seminary, which also led to the closure of the school and the government spending a lot of money to settle the matter. The conflicts were between the students and administration as they failed to sufficiently provide the necessary resources for effective learning, such as a poor teaching environment, food, and learning aids (Guardian, 2013; Mwananchi, 2013). Teachers' conflict in Bunda TC varies from one school to another. The most

experienced types of conflict in public secondary schools include student-teacher disputes, bullying, peer rivalry, academic pressure, discipline issues between staff members and heads of schools, teachers themselves, teachers and student's parents, and teachers against members of school boards (Bunda TCS report, 2023). These conflicts disrupt school operations, causing staff shortages, student displacement, emotional distress, and limited resources (Felista, 2022). This led to a decline in educational quality, leading to reduced learning outcomes. According to the report from the Bunda TSC office (2023), there are a lot of scenarios of conflicts between teachers and teachers, teachers and school management, and teachers and parents that have been reported, indicating that public secondary schools in Bunda TC are associated with an existence of conflicts.

The government has taken several initiatives to address conflict issues among public secondary school teachers. One of the key efforts is the establishment of professional development programs aimed at improving communication and conflict resolution skills among teachers (Teyler & Green, 2023). These programs often include workshops and training sessions focused on fostering collaboration, reducing tension and managing classroom conflicts (Khan & Ali, 2023). Additionally, policies have created a more structured and transparent grievance redress system within schools, ensuring teachers have a formal channel to express concerns and resolve disputes with peer administration (Johnson & Lee, 2022). Furthermore, the government has also promoted unionisation, which gives teachers a collective voice in negotiating disputes and advocating for their rights, thereby reducing individual conflicts (Smith, 2021). Although there have been several studies worldwide that highlight the

strategies employed in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools. For instance, some of the studies include those conducted by FPG (2014) in America; Mary (2017) in Ethiopia; Akinwumi (2023) in Ghana; Lukman (2017) in South Africa; Williams (2021) in Nigeria; and Kilonzo and Ivita (2019) in Kenya, but there are fewer studies related to this in the Tanzanian context. Studies done by Malingumu (2022), Felista (2022), and Mhando et al. (2022) focused more on the conflict strategies used by school management. Therefore, undertaking a study on the strategies employed by school management teams in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council

1.3 Statement of the problem

Ideally, if teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools are managed and addressed well, it could lead to schools' improvements in terms of academic achievement (Angela, 2014). A well-managed education system in terms of resources and procedures would promise the desired outcomes (Bush, 2014).

Studies conducted by Malingumu (2022); Sweetbert&Felista (2022); Felista (2022); Kaluma (2017); and Gabriel (2015) identified various causes of conflict issues such as favouritism, communication breakdown, resource allocation, workload and stress in public secondary schools. The government has implemented various policies, such as professional development programmes, conflict resolution training, and promoting better communication channels to address conflicts in public secondary schools; however, despite these efforts, conflicts persist. Therefore, this study filled the gap by evaluating the strategies employed by the school management team (SMT) in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council.

1.4 General Objective

The main aim of this study was to evaluate the strategies employed by the school management team in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council.

1.4.1 Specific Objectives

This study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- (i) To identify the common causes of conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools.
- (ii) To assess the strategies employed by the SMT in resolving conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools.
- (iii) To examine the challenges faced by the school management team in managing conflicts among teachers in secondary schools

1.5 Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- (i) What are the common causes of conflicts for teachers in public secondary schools?
- (ii) What strategies are employed by the school management team in resolving conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools?
- (iii) What are the challenges faced by the school management team in managing conflicts among the teachers in public secondary schools?

1.6 Significance of the study

Upon the completion of this study, the government of the United Republic of Tanzania was informed about the strategies employed by school management teams

in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools. Additionally, the study enlightened head of schools and other education stakeholders to take necessary measures to reduce the root causes of teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools in Bunda TC and Tanzania at large. Finally, the study contributed to the body of knowledge specifically on conflicts among teachers and how SMTs helped teachers perceive and manage conflicts. The results were intended to assist policymakers and educational planners in making adequate adjustments to create a conducive environment in public secondary schools to enhance student performance in Tanzania, particularly in Bunda TC.

1.7 Scope and delimitation of the study

This study was confined to Bunda Town Council, where the researcher's conclusions were drawn from respondents in one location. The study was carried out in ordinary-level public secondary schools within Bunda Town Council, involving one TSC officer, members of school management teams, and public secondary school teachers from the selected schools. Contextually, the study examined the strategies employed by school management teams (SMTs) in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools. Furthermore, the study used a qualitative approach, with interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) employed as methods for data collection.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

Two limitations encountered in the research were a lack of cooperation from some of the participants and time constraints during data collection. Some school staff were initially reluctant to participate due to busy schedules and concerns over

confidentiality. This was resolved by assuring them of anonymity and the academic purpose of the study, which helped build trust. Time constraints arose due to overlapping school activities and limited availability of participants. To overcome this, the researcher created a flexible schedule, including weekends and after-school hours, to accommodate participants' availability, ensuring comprehensive data collection without compromising the quality and depth of the research.

1.9 Organization of the Study

This study was organized into five chapters: chapter one presented the introduction of the study, background of the problem, statement of the problem, general objective of the study, specific objectives, research questions, significance of the study and scope and delimitation of the study. Chapter two presented the introduction of the chapter, operational definition of key terms, theoretical literature review, empirical analysis of relevant studies and research gap. Chapter three comprises the introduction of the chapter, research paradigm, research approach, research design, area of the study, study population, sample size, sampling techniques, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness of the study, and ethical consideration issues. Chapter Four presented data presentation, analysis and discussions, and Chapter Five presented a summary, conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section dealt with a literature review which provided an overview of the strategies employed by the school management team (SMT) in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools. This chapter presented the following subsections: introduction, conceptual definitions, theoretical literature review, empirical literature review, research gap and summary of the chapter.

2.2 Conceptual Definitions

School Management Team (SMT)

School Management Teams (SMTs) are leadership groups within educational institutions responsible for overseeing and coordinating various aspects of school operations. This typically includes setting strategic goals, managing staff, handling budgets, and ensuring the implementation of educational policies and standards. Eyal and Roth (2022), SMTs play a crucial role in fostering a positive school environment by addressing administrative tasks and instructional leadership. They are involved in decision-making processes that impact teachers, students, and the overall school culture. Effective SMTs are characterised by collaboration, clear communication, and strategic planning, which are essential for improving school performance and addressing challenges (Bush, 2021).

Teachers Conflicts

Teacher conflicts refer to disputes or disagreements between teachers and various stakeholders, including school management, colleagues, or students (Johnson &

Birkeland, 2021). These conflicts often arise from issues related to workload, pay, resources, and professional expectations.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by conflict theory, which was developed by Karl Marx in the 19th century to establish the critical foundation to evaluate the strategies employed by school management teams (SMT) in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools.

2.3.1 Conflict Theory

The conflict theory was developed by sociologist Karl Marx in the 19th century. The theory suggests that social life is characterised by inherent tensions and conflicts between different groups within a society (Ritzer, 2011). According to these perspectives, these conflicts arise from the unequal distribution of power, resources, and opportunities, which leads to a constant struggle between the dominant and the subordinate groups (Dahrendorf, 1995). In the context of this study on the strategies employed by the school management team in managing teachers' conflicts, the conflicts theory was a suitable framework because it recognises that the relationship between teachers and school administrators is often shaped by the power dynamics, competing interests, and the potential for disagreement and tension. By applying conflict theory, the study can explore how these underlying tensions and power imbalances within the school systems influence the way the school management team addresses and resolves conflicts among the teachers.

2.3.2 Strength of Conflict Theory

Conflict theory offers valuable insights into social dynamics, highlighting power imbalances and resource disparities. One major strength is its focus on structural inequalities, which helps to reveal underlying issues that contribute to conflicts. For example, in educational settings, conflict theory explains how differences in power and resource allocation between school management and teachers can lead to conflicts (Thomas & Davies, 2005). This framework emphasises the role of systemic issues in perpetuating inequality and provides a basis for advocating for structural reforms to address these disparities (Cox, 1987). Additionally, conflict theory encourages a critical examination of existing power structures, which can lead to more equitable solutions (Dahrendorf, 1959). By focusing on power dynamics and resource distribution, conflict theory remains a powerful tool for understanding and addressing conflicts in various organizational contexts.

2.3.3 Weakness of conflict theory

A key weakness of conflict theory is its tendency to oversimplify complex social interactions by focusing predominantly on power struggles and resource inequalities. Critics argue that it often neglects the potential for cooperation and consensus among groups (Collins, 1994). Additionally, conflict theory can overlook the roles of individual agency and mutual benefits in conflict resolution (Coser, 1956). This focus on systemic conflict may ignore how factors like cultural values and personal relationships contribute to social dynamics (Giddens, 2006)

2.3.4 Application of conflict theory

Conflict theory, primarily associated with Karl Marx, was used to examine how power and resources were distributed unevenly in secondary schools, often leading to conflicts between different groups. In this context, the theory helped to explain the dynamics between school management teams (SMTs) and teachers. According to conflict theory, schools were not seen as neutral institutions but rather as arenas where various groups with differing interests and power engaged in struggles over control and resources. For instance, SMTs often held decision-making authority and control over school resources, which created tensions with teachers who felt marginalised or undervalued. These conflicts arose from perceived inequalities in workload, compensation, and inclusion in decision-making processes. Thus, conflict theory provided a useful lens for analyzing the roles and interactions between SMTs and teachers and highlighted the importance of addressing power imbalances to manage conflicts effectively.

2.4 Empirical Literature Review

2.4.1 Common causes of conflicts among secondary school teachers

In a USA study conducted by Kelly (2021) on teacher-administrator conflicts. The study employed a mixed-methods approach. The data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS software, and data from qualitative were analysed using content analysis. The study used a total of 120 respondents.

The findings found that conflicts between teachers and school administrators were prevalent, particularly regarding workload distribution, expectations, and resource

allocation. Teachers also reported feeling undervalued, which led to conflicts with their peers over perceived imbalances in responsibility. Therefore, the current study went beyond the study conducted by Kelly by intending to fill the contextual gap, as the current study was conducted in Bunda Town Council by evaluating the strategies employed by school management teams in managing teachers' conflicts in secondary schools.

A study was conducted in the United Kingdom by Watson (2022) on teachers' workload and conflict in the UK. The study employed a qualitative research approach. The data were collected through interviews and documentary reviews. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis to get verbatim from the study respondents. The findings revealed that teachers in secondary schools frequently experience tension over the increasing demands for student achievement, which are compounded by limited resources and heavy teaching loads. The current study differed from Watson's study by filling the knowledge gap in evaluating the strategies employed by school management teams in managing teachers' conflicts in secondary schools.

A study conducted by Milner and Johnson (2022) explored teacher conflict in Australian secondary schools. The study employed a qualitative research approach. The data were collected through interviews and documentary reviews. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis to get verbatim from the study respondents. The study revealed that teacher-on-teacher conflict is often rooted in differences in teaching methods, workload, and professional expectations. Therefore, the current study went beyond the study conducted by Milner and Johnson by filling

the methodological gap, as the current study employed a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the strategies employed by the school management team in managing teachers' conflict in secondary schools.

In Kenya, a study was conducted by Gabriel (2015) on challenges facing conflict management in public secondary schools. The study used a quantitative research approach. The data were collected through both open and close-ended questionnaires. The data were analysed by using descriptive statistics with the aid of resource clashes of SPSS software. The findings indicate that poor communication and leadership, resource challenges, and personality clashes were the main causes of conflicts among teachers. Therefore, the current study went beyond Gabriel's study by filling the knowledge gap, methodological gap, and contextual gap by evaluating the strategies employed by school management teams in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools.

A study was conducted by Malingumu (2022) on conflicts and conflict management styles in secondary schools. The study employed a mixed-methods approach. The data were collected through questionnaires, observation, and interviews. The data from the questionnaire were collected descriptively with the aid of SPSS software in data analysis, and the data from qualitative sources were collected using thematic analysis. The findings indicated that favoritism is one of the most common causes of conflicts between teachers themselves in public secondary schools. Therefore, unlike Malingumu's study, which employed a mixed-methods approach to examine conflict management in schools, the current study adopted a purely qualitative approach to

fill the methodological gap by deeply exploring the strategies employed by the School Management Team (SMT) in managing teachers' conflicts.

2.4.2 Strategies employed by school management teams in resolving conflicts among teachers

In the USA, Martin and McNally (2021) conducted a study on collaborative mediation, a strategy for conflict resolution among teachers. The study employed a mixed-method approach. The data obtained from interviews were analysed through content analysis, and the data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed descriptively. The findings found that school leaders who utilized collaborative mediation were able to reduce tension and help teachers reach mutually agreeable solutions. Therefore, the current study goes beyond the study conducted by Martin and McNally by filling the knowledge gap in evaluating the strategies employed by school management teams in managing teachers' conflicts in secondary schools.

In Pakistan, Karim (2015) conducted a study on managing conflicts by school leadership. The study employed a qualitative approach. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and observation. The qualitative data were analysed by using content analysis. The findings found that the most applied conflict management strategies are compromising, collaboration, and sometimes accommodating. These strategies provide a reasonable positive impact on performance. Therefore, the current study filled the methodological gap and contextual gap, as the proposed study will employ a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the strategies employed by the school management team in managing teachers' conflicts in secondary schools.

In Ghana, a study was conducted by Akinwumi (2023) on the role of school leadership in enhancing school climate. The study used a qualitative research approach. The data were collected through interviews and documentary reviews. The data were analysed through content analysis. The findings indicate that positive conflict resolution practices lead to a more supportive school culture, which in turn enhances student engagement and participation. A highly positive school climate is essential for fostering teacher satisfaction and student success. Therefore, the current study differed from the current study by filling contextual gaps in knowledge, as the proposed study intends to evaluate the strategies employed by the school management team in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools.

A study conducted by Woloita (2019) on conflict management and its impact on teachers' performance in secondary schools. The study employed a mixed-methods approach. The data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. The data obtained from interviews were analysed through content analysis, and the data obtained from questionnaires were analysed descriptively. The findings found that schools should build conducive strategies to manage teachers' conflicts to enhance the teaching and learning process, which ultimately leads to students' academic performance. Therefore, the current study differed by intending to fill the methodological gap and knowledge gap by evaluating the strategies employed by the school management team (SMT) in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools.

In Tanzania, a study was conducted by Mhando et al. (2022) on transformation leadership and conflict resolution in Tanzanian schools. The study employed a

mixed-methods approach to gather information. The data collected were analysed through questionnaire, observation, and documentary review. The quantitative data were analysed descriptively with the aid of SPSS, and the data from qualitative sources were analysed through content analysis. The findings indicated that schools that prioritize constructive conflict resolution develop a more positive school culture, which is essential for both teacher satisfaction and student success. Therefore, the current study differed from Mhando et al.'s (2022) study by filling the contextual and knowledge gap by evaluating the strategies employed by the school management team in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools.

2.4.3 Challenges faced by the school management team in managing conflicts among teachers in secondary schools

In the USA, a study conducted by Anderson and Brown (2021) on challenges in managing teacher conflicts in US secondary schools. The study employed a mixed-methods approach. The data were collected through questionnaires, observation, and interviews. The quantitative data were analysed aid 23 using descriptive with the aid of SPSS software version 23, and the data from qualitative were analysed thematically. The findings found that many school leaders struggle to address conflicts effectively due to insufficient professional development in conflict resolution. The study also reveals that teachers may resist changes in teaching methods or school policies, creating tension. Therefore, the proposed study differs from the study conducted by Anderson and Brown (2021) in the sense that the proposed study intends to fill the knowledge gap by evaluating the strategies

employed by the school management teams in managing teachers' conflicts in secondary schools.

Chen (2020) worked on bureaucratic challenges in school conflict resolution in China. The study employed a qualitative research approach. The data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. The data were analysed by using content analysis. The findings indicated that rigid administrative processes often delay interventions and prevent SMTs from addressing conflicts promptly. This can lead to unresolved issues that affect the overall school environment. Therefore, the current study differed from Chen's intention to fill the contextual gap, as the proposed study will be conducted in Bunda TC.

Roberts and Lacey (2022) conducted a study managing teacher conflicts in Australian secondary schools. The study employed a mixed-methods approach. The data were collected through questionnaires, observation, and interviews. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS software, and the data from qualitative were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that conflicting pedagogical approaches often cause tension between teachers, making it difficult for management to foster collaboration. Therefore, the current study differed from the study conducted by Roberts and Lacey by filling the contextual gap in evaluating the strategies employed by school management teams in managing teachers' conflicts in secondary schools.

In Kenya, a study was conducted by Gabriel (2015) on challenges facing conflict management in public secondary schools. The study used a quantitative research approach. The data were collected through both open- and close-ended

questionnaires. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS software. The findings found that many schools, especially in low-income regions, lack the necessary resources, both financial and human, to implement effective conflict resolution strategies. These limitations can prevent the establishment of supportive systems for teachers. Therefore, the current study differed from Gabriel's study by filling a knowledge gap, as the proposed study will evaluate the strategies employed by SMT in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools.

In Tanzania, a study was conducted by Sweetbert and Felista (2022) on an assessment of managerial challenges facing heads of schools in the provision of quality education in secondary education. The study employed a mixed-methods approach. The data were collected through questionnaires, observation, and interviews. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS software version 23, and the data from qualitative were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that heads of schools have the challenge of being overwhelmed by managerial responsibilities, inadequate instructional learning materials, a teacher/student ratio that exceeds forty students and a shortage of laboratories. Also, the findings showed that teachers have low morale at work, and there seem to be challenges in handling teachers' conflicts. Therefore, the current study differed from Sweetbert and Felista's by filling the knowledge gap by evaluating the strategies employed by school management teams (SMT) in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools.

2.5 Research Gap

In reviewing different studies conducted worldwide by several scholars. Such scholars include Gabriel (2015); Roberts and Lacey (2022); Chen (2020); Anderson & Brown (2021); Wolaita (2021); Akinwumi (2023); Karim (2015) and Martin & McNally (2022). Fewer studies were conducted in Tanzanian contexts, including studies by Malingumu (2022), Mhando et al. (2022) and Felista (2022). However, despite the contribution of knowledge by scholars above on the problem of the study, they failed to discuss strategies employed by the school management team (SMT) in managing teachers' conflicts in secondary schools. It is from this ground that the current study aimed to fill the gap by evaluating the strategies employed by school management teams in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council.

2.6 Chapter Summary

The literature review aimed to examine evidence from empirical research which establishes a link between school management teams (SMT) and teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools. Interventions have been reviewed to assess factors that affect the learning outcomes globally and regionally as well as across the country. On the other hand, the literature review intended to establish the mentioned gaps that this research intends to fill.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

This section presented the research methodology that was employed to generate and analyse information on examining the role played by the school management team in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools. The section comprised the following subsections: research paradigm, research approach, research design, area of the study, population size, sampling technique, data collection tools, data analysis plan, the trustworthiness of research instruments, and finally the summary of the chapter.

2.2 Research Paradigm

This employed an interpretivism paradigm. Cohen et al. (2007) defined an interpretivism paradigm as understanding the subject of human experience. This set of beliefs or worldview deals with understanding and interpreting what the subject is thinking or the meaning the researcher is making in the context. The interpretivism paradigm was employed in this study to understand the subjective experiences and meanings that participants attach to managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools. This paradigm supports exploring the social realities from the perspectives of the school management teams, teachers, and educational officers involved. By focusing on how individuals interpret and make sense of their interactions and conflict resolution strategies, the study aimed to capture rich, context-specific insights rather than generalizing findings. Data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions allowed participants to express

their views openly, enabling the researcher to interpret underlying motivations, beliefs, and social dynamics influencing conflict management.

2.3 Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach. Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) define qualitative research as a critical examination of a phenomenon that enables a researcher to collect and explain data more deeply and exhaustively. The qualitative approach was used to gain a deeper understanding of how members of the School Management Team (SMT) experience and address conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools. Through interviews and focus group discussions, the approach allowed the researcher to capture participant's personal experiences, perceptions, and emotions, which provided nuanced insights into the complex social dynamics of conflict management. It also helped explore contextual factors such as leadership style, communication patterns, and institutional culture that influence conflict resolution. This approach is particularly important for this topic because it provides a holistic and interpretive understanding of the strategies and challenges faced by SMTs, offering detailed, real-world perspectives that cannot be captured through quantitative measures alone.

2.4 Research Design

A multiple case study design was appropriate for this study because the researcher aimed to collect rich and detailed data from a few selected units of analysis. This design was particularly suitable for evaluating the strategies employed by School Management Teams (SMTs) in managing teachers' conflicts, as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of how varying school contexts influence conflict resolution

practices. By examining several public secondary schools, the researcher was able to compare and contrast the approaches used, identify common patterns, and determine the most effective strategies across different settings. The inclusion of multiple cases enhanced the reliability and transferability of the findings, offering valuable, context-specific insights into conflict management in schools. The case study design was employed by selecting several public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council as individual cases. Data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions in each school, enabling cross-case analysis to explore similarities, differences, and context-specific strategies used in managing teacher conflicts. The unit of analysis in this study was the members of School Management Team (SMT), TSC Officer, TSEO and teachers.

2.5 Area of the study

The study was conducted in Bunda Town Council, focusing on public secondary schools. Bunda Town Council, located in the Mara Region, comprises 15 public secondary schools. This location was selected because it has been associated with notable teacher-related conflicts. According to the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) District Office report, in the year of 2022 they were reported seventeen (17) conflicts cases, in 2023 eighteen (18) conflicts cases were also reported and in the year of 2024 twenty three (23) conflicts cases were reported. This including disputes between teachers themselves, between teachers and students, and between teachers and school administrations within public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council (Bunda TSC Report, 2022, 2023 & 2024). Furthermore, the choice of Bunda Town Council was influenced by the limited existing knowledge regarding the strategies

used by School Management Teams (SMTs) to address these conflicts. This knowledge gap filled with the current study by evaluating the strategies employed by SMTs in managing teacher conflicts in public secondary schools within Bunda Town Council.

2.6 Study Population

Population refers to individuals who share common characteristics (Kothari, 2004). This study involved Teachers Service Commission (TSC) District Officers, Town Secondary Education Officer, members of School Management Teams (SMT), and secondary school teachers. TSC District Officers and TSEO were included because they are responsible for overseeing and managing teacher development and welfare at the district level. Members of SMT were selected, as they were tasked with the daily management of schools and staff, while secondary school teachers were included as they directly experience and navigate workplace conflicts. The study covered 350 teachers from 15 public secondary schools, 120 SMT members from the same schools, 1 TSC District Officer and 1 Town Secondary Education Officer (TSEO), making a total population of 472.

2.7 Sample size

Usually, qualitative studies involve a small sample; qualitative studies didn't require calculation to justify the sample size. The total population of this study was 472, from which the sample size was drawn. Thus, the sample size for this study was 49 respondents. The selection of this sample size was supported by Mugenda and Mugenda (2013), who argued that when the study population is less than 10,000 a sample size of 10% to 30% is a good representation of the target population. 10% of

350 teachers and 120 members of SMT were taken to make the sample. The distribution of sample size was hereunder portrayed.

Table 3.1: Summary of the sample size

s/n	Participants	Population	Sample
1.	TSC	1	1
2.	Members of SMT	120	12
3.	Teachers	350	35
4.	TSEO	1	1
	TOTAL	472	49

Source: Researcher field (2024)

2.8 Sampling Techniques

The sampling procedure refers to selecting a sample from a population (Kothari, 2004). The study will employ purposive sampling forms and convenient sampling techniques to get the sample:

2.8.1 Purposive Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling is an intentional sampling that forms non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are based upon a variety of criteria which may require specialist knowledge (Kothari, 2004). In this study, one (1) Teacher Service Commission (TSC) officer and one Town Secondary Education Officer were selected through a purposive sampling technique due to their specialized roles and expertise in the overall supervision of all teachers' issues within their jurisdiction. Again, the researcher selected seven (07) public secondary schools through purposive sampling based on the criteria of existing teacher conflicts as per the District TSC report. Selecting seven schools provided

manageable, in-depth and comparative data for cross-case analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.8.2 Convenient Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method where units are selected for inclusion in the sample because they are the easiest for the researcher to access (Nikolopoulou, 2022); this can be due to geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or willingness to participate in the research. Sometimes called accidental sampling, convenience sampling is a type of non-random sampling. In this study, 12 members of the school management team (SMT) and 35 teachers were selected through a convenient sampling technique. The reason for using a convenient sampling technique to select members of SMT and teachers was its practicality and efficiency, as it allows researchers to easily access participants who are readily available and willing to participate, saving time and resources in a study.

2.9 Data Collection Methods

Data is anything given as a fact on which research inferences will be based, while data collection techniques refer to the tools used in collecting data and how those tools will be developed (Ololube, 2013). Therefore, the researcher used a semi-structured interview and a focus group discussion.

2.9.1 Semi-structured interview

An interview is an interaction and exchange of dialogue that may involve one-on-one interaction, large group interviews, or focus group interviews (Comp & Tromp, 2006). In this study, semi-structured interviews were used as a qualitative method of

inquiry. This approach combined a predetermined set of open-ended questions with flexibility for the interviewer to explore particular themes or responses in greater depth. Semi-structured interviews were administered to TSC officers and members of school management teams, as they were considered key informants capable of providing rich and relevant information regarding the role played by school management teams in managing teacher conflicts in public secondary schools. The interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participants' respective schools and district offices. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted in both English and Kiswahili, depending on participants language preferences. Data were recorded using a digital audio recorder and supported by field notes to ensure accuracy and completeness of information.

2.9.2 Focus Group Discussion

The researcher employed focus group discussion as a method of data collection. Focus group discussion is a qualitative technique that facilitates interaction among individuals with similar backgrounds to explore their attitudes and experiences concerning a specific phenomenon. This method was appropriate for the study as it encouraged the exchange of views and feelings about the role of school management teams in managing teacher conflicts, allowing diverse perspectives to emerge. Specifically, it has been argued that interactions among participants enhance the quality of data (Patton, 2002). Discussions were conducted in the selected schools where the participating teachers were based, ensuring comfort and confidentiality. Seven groups, each comprising five members, were formed, with each group allocated one hour to discuss the three research objectives. Prior to the discussions,

the researcher introduced the purpose of the study to familiarize the participants. The discussions were conducted in both English and Kiswahili, depending on participants preferences. Each session lasted approximately 60 to 75 minutes. Responses were recorded manually in a notebook and supplemented by an audio recorder.

2.10 Data Analysis Plan

This study applied content analysis to analyses qualitative data. The data collected through interviews and focus group discussions were thoroughly read to gain an overall understanding. The data were then filtered to identify patterns and significant themes. After identifying the themes, the information was categorised according to the research questions and objectives. Respondent's descriptions and direct quotations were presented under relevant themes, and the findings were narrated with support from the literature review. The entire qualitative data analysis process was conducted manually. The researcher systematically reviewed the data to identify recurring themes, topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that consistently emerged from the interviews and focus group discussions.

2.11 Trustworthiness of the study

In this study, credibility was ensured by addressing the fit between participants' views and the researcher's representation of those views. Interviews and focus group discussions were applied as multiple methods of data collection (triangulation) to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. Transferability was achieved by providing thick, detailed descriptions, allowing readers and other researchers to determine whether the findings could be applicable in their contexts. To ensure dependability, the research process was kept logical, traceable, and documented. This

included defining clear objectives, using reliable sources of information, and analysing data systematically. Conformability was maintained by ensuring the researcher's interpretations and findings were derived directly from the data. The researcher demonstrated how conclusions and interpretations were reached, including the rationale behind theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices used throughout the study to clarify how and why decisions were made.

2.12 Ethical Consideration Issues

The researcher first secured a research clearance letter from the Office of Postgraduate Studies of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) as a basis for requesting permission to conduct the research from the Bunda Town Council office. The researcher observed the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to remain anonymous. Confidentiality was preserved by ensuring that all sensitive information was securely stored and kept out of reach from unauthorized individuals. Furthermore, no names were mentioned, as numerical codes were used instead, and no photographs were taken without the respondents' consent. To avoid any elements of plagiarism, the researcher properly cited and acknowledged all sources of information from which data were obtained.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses and discusses the findings of the study that investigated strategies employed by school management teams in managing teacher conflict in public secondary schools. The methods employed for data collection were interviews and focus group discussions. The findings are presented, analysed, and discussed by the research objectives:

- i. To identify the common causes of conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools.
- ii. To assess the strategies employed by the SMT in resolving conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools
- iii. To examine the challenges faced by the school management team in managing conflicts among teachers in secondary schools

4.2 Causes of Conflict Among Teachers in Public Secondary Schools

The research question investigated causes of interpersonal conflict among teachers in public secondary schools. The data for this research question were generated through semi-structured interviews with Town Secondary Education Officer and the Teacher Service Commission officer. Findings revealed that conflicts among teachers arise from numerous recurring issues observed across public secondary schools. Furthermore, several key factors causing conflict among teachers in public secondary

schools. These include unequal workload distribution, poor communication, and favouritism and personality clashes.

4.2.1 Unequal worked distribution

The findings from interviews with members of school management teams revealed that unequal workload distribution significantly contributes to conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools. Some of the members reported that some teachers are consistently assigned more teaching periods, administrative responsibilities, or extracurricular duties than others, which creates frustration and resentment. For example, the town secondary education officer stated.

There are cases where a few hard-working teachers end up doing most of the work, while others avoid responsibilities. This creates tension and complaints within the staff members. The overworked teachers feel exploited, and the under-worked become targets of gossip or silent judgment tension (Interview, Town Secondary Education Officer: 6th May 2025).

Another noted

When teachers feel that tasks are not distributed fairly, it lowers morale and leads to confrontations or silent grudges. These perceptions of imbalance often lead to mistrust, breakdowns in teamwork, and poor collaboration among staff members, especially when the leadership does not provide clear explanations or involve teachers in the planning process. (Interview, Teacher Service Commission: 6th May 2025).

From the interview quoted above, the findings revealed that unequal workload distribution contributes to conflict among teachers in public secondary schools, which is a critical insight into the dynamics of staff relationships and morale. The heads noted that in some cases, favouritism, lack of proper planning, or absence of clear workload policies contribute to the problem. Others admitted that a shortage of staff sometimes forces them to assign more duties to certain teachers who are more

experienced or available, but without proper communication, these decisions are often misunderstood. The data suggests that the perception of fairness in task distribution plays a crucial role in maintaining a positive working environment. When teachers believe they are being treated unequally, it damages interpersonal relationships and undermines trust in leadership and teamwork within the school. Reflecting conflict theory, this inequality in roles and obligations leads to power struggles and dissatisfaction. Additionally, the view is that those in positions of authority, such as heads of schools, may inadvertently or deliberately reproduce structural inequalities, leading to grievances among the less favored group.

This result suggests that when teachers perceive work assignments as unfair or biased, it fosters resentment, mistrust, and disengagement. These perceptions not only damage interpersonal relationships but also affect teamwork and overall school performance. The interpretation of the members of SMT's statements reveals that the root of the conflict lies not just in the actual workload but in how responsibilities are allocated and communicated. When certain teachers are overloaded while others appear to avoid duties, the sense of injustice becomes a catalyst for tension. Furthermore, the lack of transparency or teacher involvement in task planning exacerbates the issue, making the leadership appear partial or indifferent.

This finding is consistent with previous research in the field of educational management: Ngari and Mukuria (2013), in their study on conflict management in Kenyan secondary schools, found that unfair distribution of duties and favouritism in task allocation were among the leading causes of staff dissatisfaction and conflict. Nzuve and Nyaega (2011) highlighted that perceived inequity in workload affects

organisational commitment and promotes negative workplace behaviours such as absenteeism, passive resistance, or open conflict. In a study by Oredein and Alao (2010) in Nigeria, it was observed that teachers are more cooperative and productive when they feel that their responsibilities are shared equitably among colleagues. This further supports the view that fairness in duty distribution is essential for sustaining harmony among teachers.

4.2.2 Favouritism and Unfair Treatment

The interview with the Town Secondary Education Officer revealed that perceived or real favouritism in areas such as promotions, workshop selections, or the distribution of rewards is a major cause of interpersonal conflict among teachers in public secondary schools. According to the officer, favouritism, whether intentional or unintentional, creates a sense of exclusion and inequality that significantly affects teacher morale and professional relationships. For example, the Town Secondary Education Officer narrated that:

In some schools, teachers believe that decisions about who attends training workshops, receives promotions, marks national examinations or gets recognised are not based on merit or performance, but rather on personal relationships with the head of school or other influential figures. Whether this is true or just a perception, it creates deep divisions among staff tension (Interview, Town Secondary Education Officer: 6th May 2025).

The education officer further explained that these situations lead to jealousy, distrust, and frustration, especially among teachers who feel overlooked despite their hard work or qualifications. He said:

When a teacher sees the same individuals repeatedly chosen for opportunities without transparent criteria, they begin to feel unappreciated. This demoralization leads to withdrawal from team efforts, gossip, and open confrontation. It poisons the school climate

tension (Interview, Town Secondary Education Officer: 6th May 2025).

Moreover, the officer emphasized that a lack of clear guidelines and accountability mechanisms in the selection process contributes to the perception of favouritism. Without written criteria or open communication, any decision by school leaders becomes vulnerable to suspicion. Favouritism, whether real or perceived, undermines the core values of professionalism, fairness, and unity among teachers. It's one of the root causes of conflict that can quietly destroy a school's performance from within.

The findings from the interview with the Town Secondary Education Officer reveal that favouritism, real and perceived, is a critical contributor to interpersonal conflict among teachers in public secondary schools. The officer's observations reflect a broader systemic issue within school management practices, where lack of transparency, inconsistent decision-making, and poor communication result in a perceived culture of inequality. This perception negatively affects teacher morale, trust, collaboration, and professional relationships, ultimately weakening the school's ability to function as a cohesive educational unit. Teachers who consistently find themselves excluded from such opportunities begin to feel undervalued and demotivated, regardless of their qualifications or performance. This feeling of exclusion fosters jealousy, frustration, and withdrawal, often leading to conflict, gossip, or resistance to teamwork.

Importantly, the officer noted that the absence of clear guidelines, fair criteria, and open communication allows favouritism to thrive or be perceived even when it may not exist intentionally. This supports the notion that leadership transparency and fairness are fundamental to maintaining harmony in a school environment. Reflecting

conflict theory, favouritism is a form of unequal access to limited resources (opportunities, promotions) that breeds resentment and struggle among staff. This perceived inequality creates a divide between those with influence and those without, fueling structural conflict in the workplace.

The findings are aligned with a study by Ngari & Mukuria (2013) in Kenya that found that perceived favouritism in staff development opportunities (e.g., training, promotions) was one of the leading causes of conflict in secondary schools. Teachers felt marginalised when selections were made informally or without clear justification. Ncube and Tshabalala (2016), studying schools in Zimbabwe, found that subjective decision-making by school administrators regarding access to workshops and promotions led to serious morale issues and tension among staff, especially when such opportunities were perceived to go to a few "favoured" individuals. According to Nzuve & Nyaega (2011), workplace conflict in schools is often caused by the lack of equitable and transparent reward systems, which can lead to "informal cliques", mistrust, and even open resistance to leadership.

4.2.3 Personality differences

The interview with the Teachers Service Commission officer revealed that normal human differences in temperament, personal values, and communication styles are a common but often overlooked source of interpersonal conflict among teachers in public secondary schools. According to the Commission member, these differences, while natural in any workplace, can become particularly problematic in school environments already under pressure due to high workloads, resource constraints, or leadership challenges.

The representative from the Commission explained that teachers come from diverse cultural, educational, and social backgrounds, which influence how they interact, respond to criticism, manage stress, and handle disagreements. For example, some teachers may be more assertive or outspoken in meetings, while others may be more reserved or indirect in expressing their views. These differences in communication style can lead to misinterpretations, offence, or feelings of disrespect, even when no harm is intended. The participant narrated that.

In schools, especially where teachers work closely as teams sharing classes, duties, and responsibilities, personality differences can easily lead to misunderstandings. One teacher might be very task-orientated and expect others to work at the same pace, while another may be more relationship-orientated and prioritize harmony over deadlines. These differing approaches can clash and create tension (Interview, Teacher Service Commission Officer: 6th May 2025).

The findings from the interview with the Teachers Service Commission officer (TSC) highlight that normal human differences in personality, values, and communication styles are a subtle yet significant source of interpersonal conflict among teachers in public secondary schools. The Commission's insights reveal that, although diversity in personality and background is natural and beneficial in a collaborative workplace, it can become a source of tension when not properly managed, especially in stressful, high-pressure environments like schools. Additionally, under stressful working conditions, such as overloaded timetables, examination pressure, or administrative demands, these personality differences tend to surface more sharply. Teachers may become less tolerant, more reactive, or less willing to compromise. Which increases the likelihood of interpersonal conflict? Without effective conflict resolution mechanisms, team-building efforts, or

emotional intelligence training, these natural differences can escalate into ongoing disputes, grudges, or workplace bullying.

The findings concur with a study by Oredein and Alao (2010), who found that interpersonal issues related to personality clashes and communication breakdowns were frequent sources of staff conflict. They concluded these conflicts were exacerbated by a lack of conflict resolution structures. Robbins & Judge (2013) also emphasize that individual differences in values and perceptions, especially in environments with unclear expectations and poor communication, are a major cause of organizational conflict. This supports the TSC's view that the absence of structured systems for managing personality differences allows tensions to grow unchecked.

4.3 Strategies employed by school management team (SMT) in managing teachers' conflicts in secondary schools

The second objective was to assess the strategies employed by the School Management Teams (SMT) in resolving conflicts among teachers in public secondary. The researcher addressed this objective qualitatively as he used interview guides with the participants to collect information as far as this objective was concerned. The specific question in this objective was, "What are the strategies employed by school management teams in resolving conflict among teachers in public secondary schools? Teachers Service Commission Officer, Town Secondary Education Officer and members of School Management Teams were the main participants in this objective.

The following were responses of the participants on the strategies employed by SMT in managing teacher's conflicts in public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council. Up on the discussion, some participants revealed that promoting open communication, conflict mediation and arbitration, Professional development workshops, and collaboration were the strategies that are being employed in most public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council.

4.3.1 Open Communication

Interviews with the town secondary education officer, TSC officer and members of school management teams highlighted that open communication is one of the most effective strategies employed in managing teachers' conflicts. According to the participants of this study, open communication helps to create a transparent and inclusive environment where teachers feel comfortable expressing their concerns without fear of judgement or retaliation. Additionally, one of the schools' heads indicated that when conflicts arise, they initiate dialogue by inviting the involved parties to speak openly about their issues in a calm and respectful manner. The TSC officer emphasized that encouraging teachers to voice their grievances early prevents minor issues from escalating into major challenges. Furthermore, members of school management team noted that promoting a culture of trust, where communication is encouraged at all levels, fosters better relationships and teamwork among staff. When the participants asked, for example, the Teachers Services Commission Officer had this to say:

From our perspective, open communication is essential in managing conflicts among teachers. We advise school leaders to maintain transparency and create safe spaces for teachers to discuss issues fairly. This not only reduces tensions but also encourages

professionalism and accountability within the school environment (Interviews with TSC Officer, 6th May 2025).

Similarly, members of SMT commented that:

We have witnessed that schools which encourage open dialogue among staff experience fewer conflicts. As a board, we support regular forums where teachers can express themselves without fear. When communication lines are open, grievances are addressed early, preventing disputes from escalating and affecting school performance (Interviews with SMT members, 7th May 2025).

The quotes imply that open communication is a preferred strategy and a crucial mechanism for conflict resolution in secondary schools. This finding indicates that when school management teams actively promote transparent dialogue, it fosters a culture of trust, inclusive, and mutual respect among teachers. This helps in preventing minor disagreements from escalating into serious disputes. Thereby maintaining a positive working environment. Moreover, open communication strengthens teamwork, enhances staff morale, and contributes to the overall stability and effectiveness of the schools. It also reflects good leadership practices and a proactive approach by school authorities and education stakeholders in ensuring a harmonious educational setting.

The finding aligns with conflict theory, which views conflicts as an inevitable aspect of social interaction, particularly in institutions like schools where differing interests and perspectives exist. According to the theory, conflicts arise due to competition over limited resources, power dynamics or miscommunication. Open communication addresses these root causes by promoting transparency, mutual understanding, and participatory problem-solving. This finding is in line with a study conducted by Omoteso and Semudara (2011), which found that effective communication significantly reduces workplace conflicts among teachers. Similarly, a study by

Obuobisaa-Darko (2018) emphasized that open dialogue fosters trust and collaboration, thus reducing the frequency and intensity of conflicts in educational institutions.

4.3.2 Conflict Mediation and Arbitration

Interviews with TSEO, TSC officers, and school management team members revealed that mediation and arbitration are key strategies used in resolving teachers' conflicts. Participants noted that mediation often prevents conflicts from disrupting the teaching and learning process.

For example, the Town Secondary Education Officer had this to say when asked:

When conflicts arise, we advise heads of schools to begin with mediation. We usually advise them to sit with the involved teachers to guide a respectful conversation. If no resolution is reached, we advise them to escalate to arbitration through members of school management teams to ensure fairness and restore a peaceful working environment (Interviews with TSEO: 6th May 2025).

Similarly, the Teachers Service Commission Officer narrated that:

We encourage heads of secondary schools to use mediation first, involving experienced staff. If conflict persists, arbitration is conducted formally at the district level. This two-step helps resolve teachers' disputes professionally while maintaining discipline and protecting the integrity of the teaching profession (Interviews with TSC Officer: 6th May 2025).

Additionally, one of the members of the School Management Team (SMT) had this to say:

Mediation works well for minor conflicts, especially when handled early. However, when issues are severe or repeated, we proceed with arbitration. Involving the SMT members ensures impartial decisions (Interview with SMT members: 7th May 2025).

The quotes above imply that conflict mediation and arbitration are structured and valued processes within school management for maintaining harmony among

teachers. They suggest that school leaders and stakeholders recognise the importance of resolving disputes early and fairly through guided dialogue and, when necessary, formal adjustment. The findings indicate that mediation helps in defusing tension by encouraging mutual understanding, while arbitration provides a formal resolution mechanism when mediation fails. This dual approach supports conflict theory, which acknowledges that conflict is inevitable but manageable through proper institutional mechanisms. By employing mediation and arbitration, schools reduce the negative impacts of unresolved conflicts such as poor morale, reduced collaboration and disruption of teaching. The structured conflict resolution processes also reflect a commitment to justice, transparency and professionalism in school governance.

Furthermore, the finding highlights that mediation and arbitration are essential for managing teachers' conflicts in secondary schools. These strategies promote fairness, reduce prolonged disputes and maintain a stable teaching environment. This finding aligns with the work of Rahim (2011), who emphasized that integrating mediation and arbitration in organizational conflict management enhances cooperation, minimizes disruption, and fosters a positive work culture.

4.3.3 Professional Development Workshops

Interviews with TSC officers and members of school management teams revealed that professional development workshops are actively used as a strategy to prevent and manage conflicts among teachers. These workshops focus on building teachers' skills in communication, teamwork, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution. Participants noted that by equipping teachers with these competencies, misunderstandings are minimized, and professional conduct is strengthened. The

workshops also create opportunities for teachers to share experiences and foster collegiality. Participants also emphasized that continuous development enhances teachers' self-awareness and promotes a cooperative school culture, thereby reducing the frequency and severity of conflicts.

The Teachers Service Commission Officer had this to say:

The commission encourages schools to conduct regular workshops on professional ethics and interpersonal skills because teachers who participate better develop better conflict management strategies, which results in fewer cases brought to our office. Capacity building through workshops is key to maintaining professionalism and harmony in schools (Interview with TSC Officer, 6th May 2025).

Professional development workshops have improved how teachers interact. When trained in emotional intelligence and communication, they handle disagreements more constructively. We have seen a drop in conflict cases since introducing this training, and schools' climate has become more respectful and supportive (Interviews with SMT members, 7th May 2025).

The interview quotes imply that professional development workshops equip teachers with essential skills such as communication, emotional intelligence and conflict resolution. This training fosters mutual respect, improves relationships and proactively reduces conflicts, contributing to a more harmonious and productive school environment. The finding indicates that professional development workshops play a crucial role in preventing and managing conflicts among teachers by enhancing their interpersonal, communication and emotional intelligence skills. These workshops promote understanding, cooperation, and respect among staff, which are essential for minimizing conflicts. According to conflict theory, conflicts are natural outcomes of social interactions where individuals or groups compete for limited resources or hold differing values. By equipping teachers with tools to manage such tensions constructively, professional development serves as a proactive

measure to address underlying issues before they escalate. This finding aligns with the theory's emphasis on addressing structural and relational sources of conflict through empowerment, education and dialogue, fostering a more harmonious school environment. This finding is in line with the study conducted by Yusof and Tay (2014), which found that professional development programs focusing on conflict resolution and communication skills significantly reduce interpersonal conflicts among teachers. Similarly, Adeyemi (2009) emphasized that continuous teacher training improves staff relationships and promotes a collaborative school culture, thus minimizing conflict and enhancing school effectiveness.

4.3.4 Collaboration

Interviews with the Town Secondary Education Officer revealed that fostering collaboration among teachers is a key strategy in managing and preventing conflicts. A participant explained that when teachers work together on academic planning, classroom management, and co-curricular activities, it builds mutual respect, trust, and shared responsibility; collaboration reduces feelings of isolation and competition, often sources of conflict. Other participants, such as TSC officers and SMT members, also noted that these collaborative efforts not only improve professional development but also contribute to a positive school culture and enhance overall teaching and learning.

The Town Secondary Education Officer, when asked, had this to say:

We encourage schools to promote collaboration among teachers through academic teams and shared responsibilities because when educators work together, they learn to respect each other's perspectives, which reduces conflicts and strengthens professional relationships in the sense that collaboration fosters unity and

enhances the overall school climate for both teachers and students (Interviews with TSEO, 6th May 2025).

Similarly, the Teachers Service Commission Officer narrated this when asked:

Collaboration among teachers is vital because when schools promote teamwork, they report fewer conflict cases. When teachers share responsibilities and solve problems, it reduces competition and improves relationships. We always advise school leaders to use collaboration as a long-term strategy for professional harmony (Interviews with TSC Officer, 6th May 2025).

Furthermore, one of the members of SMT commented on this when asked:

We promote group work and academic teams among teachers. This fosters openness, trust and a shared sense of purpose. Teachers who collaborate frequently are less likely to engage in conflicts because they learn to understand and appreciate each other's strengths and differences (Interviews with SMT members, 7th May 2025).

The quotes above imply that collaboration is a deliberate strategy for preventing teachers' conflicts, promoting unity, and strengthening professional relationships within schools. The findings revealed that collaboration among teachers is a fundamental strategy for reducing conflicts within secondary schools. By encouraging lesson planning, team teaching and peer support, schools foster an environment of trust, mutual respect and shared responsibility. This collaborative culture minimizes feelings of competition and isolation, common triggers of conflict. According to conflict theory, conflicts arise when groups compete over resources or power; however, collaboration can transform this dynamic by promoting cooperation instead of competition. When teachers work together towards common goals, the sources of conflicts shift from rivalry to partnership. This finding aligns with the theory's emphasis on addressing structural inequalities and improving relationships through social interaction. This finding is in line with a study conducted by Johnson and Johnson (2017) who emphasized that cooperative learning and collaboration

reduce conflicts by promoting positive interdependence and communication among teachers. Additionally, a study by Maina and Salim (2018) found that collaboration in Kenyan secondary schools improved staff relationships and reduced workplace disputes, fostering a harmonious school environment.

4.4 Challenges faced by SMT in Managing Conflicts Among Teachers in Public Secondary Schools

The research question investigated challenges faced by school management teams in managing school conflict in public secondary schools. The data for this research question were generated through focus group discussions with members of the school management team. Findings revealed that members of the school management team have the ability to face several challenges in managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools. These challenges arise from both systemic and interpersonal factors, and they often limit the ability to maintain a harmonious working environment. The challenges identified were lack of resolution training, limited support from higher authority, favouritism, bias allegations and lack of clear policies or guidelines.

4.4.1 Lack of resolution training

The interviews conducted with members of the school management team revealed a significant gap in professional preparation, particularly regarding conflict management. The participants consistently reported that most individuals in leadership roles, such as heads of schools, deputies, and heads of departments, have never received formal training or capacity-building sessions on conflict resolution strategies. As a result, school leaders are often left to rely on personal judgement,

experience, or intuition when handling interpersonal conflicts among teachers. This reliance on subjective approaches often results in inconsistencies, perceived bias, and unintended escalation of conflict, especially in cases involving sensitive issues like favouritism, workload distribution, or personality clashes. The absence of a structured, informed approach undermines trust in leadership decisions and contributes to further divisions among teaching staff. For example, one of the school management team members explained that

We have never attended any specific training on conflict resolution. When a conflict arises, we handle it based on what we think is best. Sometimes it works, but other times it worsens the situation (Focus Group Discussion G2, from secondary school C2: 8th May 2025).

The interview quote above illustrates the trial-and-error nature of conflict handling in schools, which limits the effectiveness of resolution and damages relationships, morale, and team cohesion when conflicts are handled poorly. In high-stakes environments like schools, decisions about promotions, workloads, and responsibilities significantly impact teachers' professional lives, and any perception of unfairness or bias can quickly escalate tensions. Furthermore, the reliance on subjective decision-making contributes to inconsistency in conflict resolution outcomes, undermining teachers' confidence in school leadership. Without standardized procedures or a conflict resolution framework, teachers may feel that issues are not being addressed equitably, which can deepen divisions, foster resentment, and reduce cooperation within staff teams.

Moreover, the lack of training leaves many school leaders unprepared to manage the emotional and psychological aspects of conflict, such as de-escalating tensions, mediating between parties, or facilitating restorative dialogue. In schools already

burdened by high workloads and administrative pressures, this shortcoming places additional strain on school leaders and diminishes their capacity to foster a positive working environment.

These findings are in line with Bush and Glover (2014) highlight that leadership training programmes rarely include comprehensive modules on conflict resolution, despite school environments being highly interpersonal and prone to conflict. Ndungu, Iravo, and Waititu (2017), in their study on conflict in Kenyan secondary schools, found that lack of formal training in conflict resolution led to inconsistent disciplinary measures and increased staff dissatisfaction. Ghaffar (2009) argued that without structured training, school leaders often approach conflict from a reactive rather than proactive standpoint, relying on disciplinary action rather than mediation or communication-based solutions. UNESCO (2015) recommends that school leadership development programmes should include mandatory training in negotiation, emotional intelligence, and restorative practices to support positive conflict resolution.

4.4.2 Favoritism and Bias Allegations

Interviews with members of the school management team revealed that one of the recurring challenges in managing interpersonal conflict among teachers is the perception of favouritism and bias. Specifically, some teachers accuse the administration of partiality, particularly when the resolution of a conflict appears to favour one party over another.

This perception is in organizational settings, particularly in educational institutions where staff work closely and personal relationships may overlap with professional

responsibilities. This issue, while often rooted in perception, has significant implications for school leadership. For example, a senior administrator noted,

Some teachers accuse the administration of favouritism, not necessarily because the process was unfair but because the outcome did not align with their expectations. When a decision does not favour them, they perceive it as biased (focus group discussion G2, from secondary school C2: 8th May 2025).

Another member narrated that.

Even when we strive to be impartial, some teachers feel that if a decision goes against their interests, it must be due to favouritism. It's not always about what is fair but about how fairness is perceived (focus group discussion G3, from secondary school C3: 9th May 2025).

Moreover, the participants noted that

Favouritism accusations often arise not from actual bias but from emotional responses to outcomes; when one party feels disadvantaged, they tend to view our decisions as unjust, regardless of the facts (focus group discussion G2, from secondary school C2: 8th May 2025).

The perception of favouritism and bias in conflict resolution, as revealed in the interviews with members of the school management team, is a critical concern in school leadership and administration. This perception, whether grounded in reality or not, can have significant effects on staff morale, organizational trust, and the effectiveness of school leadership. Teachers, as professionals who operate in a high-pressure and often emotionally demanding setting, may interpret any unfavorable decision as biased, especially if prior communication or transparency is lacking. Such perceptions are influenced not only by the outcomes of conflict resolution but also by the processes used to reach those outcomes. Even when the final decision is fair, individuals may feel wrong if the process appears biased or inconsistent.

Therefore, school leaders must ensure that conflict management strategies are not only just but are also seen to be just.

This study aligns with a study by Kelchtermans (2006) that emphasizes the relational dimension of school leadership and how perceptions of inequity can quickly erode trust among teachers. Leaders must not only act fairly but also be seen to act fairly.

According to Blasé and Blasé (2004), when teachers perceive administrative favouritism, it leads to decreased motivation, lower job satisfaction, and heightened inter-collegial tension. Van der Westhuizen et al. (2005) stress that effective conflict resolution strategies must be grounded in policies perceived as objective, equitable, and consistently applied to avoid breeding resentment or accusations of bias.

Additionally, Bush and Glover (2012) emphasize ethical leadership as a fundamental aspect of effective school administration. Ethical leaders are expected to act impartially and maintain a high level of transparency in their decisions. Importantly, they stress that leaders must manage perceptions, not just actions. Even if a leader is objectively fair, a failure to communicate the reasons behind decisions can lead to damaging assumptions of bias or favoritism.

4.4.3 Limited Support from Higher Authorities

The interview findings with the school management team revealed that limited support from higher educational authorities poses a significant challenge in effectively addressing interpersonal conflicts among teachers. Participants reported that the lack of structured collaboration and timely intervention from external educational bodies undermines the school leadership's ability to resolve conflicts, especially those that are persistent or escalate beyond routine disagreements. For

example, during a group discussion with the school management team participant explained,

There is a lack of coordinated support between school management and external educational bodies, which affects how quickly and effectively we can respond to recurring or serious conflicts (Focus Group Discussion G1, from secondary school C1: C1:7th May 2025).

Another participant narrated that.

The absence of consistent and structured collaboration with external educational authorities limits our capacity to handle interpersonal conflicts efficiently; without their backing, we often struggle to implement sustainable resolutions, especially in more complex cases (Focus group discussion G3, from secondary school C3:9th May 2025).

Moreover, another group of participants narrated that,

We often find ourselves managing serious teacher conflicts because there is no systematic support or timely intervention from higher educational offices, which weakens our overall conflict resolution process (focus group discussion G2, from secondary school C2:8th May 2025).

The quote above underscores a critical gap in the conflict resolution framework, namely, the absence of a robust, multi-level support system that can assist school leaders in handling complex or deep-rooted interpersonal disputes. School leaders often serve as the first line of response when tensions arise between teachers. However, without adequate backing from district-level offices, teacher support services, or ministry-level departments, their ability to intervene effectively can be compromised. This finding is consistent with the study done by Bush and Middlewood (2013) that emphasises that school leaders operate within a broader educational ecosystem, and when higher authorities fail to provide adequate policy direction, training, or external support mechanisms, schools are left to manage conflicts in isolation. Similarly, Day and Sammons (2016) argue that sustained

support from local education authorities and ministries is critical in strengthening school leadership capacity. They highlight that leaders need access to external expertise, especially when internal interventions fail to produce lasting solutions.

In addition, Harris (2004) noted that successful school leadership depends on inter-organizational collaboration, particularly in managing human resource challenges such as staff conflicts. A fragmented relationship between schools and oversight bodies often leads to inconsistencies in handling professional conduct issues, which may escalate if not addressed systematically.

4.4.4 Lack of Clear Policies or Guidelines

The interviews with school management revealed a critical gap in the management of teacher interpersonal conflicts: the absence of formal structures or clear guidelines. Without established procedures for addressing and resolving disputes, school leaders often resort to ad hoc or improvised approaches. As a result, responses to conflict situations vary depending on the individuals involved, the leadership style of the administrator, or the severity of the issue. This inconsistency can lead to decisions perceived as unfair, biased, or arbitrary by the staff. For example, during a focus group discussion, the participant narrated that.

We lack a documented school-level conflict resolution framework, which means there is no standardized process to follow when disputes arise. As a result, most of our interventions are informal, reactive, and often inconsistent, leaving staff unsure of what to expect and potentially perceiving decisions as unfair or biased (focus on favouritism, group discussion G1, from secondary school C1:7th May 2025).

Another group narrated the following.

There is no formal, written conflict resolution policy at the school level, so when interpersonal issues occur, we address them on a

case-by-case basis. This informal approach varies depending on who is involved and who handles the situation, which creates inconsistency and sometimes erodes staff confidence in the fairness of the process (Focus group discussion G2, from secondary school C2:8th May 2025).

The findings from interviews and focus group discussions with school management teams reveal a critical organizational weakness in the management of teacher interpersonal conflicts: the lack of formal, documented conflict resolution frameworks. This gap has led to inconsistent and informal approaches that vary depending on individual leadership styles, the nature of the conflict, and subjective judgement. The inconsistency in how conflicts are addressed affects the outcomes of conflict resolution efforts and shapes how staffs perceive the fairness and credibility of those efforts.

Furthermore, the quotes above reflect the organizational risk of subjective or personality-driven conflict management, which undermines institutional trust and increases the likelihood of perceptions of bias or favouritism, especially in recurring or unresolved conflicts. This study aligns with the study done by Bush and Middlewood (2013) that emphasises the importance of formal policies in establishing fair and transparent management practices in schools. They argue that without consistent procedures, school leaders are vulnerable to accusations of bias, and their decisions may lack legitimacy in the eyes of staff. In the view of Van der Westhuizen et al. (2005), the absence of formal conflict resolution systems leads to what they describe as "reactive leadership", where school leaders are constantly responding to crises without a strategic or consistent approach. This not only drains administrative resources but also contributes to a climate of uncertainty and mistrust among

teaching staff. Bauer et al. (2021) highlight that organisations with clearly defined conflict resolution frameworks are more likely to foster positive work environments, reduce staff turnover, and promote professional growth. Their research stresses the role of structured mediation protocols, staff training, and the presence of neutral third-party facilitators as crucial components of effective conflict management in educational settings.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary, conclusion and recommendation of the study that investigated strategies employed by school management teams in managing teacher conflict in public secondary schools. The chapter is organized into four major sections. The first section provides a summary of the study, including the purpose of the study, the objective of the study, the literature reviewed and the methodology used to collect data. Furthermore, the other section provides a summary of the major findings, the conclusion of the study and the recommendation based on the finding of the study.

5.2 Summary of the study

This study aims to investigated strategies employed by the school management team in managing teacher conflict in public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council. Guides by Conflict Theory, developed by Karl Marx, to analyse how school management teams (SMTs) handle conflicts with teachers in public secondary schools. Conflict theory emphasises the role of power imbalances and unequal distribution of resources as sources of tension and disputes between groups. In schools, conflicts between SMTs and teachers often stem from differences in authority, resource allocation, and competing interests. This study aims to address the following objectives.

- i. To identify the common causes of conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools.

- ii. To assess the strategies employed by the SMT in resolving conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools
- iii. To examine the challenges faced by the school management team in managing conflicts among teachers in secondary schools

The study adopts an interpretivism paradigm, focusing on understanding human experiences and the meanings participants assign to their actions. This aligns with the study's goal of exploring perceptions and strategies used by School Management Teams (SMTs) in managing teacher conflicts in public secondary schools. It involves a qualitative research approach, allowing in-depth exploration of experiences and perceptions. The research design was a case study, enabling rich, contextual analysis from a few selected schools using interviews and focus group discussions. The research was conducted in Bunda Town Council, Mara Region, due to its high incidence of teacher-related conflicts and limited research on conflict management strategies in its public secondary schools. The target population involved 472 participants, including 350 teachers, 120 school management team members, 1 Teacher Service Commission officer and 1 Town Secondary Education Officer (TSEO). A total of 49 participants were selected (35 teachers, 12 SMT members, 1 TSC officer, and 1 TSEO), representing around 10% of the total population.

Purposive sampling was used to select the TSC officer, TSEO, and 7 conflict-prone schools. Convenience sampling was used for selecting teachers and SMT members for accessibility and willingness to participate. Semi-structured interviews for Teacher Service Commission officers and school management team members. Focus

Group Discussions (FGDs) for teachers were employed, organized into seven groups of five, discussing the study objectives.

Additionally, content analysis follows Braun and Clarke's five steps to identify, code, and interpret recurring themes and patterns in qualitative data. Trustworthiness is ensured through credibility (triangulation), transferability (thick descriptions), dependability (transparent processes), and confirmability (data-derived findings).

Ethical Considerations: Approval from the Open University of Tanzania and Bunda Town Council was sought. Informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and proper citation will be strictly observed.

5.3 Summary of the findings of the study

The main findings of the study were summarized based on the research questions which guided the study as follows:

5.3.1 Causes of Conflict Among Teachers in Public Secondary Schools

The study investigated causes of conflict among teachers in public secondary schools, using interviews with school management team members, TSC officer and Town Secondary Education Officer. Findings revealed that key contributors to conflict include unequal workload distribution, favouritism, and personality differences. Unequal task assignments led to resentment, mistrust, and poor collaboration, especially when not transparently communicated or fairly allocated. Favouritism in promotions, training opportunities, and rewards, whether real or perceived, was found to demoralize staff, foster jealousy, and weaken teamwork. Additionally, natural personality and communication differences among teachers,

when unaddressed in high-pressure environments, often resulted in misunderstandings and disputes.

5.3.2 Strategies employed by SMT in managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools

The study explored the role of school management teams in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools within Bunda Town Council. Findings revealed that various strategies were employed to address conflicts, including promoting open communication, using mediation and arbitration techniques, organizing professional development workshops, and fostering collaboration among staff. These approaches were found to enhance mutual understanding, reduce tension, and improve professional relationships within schools. The study highlighted the importance of proactive and structured conflict management strategies in creating a positive working environment, ultimately contributing to improved teacher performance and school effectiveness in the Bunda Town Council education system.

5.3.3 Challenges faced by SMT in Managing Conflicts Among Teachers in Public Secondary Schools

The study explored key challenges faced by school management teams in managing interpersonal conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools, identifying four main issues: lack of conflict resolution training, perceptions of favouritism and bias, limited support from higher authorities, and the absence of clear policies or guidelines. School leaders often handle conflicts without formal training, relying on personal judgement, which results in inconsistent and sometimes ineffective resolutions. Accusations of favouritism commonly arise, not necessarily from actual

bias, but from perceived unfairness in decision-making processes. Moreover, limited external support from educational authorities leaves schools isolated in addressing complex or escalating disputes. Finally, the absence of formal conflict resolution frameworks leads to inconsistent approaches, further eroding staff trust and confidence in leadership.

5.4 Conclusion

Based on the key research findings of the study, the following conclusions were made:

- i. The study concluded that conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools largely stem from both systemic and interpersonal factors. Key contributors include unequal workload distribution, favoritism, poor communication, and personality clashes. These recurring issues highlight the need for equitable work allocation, transparent communication, and effective conflict resolution strategies to promote a harmonious working environment, improve staff morale, and enhance overall school performance.
- ii. The study concluded that effective conflict management by school management teams is essential for fostering a positive working environment in public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council. Strategies such as open communication, mediation and arbitration, professional development workshops, and enhanced collaboration were identified as key tools in resolving teachers' conflicts. These approaches improved teacher relationships, professional growth, and overall school performance. The study emphasises the need for continued capacity building and institutional support for school leaders in conflict

resolution. Strengthening these strategies can lead to a more cohesive teaching environment, benefiting educators and students in the long term.

- iii. The study concluded that members of the school management team face significant challenges in managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools. These challenges, arising from both systemic and interpersonal factors, include lack of conflict resolution training, limited support from higher authorities, favoritism, bias allegations, and absence of clear policies or guidelines.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the research findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made.

5.5.1 Recommendations for Action

- i. The Ministry of Education and local education authorities should develop clear and written guidelines for allocating teaching, administrative, and extracurricular responsibilities
- ii. Based on the findings, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education and local education authorities provide regular training for school management teams on conflict resolution and leadership skills. Schools should institutionalize open communication channels and establish clear procedures for addressing conflicts promptly and fairly. Additionally, peer collaboration and mentorship programs should be encouraged to strengthen team cohesion. Further research should explore the long-term impact of conflict management strategies on teacher retention and student academic performance in diverse educational settings.

iii. Heads of schools should implement regular staff meetings and feedback sessions to encourage open dialogue between teachers and administrators. This creates opportunities to clarify decisions, address concerns early, and foster trust.

Ministry and district/council education offices should provide schools with timely support, including expert intervention in complex conflicts and periodic monitoring.

5.5.2 Recommendation for further action

- i. This study was conducted in secondary schools within Bunda Town Council, Mara Region, and Tanzania. To gain a broader understanding of investigative strategies employed by the school management team in managing teacher conflict in public secondary schools, it is recommended that similar studies be conducted in other districts across Tanzania's professional development resources.
- ii. Future research should examine the long-term effects of conflict resolution strategies on teacher morale, job satisfaction, and student outcomes across different regions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Interview guide for TSEO, TSC and SMT members

Dear Participants,

My name is **CHARLES ROBERT**, a student pursuing a Masters of Education in Administration, Planning and Policies Studies at The Open University of Tanzania. I am conducting research titled "**Evaluating strategies employed by school management teams in managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council**" to fulfill the requirements for the mentioned award. I kindly request you to cooperate with me in this study by answering the following questions. The information you are going to provide is for academic purposes only, and it will remain confidential.

1. What are the main causes of conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools?
2. From your experience, do communication gaps between school administration and teachers contribute to conflicts?
3. What are the strategies or programmes that SMT has put in place to help resolve conflicts among teachers in secondary schools?
4. Are there any specific approaches or programmes you believe have had a positive impact on resolving teacher conflicts?
5. What challenges do SMTs face in effectively managing conflicts among teachers?
6. What are the biggest challenges SMTs faces when trying to manage conflicts among teachers?

Appendix II: Focus Group Discussion Guide for Teachers

Dear Participants,

My name is **CHARLES ROBERT**, a student pursuing a Masters of Education in Administration, Planning and Policies Studies at The Open University of Tanzania. I am conducting research titled "**Evaluating strategies employed by school management teams in managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council**" to fulfill the requirements for the mentioned award. I kindly request you to cooperate with me in this study by answering the following questions. The information you are going to provide is for academic purposes only, and it will remain confidential.

1. What are the most common causes of conflicts among teachers that you have observed in public secondary schools?
2. How do personal differences, such as communication styles or personality clashes, contribute to conflicts between teachers?
3. What strategies are most commonly used to address conflicts among teachers in your experiences?
4. How do you perceive the effectiveness of the strategies in resolving conflicts and improving teacher relations?
5. What are the biggest challenges school management teams faces when trying to resolve conflicts among teachers?
6. In your opinion, what are the main challenges that school management teams face when trying to resolve conflicts between teachers, and how can these challenges be addressed?

Appendix III: Research Clearance Letter

THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA



Ref. No OUT/PG202386157

24th April, 2025

Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS),
Mara Region,
P.O. Box 299,
MARA.

Dear Regional Administrative Secretary,

**RE: RESEARCH CLEARANCE FOR MR. CHARLES ROBERT, REG NO:
PG202386157**

2. The Open University of Tanzania was established by an Act of Parliament No. 17 of 1992, which became operational on the 1st March 1993 by public notice No.55 in the official Gazette. The Act was however replaced by the Open University of Tanzania Charter of 2005, which became operational on 1st January 2007. In line with the Charter, the Open University of Tanzania mission is to generate and apply knowledge through research.

3. To facilitate and to simplify research process therefore, the act empowers the Vice Chancellor of the Open University of Tanzania to issue research clearance, on behalf of the Government of Tanzania and Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, to both its staff and students who are doing research in Tanzania. With this brief background, the purpose of this letter is to introduce to you **Mr. Charles Robert, Reg.No: PG202386157**, pursuing **Master of Education in Administration Planning and Policy Studies (MEDAPPS)**. We hereby grant this clearance to conduct research titled

“Evaluating Strategies Employed by School Management Team (SMT) in Managing Teachers ‘conflicts in Public Secondary Schools in Bunda Town Council”. He will collect his data at your area from 25th April to 30th May 2025.

4. In case you need any further information, kindly do not hesitate to contact the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) of the Open University of Tanzania, P.O.Box 23409, Dar es Salaam. Tel: 022-2-2668820. We lastly thank you in advance for your assumed cooperation and facilitation of this research academic activity.

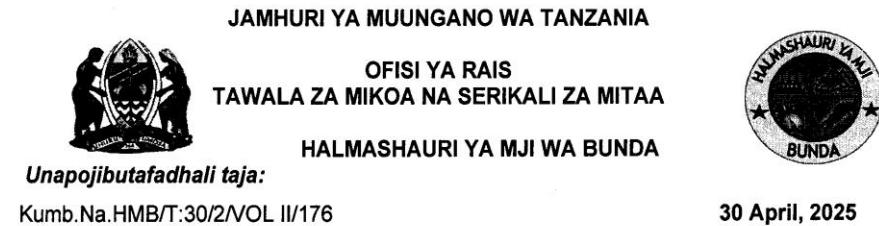
Yours sincerely,
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA



Prof. Gwahula Raphael Kimamala

For: VICE CHANCELLOR

Appendix IV: Research Permit Letters



MR. CHARLES ROBERT

**RE:PERMIT FOR RESEARCH CLEARANCE FOR MR. CHARLES ROBERT REG NO:
PG202386157**

Refer to the heading above.

2. Reference is made on the letter dated 28 April, 2025 with ref. No FA 190/227/01'O'91 of the above captioned subject.

3. I would like to inform you that permission is granted to you to conduct research titled "Evaluating Strategies Employed by School Management Team (SMT) in Managing Teachers' conflict in Public Secondary Schools". A case study at Bunda Town Council for a period of 25th April, 2025 up to 30th May, 2025.

All data that will be collected from the research is for internal use only and it they are to be published and distributed permission should be requested from the relevant authorities.

Your Sincerely.


Peter Z. Kafuku

FOR: TOWN DIRECTOR,
BUNDA TOWN COUNCIL,



Copy: Town Director,
Bunda Town Council,
288 Road of Council,
P.O.BOX 219,
31582, BUNDA, MARA - For Information

" Town Secondary Education Officer,
Bunda Town Council,
288 Road of Council,
P.O.BOX 219,
31582, BUNDA, MARA - For Information

THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
 PRESIDENT'S OFFICE
 REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

MARA REGION
 Tel. No.028-2622005, 2622004,
 2622305

Fax No.028-2622324/2622764
 E-mail: ras.mara@tamisemi.go.tz
 Ref. No. FA 190/227/01'O'90



REGIONAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE,
 13 BOMA ROAD,
 P.O. BOX 299,
 31101 MUSOMA.
 TANZANIA.

28 April, 2025

Town Director,
 Bunda Town Council,
 P.O. Box 219,
BUNDA.

RE: **RESEARCH CLEARANCE FOR MR.CHARLES ROBERT- REG. NO. PG202386157**

Reference is made to the above mentioned subject.

2. The above named student from Open University of Tanzania – Dar es Salaam applied for permission to conduct research clearance titled "**Evaluating Strategies Employed by School Management Team (SMT) in Managing Teachers' conflicts in Public Secondary Schools in Bunda Town Council**".
3. Permission is hereby granted for him to conduct research from 25th April, 2025 to 30th May, 2025.
4. Please accord him with all necessary assistance.

J. M. Kusaya
 Gerald M. Kusaya

REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY

Copy: District Administrative Secretary,
 Bunda District,
 P.O. Box 250,
BUNDA.

" " Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic),
 Open University of Tanzania,
 PO BOX. 23409,
DAR ES SALAAM.

" " **MR.CHARLES ROBERT.**

MANUSCRIPT

**Challenges in Managing Conflicts Among Teachers in Public Secondary Schools
in Bunda Town Council**

By

Robert Charles¹

Postgraduate Student at the Open University of Tanzania

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Lecturer at the Open University of Tanzania

Faculty of Education

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the challenges faced by SMTs in managing such conflicts. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. 49 participants were involved in the study, including 35 teachers, 1 TSC officer, 1 TSEO, and 12 SMT members. The researcher ensured the study's trustworthiness by addressing credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. The study found that school management teams face multiple challenges in managing teacher conflicts, including lack of resolution training, limited support from higher authorities, favouritism, bias allegations, and absence of clear policies. These issues stem from systemic and interpersonal factors that hinder effective conflict management, reduce staff morale, and weaken teamwork, ultimately affecting the overall performance and harmony of public secondary schools. The study recommended that providing SMTs with conflict resolution training, establishing clear policies, and ensuring support from higher authorities. Schools should promote transparency, fairness, and open communication, while leadership programs include mediation and negotiation skills to enhance effective conflict management and maintain a positive working environment.

Key Words: challenges, SMT, Conflicts and Public secondary schools

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Effective management of teacher conflicts is essential for maintaining a positive school climate, improving collaboration, and enhancing overall academic performance. According to Rahim (2017), well-managed conflicts can stimulate innovation, teamwork, and professional growth among educators. Conversely, unresolved conflicts lead to stress, low morale, and decreased productivity (Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2019). In educational settings, constructive conflict management fosters trust between teachers and administrators, creating a supportive learning environment (Roberts & Lacey, 2022). Despite this importances, its implementation is accompanied by several challenges.

In developed nations such as the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), and Australia, managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools presents multifaceted challenges. In the U.S.A, research indicates that school leaders often face difficulties due to insufficient training in conflict resolution and limited support from higher authorities, leading to ineffective management of interpersonal disputes among staff (Edo & Omunakwe, 2021). Similarly, in the UK, studies have highlighted that the lack of clear policies and guidelines exacerbates conflicts, as teachers are uncertain about the procedures for addressing grievances (Zurlo, 2020). Australia's education sector faces challenges related to favouritism and bias allegations, which undermine trust and collaboration among educators (Ramani, 2010). These issues are compounded by systemic factors such as unequal workload distribution, which can lead to burnout and heightened tensions among staff members.

In African countries like Kenya, Nigeria, and Botswana, managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools is influenced by both systemic and interpersonal

factors. In Kenya, findings suggest that school managers often lack adequate training in conflict resolution, leading to challenges in addressing disputes effectively (Shitambasi, 2022). Similarly, in Nigeria, studies have identified that administrative incompetence and misuse of funds contribute to conflicts among teaching and non-teaching staff, affecting overall school performance (Okotoni & Okotoni, 2003). In Botswana, research indicates that school managers do not perceive conflict as an inevitable phenomenon, which hampers proactive conflict management strategies (Morake, 2011). These challenges are further exacerbated by limited support from higher authorities and the absence of clear policies or guidelines.

In Tanzania, managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools presents unique challenges. Studies indicate that school heads often lack conflict resolution training, leading to difficulties in addressing disputes effectively (Maeda, 2021). Additionally, limited support from higher authorities and the absence of clear policies or guidelines exacerbate the situation (Ramadhani, 2020). Research also highlights issues such as favouritism, bias allegations, and personality clashes among staff members, which contribute to conflicts (Meyan, 2021). Furthermore, unequal workload distribution and administrative incompetence have been identified as systemic factors that hinder effective conflict management (Meyan, 2021). These challenges underscore the need for comprehensive training programs, clear policy frameworks, and institutional support to foster a harmonious working environment in Tanzanian public secondary schools.

In Bunda Town Council, school management teams (SMTs) in public secondary schools face persistent challenges in managing teachers' conflicts effectively. Despite the importance of maintaining a harmonious working environment, limited studies have explored the underlying factors contributing to these challenges.

Therefore, this study was set out to examine the challenges faced by SMTs in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools in Bunda Town Council.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 THEORY UNDEPINNING THE STUDY

This study was underpinned by Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) developed by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann in 1974. to establish theoretical lens on examining the challenges faced by SMT in managing teachers' conflicts in public secondary schools

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) assumes that individuals respond to conflict based on two dimensions: assertiveness (the extent to which one tries to satisfy their own concerns) and cooperativeness (the extent to which one tries to satisfy others' concerns) (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). In the context of managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools, this assumption suggests that school management teams adopt different styles competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, or accommodating depending on the situation and their priorities. For instance, principals may accommodate to maintain harmony or compete when enforcing policies, while teachers may avoid conflicts to prevent escalation. Understanding these behavioral tendencies allows the study to analyze how management approaches influence the resolution of interpersonal disputes and the overall school environment.

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) was highly applicable to this study because it provides a structured framework for understanding how school management teams and teachers respond to conflicts in public secondary schools. By categorizing conflict-handling styles competing, collaborating, compromising,

avoiding, and accommodating the theory helps explain variations in resolution strategies and their effectiveness (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). In contexts where issues like unequal workload, favouritism, and poor communication arise, TKI allows the study to assess how these behaviors influence teacher relationships, morale, and school harmony. This makes it an essential tool for analyzing conflict dynamics and proposing practical management interventions.

2.2 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

2.2.1 Challenges faced by the school management team in managing conflicts among teachers in secondary schools

In the USA, a study conducted by Anderson and Brown (2021) on challenges in managing teacher conflicts in US secondary schools. The study employed a mixed-methods approach. The data were collected through questionnaires, observation, and interviews. The quantitative data were analyzed aid 23 using descriptive with the aid of SPSS software version 23, and the data from qualitative were analyzed thematically. The findings found that many school leaders struggle to address conflicts effectively due to insufficient professional development in conflict resolution. The study also reveals that teachers may resist changes in teaching methods or school policies, creating tension.

Chen (2020) worked on bureaucratic challenges in school conflict resolution in China. The study employed a qualitative research approach. The data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. The data were analysed by using content analysis. The findings indicated that rigid administrative processes often delay interventions and prevent SMTs from addressing conflicts

promptly. This can lead to unresolved issues that affect the overall school environment.

Roberts and Lacey (2022) conducted a study managing teacher conflicts in Australian secondary schools. The study employed a mixed-methods approach. The data were collected through questionnaires, observation, and interviews. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS software, and the data from qualitative were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that conflicting pedagogical approaches often cause tension between teachers, making it difficult for management to foster collaboration

In Kenya, a study was conducted by Gabriel (2015) on challenges facing conflict management in public secondary schools. The study used a quantitative research approach. The data were collected through both open- and close-ended questionnaires. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS software. The findings found that many schools, especially in low-income regions, lack the necessary resources, both financial and human, to implement effective conflict resolution strategies. These limitations can prevent the establishment of supportive systems for teachers.

In Tanzania, a study was conducted by Sweetbert and Felista (2022) on an assessment of managerial challenges facing heads of schools in the provision of quality education in secondary education. The study employed a mixed-methods approach. The data were collected through questionnaires, observation, and interviews. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS software version 23, and the data from qualitative were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that heads of schools have the challenge of being

overwhelmed by managerial responsibilities, inadequate instructional learning materials, a teacher/student ratio that exceeds forty students and a shortage of laboratories. Also, the findings showed that teachers have low morale at work, and there seem to be challenges in handling teachers' conflicts.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the challenges in managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools. A qualitative approach was deemed suitable because it allows an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes regarding conflict management, which are often complex and context-specific (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study adopted a multiple case study research design, focusing on several public secondary schools as individual cases. This design enabled the researcher to explore and compare conflict management practices across different school contexts, thereby providing rich, detailed insights and enhancing the study's explanatory power (Yin, 2018). A sample of 49 participants were used including teachers, members of school management team, Town Secondary Education Officer (TSEO) and Teachers Service Commission (TSC) Officer. Data collection tools included semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Interviews were conducted with members of school management teams to gain insights into their experiences and strategies in handling conflicts, while FGDs involved teachers to capture collective perspectives on challenges and dynamics in conflict situations. These tools facilitated comprehensive data collection, allowing participants to express their views freely and elaborately (Kumar, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, which involved systematically coding and categorizing textual data to identify themes and patterns related to conflict causes, management strategies, and challenges. This method enabled the researcher to interpret participants' narratives and draw meaningful conclusions aligned with the study objectives (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Trustworthiness of the study was ensured through four components: credibility, achieved via prolonged engagement and triangulation of interviews and FGDs; transferability, by providing detailed contextual descriptions; dependability, through clear documentation of research procedures; and confirmability, by maintaining audit trails and reflective journaling to reduce researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethical considerations were strictly observed. Participants provided informed consent, participants were assured of confidentiality, and their anonymity was maintained. Permission letters from relevant educational authorities was obtained, and participants had the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty, ensuring respect for their autonomy and protection from harm.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This section presents the results and discussion of the study on the challenges faced by School Management Teams (SMTs) in managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools. The findings are drawn from interviews and focus group discussions, highlighting both systemic and interpersonal factors that hinder effective conflict management. The discussion interprets these challenges in relation to existing literature and theoretical perspectives, providing insights into how they

impact school harmony, leadership effectiveness, and overall educational performance.

4.2 Challenges in Managing Conflicts Among Teachers in Public Secondary Schools

The research question investigated challenges faced by school management teams in managing school conflict in public secondary schools. The data for this research question were generated through focus group discussions with members of the school management team. Findings revealed that members of the school management team have the ability to face several challenges in managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools. These challenges arise from both systemic and interpersonal factors, and they often limit the ability to maintain a harmonious working environment. The challenges identified were lack of resolution training, limited support from higher authority, favouritism, bias allegations and lack of clear policies or guidelines.

4.2.1 Lack of resolution training

The interviews conducted with members of the school management team revealed a significant gap in professional preparation, particularly regarding conflict management. The participants consistently reported that most individuals in leadership roles, such as heads of schools, deputies, and heads of departments, have never received formal training or capacity-building sessions on conflict resolution strategies. As a result, school leaders are often left to rely on personal judgement, experience, or intuition when handling interpersonal conflicts among teachers. This reliance on subjective approaches often results in inconsistencies, perceived bias, and unintended escalation of conflict, especially in cases involving sensitive issues like

favouritism, workload distribution, or personality clashes. The absence of a structured, informed approach undermines trust in leadership decisions and contributes to further divisions among teaching staff. For example, one of the school management team members explained that

We have never attended any specific training on conflict resolution. When a conflict arises, we handle it based on what we think is best. Sometimes it works, but other times it worsens the situation (Focus Group Discussion G2, from secondary school C2:8th May 2025).

The interview quote above illustrates the trial-and-error nature of conflict handling in schools, which limits the effectiveness of resolution and damages relationships, morale, and team cohesion when conflicts are handled poorly. In high-stakes environments like schools, decisions about promotions, workloads, and responsibilities significantly impact teachers' professional lives, and any perception of unfairness or bias can quickly escalate tensions. Furthermore, the reliance on subjective decision-making contributes to inconsistency in conflict resolution outcomes, undermining teachers' confidence in school leadership. Without standardized procedures or a conflict resolution framework, teachers may feel that issues are not being addressed equitably, which can deepen divisions, foster resentment, and reduce cooperation within staff teams.

Moreover, the lack of training leaves many school leaders unprepared to manage the emotional and psychological aspects of conflict, such as de-escalating tensions, mediating between parties, or facilitating restorative dialogue. In schools already burdened by high workloads and administrative pressures, this shortcoming places additional strain on school leaders and diminishes their capacity to foster a positive working environment.

These findings are in line with Bush and Glover (2014) highlight that leadership training programmes rarely include comprehensive modules on conflict resolution, despite school environments being highly interpersonal and prone to conflict. Ndungu, Iravo, and Waititu (2017), in their study on conflict in Kenyan secondary schools, found that lack of formal training in conflict resolution led to inconsistent disciplinary measures and increased staff dissatisfaction. Ghaffar (2009) argued that without structured training, school leaders often approach conflict from a reactive rather than proactive standpoint, relying on disciplinary action rather than mediation or communication-based solutions. UNESCO (2015) recommends that school leadership development programmes should include mandatory training in negotiation, emotional intelligence, and restorative practices to support positive conflict resolution.

4.2.2 Favoritism and Bias Allegations

Interviews with members of the school management team revealed that one of the recurring challenges in managing interpersonal conflict among teachers is the perception of favouritism and bias. Specifically, some teachers accuse the administration of partiality, particularly when the resolution of a conflict appears to favors one party over another.

This perception is in organizational settings, particularly in educational institutions where staff work closely and personal relationships may overlap with professional responsibilities. This issue, while often rooted in perception, has significant implications for school leadership. For example, a senior administrator noted,

Some teachers accuse the administration of favouritism, not necessarily because the process was unfair but because the outcome did not align with their expectations. When a decision does not

favour them, they perceive it as biased (focus group discussion G2, from secondary school C2: 8th May 2025).

Another member narrated that.

Even when we strive to be impartial, some teachers feel that if a decision goes against their interests, it must be due to favouritism. It's not always about what is fair but about how fairness is perceived (focus group discussion G3, from secondary school C3:9th May 2025).

Moreover, the participants noted that

Favouritism accusations often arise not from actual bias but from emotional responses to outcomes; when one party feels disadvantaged, they tend to view our decisions as unjust, regardless of the facts (focus group discussion G2, from secondary school C2:8th May 2025).

The perception of favouritism and bias in conflict resolution, as revealed in the interviews with members of the school management team, is a critical concern in school leadership and administration. This perception, whether grounded in reality or not, can have significant effects on staff morale, organizational trust, and the effectiveness of school leadership. Teachers, as professionals who operate in a high-pressure and often emotionally demanding setting, may interpret any unfavorable decision as biased, especially if prior communication or transparency is lacking. Such perceptions are influenced not only by the outcomes of conflict resolution but also by the processes used to reach those outcomes. Even when the final decision is fair, individuals may feel wrong if the process appears biased or inconsistent. Therefore, school leaders must ensure that conflict management strategies are not only just but are also seen to be just.

This study aligns with a study by Kelchtermans (2006) that emphasizes the relational dimension of school leadership and how perceptions of inequity can quickly erode trust among teachers. Leaders must not only act fairly but also be seen to act fairly.

According to Blasé and Blasé (2004), when teachers perceive administrative favouritism, it leads to decreased motivation, lower job satisfaction, and heightened inter-collegial tension. Van der Westhuizen et al. (2005) stress that effective conflict resolution strategies must be grounded in policies perceived as objective, equitable, and consistently applied to avoid breeding resentment or accusations of bias.

Additionally, Bush and Glover (2012) emphasize ethical leadership as a fundamental aspect of effective school administration. Ethical leaders are expected to act impartially and maintain a high level of transparency in their decisions. Importantly, they stress that leaders must manage perceptions, not just actions. Even if a leader is objectively fair, a failure to communicate the reasons behind decisions can lead to damaging assumptions of bias or favouritism.

4.2.3 Limited Support from Higher Authorities

The interview findings with the school management team revealed that limited support from higher educational authorities poses a significant challenge in effectively addressing interpersonal conflicts among teachers. Participants reported that the lack of structured collaboration and timely intervention from external educational bodies undermines the school leadership's ability to resolve conflicts, especially those that are persistent or escalate beyond routine disagreements. For example, during a group discussion with the school management team participant explained,

There is a lack of coordinated support between school management and external educational bodies, which affects how quickly and effectively we can respond to recurring or serious conflicts (Focus Group Discussion G1, from secondary school C1: C1:7th May 2025).

Another participant narrated that.

The absence of consistent and structured collaboration with external educational authorities limits our capacity to handle interpersonal conflicts efficiently; without their backing, we often struggle to implement sustainable resolutions, especially in more complex cases (Focus group discussion G3, from secondary school C3:9th May 2025).

Moreover, another group of participants narrated that,

We often find ourselves managing serious teacher conflicts because there is no systematic support or timely intervention from higher educational offices, which weakens our overall conflict resolution process (focus group discussion G2, from secondary school C2:8th May 2025).

The quote above underscores a critical gap in the conflict resolution framework, namely, the absence of a robust, multi-level support system that can assist school leaders in handling complex or deep-rooted interpersonal disputes. School leaders often serve as the first line of response when tensions arise between teachers. However, without adequate backing from district-level offices, teacher support services, or ministry-level departments, their ability to intervene effectively can be compromised. This finding is consistent with the study done by Bush and Middlewood (2013) that emphasises that school leaders operate within a broader educational ecosystem, and when higher authorities fail to provide adequate policy direction, training, or external support mechanisms, schools are left to manage conflicts in isolation. Similarly, Day and Sammons (2016) argue that sustained support from local education authorities and ministries is critical in strengthening school leadership capacity. They highlight that leaders need access to external expertise, especially when internal interventions fail to produce lasting solutions.

In addition, Harris (2004) noted that successful school leadership depends on inter-organizational collaboration, particularly in managing human resource challenges such as staff conflicts. A fragmented relationship between schools and oversight

bodies often leads to inconsistencies in handling professional conduct issues, which may escalate if not addressed systematically.

4.2.4 Lack of Clear Policies or Guidelines

The interviews with school management revealed a critical gap in the management of teacher interpersonal conflicts: the absence of formal structures or clear guidelines. Without established procedures for addressing and resolving disputes, school leaders often resort to ad hoc or improvised approaches. As a result, responses to conflict situations vary depending on the individuals involved, the leadership style of the administrator, or the severity of the issue. This inconsistency can lead to decisions perceived as unfair, biased, or arbitrary by the staff. For example, during a focus group discussion, the participant narrated that.

We lack a documented school-level conflict resolution framework, which means there is no standardized process to follow when disputes arise. As a result, most of our interventions are informal, reactive, and often inconsistent, leaving staff unsure of what to expect and potentially perceiving decisions as unfair or biased (focus on favouritism, group discussion G1, from secondary school C1:7th May 2025).

Another group narrated the following.

There is no formal, written conflict resolution policy at the school level, so when interpersonal issues occur, we address them on a case-by-case basis. This informal approach varies depending on who is involved and who handles the situation, which creates inconsistency and sometimes erodes staff confidence in the fairness of the process (Focus group discussion G2, from secondary school C2:8th May 2025).

The findings from interviews and focus group discussions with school management teams reveal a critical organizational weakness in the management of teacher interpersonal conflicts: the lack of formal, documented conflict resolution frameworks. This gap has led to inconsistent and informal approaches that vary

depending on individual leadership styles, the nature of the conflict, and subjective judgement. The inconsistency in how conflicts are addressed affects the outcomes of conflict resolution efforts and shapes how staff perceive the fairness and credibility of those efforts.

Furthermore, the quotes above reflect the organizational risk of subjective or personality-driven conflict management, which undermines institutional trust and increases the likelihood of perceptions of bias or favouritism, especially in recurring or unresolved conflicts. This study aligns with the study done by Bush and Middlewood (2013) that emphasizes the importance of formal policies in establishing fair and transparent management practices in schools. They argue that without consistent procedures, school leaders are vulnerable to accusations of bias, and their decisions may lack legitimacy in the eyes of staff. In the view of Van der Westhuizen et al. (2005), the absence of formal conflict resolution systems leads to what they describe as "reactive leadership", where school leaders are constantly responding to crises without a strategic or consistent approach. This not only drains administrative resources but also contributes to a climate of uncertainty and mistrust among teaching staff. Bauer et al. (2021) highlight that organizations with clearly defined conflict resolution frameworks are more likely to foster positive work environments, reduce staff turnover, and promote professional growth. Their research stresses the role of structured mediation protocols, staff training, and the presence of neutral third-party facilitators as crucial components of effective conflict management in educational settings.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 CONCLUSION

The study concluded that members of the School Management Team (SMT) face multiple challenges in managing conflicts among teachers in public secondary schools. These challenges, stemming from both systemic and interpersonal factors, significantly hinder the creation of a peaceful and productive working environment. The lack of conflict resolution training, insufficient support from higher authorities, perceptions of favouritism and bias, and the absence of clear policies or guidelines weaken the SMT's ability to handle disputes effectively. Consequently, unresolved conflicts negatively affect teamwork, teacher morale, and school performance. Addressing these challenges is therefore critical to improving leadership effectiveness, promoting trust, and fostering a collaborative school culture conducive to quality education delivery.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that education authorities and policymakers strengthen the capacity of School Management Teams through regular conflict resolution training and leadership development programs. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) should establish clear conflict management policies and guidelines to ensure transparency and fairness in decision-making. Additionally, there should be consistent support and supervision from higher authorities to assist SMTs in resolving complex disputes. Schools are encouraged to promote open communication channels and participatory decision-making, reducing perceptions of favouritism and bias. Implementing these measures will enhance the ability of SMTs

to manage conflicts effectively, improve teacher relations, and foster a harmonious and productive learning environment.

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