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A Comparative Analysis of the Perceptions of Zimbabwean Primary School Teachers and Children on the Prevalent Types of Conflict in the Primary Schools: Case Studies of Gweru and Shurugwi District Schools

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Abstract:

Conflicts in organisations are inevitable. There is therefore need for knowledge of various types of conflicts so that appropriate conflict resolution interventions are instituted. This study was a result of a realisation that heads and teachers in primary schools were hardly aware of the types of conflicts existing in their institutions. They could therefore not figure out appropriate strategies to mitigate those conflict types. The study focussed on the types of conflict that existed in order to institute appropriate intervention strategies. The study sample was 134 teachers, 120 pupils and the District Education Officer. The sample was purposively chosen. A qualitative research methodology was employed. A case study design was adopted. The major findings of the study were that conflicts in the primary schools comprised interpersonal conflicts, interdepartmental conflicts and intradepartmental conflicts. The study recommended the creation of a cooperative context after trying negotiation, resorting to peer mediation, resort to Job Expectation Technique (JET) and Role Analysis Technique (RAT) and Team building.

Keywords: *Conflict types, perceptions, primary school, Zimbabwe*

1. Introduction

Conflict is inevitable at all levels of human behaviour (Sellman, 2003; Kreitner and Kinicki, 1997; Jandt, 1985). There is need for knowledge of the various types of conflict so that appropriate conflict resolution strategies could be crafted. Through a twenty - two year experience the researcher established that there were various types of conflict that existed in the primary schools. Sadomba and Hlatwayo(2010) and Johnson and Johnson (1995) emphasised the need to match the conflict types with conflict resolution strategies. Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert (1997) also emphasised the need to marry conflict types to conflict resolution strategies employed. Psychologists have established different types of conflict. RueandByars (2003) and Madziyire, Mukeredzi, Mubika & Thondhlana (2010) identified the following types of conflict; intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, intra – organisational and inter – organisational. These types of conflict lend themselves to different conflict resolution strategies. No researches have been undertaken to the researcher’s knowledge on the types of conflict that exist in the primary schools in Zimbabwe. Informal discussions with teachers by the researcher reflect that they do not seem to relate types of conflict to conflict transformation and management that they undertake. Some did not even show that conflict types are important to them since they thought conflict could be handled in the same way. The study therefore, aimed at establishing the perceptions of teachers and children regarding types of conflict existing in the primary schools.

2. Statement of the Problem

Teachers have the problem of establishing the variety of types of conflict and craft appropriate conflict resolution strategies. The main research question was therefore; What were the perceptions of teachers and children on the prevalent types of conflict in Zimbabwean primary schools?

2.1. Sub-Problems

The sub-problems that guided the study were:

- To what extent are intrapersonal types of conflict prevalent in Primary schools?
- To what extent are interpersonal types of conflict prevalent in Primary schools?
- How are intra – organisational conflicts prevalent in Primary schools?
- How are inter – organisational conflicts prevalent in Primary schools?
- How are intra – departmental conflicts prevalent in Primary schools?

- How are intra – departmental conflicts prevalent in Primary schools?

3. Purpose of Study

The study was intended to identify the perceived types of conflicts in primary schools.

4. Significance of Study

The study was important to;

- teachers in that they identified the prevalent types of conflicts so that they would come up with appropriate conflict resolution strategies
- to heads in identifying the prevalent types of conflicts so that they would institute effective conflict resolution strategies.
- to parents in that they would know the types of conflicts and address them accordingly.
- to policy makers to enable them to craft effective conflict resolution strategies for primary schools.

5. Limitations of the Study

The study had some limitations.

- The first limitation was that the study was a case study so the data collected could not be generalised for the whole country because the study was confined to one district. Thus the strategies could not be applied to all districts in the country.
- This limitation was circumvented by triangulation of sources of information and data gathering techniques.
- Other limitations were the use of paper questionnaires, research assistants and the distance from Gweru of some schools in the sample which made the exercise to be expensive. The researcher made use of opportunities that arose from visits to student teachers posted in the district under study.
- Another limitation was that one of the languages spoken in the district namely Ndebele made it difficult for the researcher to communicate directly with participants. The use of research assistants minimised the challenge.

6. Delimitations of the Study

- The study was delimited to primary schools in the Gweru District of the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. Only participants from schools that could be accessed were invited to participate. The study focused on the types of teacher related and pupil related conflicts in the primary schools.

7. Review of Related Literature

The review of related literature will explore the concept conflict, the theoretical framework of the study and an empirical review of related literature on types of conflict.

7.1. The Concept Conflict

Various authorities understand conflict from diverse perspectives as demonstrated by the definitions advanced by a number of experts in education. Differences in viewpoints are inevitable, and often enriching. Unanimity is more unlikely when we consider that, in addition to natural differences such as male and female, there are those brought about by a range of other dimensions: status, power, wealth, age, the role assigned to our gender, belonging to a specific social group, and so on (Fisher, Abdi, Ludin, Smith, Williams & Williams, 2007, p. 3). These indicators of position in society often mean that people want different things from the same situation, sometimes these goals clash, or are incompatible. It is then there is a conflict.

Rue and Byars (2003, p. 285) contend that conflict is “an overt behaviour that results when an individual or group of individuals think a perceived need of the individual or group has been blocked or is about to be blocked”. This definition stresses the importance of basic needs like physiological needs, security needs, social needs, self- esteem and self- actualisation (Maslow, 1991).

Fisher et al., (2007, p. 3) say that “conflict is a relationship between two or more parties (individuals or groups), who have, or think they have, incompatible goals”.

However, Wright (1951) cited in Sellman (2003, p. 23) uses the Latin word “confligere” meaning to strike together. Wright (1951) cited in Sellman (2003) says confligere has two meanings, one that highlights conflict as a fight, battle or prolonged struggle between opposing forces, which can include beliefs and ideas that may result in a physical clash and another meaning which states that conflict can occur psychologically, as emotional distress between incompatible wishes within a person. In this context, conflict has both a conceptual as well as a behavioural property at both individual and group levels. The duality of conflict is emphasised by Fink (1968) cited in Sellman (2003, p. 25) who views conflict as any social situation or process in which two or more social entities that are linked by at least one form of antagonistic psychological relation (internal conflict) or at least one form of antagonistic interaction (external conflict).

Conflicts are a fact of life, inevitable and often creative. Conflicts occur according to the definitions given above, when people pursue goals which clash. Disagreements and conflicts in schools are usually resolved without violence, and often lead to improved situation for most or all of those involved. Conflicts arise from imbalances in relations. That is, unequal social status, unequal wealth and access to resources and unequal power (Fisher et al., 2007, p. 4).

7.2. *The Theoretical Framework of the Study*

The study was premised on social pedagogy theory. Hatton (2013) cites The Social Pedagogy Development Network defining Social Pedagogy as an academic discipline that draws on Care theories from various related disciplines such as education, sociology, psychology and philosophy. In essence, it is concerned with the well-being, learning and growth of a child. This is underpinned by humanistic values and principles which view people as active and resourceful agents, highlights the importance of including them into the wider community and aims to tackle or prevent social problems and inequalities.

This is done through active involvement of the people concerned and getting their views despite their differences.

Petrie, Buddy, Cameron, Wigfall and Simon (2006) posit that social pedagogy emphasises team work and valuing the contribution of others in bringing up children. The child is seen as a social being, connected to others and at the same time with their own distinctive experiences and knowledge.

ThemPra (2015) advances the following aims of social pedagogy:

- It is holistic education that is education of the head (cognitive knowledge) heart, (emotional and spiritual knowledge) and hands (practical and physical skills).
- It creates a holistic well-being that is strengthening health sustaining factors.
- It enables children to grow up as self-responsible persons who take responsibility for their society and
- It promotes human welfare and prevents or eases social problems.

ThemPra (2015) also advances the following pathways as Social Pedagogy;

- Providing opportunities for learning,
- Building strong and positive authentic relationships which are non-hierarchical,
- Enabling children to empower themselves,
- Working with the head, heart and hands in everyday activities and
- Cultural impact on what is possible in practice.

7.3. *Empirical Literature Review*

7.3.1. Types of Conflict

Like frustration, conflict is an unavoidable feature of everyday life. Psychologists have identified different types of conflicts. Rue and Byars (2003); Madziyire et al., (2010) identified the following types of conflict; intrapersonal, interpersonal, intra-group, inter-group, intra-organizational and inter-organisational. Each type is discussed below in detail. This is so because different types of conflict maybe resolved differently (Johnson and Johnson, 1995).

7.3.1.1. Intra-personal Conflict

Intra-personal conflict is internal to an individual (Rue&Byars, 2003). Mnkandla (1996) defines intra-personal conflict as the social pressures that afflict an individual. There are three basic types of conflict in this category. They were originally described by Kurt Lewin (1935) cited in Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert (1997) and investigated extensively by Neal Miller (1944, 1959). The three basic types of conflict are approach-approach, avoidance-avoidance and approach-avoidance (Weiten, 2008, p.375).

In an approach-approach conflict a choice must be made between two attractive goals. The problem of course, is that one can choose just one of the two goals. For example, a pupil has a free afternoon- should he/she play tennis or soccer or netball. Among the three types the approach-approach is the least stressful. However, if the pupil is torn between two appealing choices, it may sometimes be troublesome.

In an avoidance-avoidance conflict, a choice must be made between two unattractive goals. Forced to choose between two repellent alternatives is like being 'caught between a rock and a hard place'. For example, should the pupil continue playing poker or table tennis, games he /she dislikes? Or suppose the pupil has a painful backache, should he/she submit to surgery that he dreads or continue to live with the pain? Obviously, avoidance-avoidance conflicts are most unpleasant and highly stressful.

In an approach-avoidance conflict, a choice must be made about whether to pursue a single goal that has both attractive and unattractive aspects. For instance, a pupil is offered accommodation at a school 250 kilometres away from his/her parents. He/She does not like to be away from his/her parents but welcomes the offer of a scholarship. Approach-Avoidance often produces vacillation (Miller, 1944 in Weiten, 2008, p. 375). That means the boy goes back and forth, beset by indecision. However, the conflict has both positive and negative aspects.

7.3.1.2. Inter-personal Conflict

This is conflict between two or more individuals (Rue & Byars, 2003). It involves some form of clash stemming from personal motives of the parties involved (Kasambira, 1998). Opposing personalities often result in conflict. Some people simply rub each other the wrong way for example, some could be extroverts while others could be introverts, some could be boisterous while others reserved, some could be optimists while others pessimists (Rue & Byars, 2003). This scenario is common in schools, for teachers and children could have the attributes listed above. Kasambira (1998) states that inter-personal conflict normally occurs when two pupils do not agree on an issue.

Dissatisfaction of individuals with their roles relative to the roles of others could also be a cause of inter-personal conflict (Rue & Byars, 2003). In a school situation children and prefects may not agree on the roles played by prefects (Sadomba & Hlatswayo, 2012). The next type of conflict is inter-group conflict.

7.3.1.3. Inter-Group Conflict

Inter-group conflict is witnessed at all levels of society even in the school system (Mnkandla, 1996). Inter-group conflict involves two formal units attempting to place their goals and interests ahead of those of the others (Kasambira, 1998). Mnkandla (1996) gives an example of inter-group conflict in a school as conflict between Grade 7A and Grade 7D. This kind of conflict mostly results from the organisational structure and is sometimes independent of individuals occupying the roles within the structure (Rue & Byars, 2003). This kind of conflict can be more intense if heads of each department are also experiencing interpersonal conflict (Rue & Byars, 2003). Mescon, Thill & Bovee (1999) discuss the following as causes of inter-group conflict, competition for resources, disagreements over responsibilities, poor communication leading to misunderstanding, withholding information among members, power struggles and teams pursuing different goals.

Inter-group conflict has been noted by Madziyire et al., (2010) as manifesting itself through a number of benefits which include the following: increase in group cohesiveness, improvement in group focus and task orientation, building the “we” mentality, and promoting non acceptance of autocratic leadership. This can only occur when intergroup conflict is managed well.

Role dissatisfaction may produce intergroup conflict (Kasambira, 1998). Teachers in a school who receive little recognition and have limited opportunities for advancement may initiate conflict with other units in the school (Madziyire et al., 2010). Role dissatisfaction and conflict may result when a group that has low perceived status sets standards for another group (Rue & Byars, 2003). A group of perceived low performer children may be made to set certain standards of carrying a certain task. This may not go down well with those who might think they are able to do better at tasks set for the pupils.

Where there is role ambiguity there is bound to be inter-group conflict (Rue & Byars, 2003; Kasambira, 1998). When credit or blame for success or failure of a particular assignment cannot be determined between two departments or groups of children in a school or class, inter-group conflict usually arises (Kasambira, 1998). Kasambira (1998) suggests role clarification to resolve role ambiguity.

Inter-group conflict can also result when two organisational units are dependent on common but scarce resources (Mullins, 1999). Each group naturally believes its projects are more important and should therefore, be funded. Inter-group conflict can also result when a physical or organisational barrier to effective communication exists (Rue & Byars, 2003). In a primary school situation some teachers may receive certain information that others do not receive (Madziyire et al., 2012). This causes the group which did not receive the information to be disgruntled and hence, conflict may ensue between the two groups. This affects the performance of teachers and ultimately how children are taught.

7.3.1.4. Intra-Group Conflict

Intra-group conflict occurs within a group or team (Madziyire et al., 2010). Kasambira (1998) contends this form of conflict occurs when members of the same speciality unit do not agree on issues. Members of the same group in a class might have differences. The relationships between these members often become strained particularly when other group members side with each of the individuals (Madziyire et al., 2010). Sometimes, groups may exert pressure on individual members and members may resist having their behaviour shaped by the group and conflict arises (Rue & Byars, 2003).

In a primary school, a situation may arise where other teachers may feel there are some teachers within their grade level for example, the junior department group who are favoured by the head of the school (Kasambira, 1998). This may cause disagreements between the supposedly favoured group and those not favoured. In a classroom situation some group members may force other members to misbehave while they resist such behaviour (Mnkandla, 1996). This may cause serious disagreements between these sub-groups.

7.3.1.5. Intra-Organisational Conflict

Intra-organisational conflict is conflict within the school (Madziyire et al., 2010). Kasambira (1998) views this form of conflict as characterised by clashes that transcend hierarchical levels. Perceived unfair work distribution and unfair deadlines are seen as the major causes of this type of conflict (Kasambira, 1998). This type of conflict is also usually caused by unfair distribution of work and unfair competition for resources, disagreements over responsibilities, different values, attitudes and personalities (Madziyire et al., 2012). Mnkandla (1996) gives an example of this type of conflict as conflict between the Head and teachers. Teachers end up demotivated and this affects the way they teach.

In different primary schools intra-organisational conflict may occur. This can take the form of conflict between the Sports Department, the Music Department or grade level departments like the Infant Department or the Junior Department (Madziyire et al., 2012). In a classroom different groups may disagree over unfair distribution of resources, for example.

7.3.1.6. Inter-Organisational Conflict

This type of conflict is conflict between one school and another school or the community (Mnkandla, 1996). Madziyire et al., (2010) view this type of conflict as emanating from competition. This type of conflict is usually referred to as competition conflict. Schools inter-organisational conflict occurs between schools. Differences may arise at sports competitions between schools. These may lead schools not to cooperate in future.

In Zimbabwean primary schools, Tumbo and Moyo (2013) discovered the types of conflict in three provinces to include child to child, teacher to teacher, child to teacher and teacher to child and conflicts with administration. The study was conducted in Mberengwa District in the Midlands Province. This study centred on Gweru District in the Midlands Province.

8. Methodology

The study adopted the qualitative research paradigm. This is so because the researcher intended to find issues requiring common sense knowledge of people (Lederach, 1997). A case study design was adopted. These were intrinsic case studies where no attempt was made to generalise beyond the single case or even to build theories (Silverman, 2010). The study used quester – views, open – ended interviews and focus groups discussions. The quester-view enabled the researcher to gather data because it is easy to construct and cheaper to administer (Denzin, 1997). Individual in-depth interviews enabled participants to express unique or controversial perspectives without fear of censure (Cresswell, 2008). Focus group discussions are collective interviews. In collective interviews participants, through their interaction could provide data and some insights which could not be revealed through interviews with individuals. Focus groups result in collective synergy (Kruger & Casey, 2000 cited in Gall et al, 2007). The sample consisted of 227 teachers including heads, 180 children and the District school's inspectors of the areas under study. The sample of teachers was purposively selected and children were also purposively selected. Only those who showed interest were chosen. The researcher followed Merriam's (2009) analysis of qualitative data. The study was undertaken within three months. This time allowed for member checking.

9. Findings

9.1. Perceived Types of Conflict

The perceived types of conflict are presented as viewed by urban and rural, female and male teachers as well as children and District Education Officers (D.E.Os).

Questionnaire findings revealed that Gweru urban and rural male and female teachers 79% (n= 28) and 80% (n= 80) were in agreement that the inter-personal and inter-group conflict existed in primary schools. The types of conflict that existed in the schools were seen as teacher to teacher conflict, pupil to teacher conflict, teacher to administration conflict, teacher to parent conflict, administration to parent conflict and school to school conflict. The Gweru teachers 5% (n= 7) were the ones who added cultural conflict, religious and denominational conflict.

Shurugwi urban male teachers 70% (n= 15) and female teachers 90% (n= 23) and rural male teachers 80% (n= 18) and female teachers 60% (n= 14) were also in agreement that the same types of conflict existed in primary schools. They viewed the following types of conflict as administration to teacher, teacher to pupil, pupil to pupil, teacher to teacher and administration to parents existing in the primary schools. The participants and informants in the two districts agreed on the same types of conflict existing in primary schools. They were administration to teacher conflict, teacher to pupil conflict, pupil to pupil conflict, teacher to teacher conflict and administration to parent conflict.

The focus group discussions responses and interviewees responses concurred with the findings from the questionnaires. Below, however, were some of the views presented by participants in interviews and focus group discussions;

Conflicts in the school emanate from disunity cliques which result in a group of teachers having sour relations with other teachers (Male teacher 1).

The types of conflicts that are prevalent in the school are pupil to pupil, teacher to pupil, and teacher to head (senior teacher 1).

Boy pupils normally disagree with girl pupils in the school (Girl pupil 1).

Pupils of opposite sex may not want to perform given tasks together (Female teacher 1).

Some pupils lie about others and this causes pupil to pupil conflict (Male teacher 2)

Those pupils who come from well to do families do not want to associate with those from poor families and they tend to disagree on a number of issues all the time (Head 1)

During inter-house competitions in athletics or ball games some teachers end up fighting alleging unfair judgement (Deputy Head 1).

There are cases of male teachers who sexually abuse Grade 6 and 7 girls which cause conflict between parents, heads and the affected teachers (District Education Officer 1).

Some teachers have a tendency of absenting themselves from duty so that the heads of schools end up reporting them to us (District Education Officer 2).

The views from the excerpts concurred with the ideas raised in the above discussion on types of conflicts that occurred in the primary schools.

The perceived types of conflict are presented as viewed by urban and rural, female and male teachers as well as children and District Education Officers (D.E.Os).

9.2. Discussion on Types of Conflict

All participants and respondents in the study concurred that the types of conflict that existed in the primary schools under study were manifested through teacher to teacher, pupil to teacher, teacher to administration, pupil to pupil, a group of pupils against one pupil or another group, teacher to parent and administration to parent. Cultural and religious conflicts were also evident. Authorities who include Sellman (2003), Tumbo and Moyo (2013) and Sadomba and Hlatswayo (2012) identified the same types of conflict as identified by respondents. They revealed that the following types of conflict, administration to teacher, teacher to pupil, pupil to pupil, teacher to teacher and administration to parents existed in the primary schools. The pupils from urban and rural areas from the two districts pointed out that there exists teacher to pupil conflict, pupil to pupil conflict and head to pupil conflict.

The District Education Officer also concurred with the teachers on the types of conflict that existed in the primary schools. There was also evidence that there were no marked differences in the types of conflict that existed in the urban and rural areas in Gweru District schools. Neither were there differences between the types of conflict that occurred in the primary schools between male teachers, female teachers and the children.

The types of conflict identified seemed to fall into three categories namely interpersonal conflict, intra group and intergroup conflict (Rue and Byars, 2003). Improved relations lead to enhanced learning and peace in a school. Findings on how the participants and respondents viewed conflict types in the primary schools confirmed views of Sadomba and Hlatswayo (2012) and Tumbo and Moyo (2013).

10. Conclusions

The following conclusions could be drawn from the findings of the study:

- Two types of conflict namely interpersonal and intergroup conflict exist in the schools.
- Intra group conflicts exist to a lesser extent in the primary schools.

11. Recommendations

From the above conclusions the following recommendations are advanced;

- There is need for the creation of a co – operative context after which negotiation could be tried in the primary schools.
- Schools should resort to peer- meditation as advised by Sellman (2003) to address interpersonal conflict.
- Arbitration should be resorted to if negotiation and mediation fail.
- To minimise disagreements in role clarification was absolutely necessary. This is to entail use of role clarification procedures as Job Expectation Technique (JET) and Role Analysis Technique (RAT)
- Team building techniques could also be employed in primary schools.
- Further studies could be undertaken with school parents and community leaders.

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