

# Conflict Management and Resolution Strategies between Teachers and School Leaders in Primary Schools of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate various strategies used to manage and resolve conflict between teachers and school leaders in government primary schools of Wolaita zone. The study employed a descriptive survey design where both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to collect and analyze data, concurrently. From six districts, ten schools were selected using both simple random and purposive sampling so as to include schools sponsored by Wolaita Development Association. Subjects for this study included 146 teachers and 50 department heads who were randomly selected to respond to the questionnaires. Participants for interview included 10 principals, 10 vice-principals, and 20 unit leaders and 30 parent and teachers association members. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentages, means and standard deviations), and inferential statistics (t-test) using SPSS software version 20. Findings indicated that major causes of conflict were either; institutional, work or leadership related. Major conflict management strategies included; building leadership skills, following rules and regulations, embracing change, wise allocation of resources, involvement in decision making, providing opportunities for training, and understanding individual differences and roles. In case of disputes, techniques included; discussions, punishing, forcing, compromising, avoidance, and ignorance. This study concluded that school leaders need to understand the sources of conflicts and have a mechanism in place for staff to voice their concerns. Additionally, leaders need to continuously build leadership competences, be open to change, involve and provide staff with opportunities for growth. Besides, school leaders should look for ways to acquire and expand funding sources.

**Keywords:** Conflicts, Management, Resolution, Teachers, Leaders, Primary Schools, Ethiopia

## INTRODUCTION

Effective conflict management takes central stage in creating safer and more supportive school learning environments. Conflict occurs when different perceptions or opinions are contradictory in nature (Bano, Ashraf, & Zia, 2013; Ghaffar, 2010; Ramani & Zhimin, 2010). As noted by Adhiambo and Enose (2011), conflict brings stress and discomfort due to the fear of the unknown; hence, it is a depressing and frustrating state of affair between the parties involved. Conflict affects the smooth running of the teaching and learning process, but, if carefully examined and managed it leads to peaceful coexistence between teachers and their school leaders. However, conflict is inevitable, and in principle all conflicts cannot be resolved and managed (Ramani & Zhimin, 2010). However, researchers argue that teachers and school leaders should have sufficient knowledge about how conflict occurs, and how they can respond or manage it so as to bring positive changes and to minimize any negative effects (Olubunmi, 2014; Uchendu, Anijaobi-Idem, & Odigwe, 2013).

Conflict is described in Aja, (2013, p. 2009) as “an opposition or competition between two or more forces arising either from the pursuit of incompatible goals or a class of rival opinions.” On their part, Oboegbulem and Alfa (2013, p.91) view conflict as “a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rivals.”

Researchers have paid much attention to the issue of conflict in organizations due to its large costs and benefits. Oboegbulem and Alfa (2013) pointed out that in all human interactions especially organizations, conflicts are bound to occur. Like other organizations, conflicts are inevitable in schools due to the collection of people with diverse personalities. Conflict may be destructive if it leads to ineffective communication breakdown and work relationships, tension, argument, low performance of team members and hostility which in turn affects the smooth running of the schools (Bano et al., 2013; Makaye & Ndofirepi, 2012). However, if conflicts are properly handled, benefits may accrue; contributing to solidarity within conflicting groups and reconciliation of legitimate interests where, in turn, relationships are strengthened, there is enhanced identification of problems and solutions, increased knowledge/skill, and peace is safeguarded (Bano et al., 2013; Ramani & Zhimin, 2010). Ability to manage or resolve conflict is therefore important for school leaders for smooth running of the school.

Conflict management and conflict resolution differ as shown in literature. Ramani and Zhimin (2010) describe conflict management as “an ongoing process that may never have a resolution.” Bano et al. (2013) on

their part refer conflict management to “a process of removing cognitive barriers to agreement ... between two parties.” In contrast, conflict resolution is described by Doe and Chinda (2015, p.148) as “the reduction, elimination, or termination of all forms of conflicts.” According to Doe and Chinda conflict resolution require negotiations, bargaining, mediation and arbitration.

### **Problem Statement**

Studies focusing on conflicts show that working with peoples in the organizations involves dealing with many different kinds of problems (Okotoni & Okotoni, 2003). Like organizations, the consequences of conflict between teachers and school leaders have been regrettable. Oboegbulem and Alfa (2013, p.91) pointed out that part of the outcome related with conflicts is disruption of academic programs, inadequate staffing due to unplanned transfers, hostility among staff members, suspicion and withdrawal from active participation in school activities. These problems affect professional work of the staff in a way that they are unable to concentrate as they are pre-occupied with other matters.

In teaching and learning process, individuals interact in order to realize educational objectives within schools, as such; there are various reasons for conflicts to occur within the schools. For example, a study by Msila (2012) on conflict management and leadership stated that majority of schools leaders lack understanding of their leadership roles. However, a study in Malaysia by Salleh (2013) identified insufficient resource such as finances and lack of facilities as well as heavy workload and dissatisfaction with management as some of the sources of conflicts. Similarly, a study by Uchendu et al. (2013) conducted in Nigeria cited sources of conflicts as; inadequate facilities and funding, conflicts among staff members, personality factors, and role conflicts. Besides, the researchers also argued that highly ‘connected’ teachers break school rules and regulations and absent themselves from school which makes school management a problem for leaders.

The role of school leaders in conflict management and resolution is therefore central to effective and efficient organization of school management (Ramani & Zhimin, 2010). Since conflict is natural in any organization, the management must rationally deal with it so as to create ways which maximize its benefits and minimize its dysfunctional consequences. To be able to develop a workable approach to conflict management, understanding the root causes of conflicts is therefore critical. This study was therefore designed to identify the main sources of conflict between teachers and school leaders, and to determine which strategies are used to manage and resolve such conflicts.

### **Literature Review**

Studied on conflicts in organizations are based on different viewpoints. For example, Uchendu et al. (2013) pointed out that schools like other bureaucratic organizations have their unique labor divisions, line of command in terms of teacher-principal and subordinate-superordinate relationships, rules and regulations, and communication flow which is bound to bring conflicts. The human needs or identity theory (Bano et al., 2013) assumes that deep rooted conflict outcomes are due to unmet or frustrated human needs which relate to; security, identity, recognition, participation and autonomy.

Conflict in any organization can occur at several levels. First **interpersonal conflicts** occur due to: 1) differing work roles and work load, 2) individual differences on values, goals and needs, and 3) individuals competing for resources, such as, promotions or work assignment (Kipruto & Kipkemboi, 2013). Second **intra-group conflicts** may occur due to disagreement or differences among group members or sub-groups regarding the goals, functions or activities of the group Lastly there may be **inter-group conflicts** which tend to develop when there is ‘us against them’ for example, departments or levels of decision making. Hence, groups see each other as enemies and tend to become hostile; in-turn, positive relationship decrease (Ramani & Zhimin, 2010).

Various reasons are cited in reference to conflict in any work setting (Makori & Onderi, 2013; Uchedu et al., 2013) For example, Uchendu et al. (2013) noted factors, such as; scarcity of resources, task interdependence, role and goal incompatibility, formal and informal group opposition, communication problems, poor academic performance, and bad political interference. However, literature shows that conflicts have functional (valuable) and dysfunctional (destructive) effect on organizations (Uchendu et al., 2013; Msila 2012). The researchers agree that the consequences of conflict maybe based on the type and intensity of conflict, the context, and the characteristics of the individual exposed to it. Table 1 provides a summary of consequences of conflicts.

**Table 1: The positive and negative consequences of conflict**

Positive consequences	Negative Consequences
Leads to new ideas or approaches	Diverts energy from work
Improves quality of decisions	Breed's discontent
Medium to air and release tension, Stimulate creativity and innovation Environment of self evaluation and change Promotes organizational vitality	Reduces communication, and group cohesiveness Threat to psychological well-being Wastage of resources Creates a negative climate
Helps individuals and group to develop	Increased hostility and aggressive behavior

Sources: Various sources (e.g., Tsabalala & Mapolisa, 2013; Adeyemi, 2009)

As shown in Table 1, constrictive conflicts can lead to improved relationship between individuals and groups, and to new and better understanding of organizational problems. In contrast destructive conflict may lead to the divergence of views and reduction of effective cooperation among members of the organization. However, how the conflicting parties react to various conflicts could also affect the outcomes of the situation.

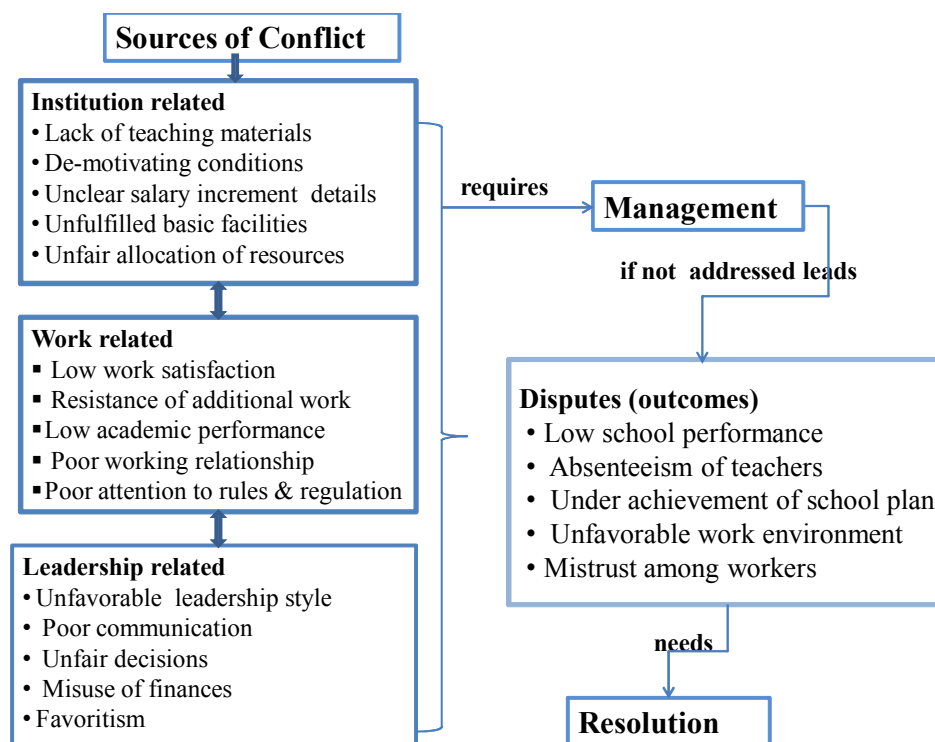
In conflict management, researchers argue that successful principals and other school leaders should learn to lead and manage (e.g., Makaye & Ndofirepi, 2012). The researchers stated that performing management functions is a continued activity for every head teacher who faces responsibility and is hampered by time. However, different conflict management techniques are often used. According to Bano et al. (2013) school managers may place emphasis on changing school structure or process. For example, some strategies may include increasing the degree of interaction, changing the reward system or appointment a neutral third party.

According to Okumbe (2008) personnel management is critical if learning activities have to succeed in schools. The researcher stated that it is not enough to acquire just adequate personnel but, there is need to develop a mechanism to develop, motivate and retain the human resource. Besides, it is essential to build an organizational climate that enhances employee mutual relationship and co-operative effort. Additionally, studies found that leadership skills of principals (Ghaffar, 2010), motivation, and capacity building of staff (Kipruto & Kipkemboi, 2013) had an influence on developing personal responsibility for teachers on their work which leads to a focus on personal accountable for the outcome and therefore less conflicts.

Career growth is another factor where teachers need help to use their talents. Teachers who disrupt their career development suffer from stress and psychological withdrawal; in turn, they can be a problem to school leaders (Okumbe, 2008). Barmao (2012) stated that less conflicts occur when teachers are assured of job security, have high interaction opportunity, and institutional support. Besides, teachers are motivated to work when their efforts are recognized (Barmao, 2012). Barmao, further argued that conflict could be managed by providing good working conditions, like; availability of teaching materials, supportive supervisory service, and opportunities to innovate as well as in-service training.

Unmanaged conflicts may lead to non-productive results in the schools. Ramani and Zhimin (2010) pointed out that successful conflict resolution involves listening and providing opportunities to address the needs of all parties, and adequately addressing their interests to find a win-win outcome for the parties involved. Ramani and Zhimin (2010) stated that in case of schools, clear-cut policies and mechanisms ought to exist to provide guidance on how to resolve conflicts. However, numerous regulatory mechanisms have been developed such as; negotiation, collective bargaining, and mediation to resolve disputes in schools (Mapolisa & Tshabalala, 2013; Ramani & Zhimin, 2010)

Based on literature, a number of factors may create conflict between teachers and school leaders and if not addressed they may lead to low school performance, absenteeism, under achievement of school plans, unfavorable work environment and mistrust among workers. Figure 1 present the conceptual framework on major sources of conflict derived from literature, and consequently the results of unmanaged conflict.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

Sources: Constructed from various studies (e.g. Oboegbulem & Alfa, 2013; Adhiambo & Enose, 2011; Ramani & Zhimin, 2010;

### Methodology

**Design:** This study utilized a descriptive survey design where both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in data collection and analysis, concurrently. A research design is described by Creswell (2009) as the plan and procedures for conducting research. According to Creswell an appropriate research design is essential to help collect, analyze and interpret data so as to answer the research question(s).

**Study site:** The study was conducted in seven rural districts out of 12 in Wolaita zone. Simple random sampling was used to select six districts while purposive sampling was used to include Boloso Sore district for schools supported by Wolaita Development Association (funding agency). Purposive sampling was used to include four schools from Boloso Sore district, namely; Gurumo Sore, Dola, Dangara Madalcho and Sore Homba primary schools. Six primary schools (i.e., Zamine Wulisho, Tora Wulisho, Shamba Kelena, Wachiga Esho, Bossa Kacha and Gututo Larena) were randomly selected from six districts.

**Sampling:** The sample included 196 participants from a population of 354 for the questionnaire: 146 randomly selected teachers while 50 department heads were included based on availability. This sample was deemed sufficient based on Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2002, p.94) to allow generalization of the findings. To allow data triangulation, 40 school leaders (i.e., 10 principals, 10 vice-principals, 20 unit leaders) and 30 Parent-teacher association (PTA) members were included based on availability for the interview.

**Data collection:** The questionnaire was the main data collection tool that was distributed to both teachers and department heads. The survey tool included open-ended and closed-ended questions. Part of the questionnaire comprised of Likert Scale items with responses ranging from Strongly Disagree =1 ... to Strongly Agree =5. Additionally, face-to-face interviews were conducted with principals and vice principals, unit heads and PTA members using a check-list to get the views related with; sources of conflict, and how schools manage and resolve conflicts in primary schools. English language was used in designing the questionnaire but interviews were conducted in the local language which took roughly 40 minutes in the principals' offices. In every school, a key person was appointed to help clarify issues and to collect the completed questionnaires. The return rate of the questionnaires was 100%.

**Pilot-testing:** The questionnaire was pre-tested in Ziga Borkoshe Primary School with twenty respondents ahead of the final work and appropriate adjustments made before it was finalized. The questionnaires were tested for content validity by consulting with experts to measure the relevance of the research instrument and adjustments were made where applicable. To test for reliability of the instrument, the Cronbach Alpha test was done and the alpha value for the scale was found to be 0.815 which shows the scale was reliable.

**Data Analysis:** Descriptive statistical (means and standard deviation, frequency count and percentages) and inferential statistics (t-test) were used as data analysis techniques. Some questions with reverse wording in the Likert scale items were recorded and an overall score for the scale determined. Data collected through the interview were summarized into themes. A pre-study statistical power calculation using G\* Power 3.1.9 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) at .05 significance level, and .80 power indicated that the minimum number of study participants needed to have adequate power in the t-test is 156. Therefore, lack of statistical power was not likely to be a factor given the anticipated sample size of 84 in group one (sponsored schools), and 112 in group two (non-sponsored schools) and a total sample size of 196.

**Ethical consideration:** This study was initially designed to satisfy the requirement for the Masters Degree. Permission was therefore acquired from Wolaita Sodo University and Wolaita Zonal Education Department to conduct the study. Further permission was sought from the school principals to correct data from their schools. Respondents were requested to give consent to participate in the study and they were given assurance on the confidentiality of the information they provided.

## Results and Discussions

### Demographic Characteristics

Table 2 presents results on study participants' background information. On gender, majority 114 (58.2%) of teachers and department heads were male while the rest 82 (41.8%) were female. Regarding education qualification, 37 (18.9%) of teachers and department heads had a first degree, 132 (67.3%) had Diplomas while 27 (13.8%) had certificates. On work experience, 17 (8.7%) of teachers and department heads had worked for 1-5 years, 87 (44.4%) had 6-10 years whereas, 51 (26.0%) and 27 (13.8%) had worked for 11-15 years and 16-20 years, respectively. About 14 (7.15%) of teachers and department heads had worked for 21 years and above. In general more than 90% had worked for over 6 years.

**Table 2: Respondents' Descriptive statistics Teachers and Department Heads**

Item		Frequency	Percent (%)	
1	Department Heads	50	25.5	
	Teacher	146	74.5	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>100</b>	
2	Sex	Male	114	58.2
		Female	82	41.8
		<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>100</b>
3	Educational Qualifications	Bachelor Degree	37	18.9
		Diploma	132	67.3
		Certificate	27	13.8
		<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>100</b>
4	Work experience (years)	1-5	17	8.7
		6-10	87	44.4
		11-15	51	26.0
		16-20	27	13.8
		21 and above	14	7.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>100</b>	

### Sources of Conflict between Teachers and School Leaders

Table 3 presents results from the open-ended questions based on responses from teachers and department heads regarding sources of conflict. The responses were categorized into three themes, namely: institutional, work, and leadership related conflicts.

**Table 3: Responses of teachers and department heads on sources of conflict**

Department heads' responses	Teachers' responses
<b>Institution related</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of provision of resources on time,</li> <li>• Unwise use and unfair allocation of resources</li> <li>• Lack of adequate funding</li> <li>• Poor infrastructure in school compound</li> <li>• Inadequate reference books</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortage and unfair allocation of resources</li> <li>• Un-conducive work environment and none existence of recreation centers</li> <li>• Inadequate teaching and learning materials</li> </ul>
<b>Work related</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of preparation of lesson plans</li> <li>• Low achievement of school plan</li> <li>• Lateness to school and absenteeism from work</li> <li>• Lack of trust and co-operation among school members</li> <li>• Misunderstanding of educational policies</li> <li>• Lack of teaching professional competency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overload of work</li> <li>• Unfair scheduling of time table</li> <li>• Teachers' dissatisfaction with work</li> <li>• Poor accountability and responsibility</li> <li>• Lack of rewards systems</li> <li>• Absence of tolerance among workers</li> <li>• Poor implementation of educational policies</li> <li>• Lack of skill training</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership related</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• False reports from leaders</li> <li>• Lack of implementation of school rules and regulation</li> <li>• Poor communication</li> <li>• Inferiority complex</li> <li>• Lack of commitment of school management committee</li> <li>• Misunderstanding, gossip being dishonest, and disrespect</li> <li>• Misinterpretation of rules and regulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• False report about teachers</li> <li>• Lack of school leadership competences</li> <li>• Absence of participatory decision making</li> <li>• Autocratic rule and lacks of openness in school activities</li> <li>• Disagreement, favoritism and unfair selection of teachers for training</li> <li>• Lack of leadership skills</li> <li>• Lack of confidentiality</li> <li>• Unfair allocation of leadership positions</li> <li>• Lack of understanding of rules and regulations</li> </ul>

**Institutional related conflicts:** From Table 3, the issues on resources (i.e., scarcity, allocation and sharing) were mentioned as a source of conflict. This could be related with lack of funding as mentioned by department heads. However, teachers were more concerned with unfair allocation of the scarce resources. Findings relates to what was stated by Afful-Broni ((2012) that scarcity of resources may motivate people to compete with others and in-turn, the situation may generate conflict between individuals or groups within the organization.

Results obtained from interviews indicated that inadequate school resources for teaching and learning process could directly result in conflicts between leaders and teachers in primary schools. For example, one vice principal from one of the sponsored schools said that:

*Three years ago, our school was not sponsored by WDA ... the school had a challenge due to lack of school resources. This caused us a lot of problems between teachers and school leaders ... the teachers were demanding more than what the school leaders could provide in terms of resources for the school teaching and learning in overall.*

The issue of school infrastructure, and work environment was linked with conflicts by both teachers and department heads. Additionally, lack of teaching materials was mentioned as a cause of conflict between teachers and school leaders. Results relate with findings by Shibeshi (2009) that poor working conditions, like, crowded classrooms, and lack of teaching materials could de-motivate teachers, and cause conflicts.

**Work related conflicts:** Lack of preparation of work plans and low achievement of school plans were identified by department heads as elements which bring conflicts in schools (i.e. lesson, weekly, monthly and annual plans). Teachers on their part mentioned work overload, dissatisfaction, unfair scheduling of time table, poor accountability and responsibility of school leaders as well as lack of recognition or rewards for their achievements. The findings are similar to work by Mapolisa and Tsabalala (2013) who indicated that work overload causes conflicts with administrators especially for teachers who are unmotivated in their work. Similarly, Okumbe (2008) argued that teachers lack motivation if they have nothing to look forward to in their work like recognition or promotion.

Further, department heads noted lateness and absenteeism from work by teachers as an issue that triggers conflicts between the parties. Besides respondents felt that lack of trust and cooperation among school community, in addition to misunderstanding and poor implementation of education policies by school leaders

could cause conflicts. They also felt that conflicts may occur due to disagreement among staff and school leaders or due to absence of tolerance among workers.

Lack of professional competency was also mentioned by department heads as a trigger for conflicts. On their part, teachers mentioned lack of opportunities for training to develop their skills in different areas. The findings support work by Shibeshi (2009) who noted that professional and social isolation especially for those in rural areas could lead to poor morale of teachers which lead to conflicts due to low performance.

**Leadership related conflicts:** Respondents identified false reports as elements which bring conflict between teachers and school leaders. On their part, department heads identified strict application of school rules and regulations as an issue. However, teachers felt that school leaders lack leadership competencies or do not understand leadership roles. These findings were consistent with work by Adeyemi (2009) who found that strict use of rules and regulations as a major source of conflict in Nigerian schools.

Response from department heads showed that poor communication, disagreements, autocratic rule, lack of commitment, and inferiority complex on the part of leaders as causes of conflict. Teachers further mentioned lack of openness and lack of involvement in decision making as causes of conflict between parties. The results support work by Uchendu et al. (2013) who argued that communication problems and individual differences can create a conflict between parties.

Additionally, dishonesty, gossip, disrespect, lack of confidentiality, favoritism, unfair selection of teachers for training and unfair allocation of leadership positions were also linked by both respondents as factors that lead to conflicts with school leaders. Results are similar with Ramani and Zhimin (2010) that school leaders at times find themselves in problem when teachers perceive that leaders use school resources for their personal gains or they detect incidences of favoritism on the part of leaders.

### Results on Conflict Management strategies

Table 4 presents results from respondents relating to conflict management strategies. Results show a negative skew for all items meaning all respondents agreed that leaders have some mechanism to manage conflicts. The aggregated mean is 40.17 with a standard deviation = 4.74 based on the aggregated Likert scale score which ranges from 10 to 50. This infers that the extent of conflict management based on the views of teachers and department heads is moderately high; meaning, school leaders place a lot of emphasis on managing conflicts. However a t-test carried out to determine if there is a mean difference between the responses from sponsored (mean = 39.95, standard deviation = 5.52) and non-sponsored schools (mean = 40.33, standard deviation = 4.07) was not statistically significant at the 5% level ( $t_{\text{value}} = -.543$   $df = 194$ ,  $p > .588$ ).

**Table 4: Responses on Conflict Management strategies**

Management	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
1. Adequate coverage of the syllabus in a session	196	1	5	4.26	.933
2. Opportunity to attend courses in conflict management	196	1	5	4.40	.933
3. Provision of teaching and learning materials	196	1	5	4.35	.857
4. Use of school leaders in decision making process	196	1	5	4.26	.907
5. Professionalism and meritocracy in appointment of teachers and school leaders	196	1	5	4.33	.923
6. Transparency and accountability in financial and resource allocation and management in school	196	1	5	4.44	.896
7. Absence of political interference in school management	196	1	5	4.44	.841
8. Frequent stakeholders meeting and consultation in school management	196	2	5	4.54	.685
9. Clear definition and description of roles/responsibilities on school management between stakeholders	196	1	5	4.49	.799
10. In-service training of education leaders, teachers and stakeholders on conflict management and resolution	196	1	5	4.46	.937
Scale aggregated mean	196	20.2	45.5	40.17	4.74
Scale Average					
Sponsored	84	20.2	45.5	39.95	5.52
Un-sponsored	112	26.2	45.5	40.33	4.07
		$t_{\text{value}} = -.543, df=194, p>.588$			

**t-test**

\*\*significant at 1% and \*significant at 5% level

### Views regarding Conflict Management Strategies

Teachers and department heads were requested to provide through open-ended questions their views regarding strategies used to manage conflicts in their schools. Results were summarized into three themes: Leadership, work and institution as shown in Table 5.

**Leadership related strategies:** Results from Table 5 indicate that school leaders strive to understand the sources of conflict and also try to develop a culture of allocating qualified persons to the right places. People are allocated key positions based on whether they are; accountable, transparent, ready for change, and have ability to implement activities based on school plans. Results align with Ramani and Zhimin (2010) who argued that administrators should have the ability to recognize sources of conflict as they might vary. Leaders should be able to understand conflicts and how to manage them, and be able to apply conflict management strategies in a practical way.

From Table 5, responses show that leaders also try to fairly allocate resources and solve problems promptly. Managing conflicts within a good time prevents spread of the conflict to others within the school community. Besides, maintaining confidentiality and being honest promotes trustworthiness. Findings support work by Ramani and Zhimin (2010) that the school community should seek to embrace open systems where individuals are allowed to air their views and conflict issues discussed openly.

**Table 5: Views of respondents on Conflict Management Strategies**

Theme	Sub-themes
<b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing the sources of conflict</li> <li>• Allocating position based on qualification</li> <li>• Appointing leaders who support change</li> <li>• Implementing accountability, transparency, and activities based on planning</li> <li>• Fair allocation of resources,</li> <li>• Solving problems promptly</li> <li>• Participating staff in decision making process,</li> <li>• Motivating, rewarding and promoting efficient workers in school</li> <li>• Maintaining confidentiality and honesty</li> <li>• Updating technology using skills of stakeholders</li> <li>• Adjusting training based on needs</li> </ul>
<b>Work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding individuals roles and accepting individual difference</li> <li>• Giving individuals autonomy in decision making</li> <li>• Encouraging competition</li> <li>• Developing self-confidence among workers</li> <li>• Keeping school rules and regulation of schools</li> <li>• Avoiding superiority and inferiority complex</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the right procedure in conflict management</li> <li>• Developing an organization culture where all stakeholders are encouraged to work hard in school continuously</li> </ul>

Respondents noted that adjusting training based on staff needs and updating technology using skills of stakeholders could supports leaders to modernize (update), enhance staff achievement; in-turn improve school performance. The finding support work by Ramani and Zhimin (2010) who stated that school leaders who are gifted in management, experience minimal brush of conflicts in their institutions, and they create linkage between motivation, commitment and capacity building.

Staff participation in decision making as well as motivating, rewarding and promoting efficient workers in school were mentioned as strategies used to manage conflicts in school. Results are similar to work Bano et al. (2013) who emphasized changing the reward system as an option to address conflicts in school.

**Work related strategies:** Results from Table 5 showed that understanding individual roles and accepting individual differences in school affairs was an essential element in managing conflicts. Besides, individuals' autonomy in making decisions, encouraging competition and developing self-confidence among workers were used to bring effective and efficient accomplishment of the school plan. Results align with work by Ramani and Zhimin (2010) who argued that the school community should embrace an open system where everyone gets an opportunity to contribute in decision making.

School leaders according to the respondents adhered to school rules and regulations based on guidelines as a management strategy to guide daily work. Results align with what was reported by Ramani and Zhimin (2010) that schools need clear policies to provide guidance on how school leaders ought to handle and resolve conflicts. Leaders and teachers need to have a good practical and theoretical background about the school rules and regulations. For example, one of the unit leaders during the face-to-face interview said that:

*The best way to manage conflict in primary schools in Wolaita Zone has been minimized through clear definition and description of individual's roles. Clear identification of school rules and regulations, accountability and responsibility of school leaders.... this mostly supports in smoothing out conflicts in primary schools.*

Addressing issues related with superiority and inferiority complex on the part of leaders was an import



element mentioned in conflict management. Superiority complex could lead to use of absolute power to cover up for skill deficiencies. Inferiority complex on the other hand can lead to conflicts and cover up for weakness on the part of the staff. Results relate with what was reported by Ramani and Zhimin, 2010) that the tendency to compete for power and status can disrupt the cooperative efforts; such power struggle may lead to deception and evasion, threats and emotional blackmail.

**Institutional related strategies:** Respondents mentioned strategies like using the right procedure and developing an organization culture where all stakeholders are encouraged to work hard in school continuously, taking into consideration that school leaders are part of responsible bodies that exist in the school. The result relates with an argument from Jantzi and Leithwood (1996) that fewer conflicts are linked with teachers' motivation, and commitment. Teachers who take personal responsibility of their work are satisfied and accountable for the outcome. School leaders should thus get everything done without running into trouble with the teachers.

### Views regarding Conflict Resolution Techniques

Respondents were requested to state the conflict resolutions techniques used by leaders to resolve conflict between schools leaders and teachers. Findings on conflict resolution techniques were categorized into three, namely: leadership, work and institution as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Response on Conflict Resolution Techniques**

Theme	Sub-themes
<b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appling appropriate leadership styles</li> <li>• Punishing, forcing, compromise (win-win decisions), avoidance and ignoring</li> <li>• All stakeholders take responsibility of negative and positive consequence</li> <li>• Design wise technique to resolve or smooth the situation</li> <li>• Practicing accountability and transparency</li> <li>• Discussion, giving genuine decision and sharing information</li> <li>• Providing skill development trainings</li> <li>• Expansion of resources</li> </ul>
<b>Work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieving individuals work plan accordingly and being punctual at the work place</li> <li>• Handling stakeholders based on individual differences/ behaviors</li> <li>• Stimulating competition</li> <li>• Developing openness at work place</li> <li>• Taking measurement based on right rules and regulation</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bringing peace and security at work place</li> <li>• Creating attractive work environment</li> </ul>

**Leadership related techniques:** From Table 6 respondents indicated that school leaders apply different leadership styles based on the situation and design wise techniques to resolve or smooth the conflicts. Most observable techniques that are used as end results include; punishing, forcing, compromise (win-win decisions), avoidance and ignoring the conflict. Besides, all stakeholders are expected to shoulder the negative and positive consequence of conflict. Findings support work by Ramani and Zhimin (2010) who argued that causes of conflicts vary within and between schools; in-turn, different forms of conflict resolutions should be used based on specific strategies since the root causes are unique. Similarly, Doe and Chinda (2015) argued that due to the high degree of interdependence and individual differences in role expectations, conflict are likely to arise among members and school are likely to address conflicts by using strategies like integrating, dominating or comprising to resolve conflicts.

Respondents further stated that leaders strive on being accountable and they embrace transparency in their decision making process. Besides, they try to involve teachers in discussions regarding conflicts, use legitimate decisions and share information to minimize the continuity of conflicts within the school. The findings relate to results by Barmao (2012) who argued that restricted and poor communication channels lead to conflicts in the schools.

Expanding sources of resources in school activities play the greatest role and back bone in teaching learning process. This indeed is a paradox because of the amount of energy and resources expended by schools to prevent and resolve conflicts. The results support work Aja (2013) who argued that resource expansion is an important element as an intervention approach to handle conflicts.

**Work related techniques:** Handling individual differences/ or behaviors in a unique way serve as a technique to resolve conflicts. School leaders need to gain information about the followers so as to handle individual difference. Leaders should work towards building interpersonal skills that come in handy while dealing with conflicts.

Respondents stated that leaders strive to stimulate competition, develop openness at the work place and

they take measurements based on institutional rules and regulation. Besides they try to build cooperative work environments. Results support work by Ramani and Zhimin (2010) who concluded that conflict issues need to be resolved in the best way possible by exchanging accurate information between the parties involved, and embracing negotiations.

One of the school principal during the face-to-face interview said that:

*Our school gets support from WDA as we work with them. The school has been a model in the Woreda as well as in Zonal level. The school internal and external structure is very attractive and conducive for teachers and other concerned bodies ... the genuine change came to our school from strong developed work cultures among the workers through working with WDA and school community. In our school, teachers and school leaders are experienced and make the school plan cooperatively with the school PTA ... many conflict occurred in school because of various reasons like, poor communication, lack of transparency, ignorance of additional work, unfair decision and similar problems. The school leaders and teachers are trained, they know how to manage and resolve conflicts in the school ... if managed and resolved, conflict do not prevent them from achieving the targeted school goals.*

One of the PTA members stated that PTA members should follow the school management strategies and resolution techniques as responsible bodies and they have to understand the school as giving services to their own community. Therefore, they should “provide all school materials; participate in decision making process, contact teachers and school leaders to see the level of school progression ....”

Based on discussions with PTA members it was evident that committee members have their own problems; they are not punctual for meetings when invited for discussions related with the school conflicts and other relevant issue related with schools teaching and learning process which affects the school performance. However, they reasoned that they are busy with their work, and their views are given less value when they are present in school meetings. Some of them do not know their right roles as PTA members in school because they do not participate in meetings. Results are similar with Tatlah and Iqbal (2011) who found poor working relationship of PTA members with other board members which led to conflicts. For example one of the respondents said that:

*PTA members should develop the culture of working with the school leaders and teachers, be compatible with others, ... adhere to being punctual on school activities, ... should build responsible and accountable bodies, and highly motivate others to build the capacity of school by mobilizing the school community.*

**Institutional related techniques:** Based on the respondents leaders try to bring peace and security to keep the school environment suitable for learning. Besides, if the school environment is boring or unattractive, stakeholders are not motivated to accomplish their tasks effectively.

### Summary and Conclusion

Conflict in primary schools were grouped into three areas: institutional (lack of or unfair distribution of school resources, and poor infrastructure); work (low performance in school plans, work overload and dissatisfaction, lack of competences in teaching, and lateness and absenteeism, intolerance among workers on the part of teachers, and lack of accountability and responsibilities, poor implementation of education policies, lack of training for staff, and lack of reward systems for leaders); and leadership (false reports, lack of commitment, poor implementation of rules and regulations, poor communication, lack of leadership skills, lack of involvement in decision making, inferiority and superiority complex, favoritism in allocating positions and training opportunities, and lack of clarity in the educational training policies and guidelines).

This study found that conflict management and resolution cannot be separated into distinct components, but, some strategies can be used in conflict management as well as in resolving conflicts; hence, it's a continuum of strategies and techniques.

Conflict management strategies used in schools include; building on leadership skills and having a mechanism in place to deal with conflicts. They also work on being knowledgeable about sources of conflicts, expanding resources, giving staff opportunities for growth, and also trying to embrace change. Further, leaders strive to build on leadership skills like knowing when to switch leadership styles based on situation, being accountable and responsible, they try to involve teachers in decision making, and create ways to recognize and reward staff, they try to understand individual uniqueness, and ensure the school environment is safe for learning.

If conflicts escalate to disputes, resolving conflict is the last result. Leaders were found to use different techniques based on situation, including; discussions, punishing, forcing, compromise (win-win decisions), avoidance, and ignorance as well as taking individual differences into account.

The study concluded that school leaders need to develop leadership competences, and have a mechanism in place to management conflicts besides knowing when to intervene (resolving conflicts). They should look for ways to acquire additional resources (seek funds), create conducive learning environment,

provide opportunities for teachers' growth, and develop a culture where teachers work collaboratively with school stakeholders. Besides, they should have a mechanism to recognize performers, and encourage innovativeness to motivate teachers.

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