



**THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN DEALING WITH CONFLICT
BETWEEN TEACHERS AND LEARNERS**

by

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Declaration

I, PHUMELELE MAHLABA (2015175355), declare that the dissertation, *The role of the school principal in dealing with conflict between teachers and learners*, submitted for the qualification of Masters (M.Ed.) at the University of the Free State is my independent work.

All the references that I have used have been indicated and acknowledged using complete references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work to another university or faculty to obtain a qualification.


.....

SIGNED

.....December...2023.....

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Ethics Statement



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Yours sincerely

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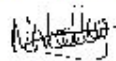
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Abstract

Globally, schools experience conflict between learners and between learners and teachers. South African schools seem not to be an exception to the status-quo. Thus, this study investigates the school principals' role in dealing with conflict between teachers and learners through persuasive management style. This study was underpinned by a persuasive management style that focuses on managers who use their ability to interpret a situation, people's actions and dialogue and then strongly urge them to do a task or achieve specific objectives. Suppose the principal can execute the actions/activities mentioned. In that case, he may change the mindset of those involved in a conflict situation, reducing the conflict to a minimum. The most important aspect of a persuasive manager is that as a mediator, they maintain control over the entire decision-making process. The study used the interpretivist paradigm and adopted a qualitative research approach utilising a phenomenology research design. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants from the four schools in the Thabo-Mofutsanyane Education district, Free State, South Africa. Semi-structured interviews were employed to generate data, and the data collected was analysed thematically. The findings revealed that conflict between teachers and learners is common in the selected schools, and such a conflict originates from different sources, such as tasks, values and goals. The findings suggest that those involved in conflict are affected psychologically, physically and emotionally due to such a conflict. Principals, as part of the School Management Team (SMT), then come through to play a role in helping find a middle way, an alternative to any conflict occurring in schools, to prevent it from escalating to violence. The principals are also responsible for maintaining the school's integrity and establishing and maintaining a peaceful and harmonious teaching and learning environment. So far, these principals have raised awareness of managing conflict among teachers and learners through school workshops. However, not enough resources and facilities are available to help principals offer beyond what they can currently offer. To this effect, the study recommends that schools should be provided with adequate resources and facilities and that counselling sessions be introduced in schools for teachers and learners.

Keywords: Conflict; Conflict Management; Dysfunctional Conflict; Functional Conflict; Conflict Education.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to:

- The unsung and sung heroes and heroines who lost their lives on duty – I am referring to all those who received media coverage and those whose stories were untold to rest in God's hands. I am sincerely sorry that your lives were cut before the time due to conflict that led to violence.
- All family members and friends of the deceased, may you continue finding solace in God's healing power.
- All teachers who have had conflicts with learners and who, despite being traumatised by the incidents, continue to get up each day to teach learners dedicatedly and offer their support so that learners can continue to strive for a better life. May God's healing power cover all your wounds, including those spoken about and those hidden and may His grace strengthen you in your teaching career.
- School learners, my prayer is that you lean to God alone and watch for the transformation that will take place and may God also heal all your wounds that were caused by the conflict between yourselves and your teachers.
- The departmental officials who have the last word in creating and implementing school policies and laws – that the ongoing conflict in schools can be conquered when God is at the centre of it all.

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“The Lord has done what He planned; He has fulfilled His Word, which He decreed long ago ...”

Lamentations 2:17a NIV

- My forefathers whose dreams were to reach higher institutions and died fighting for the right to education to be accessible to their descendants.
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- Principals of participating schools for opening doors for me to collect data in their schools.
- To all participants, thank you for your kind cooperation. It would not have been possible without your participation and cooperation.

List of Acronyms

DoE	Department of Education
DoH	Department of Health
HoD	Head of Department
OBE	Outcome Basic Education
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team

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CHAPTER 1 : ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Globally, schools experience conflict between learners and between learners and teachers. Valente, Lourenco and Nemeth (2020:1) add that in Portuguese schools, conflict between teachers and learners affects the quality of the learning environment and teachers' performance regarding teaching. Similar consequences are experienced in Nigerian schools (Anashie & Kulo, 2014). According to Furlong and Morrison (2000), conflict between students and teachers in California schools, which manifests in various forms, negatively affects teaching and learning. This assertion is supported by Özgan (2016) from a study done in Turkey. South Africa seems not to be an exception to the status quo.

Today, in South Africa, the conflict between teachers and learners in schools has reached alarming proportions and has become unbearable. The media reports on how teachers suffer at the hands of learners and vice versa (Reyneke, 2010:71). Teachers and students embroiled in conflict face various dangers, including the risk of violence, psychological abuse, theft, physical assaults, gang-related violence, corporal punishment, sexual violence, and bullying (Burton, Ward, Artz & Leoschut, 2015); which in turn hurts each individual and goes as far as affecting teaching and learning taking place in classrooms. Teachers, as well as learners in conflict with one another, experience stress that negatively impacts their personal and professional lives (Brookins, 2019:5). Unfortunately, the ongoing conflict results in workplace or home strain, undermining the quality and joy of relationships and adversely affecting the physical well-being of teachers and students (Scott, 2020). Individuals involved in the conflict may endure stress, sleep disturbances, appetite fluctuations, migraines, and social withdrawal (IEduNote, 2018). Concurrently, additional consequences include decreased focus on other responsibilities, waning interest in work, job dissatisfaction, work-related anxiety, a sense of estrangement from others, and frustration (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014:127). In more severe cases, the conflict may escalate to the point of affecting the health of these teachers and learners, leading to conditions such as peptic ulcers and various respiratory problems, including asthma, hypertension,

headaches, and coronary issues (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014:128). Conflict affects the lives of the individuals involved and negatively affects the classroom. Educators and students facing conflict undergo stress, burnout, and discontent, leading to diminished communication between the involved parties (Rahim, 2017:7). The conflict further negatively affects the performance of learners; teacher productivity in giving lessons declines, both learner and teacher become demotivated, and the conflict creates a toxic teaching and learning environment (Ali, Ashraf & Shuai, 2019:5). Lastly, unresolved conflict can brew violent attacks, which may result in the resignation of teachers and learners boycotting the school or the worst scenario, is the Department of Education (DoE) being sued for damages suffered by the victim (Brookins, 2019).

Regrettably, conflicts cannot be eliminated, as they are inherent to human nature, constituting an essential aspect of moral and emotional development. Similarly, conflicts are present in every educational institution. The school is situated in an environment where conflicts unfold regularly, gaining significance as a consequence of the numerous interpersonal relationships within the school context (Valente et al., 2020:1). However, conflict must be resolved as soon as it occurs because when left unresolved, it goes as far as destroying the teacher-learner relationship and performance in class being reduced (Rahim, 2017:7).

So, to ensure that performance in class is restored, many schools use the School Management Team (SMT) to resolve issues of conflict between teachers and learners. The SMT consists of the Principal, Deputy Principal, and Head of Department (Seaton & Seaton, 2010). The SMT, as “constituted in the new educational dispensation that ushered in the Outcome Based Education System (OBE), is a new structure with the sole function of giving leadership guidance, direction and assistance in the teaching and learning situation” (Mathipa, Magano, Mapotse & Matlabe, 2014:367). A lot of research has been done on the involvement of the SMT and the different roles each member plays in dealing with conflict occurring between teachers and learners in schools (SACE, 2020; Valente et al., 2020; Catana, 2016; Opoku-Asare, Takyi & Owusu-Mensah, 2015; Mathipa et al., 2014:367; Makibi, 2010). J Juneja (2015:15) also notes that the responsibility of the SMT is to seek a compromise, an alternative solution to any issue, to prevent its escalation into violence. Ohaka (2017:20) contributes that an additional responsibility of the SMT is to uphold the school's integrity while establishing and sustaining a tranquil and harmonious teaching and

learning environment. In this research, the emphasis has been on the role the principal, as a member of the SMT, plays in dealing with conflict occurring between teachers and learners in the Secondary schools of the Eastern Free State, Thabo-Mofutsanyane Education District.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Research done by (Khumalo, 2019; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013) has highlighted that one of the components contributing to the rise of violence in schools is a conflict occurring between teachers and learners. Unfortunately, the school environment has become unsafe for both teacher and learner since teachers now must teach and learners learn looking over their shoulders (Nkosi-Malobane, 2019) due to “the reality of pupils carrying knives, guns and arriving and going to school under the influence of substances such as drugs and alcohol” (Mncube & Harbor, 2013:1). So, the principal's responsibility when tasked to deal with conflict occurring between teachers and learners is to reveal the primary source of such a conflict to prevent it from escalating to violence and to bring the teacher and learner together to find solutions that will benefit these parties without damaging the teacher-learner relationship while protecting the reputation of the school at large. However, if the solutions suggested seems not to effectively curb the conflict between teachers and learners then conflict education will be needed to be fostered by the principal.

1.3 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework chosen for this study is a persuasive management style. In a persuasive management style, the manager uses their ability to interpret a situation, people's actions, and dialogue and then strongly urges or convinces them to do a task or achieve specific objectives (Okon & Isong, 2016). If the principal can execute the actions/activities mentioned, he may possibly change the mindset of those involved in a conflict situation. A persuasive manager's most important aspect is maintaining control over the entire decision-making process (Okon & Isong, 2016), which is critical because some decisions taken by learners and or teachers in conflict may have negative consequences alluded to earlier. As a mediator, the principal should be able to bring new perspectives to any of the two groups wanting to emerge

victorious in a conflict situation. A persuasive management style can explain the logic behind the decision and encourage everyone to ask questions to understand the rationale (Pytlik, 2020). In this way, it is possible to reduce conflict in a school setting to a minimum.

1.4 Research Questions

1.4.1 Main research question

The main research question is:

How is conflict being managed within the school through the persuasive management style of the principal?

1.4.2 Sub-research questions

- What are the contributing factors causing conflict between teachers and learners?
- What are the consequences suffered by the teachers and learners when in conflict?
- How do principals deal with the conflict between teachers and learners for resolution?

1.5 The research aims and objectives

1.5.1 Aim of the study

The study aims to investigate the principal's persuasive management style in managing conflict between teachers and learners.

1.5.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are:

- To investigate the contributing factors causing conflict between teachers and learners.
- To describe the consequences suffered by teachers and learners when in conflict.
- To describe how principals deal with conflict between teachers and learners.

1.6 Definition of terms

1.6.1 School principal

The principal guides the entire school community, encompassing students, educators, staff, parents, and community collaborators. They are the intermediary connecting the school with district leadership (GCU Blog, 2022).

For the study, the definition of a principal is appropriate as the principal leads. Also, it connects the school community with other stakeholders, such as the education district, parents and community partners.

1.6.2 Head of Department

A Head of Department (HoD), a middle manager in a school, has a significant role in improving teaching and learning through supervision and control (Mpisane, 2015). Moreover, HoDs constitute part of the SMT and serve as the primary tier within the SMT. They oversee and supervise the daily delivery of the curriculum to ensure high-quality education (Mpisane, 2015).

This definition of a school head of department is appropriate as their role is improving teaching and learning by supervising and controlling the staff members and learners to create a conducive school environment.

1.6.3 Teacher

A teacher is an individual who assists others in gaining knowledge, skills, or principles. The term "teacher" refers to the role, position, and vocation of someone dedicated to the field of education, engaging in structured educational interactions that are formal and systematic (Wati, 2018).

For this study, this definition is acceptable since the primary responsibilities of a teacher are to help learners acquire knowledge, competencies or values.

1.6.4 Learner

A learner is commonly described as an individual engaged in the process of acquiring knowledge within a school or educational setting (Jean, 2018).

This definition is acceptable for this study since learners are there to learn in a school environment.

1.7 Significance of study

This study is aimed to educate officials at the Departmental level, stakeholders in schools, such as the principal, teachers, parents, and learners, and teaching training centres about the challenges teachers and learners face in the classroom when faced with conflict, and the role each can play in the curbing of conflict between teachers and learners. The study is also aimed at raising awareness among teachers and learners about the damages conflict causes to one's well-being, its negative impact on learning and teaching, and the need for change in attitude and behaviour from the perpetrators. Lastly, principals must realise that teachers cannot resolve conflicts alone when in conflict with the learners but require leadership skills and guidance from the principal to resolve conflict successfully.

1.8 Limitations of study

The geographical boundary of the study included and was limited to two Secondary schools in the township of Harrismith and another two Secondary schools from the town of Harrismith under the Thabo Mofutsanyane Education District, Free State.

1.9 Ways to overcome the limitations

This study was limited to two Secondary schools in the township of Harrismith and another two Secondary schools from the town of Harrismith under the Thabo Mofutsanyane education district, Free State. However, the sample cohort may be identifiable to other schools in various districts within the province.

1.10 Organisation of study

Chapter One provides an overview of the study. It introduced the study, highlighted where the problem was, and highlighted the significance of the study. It also includes the aim and questions that guided the study in discovering the principal's role in dealing with conflict between school teachers and learners.

Chapter Two presents how the conceptual framework framed the study and reviewed existing literature on the types of conflict between teachers, the causes and consequences of these types of conflicts and eventually, the role that the school principal plays when dealing with conflict between teachers and learners.

Chapter Three discusses a methodological framework. It presents a detailed explanation of the methodology for collecting data for this study.

Chapter Four discusses how data was collected from the participants and analysed to determine how the school principal deals with conflict between teachers and learners. The data was then interpreted to make sense of the themes of the study.

Chapter five presents the findings and suggestions for future research, and the recommendations are based on the themes presented in Chapter Four.

1.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the topic of the study, identified the problem faced in schools by teachers when in conflict with their learners and highlighted the significance of the principal's role when dealing with this type of conflict. Basically, this chapter was a skeleton structure of the entire study. The literature reviewed showed how school conflict emanates from the need for the principal's intervention and how the framework links to the study. The research design used throughout the study was also highlighted, as well as the sampling and the ethical considerations taken to protect participants during data collection.

1.12 Conclusion

The challenges in South African education systems are massive, and this chapter has tapped into the most severe challenge facing South African schools today: conflict

between teachers and learners. Unfortunately, conflicts cannot cease, as they are intrinsic to human beings, forming an integral part of their moral and emotional growth. Hence, they exist in all schools. The school is inserted in a space where the conflict manifests itself daily and assumes relevance, resulting from the multiple interpersonal relationships in the school context. However, conflict must be resolved as soon as it occurs because when left unresolved, it destroys the teacher-learner relationship and reduces performance in class. This is a massive task, so the school uses the SMT to restore class performance and the relationship between the teacher and learner. Roles of the SMT include and are not limited to helping find a middle way, an alternative to any problem to prevent it from escalating to violence, holding the integrity of the school, and establishing and maintaining a peaceful and harmonious teaching and learning environment. Since the SMT consists of the Principal, Deputy Principal, and HoD, the emphasis of this research has been on the role the principal as a member of the SMT plays in dealing with conflict occurring between teachers and learners in the Secondary schools of the Eastern Free State, Thabo-Mofutsanyane Education District. To conclude, the chapters that followed sought to explore this dynamic.

The purpose of the next chapter is to uncover the different types of conflict occurring in schools, what each conflict means for the relationship of the teacher and learner and the effects thereof, whether positive or negative and how the principal fits in dealing with these types of conflict which affect the teacher and learner in conflict. Embarking on an exercise of this nature also gives insight into various related aspects of the topic, particularly the causes of this conflict between teachers and learners, the consequences suffered by teachers and learners in conflict, and initially, the role the principal plays in dealing with such a conflict with an attempt to save the relationship of the parties in conflict as well as protecting the classroom and school at large when there is an ongoing conflict between the teacher and learner. Besides the literature review, a conceptual framework that underpins the study is also discussed. This conceptual framework discusses in detail how it will address the challenges raised in literature and further illustrate how the principal can employ the persuasive management style when dealing with conflict between teachers and learners.

CHAPTER 2 : REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One introduced the study and found that schools are experiencing incidences of conflict between teachers and learners globally. South African schools seem not to be an exception to the status quo. Research has found that in South African schools, the conflict between teachers and learners has reached alarming proportions and has become unbearable. The media reported that teachers and learners in conflict were exposed to threats of violence, psychological abuse, robbery, physical assaults, gang violence, corporal punishment, sexual violence and bullying, which in turn harms each individual and goes as far as affecting teaching and learning taking place in classrooms. Conflict of this nature, when left unresolved, brews violence and damages the relationship between the teacher and learner.

Therefore, in this chapter, the literature aims to answer the critical questions outlined in chapter one through the lenses of authors who have written on conflict and the role the principal plays when dealing with conflict between teachers and learners. The purpose of the literature is to uncover the different types of conflict occurring in schools, what each conflict means for the relationship of the teacher and learner, the effects thereof, whether positive or negative and how the principal fits in dealing with these types of conflict which affect the teacher and learner in conflict. Embarking on an exercise of this nature also gives insight into various related aspects of the topic, particularly the causes of this conflict between teachers and learners, the consequences suffered by teachers and learners in conflict, and initially, the role the principal plays in dealing with such a conflict with an attempt to save the relationship of the parties in conflict as well as protecting the classroom and school at large when there is an ongoing conflict between the teacher and learner. Besides the literature review, a conceptual framework that underpins the study is also discussed. This conceptual framework discusses in detail how it will address the challenges raised in literature and further show how the principal can employ the persuasive management style when dealing with conflict between teachers and learners.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Conflict

Generally, conflict occurs when disagreements, misunderstandings, and miscommunication occur between different organisations (Elgoibar, Euwema & Munduate, 2017:23). In an organisation such as a school, conflict is inevitable, considering other people in it. Valente et al. (2020:1) mention that “[o]ne of the most striking characteristics of human beings is the diversities. Different ways of being, thinking and existing, different needs, world views, ethical positions mark the relationships between people.”

As per the Harvard Program on Negotiation Glossary (cited in O’Connell, 2014:12), conflict denotes a form of friction, disagreement, or discord that emerges within a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members are met with resistance or deemed unacceptable by one or more members of another group. Henderson (2020:411) defines conflict as a condition in human interaction characterized by disharmony or a perceived divergence of interests, needs, or goals. Elgoibar et al. (2017:1) additionally state that a standard definition of conflict exists between two (or more) parties (individuals or groups) if at least one of them is offended or feels bothered by the other. Moreover, conflict arises when individuals possess different values, opinions, needs, and interests and cannot find a middle ground (Juneja, 2015).

Conflicts are inevitable in human life and existence and are a necessary part of life. Conflicts are essential for change in human society since they help build relationships in groups, establish a group’s identity, build internal cohesion, lead to a balance of power in society, and create new rules and laws (UKEssays, 2018). The school, resembling a miniature version of society, brings together diverse worldviews, thought processes, and ways of life, making it a microcosm that reflects social divisions. Consequently, it becomes a setting where conflicts among various stakeholders, particularly teachers and learners, frequently arise (Valente et al., 2020:1). The sources of conflict between teachers and learners stem from differing perceptions, limited resources, and overlapping authority. While it is inevitable to eliminate conflicts due to these inherent differences and divergent interests, failure to manage them can result in chaos and disorder, underscoring the importance for the principal to address conflicts promptly and effectively (Isabu, 2017:149).

The management of conflict by the principal will not only maintain harmony between teachers and learners in conflict but also still, it will also benefit the class and school at large because once conflict starts involving other parties and goes beyond the principal's office, it can lead to chaos and destruction.

2.2.2 Functional conflict

Conflict is usually perceived as unfavourable but can be constructive when managed right. Robbin (cited in Omisore & Abiodun, 2014:124) defines functional conflict as the conflict that aligns with the group's goals and enhances its performance. Meanwhile, Naar (2020) characterises functional conflict as tension or conflict within a group that yields positive outcomes. While conflict often carries a negative connotation, functional conflict implies that individuals within a group address points of disagreement with a collaborative spirit. The term "functional" does not imply that the conflict itself was good; rather, it signifies that its occurrence led to something beneficial. This type of conflict is constructive in nature, generating new ideas, solving persistent problems, providing an opportunity for individuals to enhance their skills, fostering creativity, improving working conditions through collaborative solutions, and ultimately driving innovations and enhancements within a school (Lombardo, 2021; Gosnell, 2019:22).

So, in this case, the principal must manage conflict more quickly and effectively as soon as it is reported to ensure positive outcomes and prevent it from spiralling out of control; challenge any preconceived notions about conflict and conflict management so that those in conflict can see the importance of a managed conflict and why an unmanaged conflict is bad for these parties. The principal should further encourage both the teacher and the learner in conflict to grow and see conflict as a learning curve instead of viewing it as a stumbling block (Wilmot & Hocker, 2017:1). In addition, the principal's role is to assist both parties in conflict in improving their communication skills and teach both parties to be flexible when in conflict meaning that the parties in conflict must not allow themselves to be swallowed by this type of conflict and resort to violence so to make their points heard or their hurt felt. The principal also needs to let both sides know that they must recognise that they will not always be correct and must accept their mistakes whenever they are brought up by the principal or the parties in conflict. The principal must also help teachers and learners set boundaries between

one another. The conflicting parties must be assisted to work together to resolve the conflict while encouraging them to manage their emotions in the process. Lastly, the principal needs to assure the parties in conflict that their office is always available for them and that it is a safe space whereby the conflicting parties can freely verbalise their needs so that the principal can attend to those needs on time and at all times (Campbell, 2016:44).

2.2.3 Dysfunctional conflict

Dysfunctional conflict is the opposite of functional conflict; it is unhealthy and destructive. Whenever parties are dissatisfied with one another, the conflict is said to be dysfunctional (Compliance Prime Team, 2022). Further, a dysfunctional conflict leads to a decline in communication or the performance of a group. It can be an overabundance of conflict or a lack of sufficient motivating conflict (Freund, 2019:6). This form of conflict has adverse effects on the parties involved, as individuals embroiled in such conflicts resort to threats, verbal abuse, and deception (iEduNote, 2018). Additionally, it can lead to emotional harm, distress, damage to relationships, and initiate power struggles (Compliance Prime Team, 2022). In this context, it ruins the teacher-learner relationship, negatively impacts the lives of the parties in conflict, and can go as far as creating a toxic and unsafe teaching and learning space at a class level; hence, the principal must manage conflict as soon as it occurs because failure to do so leads to a dysfunctional conflict which is destructive and goes as far as negatively impacting the personal and professional lives of teachers and learners in conflict (Brookins, 2019:5). Regrettably, the ongoing dispute leads to strain at work or home, weakens the quality and enjoyment of relationships, and even makes teachers and students physically ill or in pain (Scott, 2020). Educators and students may also undergo stress, struggle with sleep, exhibit changes in appetite such as loss of interest or overeating, experience migraines, and distance themselves socially (iEduNote, 2018).

Other repercussions include inattentiveness to other matters, lack of interest in work, job dissatisfaction, work-related anxiety, estrangement or alienation from others, and frustration (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014:127). In more severe scenarios, conflicts can impact the health of teachers and learners, leading to conditions like peptic ulcers,

respiratory problems (such as asthma), hypertension, headaches, and coronary issues (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014:128). Conflict affects the individuals involved and has a detrimental impact on the classroom. Teachers and learners experiencing conflict undergo stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction, leading to diminished communication between the parties (Rahim, 2017:7). The conflict further negatively affects the performance of learners; teacher productivity in giving lessons declines, both learner and teacher become demotivated, and the conflict creates a toxic teaching and learning environment (Ali *et al.*, 2019:5). Lastly, unresolved conflict can brew violent attacks, which may result in the resignation of teachers and learners boycotting the school or the worst scenario, is the DoE being sued for damages suffered by the victim (Brookins, 2019). Therefore, the principal must ensure that conflict between teachers and learners does not lead to these extremes and that the principal uses their skills to protect those in conflict, the classroom and the school at large.

2.2.4 Causes of conflict between teachers and learners

As microcosms of society, schools unite diverse perspectives of various ways of existence, thought, and lifestyles, transforming into environments that symbolize social distinctions and serve as arenas where diverse conflicts arise daily (Valente *et al.*, 2020). Conflicts occur because of the problems in teams in which the individuals or groups have difficulty working together, thus leading things to a standstill or simply leading to chaos (Özgan, 2016:146). According to Segal, Robinson and Smith (2020), conflict arises from large and minor differences. It occurs whenever people disagree over their principles, motives, perceptions, concepts, or goals. Moreover, different types of conflicts occur in a school environment, including interpersonal conflict. R Raypole (2020:32) characterizes interpersonal conflict as any conflict that involves two or more people. After reviewing various definitions from other researchers, Bao, Zhu, Hu, and Cui (2016:542) provide a concise definition of interpersonal conflict as an interaction among interdependent individuals who perceive disagreement, conflicting interests, incompatibility, potential interference, and negative emotions from others. Mild or severe interpersonal conflict is a natural outcome of human interaction. When conflict arises, it either originates within the school premises and flows into the community or from the community itself into the school premises. Freud (in Shah,

2019) claims that the above occurs because of aggression in man. For example, when a teacher conflicts with a learner, other learners tend to take the side of the learner in conflict with the teacher and involve external parties like the parents and other community members to fight their battle, which, in actual fact, can lead to the disruption of the school because now these external parties will encourage acts of violence against the teacher instead of a peaceful resolution. Another example is when a parent conflicts with a teacher over their personal differences outside of the school, and the parent can use a learner as leverage to cause havoc in the class to instigate conflict between these parties with an attempt that leads to violence. Unfortunately, teachers and learners frequently find themselves at the centre of these conflicts. Back then, schools were perceived as a safe haven for teachers and learners, but these days, schools in all phases have become the playground of conflict, with cases ranging from minor to violent (Nkosi-Malobane, 2019). Since school principals are responsible for the development of safety protocols and emergency response procedures (Dowd, 2018), it is the responsibility of the principal to ensure that during the conflict resolution process, the conflict remains within the office of the principal and does not even go beyond the school premises (Isabu, 2017:149). To understand what has changed over the years, the causes of these conflicts must be uncovered, given that conflict does not just occur without reason. Ghaffar (2019:215) also adds that conflict should be classified to understand its nature and implications. Ghaffar (2019) believes conflict between teachers and learners should be classified as affective conflict. Affective conflict is when group members experience interpersonal clashes marked by anger, frustration, and other negative emotions (Ghaffar, 2019:215). These cases of conflict between teachers and learners in a classroom, whether reported or unreported, do not just happen, but there are contributing factors causing them. According to Murray and Murray (as cited in Özgan, 2016:147), these influencing factors on a broader scale may stem from individual student characteristics and behaviours, teacher characteristics and behaviour, previous relationship experiences, and broader social and contextual influences. Different authors (Ghaffar, 2019; Isabu, 2017; Özgan, 2016) mention the following common factors that trigger conflict between teachers and their learners in schools. Firstly, poor communication between the teacher and learner leads to the two parties misunderstanding and clashing. When teachers portray themselves as unapproachable, it scares off learners, creating an unsupportive teaching and learning environment, which is seen when learners do not immediately

grasp information taught by the teacher. Still, due to fear, they would rather keep it to themselves, which gives the teacher the impression that learners understand the content taught. This misunderstanding causes learners' comprehension levels to drop and may affect their academic progression negatively. When teachers only become aware of the problems, it may lead to shouting, instilling more fear in the learner. How the teacher still communicates with the learners could lead to learners lacking motivation, disliking the subject or school, avoiding the teacher at all costs and believing themselves to be failures (Albalawi & Nadeem, 2020; Duta, 2015). Secondly, crowded classes and sharing of limited resources by the learners may frustrate learners and cause these learners not to participate in learning as expected by the teacher, and in turn may cause frustration for the teacher, leading to a decline in performance from both parties and further develops learners with an aggressive attitude and learners end up being apathetic, showing no class enthusiasm. Thirdly, poor judgment of personalities and prejudice cause the two parties not to get along in the classroom because of their different personalities or dislike of one another. This deprives them of gossip or misjudgement of a person due to their displayed behaviour or physical looks (Özgan, 2016). Fourthly, the toxic environments where teachers and learners are from also contribute to their conflict, as the only solution that is taught is that they resort to violence when in conflicting situations. Teachers and learners who are exposed to violence do not know how to solve conflict amicably but would rather resort to violent measures as influenced by the communities they are or come from (Raypole, 2020:32). Fourthly, favouritism in the class can cause division among learners and may cause animosity between learners and in turn lead to the conflict between learners and their teacher (Özgan, 2016). Lastly, aggressive attitudes toward each other also add to clashes to the extent that the teacher and learner lose respect for each other, and learners go to the extent of taking and displaying weapons in class as defiance to the teacher (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014).

2.2.5 Consequences of conflict between teachers and learners

Unfortunately, South African schools have become the playground of conflict these days. Conflict rising in schools differs depending on the source and the extent to which it occurs. Conflict is often experienced at the lowest level in some schools, while conflict is experienced at the highest level in others. Usually, when conflict is at its

highest, it becomes violent. According to Nkosi-Malobane (2019), Traditionally, schools were one of the safest places learners and educators could be. Recently, the schooling environment has been experiencing challenges such as bullying, gangsterism, and serious violent crimes such as murder emanating from conflict between teachers and learners (Khumalo, 2019:1-8). These problems make learners and educators feel less safe, making it harder for learners to learn and for teachers to teach and do their jobs effectively. When a principal has not addressed a dysfunctional conflict between a teacher and learner, this type of conflict leads to teachers being irritated if they believe there is no end in sight or their perspectives are not valued. As a result, these teachers experience stress that negatively impacts their personal and professional lives (Brookins, 2019:5). Regrettably, the ongoing dispute leads to strain at work or home, weakens the quality and enjoyment of relationships, and even makes teachers and students physically ill or in pain (Scott, 2020). Teachers and learners may also experience “stress, struggle with sleep, lose interest in food or overeating, migraines and be socially distant” (IEduNote, 2018). Other consequences include and not limited to “inattentiveness to other things, lack of interest in work and school; job dissatisfaction; work anxiety; estrangement or alienation from others; and frustration for both the teacher and learner” (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014:127). The worst scenario is when conflict affects the health of those involved, which is seen when more and more adrenalin is shot into the blood, increasing the heartbeat and blood pressure. At the same time, more hydrochloric acid is secreted into the stomach, leading to peptic ulcers, respiratory problems such as asthma, hypertension, headaches, and coronary problems for the teacher and learner in conflict hence, it may be understood that conflict does not only affect an individual’s performance but also gives rise to psychosomatic disturbances, which in turn undermine the health of the individual (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014:128).

Conflict affects the lives of the individuals involved and negatively affects the classroom. The interpersonal conflict between teachers and learners has various consequences, and often, these consequences are negative. Whenever teachers and learners are involved in dysfunctional conflict, both parties suffer from stress, burning out, and dissatisfaction, resulting in reduced communication between the parties. If the conflict is left unresolved, it goes as far as destroying the teacher-learner relationship and performance in class (Rahim, 2017:7). Studies indicate that teachers

undergoing conflicts experience adverse emotions like disappointment, insensitivity, stress, sorrow, uneasiness, etc., which may lead to a dislike of their profession, low morale, diminished motivation, formation of groups with like-minded individuals, and reduced performance (Göksoy & Argon, 2016:197). Learners, on the other hand, endure consequences such as diminished concentration, subpar academic performance, absenteeism, and depression (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013:1). Lastly, unresolved conflict can brew violent attacks, which may result in the resignation of teachers or learners boycotting the school or the worst scenario, is the DoE being sued for any form of damages suffered by the victim (Brookins, 2019).

2.2.6 Conflict management

Due to human differences and interests, it is impossible to create a conflict-free environment; nonetheless, if the conflict is not controlled, it can result in chaos and anarchy; thus, the principal must stop it in its tracks (Isabu, 2017:149). The principal can stop conflict in its tracks through conflict management.

As per Rahim (cited in Elgoibar *et al.*, 2017:26), conflict management involves purposeful actions to address conflict situations, either preventing or escalating them. Additionally, conflict management is characterized as resolving disputes, emphasising minimizing adverse outcomes and prioritizing positive results (Peters & Kelman, 2020:557). The concept of conflict management imparts conflict resolution skills, including conflict handling and self-awareness about the various forms of conflict for both teachers and learners, fostering effective communication between them when conflicts arise. These skills assist both teacher and learner in establishing a positive outcome from the conflict and reducing conflict overall (Kalu Hub, 2018). It is also essential to know that conflict management does not necessarily involve avoiding, reducing, or terminating conflict. However, instead, it involves the principal designing effective strategies to minimise the dysfunctions of conflict and enhance the constructive functions of conflict to improve the relationship between the teacher and learner in conflict and the school's effectiveness. It is for this reason that the principal makes use of effective conflict management. The idea of effective conflict management in schools is accepting that disputes that arise in schools are not always amenable to resolution, therefore necessitating the need for administration and

regulation (Ohaka, 2017). So, effective conflict management takes the central stage in creating safer and more supportive school learning environments (Shanka & Thuo, 2017:63). Now, the creation of a safe and supportive learning environment lies with the school principal since ... “school principals are expected to be able to address conflicts in their schools creatively” (Msila, 2012:1). In the school's leadership position, the principal assumes a crucial role in overseeing all management processes. The principal establishes goals, formulates plans, organises activities, motivates individuals, and supervises operations (Tovmasyan, 2017:26). Msila (2012:26) additionally emphasizes that school principals must comprehend the intricacies of conflict management and possess a high level of conflict competence themselves to employ conflict resolution skills within their schools effectively. The first step in doing so is for principals to define the nature of conflict in a conflict situation; they then try to find ways of resolving it to prevent it from escalating to violence (Juneja, 2015:15). Second step is for the principal to look into the different kinds of conflict management styles to help teachers and learners in putting an end to their conflict. The principal does this intending to reach constructive results for the school's success. The principal's most commonly used conflict styles when dealing with conflict between teachers and learners are competition, collaborating, avoiding, accommodating, and compromising (Kodikal, Rahiman & Pakeerrappa, 2014:3-4). To explain each conflict style, Kodikal *et al.* (2014:3) used two dimensions, which are cooperativeness (one party is willing to sacrifice for the other party) and assertiveness (one party is not willing to sacrifice for the other party).

Firstly, when teachers and learners are competing, the parties are inconsiderate of one another. So, the principal will suggest that these parties in conflict work together to find solutions to end their conflict and finally be at peace with each other, meaning that when teachers and learners are cooperating, the parties are considerate of each other since their intention will also be to put to bed the conflict between them. Secondly, a teacher or learner may want to avoid the other as a form of suppressing the conflict, which is not recommended since it creates fear and intensifies the tension between the two parties in conflict, especially when in class so the principal can suggest that the teacher places the opponent's interests above their interests by being the bigger person so to accommodate the opponent which in this instance is the learner because, in the end, the aim is to end the conflict. Lastly, compromising style – with this style,

the principal requests that both teacher and learner in conflict compromise; they each agree to set their differences aside to find common ground, let go of the conflict and start on a clean slate through forgiveness (Kodikal *et al.*, 2014:3-4). Lastly, the principal puts these conflict styles into action to hold the school's integrity and establish and maintain a peaceful and harmonious relationship between the teacher and learner in the teaching and learning environment (Ohaka, 2017:20).

2.2.7 Dealing with conflict between teachers and learners

Since school principals are also responsible for developing safety protocols and emergency response procedures (Dowd, 2018), they manage conflict to benefit both the teacher and learner and not discriminate against the other to restore and maintain peace and harmony. Failure to do so causes the classroom to become affected, causing classroom incivility. Classroom incivility is characterised as any behaviour that disrupts a harmonious and cooperative learning environment within the classroom (Feldmann, 2001:137). So, to restore the relationship between the teacher and learner in conflict, the principal is responsible for intervening and dealing with conflict between teachers and learners to restore harmonious and cooperative teaching and learning in the classroom. If the conflict styles used by the principal still do not bring a conflict between a teacher and learner to an end, then the principal can use the following strategies. Tingley (2017) proposes that the principal, as a mediator, should focus on the conflict, not the teachers' and learners' personalities, to avoid misjudgement. Secondly, the principal should be courteous but not sugar-coat the cause of the conflict and call out wrong as it is. It is also essential for the principal to highlight the negative impact of this conflict on both parties if left unresolved and the effects it has on the other learners in the classroom and the rest of the teaching staff. Thirdly, the principal should be neutral and maintain confidentiality between the parties. Fourthly, the principal should also suggest that parties in conflict should come up with solutions that will resolve their conflict even though, as a principal, they have the power to make the final decisions. Fifthly, the principal comes up with their own suggestion and explains to the parties in conflict to convince them how the proposed solution is the best and how it will benefit both parties. Lastly, when a solution has been proposed and implemented by the principal, then the principal should clarify that it is expected for the parties to make use of the suggested solution and to also work on and improve on

their teacher-learner relationship as this relationship will be closely monitored (Kiebel, 2018:24; The Share Team, 2018). However, if the strategies mentioned above fail, the principal should introduce conflict education to the parties involved.

2.2.8 Conflict Education

When the conflict styles and strategies in curbing the conflict between the teacher and learner have not worked to the satisfaction of the principal, then the last resort is for the principal to opt for conflict education. According to Jones and Bodtke (2007), conflict education entails educating teachers and their learners about mediation, conflict management, and resolution of conflicts. The principal organises workshops for teachers and learners separately, intending to teach both these learners and teachers, whether in conflict or not, about mediation, conflict management and resolving conflicts for their benefit. With conflict education, teachers and their learners learn how to avoid conflict situations and suggest ways to work around conflict should it arise between these parties instead of resorting to violent measures. It is also imperative to note that the intention of conflict education is not to suggest that conflict should be suppressed. Still, the suggestions are that some battles should not be fought but should be overlooked as they do not count as necessary for a teacher or learner to dwell on. Jones and Bodtke (2007:110) further believe that conflict education can benefit teachers and their learners because teachers and learners can meditate and resolve conflict amongst themselves without the involvement of their senior authorities, such as the principal. This way, the principal can save time and deal with other aspects of the school other than spending much time dealing with conflict between teachers and learners. Lastly, conflict education can reduce the stress associated with conflict for the principal, teacher and learner (Jones & Bodtke, 2007:110).

2.3 Conceptual framework

A conceptual framework is described as a structure that the researcher believes is most effective in explaining the natural progression of the phenomenon being studied (Camp, 2001:29). Imenda (2014) further emphasises that a conceptual framework is the result of synthesizing various related concepts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the researched phenomenon. This framework summarises findings

from reviewed literature sources, outlining the research agenda to enhance comprehension of the research objectives. Its purpose is to offer a structure that organizes the currents of thought, providing focus and direction to the inquiry (Rallis & Rossman, 2012). Additionally, this framework illustrates the anticipated relationships between variables, defines relevant objectives for the research process, and how they converge to form coherent conclusions (Swaen & George, 2022). this study utilizes a persuasive management style as a guide to investigate how a principal can employ this style when confronted with the task of managing conflicts between teachers and learners in their school and the associated benefits of adopting this style to address the challenges identified in the literature,

2.3.1 Persuasive management style

Kamyabi and Devi (2011) assert that management styles are crucial both as a fundamental requirement for achieving organizational objectives and as a key factor in the success of any organization. To accomplish this, managers must adopt an appropriate management style to foster positive working relationships with their employees, ensuring job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Simultaneously, they achieve the organization's objectives and goals (Nxumalo, 2022). A management style is the approach a manager employs to achieve their goals. It encompasses how a manager plans, organizes, makes decisions, delegates, and oversees their staff (Andreev, 2023). Ogunola, Kalejaiye, and Abrifor (2013) further describe management style as a leadership technique managers employ to govern an organization, involving control, direction, and techniques and methods to motivate subordinates to follow instructions. Watson (2003) concludes that management styles are diverse approaches managers use to influence employees to willingly strive toward achieving organizational goals. Managers may choose from various management styles based on their preferences—some are predominantly task-oriented, aiming to expedite task completion, while others prioritize the happiness and satisfaction of others. Some managers blend these orientations. Different managers employ diverse methods to accomplish tasks in their official roles, resulting in various management styles (Nxumalo, 2022).

Nonetheless, managers must bear in mind that regardless of the style they choose, the primary purpose of a management style is to enhance employee performance to achieve organizational objectives (Prasetya & Kato, 2011). Bucata and Rizescu (2016) concur that the management styles adopted by organizational managers significantly impact all organizational activities, the organizational climate, and labour productivity. Therefore, managers must understand the advantages and disadvantages of different management styles and how subordinates perceive them.

After reading through the different management styles, it was fitting that in the context of my research, the principal can employ the persuasive management style when dealing with conflict between teachers and learners. This management style was influenced by the organisational variables such as the type of schools this study focused on, the environment from where these schools are located, the type of conflict within that school and those involved in that conflict (Quang & Vuong, 2002).

A persuasive management style is characterised by characteristics similar to an autocratic one. But, in a persuasive management style, the principal makes all the decisions. However, the principal has to sell these decisions to their staff, which is the teacher and learner in conflict, trying to convince them that what has been decided is in their best interests, creating more trust and rapport between the principal and the teacher and learner (Okon & Isong, 2016; Voidis, 2010). It is important to remember that one of the strategies in dealing with conflict between the teacher and learner is that the principal also gives a chance to those in conflict to come up with solutions of their own to make them feel part of the conflict resolution process however this strategy did not take away that the principal still makes the final decisions and is responsible in convincing the teacher and the learner that the solution brought forward by the principal is in their best interests and is deemed fitting to put an end to their conflict. Furthermore, in a persuasive management style, the principal uses their ability to interpret a situation, people's actions, and dialogue and then strongly urges or convinces them to do a task or achieve certain objectives (Okon & Isong, 2016). However, this is not an easy thing to do, given the difficulty that comes with changing one's mindset about something. That is why the principal must break down proposed conflict styles or solutions to teachers and learners before convincing them to give in to them so that they can see the bigger picture that whichever proposed solutions or conflict styles are the best way forward rather than for the principal to be seen and

regarded as a controlling maniac whose word goes without question. For this reason, Gardner (2006) recognised persuasive managers such as principals as mind changers whose job is to change the minds of their subordinates to conceive of it in a new way. So, if the principal can execute the actions/activities mentioned, he may change the mindset of those involved in a conflict situation. The most important aspect of a persuasive manager/principal is that they maintain control over the entire decision-making process (Okon & Isong, 2016). conflicting teachers and learners to ensure their comprehension of the decisions made. While the principal ultimately makes the decisions, the teacher and the learner involved in the conflict are thoroughly briefed on the rationale behind the ultimate decision (Srinivasan, 2012), which is critical because, in this instance, some decisions taken by learners and/or teachers to use threats, verbal abuse, and deception to deal with conflict may have negative consequences that will impact the professional and personal lives of these parties (Brookins, 2019; iEdunote, 2018). When the principal, as a mediator, is given the platform to make final decisions, it will bring new perspectives to any two groups wanting to emerge victorious in a conflict situation. A persuasive management style can explain the logic behind the decision and encourage everyone to ask questions to understand the rationale instead of giving orders to abide by (Pytlik, 2020). Teachers and learners must be made aware and convinced by the principal that the proposed solutions will be implemented with the intention not to control the parties in conflict but rather that the proposed solutions are perceived as the best way forward. The principal can suggest any of the conflict styles depending on the severity of the conflict. Firstly, the principal can request that the parties in conflict work together for the sake of others and the success of teaching and learning in the classroom. Secondly, a teacher or learner may want to avoid the other as a form of suppressing the conflict, which is not recommended since it creates fear and intensifies the tension between the two parties in conflict, especially when in class so the principal can suggest that the teacher places the opponent's interests above their interests by being the bigger person so to accommodate the opponent which in this instance is the learner because, in the end, the aim is to end the conflict. Lastly, compromising style. With this style, the principal requests that both teacher and learner in conflict compromise; they each agree to set their differences aside to find common ground, let go of the conflict and start on a clean slate through forgiveness (Kodikal et al., 2014:3-4). The persuasive manager's approach involves recognizing that employees are individuals and should not be

treated as objects to be exploited or overlooked. Consequently, employees are recognised as the company's most valuable asset (Srinivasan, 2012). Furthermore, this management style encompasses participative, collaborative, delegation, and laissez-faire approaches (Srinivasan, 2012). It operates on the principle that all perspectives are considered thoroughly evaluated, and a decision is made acceptable to all or most participants (Srinivasan, 2012). Hence, the principal can still use other strategies, such as focusing strictly on the conflict during conflict resolution. Secondly, the principal should be courteous but not sugar-coat the cause of the conflict and call out wrong as it is. It is also important for the principal to highlight the negative impact of this conflict on both parties if left unresolved and the effects it has on the other learners in the classroom and the rest of the teaching staff. Thirdly, the principal should be neutral and maintain confidentiality between the parties. Fourthly, the principal should also suggest that parties in conflict should come up with their own solutions that will resolve their conflict even though, as a principal, they have the power to make the final decisions. Fifthly, the principal comes up with their own suggestion and explains to the parties in conflict to convince them how the proposed solution is the best and how it will benefit both parties. Lastly, when a solution has been proposed and implemented by the principal, then the principal should clarify that it is expected for the parties to make use of the suggested solution and to also work on and improve on their teacher-learner relationship as this relationship will be closely monitored (Kiebel, 2018:24; The Share Team, 2018; Tingley, 2017). The last resort would be holding workshops for the parties in conflict to educate them on mediation, conflict management, and resolution of conflicts. With all the proposed methods in this literature, it is possible that any of them used by principals can reduce the conflict between teachers and learners to a minimum.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted that conflict between teachers and learners is a reality in classrooms, and the causes are many and vary in degree. The literature has revealed that schools in South Africa are currently in a bad state as a result of conflict between teachers and learners due to teachers using violent and horrific methods of discipline. Research further revealed the abuse of learners in schools by teachers, teachers suffering at the hands of parents and learners, even as far as murder occurring in

schoolyards. This state is an outcry for principals to intervene and to use methods that do not instigate the reaction of violence from the teacher or learner in conflict but to resolve so that peace and harmony can remain. The information revealed in the literature also suggests that principals, as persuasive managers, should make it a prerequisite to holding workshops for teachers and learners, whether in conflict or not, to educate them on conflict education. Seemingly, conflict education can become a beacon of hope that can mend a society that only knows resorting to violence is the only means of resolving conflict. In contrast, some methods advocate for peace at all times.

The next chapter discusses the research methodology and design used for this study. It further details the research paradigm, the instrument selected for the data collected, the sampling procedure, the data collection procedure, the trustworthiness of the study, as well as data analysis and the ethical issues about the study.

CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the literature aimed to answer the critical questions outlined in Chapter One. The authors who previously wrote on conflict and the principal's role when dealing with conflict between teachers and learners responded to these questions. Furthermore, this chapter highlighted that conflict between teachers and learners is a reality in South African schools and that these schools are currently in a bad state as a result of conflict between teachers and learners due to teachers using violent and horrific methods of discipline, provoking learners to act violently. Research further revealed the abuse of learners in schools by teachers; teachers suffering at the hands of parents and learners, even as far as murder committed within the schoolyards. The literature uncovered the different types of conflict occurring in schools and what each conflict means for the relationship of the teacher and learner involved in such a conflict, the effects thereof, whether positive or negative and how the principal fits in dealing with these types of conflict which affect the teacher and learner in conflict. Embarking on an exercise of this nature also gave an insight into various related aspects of the topic, particularly the causes of this conflict between teachers and learners, the consequences suffered by teachers and learners in conflict, and initially, the role the principal plays in dealing with such a conflict with an attempt to save the relationship of the parties in conflict as well as protecting the classroom and school at large when there is an ongoing conflict between the teacher and learner. Besides the literature review, a conceptual framework underpinning the study was also discussed. The continuing conflict between teachers and learners in the classroom is an outcry for intervention, so the principal taking the role of a persuasive manager needs to implement conflict resolution methods as well as make use of conflict education to restore peace and harmony between the teachers and learners in conflict instead of instigating violence and creating a healthy and conducive teaching and learning environment.

In this chapter, the methodological underpinnings of the research are briefly discussed. This discussion includes the research approach, research design, and the

research paradigm. A description of the sampling procedures and the instrument used to collect the data is also part of the discussion. After that, measures taken to assure trustworthiness are explained, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability of the data, followed by a report on the steps taken to meet the ethical requirements. The chapter concludes with the data collection procedure and the data analysis process.

3.2 Research Methodology

Igwenagu (2016:4) defined research methodology as the systematic and theoretical analysis of the methods employed in a field of study. It involves the theoretical examination of the methods and principles associated with a particular branch of knowledge. Nguyen (2019:8) further elaborates that research methodology is a systematic approach to solving research problems akin to a science that investigates how research is conducted scientifically. Within this framework, researchers explore the various steps commonly adopted to study a research problem and the underlying logic behind them. Research methodology elucidates the methods to proceed with research (Goundar, 2012:9). Agherdien (2010:2) has extensively researched theoretical frameworks. Throughout her research findings, she clearly explains that the authenticity of any study lies in the relationship between the philosophical underpinnings that determine the theoretical framework. The philosophical underpinnings are the research paradigm, methodology, design, and methods utilised in a study to examine the object of investigation. Since this study is based on an interpretivist research paradigm that emphasises experience and interpretation, it lends itself to a qualitative research approach and a phenomenology research design. Therefore, the intention of using a research methodology is to allow the readers to evaluate the reliability and validity of this study.

3.2.1 Qualitative research approach

As per Chetty (2016:1), the research approach denotes a plan and procedure encompassing a range of steps, from broad assumptions to detailed data collection methods, analysis, and interpretation. Additionally, a qualitative approach is characterized as a method of studying human behaviour that hinges on analysing

narrative data to understand the meaning of these behaviours from the participants' perspective within their social context (Cobb & Forbes, 2002:197). So, since the study is located in the interpretive paradigm, the qualitative approach is considered to be the most suited for obtaining a deep understanding of the specific phenomena, i.e., the role of the principal in dealing with conflict between teachers and learners. Part of the qualitative approach is that we want to know not just what happens but also how it happens and, most crucially, why it happens the way it does. In qualitative research, data is collected through text, video, or an audio recorder; however, for the protection of the participant's identity was to use an audio recorder since it was the only data collection method that the participants had permitted to be used during the interviews. This approach examines human behaviours, such as speech and writing, and how participants express their feelings and thoughts via these actions. Qualitative research aims to provide a clear and complete description of acts and representations of actions to better understand our reality and their effect on social change. Lastly, the qualitative approach enables the analysis of the audio recordings after the interviews to understand the participants' concepts, opinions, or experiences. This approach is used to gather in-depth insights into a problem at hand, which is the conflict between teachers and learners and is consistent with the aim of the study, which is to understand better the role that the principal plays in dealing with such a conflict thereafter (Bhandari, 2022; Hammarberg et al., 2016:2; Lambert & Lambert, 2012:256).

3.2.1.1 Application of qualitative research approach in this study

Bhasin (2020:4-16) mentioned that the qualitative research approach is characterised by three. Firstly, complex reasoning, which meant that there were situations that required complex rationale to get the right results rather than direct statistical answers; hence, in this study, participants were physically interviewed in their natural setting, which is the school, to analyse their physical reactions and read through their emotions so to gain an understanding where they come from with the topic under study. Secondly, flexibility meant that the study adapted to changes that surfaced during data collection; this occurred when participants had to reschedule their afternoon appointments for after school. Since this approach allowed flexibility, there were no restrictions to such changes. Each participant in their different rankings was

interviewed once for a maximum of an hour unless there was a request for a reschedule for an interview. A reschedule was set for over the weekend after the Saturday extra classes, and even with these interviews, the same time frame was used. Lastly, this approach painted the bigger picture by providing an insight into the problem at hand for me as a researcher to see the depth this type of conflict had on the interviewed participants. From far, one may assume that there is nothing significant about conflict occurring in a school between teachers and learners. Still, judging from the emotions and thoughts expressed by the participants on this topic, one could see the adverse effects the conflict had on each participant and the damage suffered.

3.2.2 The research design – Phenomenology

A research design involves organizing the conditions for collecting and analysing data in a way that seeks to blend relevance to the research purpose with efficiency and method (Akhtar, 2016:68). Moreover, this research design is characterised as the comprehensive plan for linking conceptual research problems with the relevant (and attainable) empirical research (Boru, 2018:1). The research design is the overarching method you adopt to combine the various components of the study logically and cohesively, ensuring that you will effectively address the research problem; it is the blueprint for data collecting, measurement, and analysis. In other words, it is the action plan or roadmap describing what the researcher will do from start to finish to achieve the goals of the research (Adom et al., 2018:438; Maponya, 2015:121; Flick, 2013:182). A research design is the path one follows during a research journey to find answers to the research question as validly, objectively, accurately, and economically as possible. Thus, through the research design, the researcher communicates to others the study design, how the information will be collected, the selection of respondents, the analysis of data, and the communication of findings (Dawood, 2020:50).

This study employed a phenomenological research design. As per Creswell (2013:77), phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that emphasizes the shared aspects of a lived experience within a specific group. This research design aimed to comprehend and portray the universal essence of a phenomenon (Delve & Limpaecher, 2022). The primary objective of this approach is to generate a description

of the nature of the specific phenomenon. According to Van Manen (cited in Nieuwenhuis, 2019:85), phenomenology's fundamental purpose is to distil individual experiences with a phenomenon into a description of its inherent nature. This phenomenology research design allows the researcher to understand and interpret the lived experiences of the research participants as expressed by them in their own words, emotions shown and thoughts expressed. Through the interviews conducted as a researcher, I was able to record the narratives of the participants who experienced conflict with their learners and if the solutions implemented by the mediators were according to their expectations, as well as recording the narratives of the mediators that helped in dealing with conflict between these teachers and their learners.

Husserl (1998) added that this “paradigm tried to explain the nature of the things, the essence and the veracity of the phenomena. Therefore, this research design was characterised by four traits. Firstly, the aim of phenomenology is the description of the phenomenon. This description includes any emerging phenomena such as emotions, thoughts, and actions of human beings (Creswell, 2013:77). The description of this research design was aimed at describing how this type of conflict occurred and naming the factors that trigger this sudden occurrence of this type of conflict at a class level and the role that the principal played in dealing with such a conflict by calming the parties in conflict to restore peace and harmony between these parties in conflict and extending the same peace even at a class level so that other learners do not hold the learner currently in conflict as leverage to cause further friction with the teacher. Secondly, the reduction of this research design was a process that ensured that assumptions and preconceptions did not pollute the study at hand. Still, the participants got an opportunity to tell of their lived experiences (Fuster, 2019:217) as they were victimised teachers and the principal as a mediator of this type of conflict. Phenomenology also indicates that there are multiple truths. As such, there is no statistically objective truth since people experience the same thing differently depending on several factors, such as experiencing conflict at the class level.

In contrast, others may experience the same conflict with the same learners off the school premises. Thirdly, the essence was the core meaning of the individual's experiences (Fuster, 2019:217) as victimised teachers were able to express how this conflict affected them as individuals and the negative impact it had on their profession as a teacher who had to deliver lessons to the same perpetrators and the role they

played in the occurrence of the conflict; as well as the role of the principal as a mediator on how they were able to deal with a conflict of such nature by applying methods that ensured peace and harmony. Lastly, intentionality was expressed by two concepts, noesis and noema. Intentionality is the correlation between noema and noesis that directly interprets the experience. Noema is an objective statement of behaviour or experience as a reality. Noesis is a subjective reflection (consciousness) of the objective statement. Given this, the reality is what it is. We do not know reality, that is, objective statements. Interrelations between consciousness and reality are called intentionality (Umanailo, 2019:1-2). These concepts simplified is that teachers and principals do not know when conflict will emerge at a classroom level; however, theirs is always to be prepared to face such a conflict and to have solutions at hand and implement those solutions with peace at the forefront so that such a conflict can be curbed before it becomes uncontrollable and escalates to violence between teachers and learners.

3.2.3 The research paradigm – Interpretive

As Saunders et al. (2009:132) outlined, a research paradigm consists of fundamental and commonly accepted assumptions that form the basis for the frame of reference, mode of theorizing, and operational methods within a group. Additionally, a paradigm mirrors the researcher's beliefs about the world they currently inhabit and aspire to inhabit. It comprises abstract beliefs and principles that influence how a researcher perceives the world and interprets and engages with it (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:26). Since this study is located in the interpretivist paradigm, it necessitates a deep understanding of the meaning of the interpretivist paradigm. Dean (2018:3) proposes that this knowledge is based on a researcher's philosophical viewpoint. Dean (2018:3) emphasises that choosing a paradigmatic camp based on ontological considerations is filled with underlying assumptions about reality. According to interpretivists, reality is subjective, multiple, and socially generated, whereas positivists believe there is just one reality (Dean, 2018:3).

This study adopted an interpretive research paradigm. Interpretivism utilizes qualitative research methods, emphasizing individuals' beliefs, motivations, and reasoning rather than relying on quantitative data to comprehend social interactions

(Nickerson, 2022). The interpretive research paradigm operates on the premise that social reality is not singular or objective but is influenced by human experiences and social contexts (ontology). Consequently, the paradigm posits that the most effective approach to studying social reality is within its socio-historic context, reconciling the subjective interpretations of its diverse participants (epistemology) (Bhattacharjee, 2012:18). Flick (1998, in Dean, 2018:3) in on epistemological issues concerning the 'knowability' of the subject or phenomena under investigation, claiming that positivists seek causes and effects by measuring and quantifying phenomena. In contrast, interpretivists believe that data cannot be collected or removed from context and thus promote knowledge generation, discovery, or construction. Hence, there is no statistically objective truth since people experience the same thing differently depending on several factors, such as experiencing conflict at the class level.

In contrast, others may share the same conflict with the same learners off the school premises. Many positivists use quantitative approaches to make generalisability claims, but interpretivists use various methods, tools, and procedures to understand the subject under study thoroughly. For this reason, the participants were physically interviewed to gain an insight into their world, understand how the conflict impacted the teachers in conflict with the learners and find out that the solutions implemented by the principals were according to the satisfaction of these teachers. Yanow (2006, in Dean, 2018:3) says that an interpretivist's reflexive research methodology is essential to the researcher's unique entanglement with their study and the study. Cohen and Crabtree (2006:1) describe this unique entanglement of the researcher with their research and the research inherent in the interpretive paradigm as a collaborative dialogue between the respective parties to construct a meaningful reality. Through the interviews, I was able to record the narratives of the participants who experienced conflict with their learners and the mediators' narratives that helped deal with conflict between these teachers and their learners. The interpretive approach relies heavily on naturalistic methods, such as interviews, to facilitate this dialogue. These interviews with the research participants allowed the researcher to understand and interpret the lived experiences of the research participants as expressed by them in their own words, emotions shown and thoughts expressed.

Bhattacharjee (2012:19) further lists the following characteristics of an interpretive research paradigm: first, social phenomena must be studied within their natural

setting. The role of the principal in dealing with conflict between teachers and learners was studied as naturally as possible to avoid biases and misjudgements. The research participants were interviewed in their respective schools after school hours to gain insight into their world and lived experiences. Secondly, interpretive research is often not concerned with searching for specific answers. Still, with understanding or 'making sense of a dynamic social process as it unfolds over time (Bhattacharjee, 2012:19). Hence, as a researcher, my interest was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of the teachers as victims as well as the lived experiences of the principal as a mediator when while resolving conflict between these parties. Thirdly, observations must be interpreted through the eyes of the participants embedded in the social context (Bhattacharjee, 2012:19). To maintain originality, the thoughts expressed by the participants were noted as they were because they bring the expectations of the participants forward on how teachers should react when in conflict with their learners and this type of conflict should be resolved by the principal. Lastly, documenting the participants' verbal language was just as important to capture the truths as the integral components of interpretive analysis (Bhattacharjee, 2012:19).

3.2.4 The research instrument

All participants under study were interviewed using one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

George (2022) explains that this type of interview is a "data collection method that relied on asking questions within a predetermined thematic framework. Semi-structured interviews provide reliable, comparable qualitative data" (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews use a very extensive interview guide and can be employed when an objective understanding of an experience or phenomenon is sufficient but subjective knowledge is lacking. The framework for producing this guide and the foci from which the construction of the interview question derives is the analysis of objective knowledge. Questions that were asked were in an order that acknowledged the distinct types of conflicts occurring between teachers and learners, the effects of these types of conflicts, the consequences suffered by these teachers and how school principals deal with these types of conflicts. The structure of this interview is formed by these interview questions, which focus on each participant's

responses. Participants could react in whatever way they want to these open-ended questions, and the researcher may follow up on their responses. The framework and the flexibility of the responses define the semi-structured part of this method. It stands out among interview techniques because of the degree of topic relevance it delivers while remaining receptive to the participant (McIntosh & Morse, 2015:1; Hawel & Bradley, 2009:27). McIntosh and Morse (2015:1), Hofstee (2006:132), Opdenakker (2006:3), and Bogdan and Biklen (2003:97) speak out that semi-structured interviews are more like conversations, as issues are probed for a subjective understanding of the phenomenon at hand so that, in the case of this study, a comprehensive and authentic picture of the role the principal plays in dealing with conflict between teachers and learners is obtained, as well as the interviewee's perception of whether the solutions implemented were according to their expectation. The one-on-one semi-structured interview is, by its nature, time-consuming. However, it is arguably the most reliable means of understanding the issue being probed. In support of qualitative interviewing, Rabionet (2011:563) states that qualitative interviewing can be categorised as a flexible and powerful tool that may be used to capture the voices and how people make meaning of their experiences. Hence, it is the most relevant instrument to use to detail how the principal plays a role in dealing with the conflict between teachers and learners, how this type of conflict-affected the teachers and whether the solutions implemented by the principal were according to the satisfactory of these teachers as the study sought to make meaning of the experiences of these teachers and principals. Conducting separate one-on-one interviews with the principal and the rest of the research participants in their respective schools adds credibility to the collected data, as the veracity of information is implicitly tested with concurrence or non-concurrence in responses. A total of sixteen participants from four schools in the Thabo-Mofutsanyane Education District, Free State Province, were interviewed. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews use a mix of closed and open-ended questions and are conducted conversationally. While open-ended questions assist in generating debate, closed-ended inquiries, according to Adams (2015:496-497), can be great gateways to open-ended probing.

An example would be asking a participant, "What are their experiences of conflict between learners and teachers?" This could be followed by asking how this conflict made the participant feel and continuing to explore further with other questions. Rather

than adhering to verbatim questions, as in a structured poll, the conversation can meander about the themes on the agenda and may dig into completely unexpected issues.

3.2.4.1 *Disadvantages and advantages of one-on-one semi-structured interviews*

Like in any other research, the instrument used in the collection of data, each instrument will have advantages and disadvantages. As the researcher, it is necessary to understand the said instrument's benefits and limitations so that the limitations may be minimised as far as possible and the advantages maximised. Adams' (2015:294) and McIntosh and Morse's (2015:7) discussion of the disadvantages of this instrument could be summarised and listed as follows:

- It is time-consuming. Preparing for the interviews, setting up the interviews, conducting the interviews, and analysing the interviews is very time-consuming.
- It is labour-intensive. This instrument usually entails the difficult task of analysing a vast volume of transcripts and sometimes many hours spent going through these.
- Interviewers are required to be smart, sensitive, poised, and quick.
- Interviewers have to be knowledgeable about the relevant substantive issues at hand.

Adams (2015:494) argues that despite the disadvantages and costs of this method, they offer some extraordinary benefits. One-on-one semi-structured interviews are superbly suited for several valuable tasks, particularly when more than a few open-ended questions require follow-up queries. It is beneficial if:

- An interviewer needs to ask probing, open-ended questions and want to know the independent thoughts of the interviewee.
- As an interviewer, you must ask probing, open-ended questions on topics your participants might not be candid about.
- A researcher must conduct a formative programme evaluation and want one-on-one interviews with key personnel.
- A researcher wants to explore mysteries that emerge after the analysed findings.

3.3 Research site

A research setting refers to the physical, social, and cultural environment in which the researcher conducts the study. In qualitative research, meaning-making is emphasised, and the researcher observes participants in their natural setting (Given, 2012). In the case of this study, the appeal was the desire to contribute to the restoration of peace and harmony between teachers and learners in conflict, especially in schools facing non-stop ongoing conflicts. It can be assumed that the gatekeepers entrusted with advancing education in disadvantaged communities will appreciate the objective input that could help them with their strategic planning in curbing conflicts in these schools.

All interviews were conducted in a school setting. The reason for choosing a school is that the participants, consisting of principals, HoDs and teachers, were always available in schools as this was their working environment.

3.4 Population of the study

A population comprises the complete group a researcher intends to study (Bhandari, 2020). These are a complete set of people with specialised characteristics suitable for the study (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010:60).

So, the population for this study consisted of school principals, HoDs and teachers from Secondary schools in Harrismith in the Thabo-Mofutsanyane Education District, Free State province. There are a total of three secondary schools in the Harrismith township and four in Harrismith town. These schools have a total number of seven school principals, twenty-one HoDs and a total number of one hundred and forty-five secondary school teachers.

3.5 Sampling

The participants in this study were purposefully selected. According to Ritchie and Lewis (in Nieuwenhuis, 2019:93), "purposive sampling is precisely what the name suggests." Those who participated in a study were purposefully selected as they were a representation of a phenomenon under study (Ritchie & Lewis, in Nieuwenhuis, 2019:93). Purposeful sampling is a non-random sampling strategy that selects a

sample based on a set of criteria or a specified goal. To select the sample, the researcher can utilise one or more strategies or criteria. In qualitative research, purposeful selection is commonly used to identify and select information-rich instances linked to the topic of interest. This strategy provides in-depth knowledge and insight into the subject. It implies including examples (participants) on the assumption that the researcher can collect and analyse data rich in information (Braun & Clarke, 2013:56).

Out of seven principals, twenty-one HoDs and one hundred and forty-five teachers, this study only interviewed four Secondary school principals, four HoDs and eight teachers from the Eastern Free State, Harrismith, in the Thabo-Mofutsanyane Education District.

Four of these principals were from four different Secondary schools in Harrismith. The reason for this selection was that principals, with their years of leading schools, are positioned to explain their experiences in how they have dealt with the conflict between teachers and learners.

Four of these HoDs were from the same school as their principals. Teachers work closely with HoDs as they were in a better position to explain how this type of conflict was resolved since their role function was to supervise teaching and learning so whenever there was a conflict between a teacher and learner, an HoD was the first to have the matter reported to by the teacher.

Each pair of these teachers was from the same secondary school as their senior. This study focused on interviewing teachers who had been involved in conflict with learners as they were in a better position to share their experiences and voice out if the solutions that had been proposed and those that the principals implemented were, according to their expectations, satisfactory.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Marshall and Rossman (1999:566, in Vuban & Eta, 2018:2) underscore the significance of ethical considerations in conducting high-quality research, defining research ethics as the application of moral rules and professional codes of conduct to the collection, analysis, reporting, and publication of information concerning research subjects. They assert that ethical guidelines exist at every stage of the study process, encompassing principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity,

respect, reciprocity, risk assessment, privacy, and care, as articulated by (Rabichund & Steyn 2011:144). Furthermore, ethics extends to the concept of doing good and avoiding harm. Preventing or mitigating harm is achievable by applying appropriate ethical principles, thereby emphasizing the need to safeguard human subjects or participants in any research study (Orb et al., 2000:93).

Whenever a study consists of human beings, it needs to be scientifically valid and conducted in line with ethical standards (Manandhar & Joshi, 2020:89). Ethics encompass the moral principles guiding an individual's behaviour. Research ethics, in turn, involves adhering to what is morally and legally right in the context of research. These ethical norms serve as guidelines for conduct, differentiating between right and wrong and acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (Parveen & Showkat, 2017:2).

3.6.1 Permission

Permission is formally described as authorizing someone to undertake a specific activity (Kaur, 2017:1856). Seeking permission for research indicates respect for individuals and their choices, contributing to a fair, well-considered, and non-exploitative research process (Garcia, 2018). Before the collection of data in schools, an ethical clearance was applied and granted by the institution with the following ethical clearance number UFS-HSD2022/1669/23; this came after the Free State Department of Education permitted the interviewing of participants in the chosen schools in the Eastern side of the Free State province, specifically Harrismith. The participants were also protected from harm, such as emotional harm. A counsellor was on standby for counselling sessions for victims. The information shared by the participants was handled with strict confidentiality since the collected data's recordings and folders were stored in a password-secured cloud file.

3.6.2 Informed consent by the participant

Consent involves an information exchange process between the researcher and the human participants in research (Manandhar & Joshi, 2020:89). Informed consent by participants is passive. Passive consent refers to participants being informed about the study and considered to agree to be part of the research unless otherwise (Manandhar & Joshi, 2020:89).

School principals and the rest of the participants each received a consent form to sign. Each form contained information about the study, which sought approval to conduct the interviews. Participants who agreed to be part of the study had to sign the consent forms, bearing in mind that they were not obliged to continue taking part in the research and had a choice to withdraw from the study at any time and were assured that their names were going to be blocked out on the consent forms when attached to the dissertation.

3.6.3 Confidentiality, non-identification and non-traceability

Vuban and Eta (2018:2) mentioned that at every stage of the research process, there are codes and guidelines to be followed, including respect, privacy and care. According to Rabichund and Steyn (2011:144), respecting participants' privacy alludes to protecting their identities and anonymity by using pseudonyms. Heaton (2022) notes that pseudonyms are commonly employed to anonymize participants and other individuals, organizations, and locations mentioned in interviews and other textual data collected for research purposes. In crafting interview questions for participants, care was taken to ensure that they were non-derogatory, maintaining respect and upholding the dignity of each participant. Participants were reassured that there would be no penalties for withdrawing from the study at any point if they felt uncomfortable. Expanding on ethical considerations, Rabichund and Steyn (2011:144) emphasize that ethical measures should extend to the actual writing and dissemination of the final research report. Additionally, Nnebue (2010:6) underscores the importance of providing details about handling personal data collected during the study. So, all the participants' recordings and transcriptions were saved in a password-protected Cloud file and the ultimate destruction of the said files at the end of this research.

3.6.4 Harm

Harm entails presenting the reasonably expected and potentially foreseeable benefits and/or risks to the participants or others involved in the research project, as emphasized by Nnebue (2010:6). It was possible that emotions could be revoked given the nature of this study. As stated in the literature, parties involved in conflict can experience emotional stress, deteriorating their health (Scott, 2020). Even though the

questions asked were not initially intended to provoke the wounds in the emotions of those involved in the conflict, a qualified counsellor was on standby if a participant needed to book a counselling session.

3.7 Quality assurance of the research

Qualitative researchers must establish four dimensions of trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Dahal, 2023:2299). The most significant aspect or criterion in determining trustworthiness is credibility. This is because, to illustrate the truth of the research study's findings, the researcher must clearly link the research study's findings to reality.

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility is the plausible and trustworthy research (Dahal, 2023:2304). Thus, credibility in this context proved that the research findings were trustworthy. Participants were encouraged to speak freely and share their experiences as they were unfiltered as victims and mediators to ensure authenticity because the questions were not structured to limit them.

3.7.2 Transferability

The concept of transferability is established by showing readers that the findings of a research study may be applied to various locations, circumstances, times, and populations. The researcher cannot confirm that the research study's conclusions will be applicable; instead, the researcher gives evidence that they might be (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121-122; Maponya, 2015:140). The proof is just a lengthy description of the phenomenon. Thick description is a qualitative research technique in which a qualitative researcher gives a thorough and detailed explanation of their data collection experiences. A qualitative researcher is conscious of the cultural and social circumstances in which data is collected, entailing discussing the location of the interviews and other data collection components that contribute to a more complete picture, permitting outside researchers and readers to make decisions on transferability (Dahal, 2023:2303; Maponya, 2015:140). The concept of transferability

enables the next researcher to use the findings of this study as a reference should they conduct the same study of this nature but from a different location and in a different year.

3.7.3 Dependability

Dependability demonstrates the research study's conclusions as consistent and reproducible. Dependability is critical to trustworthiness. If additional researchers looked at the data, they would come up with identical findings, interpretations, and discoveries; this is necessary to ensure that nothing was overlooked throughout the research study and that the researcher's final report was neither sloppy nor misleading (Dahal, 2023:2299; Trochim, 2021:1; Maponya, 2015:140). While there are various approaches to establishing dependability, having an outside researcher do an inquiry audit on the research study is one of the finest ways. An inquiry audit entails having a researcher not involved in data gathering and analysis analyse the data collection, data analysis, and research study results, which is done to ensure that the findings are accurate and that the data obtained supports the conclusions. All interpretations and conclusions are scrutinised to see if they are backed up by the data (Dahal, 2023:2299; Trochim, 2021:1; Maponya, 2015:140). In this context, the supervisor played the role of an outside researcher conducting an inquiry audit since all the data collected, including its analysis and results, were presented to the supervisor for approval.

3.7.4 Confirmability

The criterion of confirmability refers to the degree of certainty that the outcomes of the research study are based on the participants' tales and words rather than possible researcher biases (Mbanjwa, 2014:40). Confirmability exists to ensure that the findings are shaped more by participants than by a qualitative researcher (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:122). Confirmability proved a clear link between the data collected and the findings. Here, confirmability was ensured by participants who confirmed the interpretations recorded by the researcher after each interview. Participants were also given copies of their interviews after transcription to verify that all information captured during the interviews came across as trustworthy and accurate as possible.

3.8 Limitations of the study

The geographical boundary of the study included and was limited to two Secondary schools in the township of Harrismith and another two Secondary schools from the town of Harrismith under the Thabo Mofutsanyane education district, Free State.

3.8.1 Ways to overcome the limitations

This study was limited to two Secondary schools in the township of Harrismith and another two Secondary schools from the town of Harrismith under the Thabo Mofutsanyane Education District, Free State. However, the sample cohort may be identifiable to other schools in various districts within the province.

3.9 Data collection procedure

All conducted interviews were captured using a digital audio recorder, facilitating a more streamlined allocation of personnel resources (Rumble et al., 2009). Further, this type of audio recorder was faster and more effortless as a researcher wrote down accurate and well-detailed information other than note-taking, which takes too much time and may not be accurate (Smit, 2003).

Interviewees were explained the entire interview process, and permission was asked to record the participants. The participants in this study were recorded in order to capture the information precisely. Each participant was interviewed once and lasted an hour to minimise fatigue for both interviewer and respondent (Hardwick, 2022; Adams, 2015:293; McIntosh & Morse, 2015:4).

After every interview, recordings were transcribed to enable the analysis of data.

3.10 Data analysis

This study is located in the interpretive paradigm, and interpretive research is not aimed at gathering “simple” data, but instead, the way reality is accessed and systemised, organised or rationalised changes the data. The analysis process is arguably the “heartbeat” of the research, for the quality of the analyst’s thinking

becomes evident herein. The analyst has to make meaning of utterances, which are seldom straightforward and linear (Henning et al., 2004:103). Qualitative data analysis involves categorizing and interpreting linguistic material to draw conclusions about the implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning within the material and its representations (Flick, 2013:1). The interviews were recorded and promptly transferred to a computer for manual transcription. Data recording was essential for the researcher to transcribe the interviews verbatim and comprehend them during the subsequent analysis phase (Schreier et al., 2006). Transcribing is a widely practised method during interviews as it facilitates analysis (Streefkerk, 2019). While the analyst making of meaning is a central tenet of qualitative data analysis, the data analyst has a variety of options for the *modus operandi*, ranging from content analysis to grounded theory (a type of content analysis that aims to build theory based on data), to a variety of discursive procedures, such as discourse analysis and narrative analysis, and also global analysis procedures in which the researcher formats the data into a portrait of the phenomenon being studied (Henning et al., 2004:103). This study used a content analysis. The data sets of the data collection instrument were analysed thematically using content analysis. According to Lochmiller and Lester (2017:168), this analysis approach allows you to move from a broad understanding of your data to identifying themes across the data sets. The data were transcribed verbatim and analysed through coding and categorisation into themes and sub-themes. This led to searching for relationships and identifying common trends in practices and thinking on the conflict between teachers and learners. Once the data was transcribed, the researcher immediately engaged in the interpretation process. Therefore, the coded data most relevant to the research question(s), methodology and theoretical perspectives were interpreted. Findings were displayed by offering a series of quotes from the data and detailed interpretations of these quotes as they relate to the overarching theme(s) (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017:168). Thematic analysis is, therefore, the technique for finding, examining, and reporting patterns (themes) from data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Mortensen (2020) mentioned that thematic analysis consists of six steps. Firstly, the researcher familiarises themselves with the data, meaning going through the recordings multiple times to ensure nothing is missed or misinterpreted. Secondly, a researcher assigned preliminary codes to their data to describe the content researched, which was created when similar patterns were picked out in an

answered question. Thirdly, a researcher searched for patterns in their codes across the different interviews to create themes. Repetition of sentences and similar answers from the participants enabled the identification of themes and sub-themes from the analysed data. Fourthly, after identifying and creating themes, a researcher reviewed them to ensure that they aligned with the topic at hand. So, the themes and sub-themes were discussed in more detail in chapter four. Fifthly, the reviewed themes were to be defined and named accordingly. Lastly, a researcher produces a report on these themes (Mortensen, 2020).

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter located the research in the interpretative paradigm and the research design in the qualitative genre. Thereafter, the data collection instrument used was examined for its relevance and the value it added to the quality and authenticity of the study. All participants were interviewed through one-on-one semi-structured interviews as each participant qualified to be part of the study due to their experiences of having experienced conflict between teachers and learners first-hand, as well as the experience of the principal in dealing with such a conflict for the restoration and conducive teaching and learning environment as well as restoring the relationship of those in conflict and ensuring the maintenance of peace thereof. The experiences shared by the participants during the interviews enabled data analysis. Themes emerged from the analysed data; therefore, these themes were discussed in-depth. The next chapter examines the data analysis process and how each theme is relevant to the study.

CHAPTER 4 : DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter located the research in the interpretative paradigm and the research design in the qualitative genre. The research approach, design, paradigm, and how they were applied in this study were discussed. Thereafter, the data collection instrument used was examined for its relevance and the value it added to the quality and authenticity of the study. All participants were interviewed through one-on-one semi-structured interviews as each participant qualified to be part of the study due to having experienced firsthand conflict between teachers and learners. After that, measures taken to assure trustworthiness were explained, which included credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability of the data, followed by a report on the steps taken to meet the ethical requirements. The experiences shared by the participants during the interviews enabled data analysis.

This chapter presents data collected from the participants during the one-on-one semi-structured interviews as evidence to support the claims made. The procedure of collecting and analysing data is also explained in detail. The analysed data is structured to answer the research questions. Since the aim of the study is to explore the principal's role in dealing with conflict between teachers and learners, the responses from each principal revealed their overall role when dealing with conflict between teachers and learners within their schools. Furthermore, this chapter also presents the general views of the rest of the participants with the inclusion of quotes which serve as evidence that the data collected was indeed from the participants when they were answering questions asked. Judging from the participants' views, one could also identify the principal's management style when dealing with this conflict between teachers and learners. Lastly, the themes from the data analysis are also discussed in-depth.

4.2 Data collection procedure

After being granted permission by the Free State Department to collect data from their schools, the school principals were approached to request permission for the

interviews within their premises, with ethical clearance from the institution and permission letters from the department at hand. Appointments were then set for interviews after purposefully selecting the participants who consented to be part of the research. The interview process was carefully explained to the participants, and each participant was assured of identity protection and anonymity by using pseudonyms. Heaton (2022) highlights the frequent use of pseudonyms to anonymize participants and other individuals, organizations, and locations mentioned in interviews and other textual data collected for research purposes. Given the nature of this study, it was possible that emotions could be revoked. As stated in the literature, parties that have been involved in conflict can experience emotional stress, which in turn can lead to their health deteriorating (Scott, 2020). Even though the questions prepared were not initially intended to provoke the wounds in the emotions of those involved in the conflict, a qualified counsellor was on standby if a participant needed to book a counselling session. The participants were also permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without any applicable penalty. The interviews were guided by the prepared set of semi-structured interview questions; each was structured and asked to respect and uphold each participant's dignity without derogatory remarks.

The framework for producing this guide and the foci from which the construction of the interview question derives is the analysis of objective knowledge. Questions that were asked were in an order that acknowledged the distinct types of conflicts occurring between teachers and learners, the effects of these types of conflicts, the consequences suffered by these teachers and how school principals deal with these types of conflict. The structure of this interview is formed by these interview questions, which focus on each participant's responses. Participants could react in whatever way they want to these open-ended questions, and the researcher may follow up on their responses. The framework and the flexibility of the responses define the semi-structured part of this method. It stands out among interview techniques because of the degree of topic relevance it delivers while remaining receptive to the participant (McIntosh & Morse, 2015:1; Hawel & Bradley, 2009:27). McIntosh and Morse (2015:1), Hofstee (2006:132), Opdenakker (2006:3), and Bogdan and Biklen (2003:97) speak out that semi-structured interviews are more like conversations, as issues are probed for a subjective understanding of the phenomenon at hand so that, in the case of this study, a comprehensive and authentic picture of the role the principal plays in dealing

with conflict between teachers and learners is obtained, as well as the interviewee's perception of whether the solutions implemented were according to their satisfaction. In support of qualitative interviewing, Rabionet (2011:563) emphatically states that it is a flexible and powerful tool that may capture the voices and how people make meaning of their experiences. Hence, it is the most relevant instrument to use to detail how the principal plays a role in dealing with the conflict between teachers and learners, how this type of conflict affected the teachers and whether the solutions implemented by the principal were according to the satisfaction of these teachers as the study sought to make meaning of their experiences.

Conducting separate one-on-one interviews with the principal and the rest of the research participants in their respective schools adds credibility to the collected data, as the veracity of information is implicitly tested with concurrence or non-concurrence in responses. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews use a mix of closed and open-ended questions and are conducted conversationally. While open-ended questions assist in generating debate, closed-ended inquiries, according to Adams (2015:496-497), can be great gateways to open-ended probing. An example would be asking a participant, "What are their experiences of conflict between learners and teachers?" This could be followed by asking how this conflict made the participant feel and continuing to explore further with other questions. Rather than adhering to verbatim questions, as in a structured poll, the conversation can meander about the themes on the agenda and may dig into completely unexpected issues.

Each interview between the researcher and participant only occurred once, after school hours, in the staffrooms. Meanwhile, those who requested rescheduling were also interviewed once after their Saturday catch-up classes. Each interview lasted an hour to minimise fatigue for both interviewer and respondent (Hardwick, 2022; Adams, 2015:293; McIntosh & Morse, 2015:4). Interviewees were asked permission to record the whole interview. Each of these interviews was conducted using a digital audio recorder, which allowed for a more efficient allocation of personnel resources (Rumble et al., 2009). This type of audio recorder was fast and convenient, enabling the researcher to capture accurate and detailed information, unlike note-taking, which is time-consuming and may lack precision (Smit, 2003). The primary purpose of recording data is to facilitate the verbatim transcription of interviews and to make sense of them during the subsequent analysis (Schreier et al., 2006). Following each

interview, the recordings were promptly transferred to a computer for immediate manual transcription, as transcribing is a widely adopted practice during interviews, facilitating the analysis process (Streefkerk, 2019).

4.3 Analysis of data

Since this study is located in the interpretive paradigm, interpretive research is not aimed at gathering “simple” data, but instead, how reality is accessed and systemised, organised or rationalised changes the data. The analysis process is arguably the “heartbeat” of the research, for the quality of the analyst's thinking becomes evident herein. The analyst has to make meaning of utterances, which are seldom straightforward and linear (Henning et al., 2004:103). In qualitative research, data analysis involves categorizing and interpreting linguistic (or visual) material to generate statements about the implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making within the material and its representations (Flick, 2013:1). While the analyst making of meaning is a central tenet of qualitative data analysis, the data analyst has a variety of options for the *modus operandi*, ranging from content analysis to grounded theory (a type of content analysis that aims to build theory based on data), to a variety of discursive procedures, such as discourse analysis and narrative analysis, and also global analysis procedures in which the researcher formats the data into a portrait of the phenomenon being studied (Henning et al., 2004:103). This study used a content analysis. The data collection instruments' datasets were analysed thematically, including content analysis. According to Lochmiller and Lester (2017:168), this analysis approach allows you to move from a broad understanding of your data to identifying themes across the datasets. The data were transcribed verbatim and analysed through coding and categorisation into themes and sub-themes, leading to the search for relationships and identification of common trends in practices and thinking on principles of instructional leadership practices. Once the data was transcribed, the researcher immediately engaged in the interpretation process. Therefore, the coded data most relevant to the research question(s), methodology and theoretical perspectives were interpreted. Findings were displayed by offering a series of quotes from the data and detailed interpretations of these quotes as they relate to the overarching theme(s) (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017:168). Thematic analysis is a

technique for finding, examining, and reporting patterns (themes) from data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Mortensen (2020) mentioned that thematic analysis consists of six steps. Firstly, the researcher familiarises themselves with the data, meaning going through the recordings multiple times to ensure nothing is missed or misinterpreted. Secondly, a researcher assigned preliminary codes to their data to describe the content researched, which was created when similar patterns were picked out in an answered question. The comments from the participants on the setting, such as the schools and the names of the participants, were coded. Coding involves assigning codes, words, or phrases to identify the topics or issues in portions of data and organizing the data in a manner conducive to subsequent analysis (Bailey, 2007). As outlined in Chapter Three, participant identities were safeguarded through pseudonyms, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the individuals involved. Heaton (2022) notes that pseudonyms are frequently employed to de-identify participants and other individuals, organizations, and locations mentioned in interviews and other textual data collected for research purposes. The research participants were coded as follows:

- Principals from four purposefully selected schools: P1A, P2B, P3C, and P4D.
- Head of departments from four purposefully selected schools: HOD1A, HOD2B, HOD3C, and HOD4D.
- The teachers were paired from the four purposefully selected schools: T1A and T2A; T3B and T4B; T5C and T6C; T7D and T8D.

Thirdly, a researcher searched for patterns in their codes across the different interviews to create themes. Repetition of sentences and similar answers from the participants enabled the identification of themes and sub-themes from the analysed data. Fourthly, after identifying and creating themes, a researcher reviewed them to ensure that they aligned with the topic at hand. So, Chapter Four discussed the themes and sub-themes in more detail. Fifthly, the reviewed themes were defined, named, and discussed in-depth.

Finally, the researcher produced a report on the defined and named themes (Mortensen, 2020). The themes and sub-themes in the table below emerged from the participants' responses and are not restricted from this explanation that the participants mentioned that the type of conflicts in schools either emerge from internal

or external and are influenced by the environments where teachers and learners are from. The participants further highlighted the psychological and physical consequences of this type of conflict on the teachers and learners amid their conflict. Lastly, the principals and HoDs noted the importance of managing conflicts of such nature, and the strategies that the principals have used thus far were also mentioned. The table below presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged while analysing and interpreting the data collected. These themes and sub-themes will be discussed in detail below the table.

Table 4.1: Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Common types of conflicts in schools and their causes	Intrapersonal conflict Interpersonal conflict
2. Consequences of dysfunctional conflict between teachers and learners	Psychological consequences Physical consequences
3. A call for reinstating corporal punishment as a discipline measure to curb conflict between teachers and learners	Discipline Different discipline methods
4. Impact of the role of the principal in managing conflict occurring between teachers and learners	Conflict management Benefits of managing conflict
5. The role of the Head of Department as a member of the SMT in supporting principals and teachers	Role of an SMT member
6. Strategies used by the principal to resolve conflict between teachers and learners	Workshops Conflict Education Involvement of external parties

4.3.1 Theme one: Common types of conflicts in schools and their causes

At the beginning of Chapter One, different authors had brought forward that schools across the globe are experiencing conflict, and South Africa was no exception to the status quo (Valente et al., 2020; Özgün, 2016; Anashie & Kulo, 2014; Furlong & Morrison, 2000). Unfortunately, conflicts cannot be eradicated, as they are inherent to

human nature, constituting an essential aspect of moral and emotional development. This holds true for all schools (Valente et al., 2020:1). Given that schools operate in an environment where conflict is a daily occurrence and has significance (Valente et al., 2020:1), conflicts manifest in diverse forms as a result of multiple interpersonal relationships within the school context (Valente et al., 2020:1; Furlong & Morrison, 2000). Ghaffar (2019:215) notes that conflict classification often stems from antecedent conditions that give rise to conflict, with various sources such as tasks, values, and goals. It is deemed appropriate to categorize conflict based on these sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of its nature and implications (Ghaffar, 2019:215-217). Since schools accommodate different people, conflict will always be inevitable. Valente et al. (2020:1) mention that “[o]ne of the most striking characteristics of human beings is the diversities. Different ways of being, thinking and existing, different needs, and world views ...” So, teachers and learners come from different backgrounds and are often faced with problems, including harbouring the burden of their problems, leading to what is known as an intrapersonal conflict. Rahim (2017:97) conceptualizes intrapersonal conflict as an individual's struggle in decision-making due to uncertainty or conflicting internal forces, where attractive and unattractive alternatives pull or push the individual in opposite directions. Coping with this conflict is a daily challenge for each organizational member. Failure to address internal conflict can lead to the emergence of interpersonal conflict. As Rahim (2017:117) described, interpersonal conflict involves the display of incompatibility, disagreement, or differences between two or more interacting individuals. The factors contributing to interpersonal conflict can be categorized into two types: affective conflict (marked by interpersonal clashes involving anger, frustration, and negative feelings among group members) and retributive conflict (characterized by a desire for a prolonged conflict to punish the opponent) (Ghaffar, 2019:215-217). All the principals interviewed identified a common problem that often causes conflict between teachers and learners. These principals identified bringing personal issues to class, which results in teachers taking out their frustrations on the learners; this triggers learners to react out of frustration, giving rise to conflict between these parties.

P2B commented on the following:

“It was during conflict resolution that it often came to light that teachers and learners were in conflict with themselves and would then take out their stress on each other. I

do not recommend this method of dealing with stress because other people end up being victimised for no reason, causing unnecessary conflict.”

A solution to the above statement was for the parties to resolve their internal issues outside of school premises or instead leave them at the gate to curb the conflict that stems from affective conflict.

P3C had the following to add:

“When you interview the individuals in conflict, you would hear from their statements that they are in an intrapersonal conflict and their stress stems from external environments such as home. So, I usually advise these parties separately to deal with their internal issues outside the school to limit the conflict occurring in class because it is unfair for a person to be victimised for things they do not know about. An incident that once occurred was when a teacher lashed at a learner and used a word I cannot mention, and that caused a lot of commotion because the entire class wanted to attack that teacher. My resolution was to calm the learners first and had the teacher to apologise on that same fateful day not only to the victim but as well as to the rest of the class. After having had a conversation with the teacher, it turned out that the teacher was experiencing problems at home, of which was unfair to the victim because she had nothing to do with what was happening in the teacher’s life.”

P1A also reminisced that a conflict between a teacher and a learner once dragged on for almost a semester of that academic year. The principal had thought that the solutions implemented were adequate because the parties in conflict seemed to get along; hence, the principal paid no attention to follow-up on their case but only for the parent of the learner to come forward and report that her child had endured emotional abuse for the past two terms from the teacher because of the derogatory remarks that were always indirectly directed to her in almost all of the teacher’s lessons. The principal added that he was disappointed in the teacher’s actions because he thought the matter was addressed and put to bed. Hence, the teacher is expected to be bigger and not entertain the conflict further. So, the principal urgently addressed the case brought against the teacher, as this was now a retributive conflict. The reason for calling out such behaviour was to avoid escalating the matter to acts of violence against the teacher, either from the learner or parent. It is for such a reason as this one that Kiebel (2018:24) and the Share Team (2018) suggested that part of the solutions implemented by principals is to also clarify to the parties in conflict that it is expected of them to work on the betterment of their teacher-learner relationship from

time-to-time as their relationship will be closely monitored. So, when a relationship of those who had clashed before is closely monitored, chances of it breaking again will be minimal. By drawing from P1A discussion, P2B elaborated the following:

“It is important to closely monitor the teacher and learner who have been in conflict before, reason being, some teachers do not want to be reprimanded because they are adults. Whereas, some learners also feel that focus is only on reprimanding them. So, if you think solving it once does away with the conflict, you will be surprised to learn that it is still ongoing in class hence the importance of monitoring their relationship.”

Similarly, P4D highlighted the importance of monitoring teacher-learner relationship after a conflict

“Remember that individuals come from different backgrounds so when their relationship is not monitored from time-time after resolving a conflict, expect that between these parties; one may be holding a grudge against the other and keep on instigating conflict in class even further so at least when monitoring them then you can still manage the conflict without causing any further damage.”

Furthermore, since school principals are responsible for the development of safety protocols and emergency response procedures (Dowd, 2018), it is their responsibility to ensure that during the conflict resolution process, the conflict remains within the office of the principal and does not even go beyond the school premises to avoid external parties to instigate acts of violence against the perpetrator at that time (Isabu, 2017:149). It is evident from the above cases that conflict can originate within the school premises and flow into the community or from the community itself into the school premises. Freud (in Shah, 2019) claims that the above is triggered by aggression in man. Back then, schools were perceived as a safe haven for teachers and learners, but these days, schools in all phases have become the playground of conflict, with cases ranging from minor to violent (Nkosi-Malobane, 2019). To understand what has changed over the years, the causes of these conflicts must be uncovered, given that conflict does not just occur without reason. Ghaffar (2019:215) adds that conflict should be classified to understand its nature and implications. According to Ghaffar (2019), the conflict between teachers and learners should be

categorized as affective conflict. Affective conflict is characterized by interpersonal clashes among group members involving anger, frustration, and other negative feelings (Ghaffar, 2019:215). These cases of conflict between teachers and learners in a classroom, whether reported or unreported, do not just happen, but there are contributing factors causing them. HOD2B identified absenteeism, gossip, disrespect, lack of communication, no work done, and lack of discipline as common causes of conflict between teachers and their learners. Argon (in Özgan, 2016:147) supports the statement mentioned above by indicating that issues like the personality traits of students and teachers, disparities in their values, beliefs, and attitudes, crowded classrooms, inadequate quality of educational processes, miscommunication, apathetic students, aggressive attitudes, the display of weapons in defiance to teachers, insufficient tools and equipment, and the sharing of limited resources contribute to conflicts at the class level. When conflict stems from negative causes, it results in dysfunctional conflict. Dysfunctional conflict occurs when parties reach an agreement that is not beneficial to all involved, leading to emotional harm, distress, damaged relationships, and power struggles (Compliance Prime Team, 2022).

HOD3C mentioned that:

“Nothing good can come out of a dysfunctional conflict. It is toxic in nature and causes chaos in classrooms, which ends up having a negative effect on the likelihood and performance and productiveness of both the teacher and learner.”

A conflict of this nature has adverse effects on the involved parties, as they resort to threats, verbal abuse, and deception, causing the deterioration of relationships. Moreover, such conflicts may escalate to retaliation and additional negative actions (iEduNote, 2018), underscoring the importance of addressing them promptly when they arise.

4.3.2 Theme two: Consequences of dysfunctional conflict between teachers and learners

According to Nkosi-Malobane (2019), traditionally, schools were one of the safest places learners and educators could be. Recently, the schooling environment has been experiencing challenges such as bullying, gangsterism, and serious violent crimes such as murder emanating from conflict between teachers and learners

(Khumalo, 2019:1-8). These problems make learners and educators feel less safe, making it harder for learners to learn and for teachers to teach and do their jobs effectively. When a principal has not addressed a dysfunctional conflict between a teacher and learner, this type of conflict leads to teachers being irritated if they believe there is no end in sight or their perspectives are not valued. As a result, these teachers experience stress that negatively impacts their personal and professional lives (Brookins, 2019:5). Catana (2016:1) reported that conflicts occurring within the school deteriorate the school's climate, creates difficulties in internal communication, which in turn negatively impact on students' performance. A high level of dysfunctional conflict negatively affects those involved in such a conflict and the organisation, so teachers and the school are no exception. The principals interviewed agreed that conflict between teachers and learners had negative consequences and affected the rest of the class and the school.

P1A mentioned the following:

“Consequences suffered by teachers and learners are dire to an extent that learners’ performance is negatively affected and their marks drop low. Teachers are no longer productive in their lessons as, well affecting the rest of the class. These have a negative impact on the pass rate, tainting the reputation of the school.”

Moreover, dysfunctional conflict between teachers and learners leads to frustration for both parties, especially when they perceive a lack of resolution from the principal or feel their concerns are not being acknowledged. T2A agreed with the above statement:

“Sometimes when reporting to the seniors of a particular learner giving you a hard time in class, their response to taking action is often slow which causes frustration.”

T4B shared the same sentiments as T2A:

“We are constantly in need of support from our principals especially when faced with a conflict with a learner so when there is no response of action on their end; it ends up making the class environment uncomfortable because you are always in a foul mood in class.”

Consequently, teachers involved in such conflicts experience stress, negatively impacting their personal and professional lives (Brookins, 2019:5). T3B shared his experience:

“The unfortunate part of frustration from a workplace is that the stress experienced also affects those at home. It is not their fault that I am in conflict with a learner but when a principal takes time to respond to your complaint, stress keeps on mounting on you, which in turn causes one to take out their frustrations on those at home.”

T6C shared that:

“Not only does stress from conflict with a learner cause you to take out your frustrations to those at home but you end up taking out the frustrations on other learners in class and fellow colleagues.”

Mismanagement of this conflict can result in psychological effects, including inattentiveness, job dissatisfaction, work anxiety, alienation, and frustration (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014:127). Additionally, negative psychological impacts encompass discomfort, insecurity, feelings of insignificance, sadness, resentment, frustration, and stress, leading to social repercussions such as hostility, intolerance, and violence (Valente et al., 2020). T7D shared her experience

“It is not nice putting on a monstrous face to scare learners ... (giggles) but one has to be hostile to show learners that they must not dare cross the line with you.”

Catana (2016:1) notes that conflict adversely affects teachers' image, creating isolation, demotivation, and unfriendly atmospheres. Furthermore, it manifests as professional vanity. In terms of behavioural changes, individuals may exhibit excessive smoking or alcohol consumption, disordered eating, aggressiveness towards others, and reduced communication (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014:127). Physiologically, dysfunctional conflict can induce health issues, including high blood pressure, peptic ulcers, respiratory problems (asthma, hypertension), headaches, and coronary problems among teachers and learners involved. These above-mentioned adverse effects are evident that the dire consequences of a dysfunctional conflict also undermine the health of those involved (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014:128). The young teachers who have conflicted with their learners attested that their well-being was also affected, with most of them falling sick due to stress. Unfortunately, half of these young teachers reported a sudden dislike of the learners they had clashed with.

One of the young teachers, T8D, said:

“Having to reprimand one thing from time to time results leads to resenting the perpetrator because, to me, failing to change your behaviour or actions is nothing but pure disrespect. It is even sad when your seniors do not seem to take your complaints serious, putting your life at risk because schools have become warzones these days.”

T5C also added that:

“Eish, naughty learners are a problem in class, usually reflecting their home situations but unfortunately when you are constantly reprimanding one thing then you overlook the fact that there might be a problem but not all of us are parents so you end up using a coping mechanism such as resenting and avoiding the learner by all means.”

Unfortunately, the spike in violence in schools where these learners carry deadly weapons and go to schools under the influence of substances is due to the exposure to the ongoing violence and crimes where these schools are situated, which is within the community, influencing their behaviour; hence, they opt to react to conflict violently (Mncube & Harbor, 2013:1).

Ultimately, the repercussions of an ongoing conflict between teachers and learners become evident as teachers endure stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction, resulting in diminished communication. This conflict can detrimentally impact the teacher-learner relationship, leading to a decline in classroom performance if left unresolved (Rahim, 2017:7). According to Göksoy and Argon (2016:197), teachers experiencing conflicts may harbour negative emotions such as disappointment, insensitivity, stress, sorrow, and uneasiness. They may develop a dislike for their profession, experience low morale and motivation, form alliances with like-minded individuals, and witness a decline in performance. On the other hand, learners may grapple with a loss of concentration, diminished academic performance, class absenteeism, and even depression (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013:1). Opoku-Asare et al. (2015) emphasise that unresolved conflicts between teachers and learners can lead to teachers hesitating to deliver quality education, depriving pupils of the intended benefits of the curriculum.

P4D supported this negative impact on class performance by mentioning the following:

“In my years of leading as a principal, even the School Governing Body (SGB) and the rest of the SMT can attest that when there is conflict between teachers and learners, learner performance and teacher productiveness in class declines. For an example, a

teacher known for producing excellent results in his or her subjects suddenly produces bad results. Another example is learners in conflict with that specific teacher bunk class because of their dislike of that teacher and/or fail the subject of that teacher because of their sudden disinterest in that subject.”

P2B also mentioned that:

“Negative effects of such a conflict can be seen through a drop of performance from both the learner and teacher and absenteeism.”

4.3.3 Theme three: A call for reinstating corporal punishment as a discipline measure to curb conflict between teachers and learners

T1A, who has been involved in a conflict with a learner, mentioned that the disciplinary methods of this era are soft on learners, making it difficult to contain these learners because he was used to corporal punishment, which was effective when disciplining learners. Other teachers such as T3B also suggested that:

“If only corporal punishment was still permitted, I doubt there would even be cases of violent attacks against fellow teachers.”

“Corporal punishment needs to be reinstated given that it was an effective method that disciplined learners.” - T2A

“I have been teaching for many decades and when corporal punishment was still permitted, there was order in the class” - T5C

“There would be a harmonious teaching and learning environment if only corporal punishment could be reinstated.” – T4B

“If only corporal punishment was still permitted then there would less cases of ill-disciplined learners in class.” - T8D

“It is unfortunate that corporal punishment has been abolished, it was a good method for maintaining order in class” - T6C

“I am not instigating violence given the rife effects of corporal punishment against learners but a whip here and there would curb conflict between minors and adults to begin with” – T7D

Maphosa and Shumba (2010:387) echo similar views, stating that the rise in learner indiscipline cases in schools implies a lack of effective alternative disciplinary

measures implemented by teachers following the prohibition of corporal punishment in South African schools. Findings by Maphosa and Shumba (2010) further revealed that corporal punishment “helped a lot and it was easy to keep learners under control and to keep them focused... corporal punishment was liberally used and helped teachers to ensure discipline in schools and classroom.” Naong (2007) highlighted teachers' claims that maintaining discipline and earning respect from children becomes challenging in the absence of corporal punishment. Similarly, Shaikhmag and Assan (2015) found numerous arguments that suggest that eliminating corporal punishment weakens teachers' control over learners.

While corporal punishment may appear effective in disciplining learners, it constitutes a violation of children's rights. This form of punishment infringes on their right to protection from violence, respect for physical and human dignity, development, education, health, and freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (End Violence Against Children, 2021). Moreover, corporal punishment can lead to severe physical and psychological harm, imparting the notion that violence is an acceptable means of conflict resolution or influence. It is deemed ineffective as a disciplinary measure (The Key Points, 2007). Lastly, corporal punishment is associated with various adverse outcomes for children globally, including physical and mental health issues, impaired cognitive and socio-emotional development, poor educational performance, and increased aggression and engagement in violence (WHO, 2021). Therefore, this research does not endorse advocating for corporal punishment, as it promotes peaceful relationships and aims for healthy and conducive teaching and learning environments. Principals should prioritize alternatives that restore harmony and peace in conflicts, avoiding promoting violence as the sole means of conflict resolution.

4.3.4 Theme four: Impact of the role of the principal in managing conflict occurring between teachers and learners

Failure to manage conflict increases the risk of escalating into violence. A UNESCO report (2022) revealed that forty-eight per cent of learners in Southern and Eastern Africa were subjected to violence in schools, underscoring the significance of effective conflict management. Muindi (2016:204) asserts that inadequately managed conflicts

can lead to shortcomings in various aspects, including student behaviour and academic performance. Okoth and Onyango (2016:135) stress that every school should proactively handle conflicts by employing diverse conflict management methods, including guidance and counselling, to prevent stress, unnecessary fatigue, and tensions among educational stakeholders, which could escalate into destructive conflicts. Conflict management is thus defined as the practice of mitigating the negative and unproductive outcomes of disputes while promoting positive outcomes, intending to enhance learning conditions to be better, conducive, and favourable for all participants (Shahmohammadi, 2014:633).

P3C mentioned the following:

“The benefits of managing conflict the minute it surfaces is that it is resolved immediately, eliminating destructiveness because when left unattended, it can drag for months leading to the entire academic year, leaving behind trails of damage on the parties in conflict as well as on teaching and learning environment.”

“Teachers have complained that principals take time to respond to complaints but that is not often the case. Reality speaking, I tend to be occupied with other things but that is no excuse but I know when I have attended to such a complaint on time, the teacher becomes happy and is productive in class” – P1A

“A resolved conflict between a teacher and his learner is that both parties become productive in class which means pass rate remains steady so it becomes a win-win situation” – P4D

“An effective response to conflict between a teacher and a learner restores the teacher-learner relationship and makes the teaching and learning space harmonious once again” – P2B

Shahmohammadi (2014:633) reinforces the principals' stance, asserting that effective conflict management benefits students, teachers, and even the principal to grasp concepts and skills for preventing, handling, and resolving conflicts non-violently. This, in turn, fosters a safer and more supportive learning environment in schools where all students can learn and achieve their goals. This approach helps mitigate the occurrence of numerous strikes, damages, or burning of buildings, or at least reduces their frequency. Ultimately, conflict management significantly contributes to enhancing students' academic performance (Muindi, 2016:204).

4.3.5 Theme five: The role of the Head of Department as a member of the SMT in supporting principals and teachers

The principal does not function independently; hence there is a SMT that assists in the school's management. The SMT as “constituted in the new educational dispensation that ushered in the Outcome Based Education System (OBE) is a new structure with the sole function of giving leadership guidance, direction and assistance in the teaching/learning situation” (Mathipa et al., 2014:367). The SMT consists of the Principal, Deputy Principal and Head of Department (Seaton & Seaton, 2010). The focus will be on the HoD's role when tasked with resolving between teachers and learners. However, it is essential to note that though the HoD role has been included, that does not take away that in this research, the emphasis has been on the role the principal plays in dealing with conflict occurring between teachers and learners in the Secondary schools of Harrismith in the Eastern side of the Free State, Thabo-Mofutsanyane Education District.

The HoD is tasked with carrying out professional duties, overseeing personnel matters, contributing to the development of a code of conduct for learners, and coordinating all activities that support teaching and learning (Bryneven School, 2013:1). According to Juneja (2015:15), another responsibility of the HoD is to mediate and find alternative solutions to prevent problems from escalating into violence. Finally, Ohaka (2017:20) emphasizes that the HoD plays a crucial role in upholding the school's integrity and establishing and maintaining a peaceful and harmonious teaching and learning environment.

P2B had this to say:

“An HoD is always the first one in line to have cases of conflict between teachers and learners reported to. This is because the HoD works closely with teachers and learners and are trained to handle a case of this nature, but that does not take away that I approve and finalise decisions taken during the conflict resolution process.”

“The HOD does not take away my powers as the principal but for someone who works closely with teachers and learners play an important role when supporting teachers and learners in conflict” – P3C

Tingley (2017) proposes that the HoD must deal with conflict between teachers and learners in the following ways: focus mainly on the conflict and not the personalities of

the individuals in conflict, be honest in the handling of the conflict, remain neutral, allow the parties in conflict to be part of decision-making and closely monitor the parties after resolving the conflict. Tucker (2018) further adds that another conflict resolution is for the HoD to emphasise to teachers the importance of maintaining their relationship with their learners. Teachers must know they are responsible for creating a healthy relationship between them and their learners. Failure to do this will be seen through an ongoing conflict between the parties. An ongoing conflict between teachers and learners easily breaks their relationship since the parties fail to bond. So, this failure to bond stems from teachers not wanting to shift from traditional to modern education. Traditionally, teachers wish to have complete control over learners. In contrast, in contemporary education, the teacher establishes a close, trusting and caring relationship with their learners and considers their feelings (Fang, 2021:348).

The principals have admitted that their methods of handling such a conflict have failed because of their traditional problem-solving approaches.

P4D added that:

“Traditionally, the teacher would always be right, but that method does not solve any problem but instead worsens it because even when learners are victims, they feel that they are not favoured and their feelings unconsidered.”

P1A supported the statement:

“Sometimes, advice to the teacher to ignore the conflict because of ‘students are just kids’ is the worst solution because speaking from experience, I have experienced scenarios whereby a small issue threatens to turn into a big deal. Rather have the matter dealt with than hoping it goes away on its own because it will not.”

Lastly, HoD3C commented on the traditional method of solving conflict by saying:

“Ignorance is not blissful; once you turn a blind eye to a conflict brought to your attention, just expect the worst to unveil. Experience has taught me to react with urgency to cases as these.”

Regrettably, the emphasis on conventional methods of managing a work environment within institutions often results in dysfunctional conflicts. In organizations such as schools, the conventional approach prioritizes orderliness, stability, and the suppression of any emerging conflicts (Utleg, 2012:36). The consequences of advocating for the suppression of dysfunctional conflicts are that the parties involved

resort to threats, verbal abuse, and deception in their retaliatory actions, ultimately leading to the deterioration of relationships (iEduNote, 2018).

Each of the HoDs from the four Secondary schools mentioned different types of solutions that have worked in favour of all – them and the parties in conflict. The following were the most important:

Firstly, conflict reported to the team is attended to with urgency. Then, the parties in conflict are called in and allowed to express their grievances separately. The mediator lends an ear without bias or showing any sign of discrimination.

HoD1A said that:

“As an HoD, I try to attend to cases reported as soon as I can to avoid the escalation of conflict to violence. Experience is such a teacher, but one of the reasons causing me to react with urgency is to avoid losing our teachers and learners, either to death or resignation or having to expel a learner. This era has truly brought children that have made us leave our comfort zones.”

HoD4D added the following:

“Experience has taught him to nip conflict in the bud. I am not a fan of conflict, so when it is brought to my attention, I immediately attend to it with the intention to solve it as urgently as possible.”

Secondly, the mediator now brings together the parties in conflict to discuss the conflict between them and allows them to express themselves; the mediator listens without interference or judgement and notes down things like emotions expressed and the language used. This method gives the mediator and those in conflict a chance to identify the root cause of their conflict. The mediator brings the identified root cause of conflict to the table and gives the parties in conflict a chance to do the same. Lastly, the mediator provides the parties with homework to devise solutions to resolve their conflict. Thirdly, those in conflict are given a chance to lay out their solutions and to provide a reason behind each suggestion, and the mediator notes them down. Fourthly, the mediator proposes their solutions or adds to the already suggested solutions. Fifthly, the mediator convinces these parties in conflict to accept whatever solution is on the table; this includes detention for learners, cleaning of bathrooms, picking up litter, correcting a misunderstanding, and improving communication between teachers and learners or the learner moved to another classroom. However,

if the conflict remains unresolved even after all the solutions proposed, which in most cases is not likely to occur, external parties such as parents are involved in intervention. Lastly, the matter escalates to the principal if there is no sight of resolution or when the conflict reported is severe.

HoD2B concluded by adding the following:

“Out of the strategies I have proposed, you will note that severe cases of conflict between teachers and learners are escalated to the principal as they are authorised to take decisions such as whether to suspend or expel a learner.”

4.3.6 Theme six: Strategies used by the principal to resolve conflict between teachers and learners

Each of the principals mentioned that the steps taken by their HoDs are similar to theirs, even though they become firm when they resort to involving the parents, which in most cases leads to suspending those involved in the conflict depending on the severity of their conflict. Expulsion and the involvement of senior authorities such as the DoE are used when conflict has escalated to acts of violence and the matter is beyond the principal's control. The principals mentioned that they are also responsible for constantly reaching out to the parties in conflict, even when the conflict has been resolved, so they do not feel neglected. The principals also involve external parties such as police officers, pastors, members of the Department of Health (DoH) to educate on conflict, the dangers of conflict, the importance of managing conflict, and the consequences if conflict is not resolved. The principal also reminds learners and the staff of the school's code of conduct regarding conflict and offers educational workshops for teachers on resolving conflict.

P3C added that:

“Workshops are not only for teacher-learner conflict but for all sorts of conflict such as teacher-teacher conflict, conflict between junior staff members and with senior staff members, learner-learner conflict. Learners, too, have sessions that teach them how to better handle conflict because most of them react violently towards others because of the teachings from home or some are acting out because of peer pressure.”

“Police visibility within the school premises is also beneficial as there is restoration of order in schools and learners stay on track in terms of discipline.”

– P4D

“Members of the DoH raise awareness on the health consequences of bottling anger and unresolved conflict.” - P1A

“The role of the pastors is just as significant given that they deal with spiritual aspects of things such as encouraging prayer, studying of the Word, peaceful cooperation and the likes.” – P2B

As the workshops' objectives were elucidated, including cultivating the ability to manage conflict without resorting to violence, it became evident that such workshops are essential in schools, underscoring the significance of conflict education in South African schools. According to Jones and Bodtger (2007:109), conflict education entails instructing teachers or learners in conflict resolution, conflict management, and mediation. Finally, Jones and Bodtger (2007:110) assert that training teachers and learners in conflict education has the added benefit of peer mediation, where teachers or learners independently resolve conflicts among themselves without involving their principals. This practice could save principals a considerable amount of time and may also assist in reducing the stress associated with conflict.

How a principal oversees teachers and learners significantly influences their performance and success. Kamyabi and Devi (2011) affirm that management styles are crucial for realizing a school's objectives and pivotal for its success. Principals must adopt an appropriate management style, foster a positive work relationship with their staff, ensure job satisfaction, and cultivate commitment to the school's objectives and goals (Nxumalo, 2022). A management style is a manager's approach to fulfilling their goals, encompassing planning, organizing, decision-making, delegation, and staff management (Andreev, 2023). Ogunola *et al.* (2013) additionally describe management style as a leadership technique involving control, direction, and using methods to motivate subordinates in managing an organization. It includes controlling, directing, and employing strategies to encourage subordinates to follow instructions. Watson (2003) concludes that management styles are the diverse approaches managers use to influence employees, enabling them to willingly strive toward achieving organizational goals.

While managers may choose from various management styles based on their preferences, some lean towards being task-oriented, aiming to expedite tasks, while others prioritize the happiness and satisfaction of their team. Some blend these

orientations, resulting in diverse management styles (Nxumalo, 2022). Regardless of the chosen type, managers must remember that a management style's primary purpose is to improve employee performance, facilitating the achievement of organizational objectives (Prasetya & Kato, 2011). Bucata and Rizescu (2016) concur that the management styles adopted by organizational managers significantly impact all activities, the organizational climate, and labour productivity. Therefore, managers need to comprehend not only the advantages and disadvantages of different management styles but also how these styles are perceived by their subordinates.

Principals, as leaders who make and finalise decisions in the school, are instantly categorised as persuasive managers. A persuasive management style is characterised by characteristics similar to that of an autocratic one. However, in a persuasive management style, the principal makes all the decisions (Okon & Okon, 2016). Thus, principals should always be able to direct and maintain control over the entire decision during the conflict resolution process to ensure the successful resolution of conflict occurring in schools between teachers and learners (Okon & Isong, 2016). One way of doing this is for the principal to be able to understand and manage conflict in such a way as to change the situation for the better, and this can be done through persuading and selling decisions to teachers and learners and trying to convince them that what has been decided is in their best interests, creating more trust and rapport between the principals and the teachers as well as the learners (Dewi & Saputra, 2019:123; Okon & Isong, 2016; Voidis, 2010). Although, this is not an easy thing to do, given the difficulty that comes with changing one's mindset about something. That is why principals must break down proposed solutions to teachers and learners before convincing them to give in to them so that they can see that the proposed solutions are the best way forward rather than for the principal to be seen and regarded as a controlling maniac whose word/decision goes without question.

For this reason, Gardner (2006) recognised persuasive managers as mind changers whose job is to change the minds of their subordinates to conceive of it in a new way. So, if the principal can execute the actions/activities mentioned, he may change the mindset of the teachers and learners involved in a conflict situation. A persuasive manager's most important aspect is maintaining control over the entire decision-making process (Okon & Isong, 2016). Nevertheless, the principal or manager will dedicate additional time to engage with their employees and learners, ensuring a clear

understanding of the decisions. While the ultimate decisions rest with the principal, teachers and learners are thoroughly informed about the rationale behind these decisions (Srinivasan, 2012), which is critical because, in this instance, some decisions taken by learners and or teachers when in conflict use threats, verbal abuse, and deception to deal with conflict, which may have negative consequences that will impact the professional and personal lives of these parties (Brookins, 2019; iEdunote, 2018). Whereas the principal, as a mediator, will bring forth new perspectives such as focusing mainly on the conflict and not the personalities of the individuals in conflict, being honest in the handling of the conflict, remaining neutral, allowing the parties in conflict to be part of decision-making and closely monitoring the parties after resolving the conflict as a form of emerging these two groups to be victorious in a conflict situation. Omisore and Abiodun (2014:129) also suggested additional strategies for the principal, such as identifying the conflict elements, emotions, behaviour, and contradictions. Transformation involves altering the conflict's orientation and raising awareness among the involved parties. At the same time, devising solutions entails changing elements to facilitate a shift in the conflict's direction, leading to a visible resolution. Moreover, effective conflict management serves as a strategy for conflict resolution, effectively minimizing disruptions and offering a satisfactory and acceptable solution (Thakore, 2013:12).

A persuasive principal or manager can further clarify the logic behind decisions, encouraging teachers and learners to seek understanding through questions rather than issuing orders (Pytlik, 2020). It is crucial for the principal to consistently inform and persuade teachers and learners that the proposed solutions aim not to control them but are considered the most suitable path forward. The persuasive management style recognizes employees as individuals rather than objects, emphasizing that teachers and learners are the school's most valuable assets (Srinivasan, 2012).

In conclusion, a persuasive principal, employing the components of this management style, effectively minimizes conflicts between teachers and learners in a classroom setting.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, data collected from the participants during the one-on-one semi-structured interviews were presented and evidence to support the claims that the

participants made were also given. The procedure of collecting and analysing data was also explained in detail. The analysed data was structured to answer the research questions. Since the aim of the study was to explore the principal's role in dealing with conflict between teachers and learners, the responses from each principal revealed their overall role when dealing with conflict between teachers and learners within their schools. Furthermore, this chapter also presented the general views of the rest of the participants with the inclusion of quotes, which served as evidence that the data collected was indeed those of the participants when they were answering questions asked. The data collected opened the eyes of the researcher about the challenges faced by the principals and their HoDs when dealing with incidences of conflict in schools, as well as challenges faced by teachers who find themselves in conflict with their learners. The themes further revealed that teachers yearn for the reinstatement of corporal punishment as the means of curbing conflict between them and the learners; however, this was not ideal because such a method of discipline promotes violence, whereas this study advocates for peace among teachers and learners in conflict so that the teaching and learning space will also be conducive. The consequences that these teachers endured were also a call for a quick intervention from the principal. At least, despite the shortcomings of these principals, they were putting an effort into curbing conflict between teachers and learners. Lastly, it was from the conflict resolution methods that one could identify the kind of management style the principal used when dealing with this kind of conflict between teachers and learners.

The next chapter starts by presenting a summary of the findings. The researcher also concludes the rest of the study and recommendations are based on the interpretation of the data collected. Lastly, suggestions for future reference are also mentioned.

CHAPTER 5 : FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter encompassed themes generated from the qualitative data gathered per the methodology outlined in chapter three. The steps on how data was collected and analysed were explained. The analysed data was structured to answer the research questions as in chapter one. Since the aim of the study was to explore the role the principal plays in dealing with conflict between teachers and learners, the responses from each of the principals revealed their overall role when dealing with conflict occurring between teachers and learners within their schools; this includes hosting workshops that taught both teachers and learners on conflict. Furthermore, this chapter also presented the general views of the rest of the participants with the inclusion of quotes, which served as evidence that the data collected was indeed those of the participants when they were answering questions asked. The data collected opened the eyes of the researcher about the challenges faced by the principals and their HoDs when dealing with incidences of conflict in schools, as well as challenges faced by teachers who find themselves in conflict with their learners. The themes further revealed that teachers yearn for the reinstatement of corporal punishment as the means of curbing conflict between them and the learners; however, this was not ideal because such a method of discipline promotes violence, whereas this study advocates for peace among teachers and learners in conflict so that the teaching and learning space will also be safe and conducive.

This concluding chapter presents a summary of the findings of the data collected, and conclusions emanate from the same alluded data collected as in chapter four. These findings illustrate the connection between the background of the study, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the conceptual framework, the literature review, and the collected data. The recommendations are in a form of request that although it is impossible to have a conflict-free environment, it is possible to reduce a conflict of such nature to a minimum for as long the Education Department and principals are willing to invest in curbing this type of conflict. Finally, the chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

5.2 Findings, conclusions and recommendations will be based on the themes presented in chapter four

5.2.1 Common types of conflicts in schools and their causes

Findings

Just like in any organisation, intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts are common. Hence, these two types of conflict also apply in a school context. Intrapersonal conflict seems to be the primary cause of disagreement between teachers and learners, leading to interpersonal strife. In most cases of interpersonal conflict between a teacher and a learner, neither compromise on their standpoint, even when they aggravate the situation. Some learners feel they are right even where the situation dictates otherwise. Some teachers also have wrong convictions and do not want to be advised otherwise. As a result, these clashes cause the teacher and learner to find themselves in a dysfunctional conflict. Since the school is a microcosm of the community in which it is found, environmental factors such as abuse of drugs and poor involvement of the police in addressing the easy accessibility of drugs play a role in encouraging students to ignore the school code of conduct and contemplate dropping out of school. Another finding is that principals do not address and follow up on the incidents of conflict they handle between learners and teachers. This makes the handling of conflict a once-off matter with no follow-up, which leaves teachers and learners frustrated on their end and with a damaged teacher-learner relationship.

Conclusion

Due to human differences, it is impossible for the school to be complete free from conflict occurring between teachers and learners. However, that does not take away that a rise of conflict between teachers and learners should be taken lightly by those in conflict and those affected by it but needs to be addressed in its early stages. Failure to do so, leads to repercussions, thus necessitating the principals to constantly improve on their conflict resolution skills to better handle this type of conflict. Over and above that, the Education Department officials need to provide principals with training from time-to-time to ensure that their principals evolve with the times and are equipped with the necessary skills to handle conflict between teachers and learner when it arises in a school situation. The repercussions of conflict between teachers and learners not

handled correctly can escalate to acts of violence by the parties in conflict; negatively impact the relationship of these parties and academic performance in class declines.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the School Based Support Teams invite and work closely with experts such as social workers, members of police forums, members of the department of health, to address students on the dangers of unresolved conflict in general. Schools should also have a follow up mechanism on the recommendations of conflict resolution to ensure that conflict is always kept at bay.

5.2.2 Consequences of dysfunctional conflict between teachers and learners

Findings

Frustrated teachers and learners experience stress, which affects their personal and professional lives. Findings revealed that stressed teachers who experience conflicts have negative feelings such as disappointment, insensitivity, sorrow, and uneasiness. They may dislike their profession, have low morale and motivation, form groups with like-minded people and have reduced performance. The consequence of reduced performance can lead to a teacher's reluctance to provide quality teaching to their pupils and cause them to lose out on what they should gain from the curriculum. Whereas learners under stress experience loss of concentration, depression, poor academic performance, bunking of classes, and eventually dropping out of school. Other consequences include and are not limited to psychological impacts such as lack of interest in teaching and learning, alienation from others, class anxiety and decreased communication between these parties in conflict. Parties involved in conflict also experience deteriorating health due to substance abuse and unbalanced dietary habits, which causes a rise in health conditions such as high blood pressure, migraines and coronary problems.

Conclusion

Seemingly, consequences of unresolved conflict are severe on those involved in the conflict hence the need to have it resolved to avoid further suffering by the teacher and learner. In order for the teacher to be productive in class and for learner performance to improve then principals are tasked with ensuring that conflict between

these parties are managed to reduce the negative consequences associated with unresolved conflict.

Recommendation

It is recommended that School Based Teams attend to cases of conflict between teachers and learners as urgently as they can so to prevent teachers and learners suffering from further consequences that have a negative effect on their professional and personal lives.

5.2.3 A call for reinstating corporal punishment as a discipline measure to curb conflict between teachers and learners

Findings

Teachers in conflict with learners believe that reinstating corporal punishment can restore discipline in the classroom. These teachers felt that abolishing corporal punishment had given learners power over their teachers, hence the disrespect. However, this measure of discipline has been proven to have a link to adverse outcomes for children across different countries; these include but are not limited to a negative outcome on physical and mental ill-health, impaired cognitive and socio-emotional development, poor educational outcomes, and increased aggression. Furthermore, corporal punishment teaches children that violence is an acceptable and appropriate strategy for resolving conflict or getting people to do what they want. The outcomes mentioned above also led to South Africa abolishing corporal punishment as a means of disciplining learners as it was inhuman and degrading to learners. Teachers and principals are, therefore, expected to use other alternatives that are free from torture but maintain respect for physical and human dignity, such as reconciling with learners. Reconciliation is opposed to using corporal punishment, which infringes upon the rights of these learners to protection from violence, development, education, and health.

Conclusion

Although the reinstatement of corporal punishment sounds ideal as a discipline measure however it has been proven to have negative effects on the likelihood of the learner. Hence, it is advisable that disciplinary measures used in class do not promote

violence but promotes peace and teaches learners that violence is not the solution to solving problems. An alternative such as reconciling with your opposition can still resolve a conflict at hand amicably without resorting to violence.

Recommendation

School Based Team need to host more workshops on conflict education so teachers improve on their conflict resolution skills to find ways of resolving conflict between them and learners without resorting to violent means of discipline.

5.2.4 Impact of the role of the principal in managing conflict occurring between teachers and learners

Findings

A dysfunctional conflict is associated with negativity because it is unhealthy and destructive. Teachers and learners in a dysfunctional conflict often use threats and verbal abuse. Dysfunctional conflict, when not managed, negatively impacts teacher-learner relationships, negatively impacts the lives of these parties in conflict, and can go as far as creating a toxic and unsafe teaching and learning space at a class level. For this reason, principals need to have conflict within their tracks to avoid escalating to unfavourable outcomes. So, it has emerged that effective conflict management benefits those in conflict. Principals who effectively manage conflict enable learners and teachers to appreciate the ideas and skills for preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts without violence. Managing conflict creates a safer and more supportive classroom teaching and learning space where both the teacher and the learner can flourish. Additionally, conflict management reduces strikes, which can lead to damage or burning of school buildings.

Conclusion

To successfully manage conflict in schools, School Based Team need high conflict competence themselves in order for their conflict resolution skills to be effective in their schools. It is for this reason that they need to constantly improve on their conflict resolution skills so that whenever they are faced with conflict between teachers and learners then they are able to resolve it in a way that holds the integrity of the school

and maintains a peaceful and harmonious relationship between the teacher and learner and also on the teaching and learning environment.

Recommendation

Strategies implemented by School Based Teams when dealing with conflict between teachers and learners need to always hold the integrity of the school and maintain a peaceful and harmonious relationship between the teacher and learner and also on the teaching and learning environment.

5.2.5 The role of the Head of Department as a member of the SMT in supporting principals and teachers

Findings

Findings further revealed that principals do not independently manage the school but manage matters about conflict along with the HoD. Still, this alliance does not take away their powers as the heads of their respective schools. HoDs are responsible for the school's learning and teaching activities, making them work closely with teachers and learners. Since HoDs are the first in line to have conflict reported to them, one of their roles is to mediate between the parties to end the conflict. However, suppose conflict is severe or no resolution is in sight. In that case, the HoD escalates the case to the principal as they are authorized to implement measures such as suspension, expulsion, and parental involvement. HoDs and principals have also evolved into modern education. During conflict resolution, the HoD and principal show compassion to both parties in conflict regardless of who is in the wrong. Traditionally, principals and HoDs would always side with teachers only when they were wrong and did not consider the learner's feelings with a complaint.

Conclusion

HODs are the first in line to have conflict between teachers and learners reported so to successfully manage conflict in schools, the HOD need high conflict competence themselves in order for their conflict resolution skills to be effective in their schools. It is for this reason that the HOD need to constantly improve on their conflict resolution skills so that whenever they are faced with conflict between teachers and learners then they are able to resolve it in a way that holds the integrity of the school and maintains

a peaceful and harmonious relationship between the teacher and learner and also on the teaching and learning environment.

Recommendation

At all times, strategies implemented by the HOD when dealing with conflict between teachers and learners need to always hold the integrity of the school and maintain a peaceful and harmonious relationship between the teacher and learner and also on the teaching and learning environment.

5.2.6 Strategies used by the principal to resolve conflict between teachers and learners

Findings

Modern education equates to principals being persuasive managers of the school. As a persuasive manager, the principal considers both parties in conflict and is not biased. Moreover, the principal involves the parties in conflict in decision-making and does not dictate to oppress. Such principals give equal chances to those engaged in conflict to state their cases and allow them to devise their strategies to resolve such a conflict even though the principal makes the final decision. When teachers and learners are involved in decision-making, this creates trust between them and their principal and that assures them that they are valued and essential in the school. Even when the principal makes a decision, it is always in the best interest of those involved in conflict.

Furthermore, principals have also opted to organise workshops for these parties to reduce conflict between teachers and learners. These workshops intend to teach teachers and learners about matters of conflict. These workshops train teachers and learners in conflict resolution, management, and mediation. These workshops equip teachers and learners with skills to meditate and resolve conflict amongst themselves without the principal's involvement. This way, the principal can save time and deal with other aspects of the school. Lastly, another benefit of conflict education is that parties in conflict, including their mediator and the principal, have less stress to deal with.

Conclusion

As a leader of the school, the principal is tasked with the responsibility of helping find a middle way, an alternative to any conflict situation occurring in a school in order to

prevent it from escalating to violence. In an era where everyone knows their rights, it is crucial that the principal always makes use of conflict resolution strategies that do not oppress those in conflict but are rather accommodative at all times. On top of that, the principal needs to effectively manage conflict of this nature with an aim to restore the relationship of the teacher and learner and continue creating a safer and more supportive school learning environment for the benefit of the teacher and learner. So, the strategies implemented by the principal need at all times to creatively address conflict between teachers and learners. Hence principals implemented strategies that aimed at minimising disruption stemming from the existence of a conflict and the solutions were satisfactory and acceptable to teachers. Lastly, one of the successful strategies implemented by the teacher has been hosting workshops for teachers and learners. These workshops were hosted to teach learners and teachers in conflict resolution, conflict management and mediation. The purpose of these workshops were to equip teachers and learners with skills to mediate and resolve conflict amongst themselves without the involvement of the principal. This way, the principal was able to save time and deal with other aspects of the school. Lastly, another benefit of conflict education is that parties in conflict including their mediator, who is the principal have less stress to deal with.

Recommendation

A recommendation for the workshops hosted by principals is to also invite and work closely with experts such as social workers, members of police forums, members of the department of health, to address students and teachers on the dangers of unresolved conflict. Lastly, principals should also have a follow up mechanism on the recommendations of conflict resolution to ensure that conflict is always kept at bay.

5.3 Suggestions for future research

The same research can still be conducted in areas across the different education districts in the Free State province to generate different results from this study. Researchers are also not limited but can broaden their research on the mental health of learners and teachers as far as they are involved in conflict with one another and, further investigate how teaching and learning are affected when teachers and learners conflict. To end, researchers can also develop conflict resolution models to assist

School Based Support Teams and the Education Department across the country in curbing conflict between teachers and learners within the schools.

5.4 Conclusion

To conclude, research done by Khumalo (2019) and Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) has highlighted that one of the components contributing to the rise of violence in schools is a conflict occurring between teachers and learners. Conflicts are inherent in human nature, constituting an essential aspect of moral and emotional development. Similarly, conflicts are ubiquitous and inevitable in all schools. The school operates within an environment where conflicts manifest daily, gaining significance due to the myriad interpersonal relationships within the school context (Valente et al., 2020:1). Furthermore, literature revealed that since schools accommodate individuals with different ways of being thinking and existing, including different needs and worldviews trigger teachers and learners to clash leading these parties to conflict. Equally, it has become apparent that an interpersonal conflict between teachers and learners is also triggered by intrapersonal conflict, in which individuals impose their personal stresses on others. The methodology underpinning this research sought to understand the lived experiences of teachers in conflict with their learners and the principal's involvement in dealing with such a conflict. It then emerged that when these teachers and learners are in an interpersonal conflict, none of the two compromise on their standpoint, even in those incidences where they aggravate the situation. Some learners feel they are right even where the situation dictates otherwise. Some teachers have wrong convictions and do not want to be advised otherwise. It is for these reasons that the need for principals to deal with this type of conflict in its early occurrence to avoid it escalating to acts of violence, which in turn also threatens to destroy the relationship of the teacher and learner and can go as far as negatively affecting teaching and learning in class. So, to curb an ongoing conflict between teachers and learners, principals need to manage conflicts effectively by employing all methods of conflict management, including guidance and counselling, as well as educating teachers and learners on the importance of managing conflict by themselves. In addition, principals should also have a follow-up mechanism on the recommendations of conflict resolution to ensure that conflict is minimised. The added benefit of managing such conflict is that it allows students, teachers, and even the principal to appreciate the

concepts and skills for preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts without resorting to acts of violence. This creates a safer and more supportive teaching and learning environment for schools where all teachers can deliver quality curriculum, and learners can learn and improve their academic achievement to achieve their goals. Teachers and learners do not have to depend on the principal for conflict resolution. However, these parties can handle conflict by themselves, reducing stress for the principal and saving his time.

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APPENDIX A: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FROM FS DoE



APPENDIX B: LETTER TO PRINCIPAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



The Participant

..... High School
Harrismith
9880

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

The undersigned is currently a registered student for the MEd-degree at the University of the Free State, and herewith humbly requests the participation of the principal, head of department, deputy principal as well as teachers.

Date of research

The research will be conducted from June 2023 to August 2023.

Title of research: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN DEALING WITH CONFLICT BETWEEN TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

Details of researcher

Name	Student Number	Contact details
Phumelele Mahlaba	2015175355	074 842 5049

The main aim of the study is to know the role of the school principal in dealing with conflict between teachers and learners.

Kindly note that the research study requires individual interviews with principals, deputy principal, head of department and teachers. The research believes that you, as principal, your deputy principal, your head of department and educators, are suitably placed and experienced to add value to the research study. You are therefore humbly requested to make yourself available for the research to gain a proper understanding into the daily experiences of those persons responsible for school leadership.

Kindly find attached hereto a **Research Study Information Leaflet** to foster a broader understanding of the envisaged study. A **Consent Form** is also attached if you agree to participate in the research study. For any further information about any aspect of this study, please contact Phumelele Mahlaba at 074 842 5049 or via email at phumemahlaba@gmail.com. You may also contact the researcher's supervisor, Dr. J. S. Kabi, at 051-401-9730 or via email at KabiJS@ufs.ac.za.



APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT



CONSENT FOR PRINCIPALS, DEPUTY PRINCIPAL, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT AND EDUCATORS TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to the recording of the *semi-structured interview data collection method*.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s):

PHUMELELE MAHLABA

Signature of Researcher:



Date:

/ / 2023



APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

TITLE: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN DEALING WITH CONFLICT
BETWEEN TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

Questions for head of department

1. What are your experiences of conflict between learners and teachers?
2. What are the reasons for the conflict between the learners and the teachers?
3. Describe the consequences of the conflict between teachers and the learners.
4. How should the educator deal with conflict? Describe some strategies in that regard.
5. How should the head of department deal with conflict? Describe some strategies in that regard.
6. How should the school principal deal with conflict? Describe some strategies in that regard.
7. What is the role of the head of department in resolving conflict between teachers and learners?
8. What is the role of the school principal in resolving conflict between teachers and learners?

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: PRINCIPALS

TITLE: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN DEALING WITH CONFLICT
BETWEEN TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

Questions for principals

1. What are your experiences of conflict between learners and teachers?
2. What are the reasons for the conflict between the learners and the teachers?
3. Describe the consequences of the conflict between teachers and the learners.
4. How should the educator deal with conflict? Describe some strategies in that regard.
5. How should the head of department deal with conflict? Describe some strategies in that regard.
6. How should the school principal deal with conflict? Describe some strategies in that regard.
7. What is the role of the head of department in resolving conflict between teachers and learners?
8. What is the role of the school principal in resolving conflict between teachers and learners?

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: TEACHERS

TITLE: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN DEALING WITH CONFLICT
BETWEEN TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

Questions for teachers

1. What are your experiences of conflict between learners and yourself as an educator?
2. What are the reasons for this conflict between these learners and yourself as a teacher occur?
3. Describe the consequences suffered because of this conflict?
4. What are the challenges experienced as an educator when in conflict with a learner?
5. How have you resolved this kind of conflict as an educator?
6. How have you as an educator dealt with this type of conflict? Describe some strategies in that regard.
7. Has the head of department resolved conflict according to your expectations?
8. Has the principal resolved conflict according to your expectations?

APPENDIX G: TURN IT IN (PLAGIARISM REPORT)

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN DEALING WITH CONFLICT BETWEEN TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

ORIGINALITY REPORT

7 %	7 %	1 %	6 %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

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