

## **Strategies of Resolving Conflict Among School Personnel In Urban And Peri-Urban Secondary Schools In Gwanda District, Zimbabwe**

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**Abstract:**-This study sought to investigate conflict resolution strategies used in the urban and peri-urban secondary schools of Gwanda District, Zimbabwe according to perceptions and views of school heads and teachers. The descriptive survey design was used to collect data through survey questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. The data was presented using tables and percentages. The results show that most respondents were not happy with the way conflict was being handled in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools. The study established that conflict resolution strategies that were highly used in the urban and peri-urban secondary schools of Gwanda District included the competing or forcing style, and the collaboration style. The study also established that school personnel of Gwanda urban and peri urban secondary schools encounter challenges when resolving conflict such as lack of conflict management skills by the school heads, and poor management styles. Where conflict resolution was attempted, there was lack of support by the teachers mainly due to lack of trust for the school administration in handling conflict issues. The study recommended in-service training of teachers and school heads in conflict resolution, the establishment of committees to help resolve conflict in schools and the acquisition of conflict resolution skills as a pre-requisite for promotion to headship.

**Keywords:** *Conflict resolution, urban, peri-urban, conflict management, Challenges, strategies*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The study focuses on the strategies used to resolve conflict in Gwanda urban and peri-urban Secondary Schools in Zimbabwe. Conflict is a disagreement that pertains to the opposing ideas and actions between two or more parties in opposition of one party to another, in an attempt to reach an objective different from that of the other party resulting in an antagonistic state (Behrman, 1998; Kipyego (2013); Laue (1990) in Johdi & Apitree (2012); Tschannen-Moran (2001) in Shahmohammadi, 201). Sagimo and Owen in Afful-Broni, (2012) and Borisoff & Victor (1989) in Barmao (2012) see conflict as disagreements between and among individuals and groups over incompatible goals, resources, thoughts, rewards, needs, beliefs, values and aspirations or emotions which lead to bitterness and opposition. Conflict is part of daily life and is inevitable at all levels of human life hence is a common phenomenon in organizations including schools where it usually occurs between school heads and teachers, teachers and teachers, teachers and pupils, teachers and parents, pupils and pupils because where there is human interaction; there is a likelihood of agreements and disagreements (Opoku-Asare, Takyi1 & Owusu-Mensah 2015; Doğan, 2016; De Janasz, Dowd & Schneider (2006) in Johdi & Apitree 2012; Mapolisa & Tshabalala (2013); Dick & Thodlana (2013). Conflict connotes a stressful, unhappy, distressing, depressing, annoying and frustrating state of affairs. Hence in a school environment conflict can affect the accomplishment of educational goals resulting in adverse effects on the academic environment, including affecting the morale of educators, the pace at which they work, and increasing absenteeism and negatively impact on pupils' performance and can become an obstacle towards achieving educational development or better performance (Jennings & Wattam, 2004 in Opoku-Asare, Takyi1 & Owusu-Mensah, 2015; Okotoni & Okotoni, 2003.; Mapolisa & Tshabalala, 2013). The issue of conflict management then becomes paramount for goal accomplishment hence the value of this study cannot be over emphasised.

Moran (2001) in Shahmohammadi, (2014) sees conflict management as "a philosophy and a set of skills that assist individuals and groups in better understanding and dealing with conflict as it arises in all aspects of their lives". The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 1995 in Okotoni & Okotoni (2003) lent credence to this point by indicating that *conflicts when not dealt with constructively often explode into violence*. Hence Rahim, (2002) in Shahmohammadi, (2014) argues that conflict management minimizes the negative outcomes of conflict and promotes the positive outcomes of conflict with the goal of improving learning in a school. Robinson et al (1974) in Beheshtifar & Zare (2013) concur in that conflict

management towards constructive action is the best approach in resolving conflict in organization. When conflict arises, it needs to be managed properly so that it becomes a positive force, rather than a negative force which would threaten the individual or group (Robinson et al (1974) in Beheshtifar & Zare, 2013). If conflict is not managed well it can harm the organization's structure in the short and long term. If properly managed or resolved, conflict can present ideal opportunities for learning or improved efficiency, develop the skills of communication, open up important issues or highlight problems, develop trust, relieve anxiety, suspicion and trust and bring about sustainable development (Doğan 2016; Rawlings (1996) in Dick & Thodlana 2013). For this reason, it is necessary to manage the conflicts and divergences constructively, positively and in the manner that it integrates the conflicting parties and enhance the relations as far as possible (Türnüklü, 2005 in Doğan 2016). Hence conflict resolution or management strategies enable school authorities to understand and resolve conflict in an appropriate manner (Barmao, 2013).

Different forms of conflict have been reported in Zimbabwe's educational environment. The Chronicle Newspaper of the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2014 reported a case of conflict in one High School in the city of Bulawayo between the school teacher and a student which finally resulted in a physical fight in which the student beat the teacher after a dispute over gloves that were not part of the school attire. A study carried out in Masvingo District in Zimbabwe by Makaye & Ndofirepi (2012) on Conflict Resolution between heads and teachers indicated that barely a month passes without either the head conflicting with the teachers or the teachers amongst themselves. Another study carried out in Nkayi District by Mapolisa & Tshabalala (2013) also revealed that cases of conflict in schools are inevitable and that almost every week the head has to deal with one or two cases of conflict. Mapolisa & Tshabalala (2013) argue that this scenario affects the smooth flow of the school activities hence negatively impacts on pupils' performance. It goes without saying that even in Gwanda district just like in Nkayi, Bulawayo and Masvingo alluded to above, conflict is also part of daily business in secondary schools. Like any other school personnel in other districts of Zimbabwe, the school personnel in Gwanda District also have opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values and goals hence they are bound to conflict one way or the other. When such conflicts are not resolved early, they can turn teachers, parents, learners and heads into enemies or strain good or peaceful relationships and make it difficult, if not impossible, for effective teaching and learning to take place. It is from this background that the researcher felt compelled to carry out this research study to establish the conflict resolution strategies used in Gwanda District's urban and peri-urban Secondary Schools. Tossietal in Barmao (2013) identified strategies of resolving conflict to include styles or strategies of conflict resolution, improving organizational practices and structure. The styles or strategies of conflict resolution are discussed first.

## **II. STYLES OR STRATEGIES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Different types of conflict exist within and between individuals and groups hence demand different styles of handling. According to Barmao (2013) head teachers need to have conflict resolution skills to effectively manage conflict in their schools. The styles of resolving different forms of conflict according to Rahim (1983) in Doğan (2016) include competing, compromise, avoidance, smoothing, collaborative and structures.

### **Competing or forcing style**

As argued by Kipyego (2013) competing is a strategy where one seeks to satisfy his or her interest at the expense of others and this style is also known as the "win-lose" approach. It is a situation where one seeks to achieve his/her own preferred outcomes at the expense of a partner and wants to make someone accept blame for the problem or to achieve one's goal at the sacrifice of others' goals. According to Kipyego (2013) an individual pursues his or her own concerns despite the resistance of the other person. This may involve pushing one's viewpoint at the expense of another person's or maintaining firm resistance to another person's actions. Competing or forcing works in certain situations when all other, less forceful methods, do not work or are ineffective. It is also suitable when one needs to stand up for one's own rights, to resist aggression and pressure. According to Barmao (2013) competing is useful and justified when a quick action is required during instances such as an emergency and life-threatening situations and when a decision has to be made fast. The competing or forcing style can be useful when an unpopular solution must be applied and a deadline is near. Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya (2012) contends that competing or forcing style is inappropriate in an open and participative climate though its strength lies in its speed and its weakness is that it may negatively affect one's relationship with the opponent in the long run. Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya (2012) also argues that the competing or forcing style may cause the opponent to react in the same way even if the opponent did not intend to be forceful originally. The compromising style of resolving conflict is articulated next.

### **Compromising conflict resolution style**

Compromising is a big step toward conflict resolution and demands both courage and consideration when both parties look for common ground. Kipyego (2013) and Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya (2012) describe compromising as a situation where each party gives up something of value in order to satisfy the other party's claims and expectations to resolve the conflict hence is a "give-and-take" approach (Doğan 2016). It is a style typical of individuals who possess an intermediate level of concern for both personal and other's outcomes. Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya (2012) contends that compromising can be seen as a bargaining style that is applicable in situations where the goals and power of both sides are of equal importance. Compromisers value fairness and anticipate mutual give and take interactions by accepting some demands put forth by others. Compromisers believe consensus encourages others to meet half way, thus promoting conflict resolution. The approach is about finding the middle ground whereby a little is given and a little is gotten. According to Kipyego (2013), compromising looks for an expedient and mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties. The compromising style of resolving conflict is appropriate when the goals are moderately important and it is ideal to find a temporary and timely settlement on complex issues (Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya, 2012). Weeks (1994) points out that compromising can be used as a first step when the involved parties do not know each other well or haven't yet developed a high level of mutual trust. The compromising style is useful when the cost of conflict is higher than the cost of losing the ground, or when equal strength of opponents are at a standstill and the deadline is looming. The compromising style is useful when collaboration and forcing do not work and when both parties are not satisfied with the outcome of a lose-lose situation. Avoidance style of resolving conflict is discussed next.

#### **Avoidance Conflict Resolution Style**

As described by Weeks (1994) avoidance involves withdrawal or suppression of the conflict and according to Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya, (2012) it requires no courage or consideration for the other party. Avoidance or withdrawal is a situation when a person does not pursue his or her concerns or those of the opponent. People who fear conflict use the avoidance style to escape from the conflict situation and pretend there is nothing wrong, hence they stonewall and completely shut down. The affected staff member does not address the conflict, but sidesteps, postpones or simply withdraws from it and essentially pretends that it never happened or does not exist (Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya, 2012). Avoidance or withdrawal is used when the issue is trivial or not worth the effort or when more important issues are pressing and one does not have the time to deal with them. Weeks (1994) posits that avoidance is more appropriate when more important issues are pressing and one needs more time to think and collect information before an action is taken for example if one is unprepared or taken by surprise and is unable to deal with the conflict. According to Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya (2012) avoidance is ideal when victory is impossible and when someone else is in a better position to solve the problem. Avoidance or withdrawal style of resolving conflict is also ideal when the opponent is forcing or attempts aggression hence one might choose to withdraw and postpone one's response until favourable circumstances are available for one to push back (Victor 2012 in Bankovskaya, 2012). One might choose avoidance or withdrawal when it is not the right time or place to discuss issues and when one is unable to manage the conflict because of one's emotions or because somebody else can handle the conflict better. When avoidance style of conflict management is used, everyone loses. Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya, (2012) contends that the biggest disadvantage of the avoidance style is that the issue is never directly addressed or resolved. However, avoidance or withdrawal may be interpreted as an agreement and may lead to weakening or losing one's position. Smoothing conflict resolution style is reviewed next.

#### **Smoothing or Accommodating Conflict Resolution Style**

Smoothing is also known as the accommodating style of resolving conflict. In a school situation, smoothing is accommodating the concerns of conflicting teachers first of all, rather than the mediating head's own concerns (Afful-Broni, 2012; Victor 2012 in Bankovskaya, 2012). A school head using smoothing to resolve conflict tries to get his/her own goals, objectives and desired outcomes off the way to allow the conflicting staff members to achieve their own goals and outcomes. The smoothing or accommodating strategy of resolving conflict encourages cooperation and may actually help individual teachers to strengthen their relations and future negotiation positions (Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya, 2012). The smoothing style entails playing down differences while emphasizing common interest between the conflicting parties. Smoothing is ideal when one has no choice or when the continued competition would be detrimental and can help in protecting more important interests while giving up on the less important ones (Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya, 2012). Afful-Broni (2012) contends that smoothing involves working together by conflicting parties to find a mutually beneficial solution and is characterized by an active concern for both pro-social and pro-self behavior. Weeks (1994) posits that smoothing can be used when it is important to provide a temporary relief from the conflict or to buy time until one is in a better position to respond or when the issue is not as important to one

individual as it is to the other person. Smoothing is ideal when a person accepts that he/she is wrong and there is no choice but to participate in seeking a mutually beneficial solution as continued competition would be harmful. Collaboration as a conflict resolution strategy is articulated next.

### **Collaboration Conflict Resolution Strategy**

Collaboration plays a major role within conflict resolution and requires great courage and much consideration and is often described as “win-win” scenario. In collaborating conflict resolution both parties creatively work together to find a mutually beneficial solution and to achieve the goals and desired outcomes benefitting all involved parties (Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya, 2012). It is characterized by an active concern for both pro-social and pro-self behavior; cooperation conflict style is typically used when an individual has elevated interests in their own outcomes as well as in the outcomes of others. During conflict, cooperators collaborate with others in an effort to find an amicable solution that satisfies all parties involved in the conflict. Individuals with this type of conflict style tend to be highly assertive and highly empathetic at the same time. By seeing conflict as a creative opportunity, collaborators willingly invest time and resources into finding a “win-win” solution. People tending towards a collaborative style try to meet the needs of all people involved. These people can be highly assertive; they cooperate effectively and acknowledge that everyone is important. This style is useful when one needs to bring together a variety of viewpoints to get the best solution; when there have been previous conflicts in the group; or when the situation is too important for a simple trade-off. Collaborating with other conflicting parties involves listening to their side, discussing areas of agreement and goals as well ensuring that all the conflicting parties understand each other.

### **III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Several reports on conflicts between teachers, teachers and students, teachers and school heads and parents in Zimbabwean education system have appeared in media while some have been professionally and privately handled by Education Officers. Such conflicts have resulted in negative publicity of some schools and increased hostility in schools and lack of conducive teaching-learning environment, dismissal and suspension of students, administrators and teachers in some cases. The study therefore sought to investigate the nature of conflict and determine its major causes amongst educational personnel and recommend best practices of resolving conflict in urban and peri-urban Secondary Schools of Gwanda District in Matabeleland South Province. The following main research question and sub-research questions were posed to guide the study.

### **IV. THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

The descriptive survey design was preferred for this study as it was found to be ideal for gathering original data for purposes of describing certain perceptions, opinions, attitudes, relationships and orientations that are held by a population as large as that of the Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary Schools. The descriptive survey method was preferred because it is probably the best method there is for collecting original data for purposes of describing a population that is too large to observe directly (Tshuma and Mafa in Tichapondwa (2013). The researcher preferred the descriptive survey as it is the most frequently used method of research to describe what we see, observe beyond the situation and reveals the actual picture of a situation through the emerging trends from the study, thereby giving a comprehensive picture (Leedy, 1997). The descriptive survey approach therefore enabled the researcher to make accurate observations of the natural situation in line with Leedy’s (1993) argument that the descriptive survey “---looks with intense accuracy at the phenomena of the moment and describes precisely what researchers see.” Hence the descriptive survey research design enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth information, extract patterns and compare relationships between the variables and facilitate generalization of one’s findings to the larger population (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster, & Prozesky, 2001; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2006; Maree, 2007; Borg & Gall, 1996). The use of the descriptive survey in this study facilitated objectivity, where the researcher developed an understanding of the world as it is ‘out there’, independent of one’s personal bias, values and idiosyncratic notions. To achieve the desired objectivity, the researcher had to be personally detached from those being studied through the use of objective standardised questionnaires, observation schedules, and interview guides to collect data (Borg & Gall, 1996; Maree, 2007).

Since the target population of secondary schools in the Gwanda district is too large to study effectively, four peri-urban and two urban secondary schools were selected. The target population comprised four (4) peri-urban and two (2) urban secondary schools in Gwanda District of Matabeleland South Region whose participants had individuals with common characteristics that is of interest to the researcher (Best & Khan, 1993). Data was collected by means of the stratified random sampling technique which Cohen & Manion (1994) define as a technique of dividing the target population into homogeneous groups of subjects with similar characteristics. For the purpose of this study, three strata of school heads, deputy heads and that of teachers in

the six secondary schools were selected to facilitate data collection. Data from each level was sought to gain in-depth knowledge of what conflict meant to each stratum of the population and the kind of conflict resolution strategies that are in place in the sampled schools.

Data was collected from each school through use of questionnaire and face to face interviews. Characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of these instruments were taken into account during implementation to gather the requisite data for the study. Combining the questionnaire and interview instruments made triangulation and validation of collected data and its sources possible as different sources were consulted in order to overcome inherent weaknesses of each of the techniques to improve the authenticity of the study (Leedy, 1993; Borg and Gall, 1996; Maree, 2007). The researcher presented the research findings in the form of tables together with the description of analysis of trends and revealed general tendencies in the data. These helped the researcher to analyse the data from the sample and to draw conclusions about the larger population (Maree, 2007). The research results and discussion are discussed next.

## **V. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study sought to establish the conflict resolution strategies used in the urban and peri-urban secondary schools of Gwanda District in Matabeleland South Province in Zimbabwe. Data collected through survey questionnaires and interviews with teachers, school heads and deputy heads of two urban and four peri-urban secondary schools in Gwanda District revealed a near split half of satisfactory and unsatisfactory usage of conflict resolution strategies. The study therefore concurs with Dick & Thodhlana (2013) in recommending that school heads be trained in conflict management and resolution styles. The study focused on different conflict resolution strategies of which avoidance is discussed next.

## **VI. DIFFERENT CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES**

**Table 5: Styles of conflict Resolution**

Style	Frequency	%
Competing or forcing style-head pursues own interest	13	27.08
Compromising style-head values Fairness	7	14.58
Avoidance style-head ignores conflict and pretends nothing happened	15	31.25
Collaboration-head listens, discusses and ensures understanding	13	27.08
Smoothing or accommodating-head separates conflicting parties	0	
Total	48	99.99 (100%)

In responding to the styles of conflict resolution being used some participants indicated more than one style as existing in their schools. This data agrees with Tosietal in Barmao (2013) and Afful-Broni, (2012) who contend that school heads apply different styles of conflict resolution to different types of conflict. The avoidance style is discussed next.

## **VII. AVOIDANCE STYLE**

In responding to the extent to which avoidance style of resolving conflict was used, most respondents (15) revealed that this style was used most in schools. The findings of the study revealed that the avoidance style of conflict resolution is the most prevalent practice among school heads in Gwanda urban and peri – urban secondary schools. The study further concurs with Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya, (2012) and Weeks (1994) in that school heads in Gwanda urban and peri – urban secondary schools fear conflict hence pretend there is nothing wrong, stonewall and completely shut down. Interview discussions revealed that school heads do not take conflicts seriously, but they simply keep quiet as if nothing ever happened and that fuels conflict even more. The findings of this research study concur with Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya, (2012) and Weeks (1994) in that most school heads do not address the conflict, but sidestep, postpone or simply withdraw from it and essentially pretend that it never happened or does not exist. The findings of the study concur with Dick & Thodhlana (2013) and Mopolisa & Tshabalala (2013) in that in-service training for teachers and administrators in conflict resolution and management is lacking and is needed in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools. The competing style is discussed next.

### **VIII. COMPETING OR FORCING STYLE**

When responding to the extent to which the competing or forcing style of resolving conflict was used, thirteen (13) responses revealed that many school heads in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools preferred this style which is characterized by autocratic leadership. This style is the second most prevalent in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools. Heads of schools implementing the competing style of resolving conflict have the head seeking to satisfy his or her interest at the expense of the subordinates (Kipyego, 2013). Hence this style is also known as the “win-lose” approach. School heads resolving conflict through the competing style will do whatever it takes to ensure that they achieve their goals regardless of their effects on others (Kipyego, 2013). From the interviews conducted by the researcher with teachers, it was revealed that school heads who pursue this style of conflict resolution hardly listen to the views of teachers, they are always right and teachers are always on the wrong hence practice autocratic style of leadership. This is in agreement with Kipyego (2013) who highlighted that school heads using this style of resolving conflict always want someone to accept blame for the problem even if they are not to blame. In such situations conflicts are bound to occur even during conflict resolution sessions when the opponent reacts in the same way even if he/she did not intend to be forceful originally (Victor, 2012) in Bankovskaya (2012). The findings of this study concur with Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya (2012) in that the competing or forcing style is inappropriate where leaders use an open and participative climate. This style is however quite useful when quick action has to be taken especially on cases of emergency and the decision has to be made fast (Barmao, 2013; Victor, 2012 in Bankovskaya, 2012). The findings of this study concur with Kipyego (2013) in that most school heads in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools seek to satisfy their interests at the expense of their subordinates’ through some form of autocratic leadership hence the resultant resistance resulting in conflicts. The findings of this study concur with Dick & Thodhlana (2013) who revealed a high prevalence of dictatorial administrative tendencies among school heads in Gweru hence a further indication for in-service training for school heads and teachers in conflict resolution. The collaboration style in which the head listens, discusses and ensures understanding is discussed next.

### **IX. COLLABORATION STYLE**

When responding to the extent to which the collaboration style of conflict resolution was used, thirteen (13) respondents indicated that the style was used by school heads in urban and peri-urban secondary schools of Gwanda District. School heads that prefer the collaboration style of resolving conflict resolution listen to and discuss with the conflicting parties and ensure that the conflicting parties understand each other. The collaboration style requires great courage and much consideration and is often described as “win-win” scenario. In collaborating conflict resolution both parties creatively work together to achieve the goals and desired outcomes benefitting all involved parties (Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya, 2012).

The usage of collaboration style of conflict resolution is tied to the second position with the competing style in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools. According to Afful-Broni, (2012) and Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya, (2012), the collaboration style or win-win scenario plays a major role in conflict resolution. It entails a situation where the school head and conflicting parties work together, listen and discuss areas of disagreement and agreement and ensure that the conflicting parties understand each other. The findings of this study revealed that in spite of the fact that it costs time and skill to implement this strategy, a good number of school heads use the collaboration style in resolving conflict in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools. The findings of the study concur with (Türnüklü, 2005 in Doğan 2016; Barmao, 2013) in that a good number of school heads in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools manage conflicts constructively, positively and in a mutual manner that it integrates the conflicting parties and enhances the conflicting parties to understand each other and resolve the conflict in an appropriate manner.

The interviewed teachers revealed that the collaboration style of conflict resolution though highly used in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools, was not properly implemented since school heads dominated the discussions and at the end of the conference the conflicting parties did not benefit. This domination by school heads during conflict resolution conference is testimony enough for the need to in-service school heads in conflict resolution strategies to ensure effective usage. Interview sessions with school heads revealed that some teachers are difficult to deal with hence school heads at times resorted to the dictatorial style that does not encourage discussions. The implication here is that most school heads in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools do not handle conflict appropriately. The suggestion according to Madziyire (2010) is that school heads should lead by example, face issues head-on and in the conflict look for amicable solution that satisfies all parties involved in the conflict instead of shying away. The ideal situation in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools can be achieved through providing in-service training of teachers and school heads as recommended by Dick & Thodhlana (2013) and Mapolisa & Tshabalala (2013). The compromising style of resolving conflict is articulated next.

## **X. COMPROMISING STYLE**

In responding to the extent to which the compromising style of conflict resolution was used in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools seven (7) respondents indicated that some school heads preferred the style which values fairness in resolving conflict. This compromising style of conflict resolution enables both parties to bargain for common ground in which each party gives up something of value to resolve the conflict and is also known as the “give-and-take” style (Kipyego 2013 and Victor 2012 in Bankovskaya, 2012). The findings of the study show limited usage of the compromising style by a few school heads when resolving conflict in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools. The findings of the study show that not many school heads in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools value fairness and mutual “give and take” interactions where both parties accept demands put forth by the contending parties as postulated by Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya (2012). Failure to use the “give and take” strategy by most school heads in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools suggests a high prevalence of autocratic leadership that is characterized by dictatorial administrative tendencies among school heads hence concurs with Dick & Thodhlana (2013). The findings of the study further suggest a need for in-service training for school heads and teachers in conflict resolution. The smoothing style is discussed next.

## **XI. SMOOTHING OR ACCOMMODATING**

When responding to whether school heads separate conflicting parties as a way of resolving conflict, the study revealed that none of the school heads in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools implement this strategy. According to Afful-Broni, (2012) and Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya, (2012) smoothing or accommodating style of conflict resolution seeks to resolve conflicting teachers’ concerns first before the school head’s own. The school heads using this style allow the teachers to first achieve their goals before they can achieve their own. This strategy is quite accommodating and encourages cooperation and improves relationships at workplace. Failure to use smoothing or accommodating does not concur with Afful-Broni (2013) and Victor (2012) in Bankovskaya (2012) in that school heads in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools when mediating conflicts put their own concerns first at the expense of the conflicting subordinate teachers. The findings of the study point to the existence of autocratic leadership that is characterized by dictatorial administrative tendencies hence concurs with Dick & Thodhlana (2013) and Mapolisa & Tshabalala (2013) in advocating for in-service training for school heads and teachers in conflict resolution. Challenges that are experienced when handling conflict in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools are discussed next.

## **XII. CHALLENGES ON HANDLING SCHOOL CONFLICT.**

The study also sought to establish challenges encountered by the school personnel in handling conflict in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools.

Table 5: Challenges to managing conflict

Challenge	Frequency	%
Lack of initiative by head	7	11.67
Scarce financial resources	5	8.33
No support from the employees	7	11.67
Sabotage of the head by the teachers	4	6.67
Poor management style	14	23.33
Heads lack skills in conflict management	23	38.33
	60	100

In response to the challenges faced by school personnel in managing conflict lack of conflict management skills by school heads was identified as most critical challenge. This weakness concurs with recommendations made by Mapolisa & Tshabalala (2013) and Dick & Thodhlana (2013) that qualified teachers and school heads be in-serviced in conflict resolution strategies and that conflict management courses be included in teacher education curriculum.

Poor management style by school heads was identified as the second most critical challenge in handling conflict. Interviews that were conducted revealed that the major drawback to conflict resolution in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools was poor administration style. The respondents indicated that school heads used dictatorial styles of leadership making it difficult to freely and honestly air out their views and as a result they hardly iron out issues amicably. Interviewed participants suggested that conflict skills should be a pre-requisite for promotion to headship. The findings of the study concur with Dick & Thodhlana (2013)

and Mapolisa & Tshabalala (2013) on the need to in-service school heads and teachers in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools in conflict resolution and management.

Lack of initiative by school heads and support from school personnel were placed third critical challenges in handling conflict solution in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools. Most of the interviewed participants indicated that school heads should put in place committees that will handle and resolve conflict in schools. This is actually in agreement with Dick & Thodlana (2013) who revealed that there are no structures such as conflict resolution committees, peer mediation support groups, newsletters and suggestion boxes to pass information from school to stakeholders in most Zimbabwean schools to support conflict management. This suggests that most heads in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools could be resorting to avoidance when it comes to handling conflicts and prefer to leave things as they are and pretend nothing is wrong. Interviewed participants recommended the establishment of conflict resolution committees and empowerment of school heads and teachers with conflict resolution skills through in-service training hence concur with Dick & Thodlana (2013) and Mapolisa & Tshabalala (2013).

The study revealed that provision financial resources did not affect the conflict resolution management in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools. A few responses indicated sabotage of the school head by teachers as a challenge to conflict resources. Sabotage is an act of fixing administration and is usually the result of autocratic leadership which the study revealed as a main characteristic of school heads in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools. The findings of this study is in line with that of Dick & Thodlana (2013) who revealed that a good number of heads used autocratic management style in their schools hence are often at log-heads with their teachers. In the main, the findings of this study emphatically point towards a need for in-service training of teachers and school heads in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools.

### **XIII. CONCLUSIONS**

The study set out to investigate the conflict resolution strategies used in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools in Gwanda District. The study concluded that most teachers were not happy with the way conflict was being handled in their schools. The study revealed that Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary school heads use varied strategies in resolving conflict mainly due to the diverse nature of conflict occurring in schools. This most used strategy is the avoidance where school heads chose to ignore conflict and pretended as if it never existed hence teachers felt the administration was not sensitive enough to their plight. The study second most common are the usage of competing or forcing style and the collaborative style. The competing style is characterized by autocratic tendencies where only the views of the school head are heard while the collaboration strategy is where the head listens, discusses areas of agreement and disagreement and ensures that conflicting parties understand each other. The study also established that school heads in Gwanda urban and peri-urban secondary schools did not use the smoothing style when mediating conflicts hence put their own concerns first at the expense of the conflicting subordinate teachers. In the main, the findings of the study point to the existence of autocratic leadership that is characterized by dictatorial administrative tendencies hence concurs with Dick & Thodhlana (2013) and Mapolisa & Tshabalala (2013) in advocating for in-service training for school heads and teachers in conflict resolution. The study also established that school personnel in Gwanda urban and peri urban secondary schools encounter challenges when resolving conflict. The major challenges faced are lack of conflict management skills by the school heads coupled with poor management styles as alluded to by (Barmao, 2013). Where conflict resolution is attempted, there is lack of support by the teachers mainly due to lack of trust for the school administration in handling conflict issues. To a lesser extent, conflict resolution faces the challenge of limited financial resources and sabotage of the school heads by teachers probably due to the autocratic administrative style that seems to dominate among the studies school heads. The study recommended in-service training of teachers and school heads in conflict resolution and the establishment of committees that will help resolve conflict in schools. The study recommended that conflict resolution skills be a pre-requisite for promotion to headship hence the provision of conflict resolution training to aspiring school heads would empower them to effectively resolve conflict once promoted to school head positions.

### **XIV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In light of the conclusions made above, the study recommended that:

- in-service training workshops and seminars be mounted for teachers and school heads to equip them with conflict resolution skills
- conflict resolution committees, peer support groups and suggestion boxes be established to facilitate conflict resolution
- school heads be discouraged from using the autocratic tendencies and adopt styles that enhance working relations full of trust and respect.

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