

# Conflict Management Strategies among Secondary School Leaders in Kitwe District in the Copperbelt Province in Zambia

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**Abstract:** The study sought to explore conflict management strategies among secondary school leaders in Kitwe district.

The study was qualitative in nature identifying and exploring behaviours of actors that is motivations, opinions and attitudes. It was supported by a case study design which used interviews, Focus Group Discussions and Theatre for Development techniques to collect data from 52 respondents. A sample comprising 13 Headteachers; 13 Teacher Union leaders; 13 School Council leaders and 13 Education Board leaders was used. To collect this sample, the researcher used quota sampling method whose population was divided into the above mentioned groups. The data collected was subjected to qualitative analysis. They were analysed using thematic approach.

On findings, research question one sought to elicit data on conflict management strategies found in schools. The main result was that ignoring each other strategy was used. Research question two was on the effectiveness of conflict management strategies found in schools. The result was that it contributed to the enhancement of teaching and learning within the schools. Research question three was on challenges faced in enforcing conflict management strategies found in schools. The main result was that Education Boards were not operated as expected. The last research question solicited data on the proposed alternative conflict management strategies in dealing with conflict management issues in schools. The main result was that there must be protection from any form of harassment.

In light of the findings, the study recommended that MoGE should re-emphasise that Education Boards, School Councils and Teacher Unions are taken as conflict management strategies in order to maintain democracy and partnerships in the Ministry of General Educational system as stipulated in the 1996 Educating our Future policy. This is all meant to create systems' thinking among these leaders. The MoGE should come up with seminars at all levels hence creation of best practices for conflict management. Finally, Education Board leaders, Teacher Union leaders and School Council leaders should be recognised fully as leaders.

**Keywords:** Systems' thinking, Conflict management, Leaders, Strategy

## I. BACKGROUND

The world over, Zambia inclusive, is looking at practical ways of managing conflicts in educational institutions. These practical ways are termed as conflict management strategies.

According to Swanstrom and Weismann (2005), in their concept paper, provided an overview of the concept 'Conflict Management' and defined it as the limitation, mitigation or containment of a conflict without necessarily solving it. They also contend that conflict management should imply a change from 'destructive' to 'constructive' in the mode of interaction. Changing the mode of interaction from destructive to constructive creates confidence building measures which are crucial as they serve to strengthen the conflict management process by increasing trust among actors. Jeong, (2011) on the other hand, expresses that a conflict has been broadly associated with tension surrounding decisions on various choices, sometimes being manifested in confrontations between social forces and that coping with conflicts particular ways such as strategies are employed. In other words, a strategy serves as an overall plan to responding to a given situation. Therefore, conflict management strategies are designed to control costly struggle in order to minimise negative impacts of unstrained forces. The goal of conflict management strategies is the promotion of harmonious relationships in the social environments like schools (William, 2005). UNESCO (2000) is in support of this goal in that it encourages changing the vision of the world, the way of communicating and living together in educational institutions. Furthermore, William (2005) advises that we must apply cogs of the machine thus: systems, structures and policies. This, according to him, is termed as systems' thinking. He defines systems' thinking as a conceptual framework, body of knowledge and tools to make the full patterns clear and help people see how various parts of the system that is:

1. Actors- Headteachers, Teacher Union leaders, Education Board leaders and School Council leaders;
2. Structures- Secondary schools and positions held by people;
3. Mechanisms- ways these actors and structures operate together.

In short, in systems' thinking people are looking for patterns in the way that the different parts of the system interact and influence each other.

The premise of UNESCO is that friction and conflict will always exist in educational institutions, the wellbeing of

which does not so much depend on conflict but on the ability, to 'identify it', tackle it' and 'find solutions'. UNESCO is encouraging institutions to initiate best practices for conflict management. These practices are aimed at informing Headteachers, teachers, parents and pupils, who one way or another, are confronted with conflicts in schools in order to look for practical solutions to manage conflicts. The intention of UNESCO is to inform stakeholders what is best in terms of education and supply pedagogical tools to manage conflicts which they are confronted with on a daily basis. UNESCO emphasises that each institution must establish its own conflict management strategies depending on its own local situation. This means that it is not just a matter of using conflict management strategies such as compromising, co-operation, avoiding and confrontation.

The Zambian Ministry of General Education has also come up with the idea of promoting democracy and partnership (MoGE, 1996) *Educating Our Future Policy*. According to this policy, "democratisation of Education, with its demands for partnership in educational provision, requires that the government creates an enabling environment and establishes rules and regulations that will protect the rights of various educational agencies to full and fair participation in educational development" (MoGE, 1996:2). This means that parents', pupils', teachers' and Headteachers' rights are given full and fair participation and are protected in the Ministry of General Educational system. To support this idea, Jensen and Schnack, (1994) has called this 'action competence' meaning that the individual is able and willing to be a qualified participant. The Ministry of General Education's encouragement on the issue of democracy is also supported by Dewey, (1916) who has been a great inspiration for many theorists as well as practitioners, democratic leadership means that democracy is lived through participation in the everyday practice of school life. He encourages 'deep' democracy which allows for free and open inquiry and critiques, recognition of interdependence in working for the common good.

All the above are leading into encouraging education leaders to be democratic in their leadership as they execute their duties. It is a well-known fact that where democracy lacks, conflicts are prominent. In the research done by (Mulford, 2005) suggests, on the basis of findings from a large Australian school leadership research project, that reforms should be related to the following factors:

- (i) Distributed leadership- Teachers, Pupils and Parents should be involved in leadership in order to feel cared for and valued and be given opportunities to be involved in decision making.
- (ii) Development and learning- A unifying focus and shared insights into what the school is doing and why it is doing it provides the basis for proper management of conflicts in schools.

Bernstein, (2000) also gives an insight of the main purpose of school leadership whose premise is to empower and enable staff and students to assume responsibility for learning, acting and collaborating in school and outside school. He strongly emphasises on the point of democracy.

Lastly, the inclusion of democracy in the 1996 *Educating Our Future Policy* is a very serious conflict management strategy which is meant to help school leaders such as Headteachers, Teacher Union leaders, School Council leaders and Education Board leaders manage conflicts in their respective schools. One wonders, are they utilising this conflict management strategy put in place by MoGE to manage conflicts reported from time to time? What conflict management strategies do they use? These are questions which need answered. Therefore, the focus of this study was to explore conflict management strategies among secondary school leaders in Kitwe district.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Initiation of 'best practices' for management of conflicts has become a common concern both globally and locally. According to William, (2005) these best practices are aimed at the promotion of harmonious relationships which is the goal of conflict management strategies. The 1996 Ministry of General Education, *Educating Our Future Policy*, is encouraging democracy and partnership among school leaders in order for them to live together in harmony hence creation of systems' thinking which is the ideal situation for the management of conflicts in schools (MoGE, 1996). However, there are still conflicts reported from time to time in these schools. The direction in which this problem is moving has generated social tension to which we have not been able to find solutions. In response to this problem, this study explored conflict management strategies among secondary school leaders in Kitwe district in order to come up with options for effective management of conflicts reported from time to time.

## III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to explore conflict management strategies among secondary school leaders in Kitwe district.

## IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were to:

- i. Establish conflict management strategies found in schools.
- ii. Explore effectiveness of conflict management strategies found in schools.
- iii. Examine challenges found in enforcing conflict management strategies found in schools.
- iv. Propose alternative conflict management strategies in dealing with conflict management issues in schools.

## V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. What conflict management strategies are found in schools?

- ii. How effective are conflict management strategies found in schools?
- iii. What challenges are found in enforcing conflict management strategies in schools?
- iv. What alternative conflict management strategies can be proposed in dealing with conflict management issues in schools?

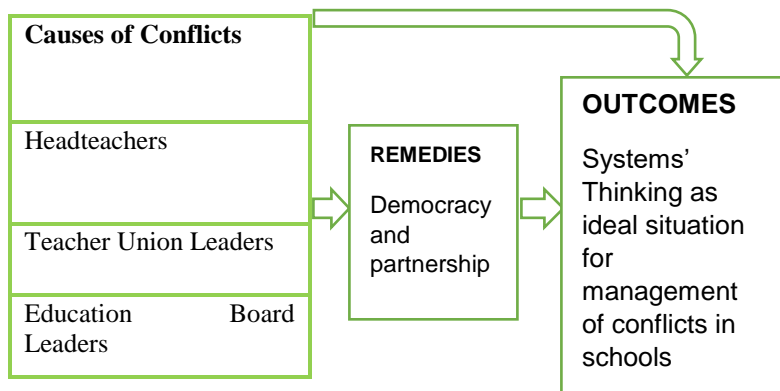
**VI. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

- a. Increased understanding of necessary knowledge and skills needed to successfully manage conflicts may contribute to smooth operations of Ministry of General Education.
- b. This study may provide a forum for exploration of conflict management strategies among Headteachers, Teacher Union leaders, School Council leaders and Education Board leaders.
- c. Findings of this study may add value to the Ministry of General Education at the level of policy formulation.

**VII. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

A conceptual framework represents the researcher’s synthesis of literature on how to explain a phenomenon (McGaphie et al, 2001). It maps out the actions required in the course of the study given his/her previous knowledge of the other researchers’ points of view and their observations on the subject of research.

In other words, the conceptual framework is the researcher understands of how particular variables in his/her study connect with each other. It is the researcher’s map in pursuing the investigation.



The model above shows Headteachers, Teacher Union leaders, Education Board leaders and School Council leaders causes of conflicts. If these people work together in a democratic way and partner together they will create “systems’ thinking” which is an ideal situation for the management of conflicts in schools.

**VIII. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Schools, in the management of conflicts, have sought to develop universal or generic theories to explain the existence of conflicts at every level of social interaction: between individuals, groups, institutions and state or society.

The researcher discussed one theory that guided this study: This theory was particularly directed at managing conflicts in schools. Therefore, it guided the researcher in exploring the effectiveness of managing conflicts in the Zambian Educational System.

*i Basic Human Needs Theory of Conflict*

According to Burton, (1990) the core assumption for many people working on conflict management is the belief that humans need a number of essentials to survive and thrive. If these needs are denied, they will strive to attain them by any means necessary.

Burton developed ‘Basic Human Needs’ theory of deep rooted conflict that are seen as affecting every sphere of human existence. According to him, human needs are in born and are a part of the basic make-up of every human being as the elemental requirements for human development, as such, they are both universal and trans-historical, relevant to every community at every point in human history. He categorized identity and security as the core of basic human needs.

The quest to satisfy these needs is the basic ‘drive’ for human motivations and behaviour. They will be pursued by all available means, of seemingly ‘irrationally’ and against all odds.

He believes that attempts to suppress needs, usually involving some form of coercion will never be successful in the long-term in any given institution. Attention must instead be directed to developing systems that satisfy these needs. While the needs themselves are generic, the satisfiers of these needs are contextually specific. Because needs for identity and security do not pertain to scarce resources, it is possible to satisfy the needs of all stakeholders through integrated outcomes. (For example, we can both be more secure if we each support each other’s identity and security; (‘my identity can co-exist with your identity’). There is, therefore, a presumption that a satisfactory end state can be reached. Yet it is not possible for an outsider to prescribe what will fulfil the need requirements of another individual or group; they must identify those satisfiers themselves. Burton argues that this can only be done through inclusive processes. All stakeholders must be involved in dialogue to identify underlying needs and the means for satisfying them.

Burton does not focus on power dynamics or recognize the existence of asymmetries in the relationships between those in conflict. He tends to assume that the costs of conflict are high for all stakeholders and that each will willingly implement good agreements because their needs are also satisfied by it. This presumes a degree of rationality in analysing the problem

and developing an integrated outcome. Burton and those who follow this approach, have tended to focus on the integrity and efficiency of the process that brings those in conflict towards reaching mutually agreed outcomes, rather than adherence to seemingly abstract principles. This means that groups at some point become unresponsive to the needs of other groups and in this case, the basic communal needs are for:

- a. Acceptance; recognition of the group's unique identity as expressed in their values.
- b. Access; to effective participation in decision-making institutions.

Burton believed that if groups were unresponsive, it weakened the institution's capacity to respond to and meet the needs of various groups. Ironically, because of failure to meet these basic needs adequately, the institution often remained weak and vulnerable to challenges. He observed that, however, that often the situation could remain relatively stable until some event occurred that acted as a catalyst for mobilizing the groups to take action to address these conditions (much in the way that a conflict may be 'latent' in the institution until some triggering event occurs that reveals its existence). Conflict becomes persistent and does not go away completely unless the basic needs of identity and security are met.

In this context, actors (individuals and groups) always act in the pursuit of their own interests. Associated with this idea is the assumption that actors will aim to maximize their power over all other actors so as to have a competitive advantage over them, in a framework that assumes that there are almost inevitably winners and losers. This theory is supported by other studies when they suggest that there is no such a thing as altruism or other forms of unselfish behaviour because everyone is trying to pursue their interests and have exterior motives (Coser, 1956). Other studies support this theory when they suggest that institutions have different identity groups who are unresponsive to the needs of other groups (Azar, 1990). He believed that if groups did not respond to and meet the needs of other groups, the institution was weakened. In this case, Azar found out that if groups remained rigid by failing to meet these basic needs of identity and security, the institution remained weak and vulnerable to challenges. He observed, however, that often the situation could remain relatively stable until some event occurred that would act as a catalyst for mobilising the group to take action to address these conditions, much in the same way that a conflict may be latent in the institution until some triggering event occurred that would reveal its existence. He contended that conflict became persistent and did not go away completely unless the basic needs of identity and security were met.

This theory supports the idea that secondary schools in Zambia are Education Boards and have leaders who are divided into groups. These groups are: Headteachers; Teacher Union leaders; Education Board leaders and School Council leaders, who each has the need to protect their identities and security. Burton argued that failure to satisfy these identities

and security led to dysfunctional development, frustration and protracted conflicts.

The Ministry of General Education encourages democracy and partnership in Education Boards in order to ensure that the above mentioned leaders co-exist, but there are still conflicts reported from time to time in these institutions (MoGE, 1996). This is a problem in the Ministry of General Education. The Ministry of General Education wants these leaders to be democratic and believes that democracy can play a major role in achieving co-existence among these leaders because democracy enables groups to respect needs of identities and security.

In this study the assumption was that successful management of conflicts was centred on using conflict management strategies that would encourage Headteachers, Teacher Union leaders, Education Board leaders and School Council leaders to co-exist by being responsive to each other's identities and security.

This study adopted Swanstrom's and Weismann's (2005) definition of conflict management strategies as 'Changing from destructive to constructive' in the mode of interaction in order to make actors live together in harmony. This definition fits this theory.

## IX. RESEARCH DESIGN

Cresswell (2012) stated that a research design is the specific procedure employed in carrying out in a research process. It involves the collection of data, data analysis and report writing. Chola (2016) also contended that a research design is a frame work in the whole process of research aimed at pointing the researcher in the direction of that research. Since this study endeavoured to generate opinions regarding the management of conflicts in single institutions, a case study design was adopted. A case study design, according to Marczk et al (2005) involves an in depth examination of a single person of a few people. It provides an accurate and complete description of the case. Case studies also involve the intensive study of an individual, family, groups, institution or other level which are conceived as a single unit. The information is highly detailed, comprehensive and typically reported in narrative form as opposed to the quantified scores on a dependant measure. This research design was ideal for this study as it allowed this investigation to focus on the specific case and understand it in detail. The researcher used interviews, focus group discussions and theatre for development techniques to collect data from 52 respondents. A sample comprising 13 headteachers, 13 teacher union leaders, 13 school council leaders and 13 education Board leaders was used. To collect this sample the researcher used quota sampling method whose population was divided in the above mentioned groups. The data collected was subjected to qualitative analysis, they were analysed using thematic approach.



## X. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 10.1 What conflict management strategies are found in schools?

Figure 1: Responses from Participants on what conflict management strategies were found in schools

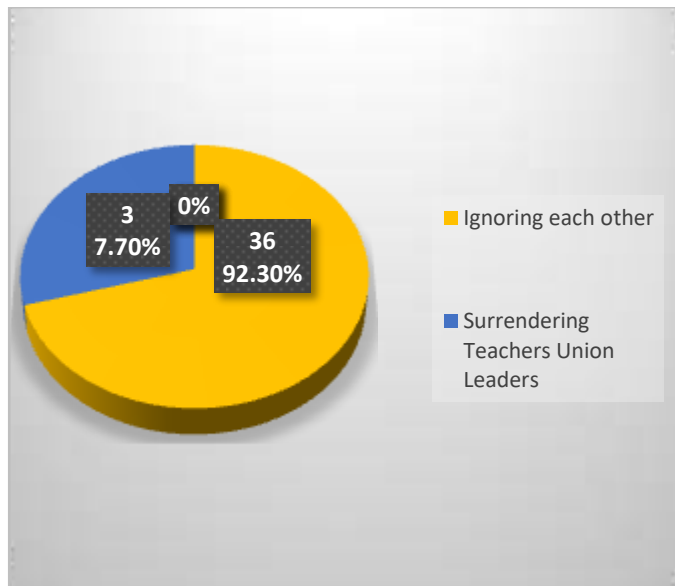


Figure 1 above shows the response rate of Participants on what conflict management strategies they used in schools. Out of 39 respondents who took part in this study, 3 participants used Surrendering strategy which represents 7.70%, 36 participants used Ignoring strategy which represents 92.30%.

As observed by (Bramson, 1981), it is clear from the current finding that one's definition of ignoring each other is shaped by the context prevailing in his or her own context under the surrounding circumstances. It is also clear that Headteachers, Teacher Union leaders and Education Board leaders had their own way of looking at ignoring each other strategy as a conflict management strategy.

In this study, responses regarding ignoring each other pointed to the management of conflicts in their respective schools. Looking at the findings, it is evident that ignoring each other helped maintain peace in these schools. Each group of participants had its own reason for using ignoring as a conflict management strategy. What was coming out strongly was that each group was difficult to deal with and hence conflicts continued. In the long run these stakeholders resorted to ignoring each other as a conflict management strategy. At the time this research was conducted there was peace using this strategy. Bramson, (1981) identified types of difficult people such as:

- Hostile-aggressive people who are always antagonistic and impolite.
- Complainers who spend most of their time moaning about their troubles.

- Silent and unresponsive clams who seem to ignore you and your questions.
- Super-agreeable friendly types who do not follow through on their promises.
- Wet-blanket negativists who can bring down morale of a group with their pessimism.
- Know it all experts who think their way is the right way.
- Indecives who keep changing their minds and have trouble making decisions.

In this study, Headteachers indicated that Teacher Union leaders and Education Board leaders were difficult to deal with. On the other hand, Teacher Union leaders and Education Board leaders also indicated that Headteachers were difficult to deal with. Therefore, it is evident that these participants had resorted to ignoring each other as a conflict management strategy. According to them it was a good conflict management strategy as it was meant to give each other space instead of wasting time quarrelling.

Bramson contends that we all have reasons to ignore someone. It could be due to their behaviour or rough argument. In his research, he found out that true power of ignoring someone who hurts or bothers you is that it sets you free to pursue your goals.

He also observed that ignoring people simply means that one is just keeping distance when he or she feels like those people are playing with one's feelings.

In this study, Headteachers, Teacher Union leaders and Education Board leaders indicated that they did not have to react to everything, but they could just ignore it. It is evident that these participants were uncomfortable with each other each time they wanted to communicate. They instead turned away and ignored each other. In this way they did not get into conflict with each other. This is how ignoring was used as a conflict management strategy in this study.

#### 1. Reasons given by headteachers for ignoring Teacher Union leaders and Education Board leaders

##### a. Teacher Union leaders

There was consensus among Headteachers that Teacher Union leaders, at one time, were given space for them to express themselves, but in the long run, they became too demanding and started diminishing Headteachers. They said that Teacher Union leaders were so confrontational that they could not even give them chance to differ with them, meaning that if they did not agree with them, they would get into conflict. They also indicated that Teacher Union leaders would do all they could to get what their members wanted especially that they were competing for clients to join their respective unions. It is evident that at the time this research was being done, there were four Teacher unions namely: PROTUZ, ZNUT, SESTUZ and PETUZ. There was mention that when Headteachers realised that Teacher Union leaders had become too confrontational, they started ignoring them in order to

create a gap between them and Teacher Union leaders. Because of this, Teacher Union leaders started influencing their members to attack Headteachers. As a result, instead of just ignoring them, they went further by surrendering all Teacher Union leaders to the District Education Board Secretaries' offices and this created fear among Teacher Union leaders. They said that from the time Headteachers started ignoring Teacher Union leaders, conflicts had been managed well.

The following sentiment from one of the Headteacher interviewees represents the prominent view point of Headteachers interviewed:

*These Teacher Union leaders are too demanding. Sometimes they are unrealistic. I know why they do this. They are fighting for clients to join their respective unions. It is a well-known fact, Sir, that there are four Teacher Unions. These are PROTUZ, SESTUZ, ZNUT and PETUZ. Hahaha! there are many more to be formed. This situation has created conflicts between Teacher Union leaders and us. At first we accommodated them. I am saying WE because we used to have meetings where we were resolving that we should start ignoring Teacher Union leaders if we were to manage conflicts well. For sure when we started doing this, we were able to manage conflicts, but of course, we had resistance which made us go further by surrendering Teacher Union leaders. Surrendering of these Teacher Union leaders created fear among them and hence they stopped attacking us and from that time we have been at peace. I am assuring you that ignoring Teacher Union leaders helps a lot in managing conflicts in these schools. All the Headteachers can tell you this. We discuss when we have meetings and we speak the same language.*

Truly this extract is a true picture of what was coming out from Headteachers.

#### *b. Education Board leaders*

Headteachers indicated that there were always conflicts between Education Board leaders and Headteachers concerning school fees, especially when it came to hiking of school fees. In the long run, Headteachers realised that if they ignored them they would be hiking school fees freely without any conflict. According to them, ignoring Education Board leaders was a solution to pegging higher fees without hindrance.

#### **One Headteacher interviewee had this to say:**

*The problem with Education Board leaders is that they want to be paying lower fees and yet costs of school requirements have gone up. Believe me or not, we are failing to run these schools efficiently because of insufficient funds and when we ask Education Board leaders to increase fees, it becomes a conflict. Sometimes they even tell us that we use three quarters of school fees*

*on allowances. It is for this reason that we decided to start ignoring them in order to avoid conflicting with them.*

This extract is a true representation of all the Headteachers who were interviewed.

#### *2. Reasons given by Teacher Union leaders for using ignoring as a conflict management strategy*

Teacher Union leaders said that they were comfortable with ignoring Headteachers because each time they did so, they had no problem. Even if things were not going on well, they left them as they were. They further said that each time they tried to attack the Headteachers on what their members felt was wrong, they would get annoyed and tell them that they would be surrendered. There were times the DEBS' office would ask Headteachers to release some of the teachers and this was an opportunity for Headteachers to surrender all the Teacher Union leaders who talked too much. Because of fear of being transferred, they tried as much as possible to ignore Headteachers. They said that they would not like to be transferred to remote areas. The researcher observed that truly remote areas did not have good facilities hence need to ignore headteachers was in order. Teacher Union leaders also expressed that their members did not support them when they were transferred, so it was better for them to ignore Headteachers. Another area of interest that came out strongly was the idea of promotion. They said that representing Teachers was not health because Teacher Union leaders had lost out on promotion. They said that being in conflict with Headteachers made them lose out on a lot of good things like being promoted and teaching in good schools.

#### **One of the Teacher Union leaders had this to say:**

*I am comfortable with ignoring my Headteacher because you will have no problem. Even if things are not going on well you leave them as they are. Each time I attack him, he gets annoyed and tells me that he will surrender me. Sir, there are times when the DEBS' office asks Headteachers to surrender some teachers and this is an opportunity for him to surrender all the Teacher Union leaders who talk too much. Because of fear of being transferred, I have tried as much as possible to ignore my Headteacher. Apart from this, I have lost out on my being promoted as Head of Department and besides, I would not like to be transferred to a remote area. Here, we have Peri-urban schools and Urban schools. Urban schools have good facilities which no teacher would like to leave. In order to keep away from conflicting with my Headteacher, I have decided to ignore him.*

#### *3. Reasons given by Education Board leaders for using ignoring as a conflict management strategy*

Education Board leaders said that they resorted to ignoring Headteachers because they had quarrelled too much on school fees. They complained that they would not afford to have school fees increased all the time because most of the parents

were not in formal employment. Each time they complained, Headteachers took it as an attack on them and so, they decided to be ignoring them.

### One Education Board leader had this to say:

*As I am talking, I was pruned from where I was working. This time I just do piece work which is not well paying. A lot of us are in this category. What parents have resorted to is that we just accept whatever amount schools charge and ignore Headteachers. What this means that we just pay what we can afford and not what the Headteacher and his teachers want. Because we have decided to ignore Headteachers, we no longer quarrel. There has been peace since then. School fees are no longer an issue to quarrel about.*

This issue of fees was coming out seriously and leading into Education Board leaders ignoring Headteachers.

Ignoring each other as a conflict management strategy is in line with Bramson, (1981) who found out that one could ignore the other person if they did not want to go into an argument. He termed this as silent treatment and it helps in the management of conflicts in organisations. He further found out that it was a good conflict management strategy when dealing with difficult people in organisations.

### 10.2 How effective are conflict management strategies found in schools?

Figure 2: Responses from Participants on the effectiveness of conflict management strategies found in schools

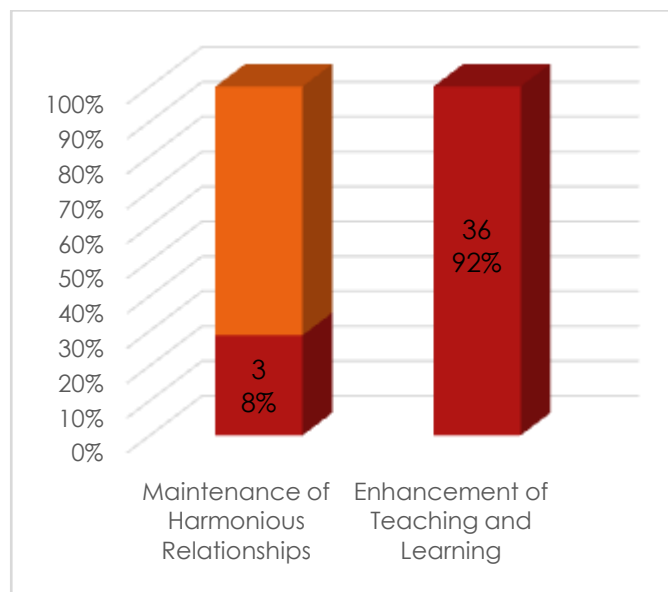


Figure 2 above shows the effectiveness of conflict management strategies found in schools. 92% represents 36 participants out of 39 participants who said that Teaching and Learning were enhanced within Schools. 8% represents 3

participants out of 39 participants who said that It helped maintain harmonious relationships.

Recognition of growing environmental ambiguity and the intensification of the demands and expectations placed on Headteachers in terms of provision of quality education in our Zambian Ministry of General Education, there is need for school leaders to provide any means of leadership which will contribute to the provision of quality education. In this study, ignoring each other has contributed to the provision of quality education in these schools. This means that teaching and learning have been enhanced according to the perceptions of participants. Although creation of harmonious relationships had received the lower percentage, it also contributed to the enhancement of teaching and learning in these schools.

On the side of Headteachers, the study revealed that ignoring helped them peg reasonably higher fees in order to beat up higher costs of school requirements, of which if parents were involved, they would not understand this situation because they always wanted to pay less fees. They said that running schools would only be effective if funds were enough. Furthermore, they said that each time they ignored Education Board leaders, things moved fast. One Headteacher indicated that he had managed to put up a one by three block of classrooms because he ignored Education Board leaders. He said that each time he consulted them they brought in a lot of issues and things were not moving until he just decided to start ignoring them. Respondents also said that Ministry of General Education had told them to come up with work plans. They said that each time they ignored Education Board leaders, they were able to fulfil almost all activities mentioned in their work plans.

### One Headteacher had this to say:

*I used to consult Education Board leaders and each time I did that, things were not moving as scheduled because we were just busy quarrelling, especially when we decided to put up a one by three block of classrooms. When I decided to start ignoring them, I managed to put up this block of classrooms which helped decongest two Grade ten classes and hence provision of effective delivery of teaching and learning situation.*

In order also for Headteachers to see to it that there was effective teaching, they had to ignore Teacher Union leaders since they were just busy attacking them. They said that ignoring them had created too much respect for Headteachers hence instilling fear into them. This study revealed that Teacher Union leaders, having the fear instilled into them, they were able to concentrate on teaching instead of attacking Headteachers all the time. This ignoring aspect helped to enhance teaching and learning in schools.

**One Headteacher Interviewee had this to say:**

*Let me also state that when we had Headteachers' meeting, at one time, we indicated that Teacher Union leaders had become too confrontational. It is from there that I decided to start ignoring them in order to create a gap between me and Teacher Union leaders. Because of this, they started influencing their members to attack me. As a result, instead of just ignoring them, I went further by surrendering all the Teacher Union leaders to the District Education Board Secretary's office and this created fear among teachers. From the time I started ignoring them and surrendering Teacher Union leaders, conflicts have been managed well. In this way, the rest of the teachers who have remained, have concentrated on teaching instead of attacking me all the time. Like this, teaching and learning have been enhanced at this school.*

Ignoring, being effective in this context, is in line with Gronn, (2002) who supported the idea that sometimes it was important for leaders to ignore subordinates in order to achieve certain goals accorded to them by the organisation. On the other hand, ignoring helped maintain harmonious relationships in these schools in that where people worked in harmony with each other there was productivity. According to the Human Relations model, an effective organisation is one which has healthy staff relationships (Nyongesa, 2007). Where there is harmony there is co-ordination among stakeholders involved in the educational process hence leading to quality education.

Maintenance of harmonious relationships is in line with Robinson, (2010) who observed that people who used ignoring strategy tended to ignore conflict and hence usually maintained a harmonious relationship.

On the side of Teacher Union leaders, it is evident that ignoring Headteachers had contributed to effective teaching and learning in that they concentrated on teaching instead of attacking Headteachers all the time. They said that the fear instilled into them had actually forced them to direct their energy on teaching and hence enhancement of teaching and learning.

**One of the Teacher Union leaders had this to say:**

*Truthfully speaking, Headteachers, having instilled fear in us, has contributed to effective teaching. This means that ignoring has helped me to concentrate on teaching hard because I have no chance of attacking the Headteacher.*

**Another Teacher Union leader had this to say:**

*Yaya! I agree with him. Mwandini, teaching has been enhanced in these schools. Some of our colleagues even stopped teaching. They were just busy concentrating on union matters in schools.*

**10.3 What challenges are found in enforcing conflict management strategies found in schools?**

Table 1: Responses from Participants on challenges faced in enforcing conflict management strategies found in schools

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Creation of Time Bomb	4	11.11%	11.11%
No team work	3	8.5%	19.61%
Unilateral Decision Making	1	3.41%	23.02%
Education Boards not Operated as Expected	31	76.9%	92.23%
Total	39	100%	100%

Table 1 above shows Participants on challenges faced in enforcing conflict management strategies found in schools. 11.11% represents 4 participants out of 39 participants who said that it created a time bomb. 8.5% represents 3 participants out of 39 participants who said that there was no teamwork. 3.41% represents 1 participant out of 39 participants who said that there was unilateral decision making. 76.9% represents 31 participants out of 39 participants who said that Education Boards were not operated as expected.

Despite teaching and learning being enhanced using ignoring as a conflict management strategy, there were still challenges encountered using the same strategy. There was consensus that using ignoring as a conflict management strategy had challenges in that the situation was becoming worse since, among them, feelings were hurt. Participants indicated that, quite fine, teaching and learning were enhanced, but Education Boards were not operating as expected.

**One Headteacher interviewee had this to say:**

*Although we ignore each other, we are sitting on a time bomb because ignoring each other does not mean the conflict is over.*

**One Teacher Union leader had this to say:**

*We are no longer operating as a team because we are busy ignoring each other. When there is a problem we need to sit, discuss it and find a solution to it, but this is not the case. Headteachers just decide on what is supposed to be done and we just follow without hesitation.*

The common feature which came out strongly as the biggest challenge was that Education Boards were not operated as expected.

**One Education Board leader came out strongly, thus:**

*We do not know what goes on in these schools. If we are to know, it is just scanty information. These Education Boards are just on paper. They do not operate as they were planned. I am sure what I am saying even others know. These Education Boards are not taken seriously. I am not saying they are not*



*operational, but they do not just operate as expected. That is why sometimes you hear that teachers have differed with Headteachers or parents have differed with Headteachers and teachers and pupils differing with Headteachers. This is the biggest challenge. Although ignoring each other has worked well with us, we need to realise that we are just pretending to be in harmony.*

This is in line with Mikgoro (1998), who came up with the philosophy of 'Ubuntu leadership' which means a person can only be a person through others. He contended that Ubuntu embodied the belief that an individual's most effective behaviour occurred when he or she was working towards the common good of the group. He further advised that school leaders and members must integrate Ubuntu into their processes, structures, policies and practices to benefit from this philosophy and that where teamwork was compromised this could not be achieved. This means that organizations like schools can only exist through interactive fora, collective value creation and clarification of self-accountability, decisions and actions should be consistent with group values.

Boon, (1996) offered a critical analysis of his findings. He indicated that critical organizational discussions took place in interactive fora where stakeholders worked collectively to create the values that would govern the organization. He further indicated that the fora occurred regularly and served to build trust and meaningful relationships among participants. This meant that members developed consensus on the core values and worked to narrow the gray areas in a manner similar to adaptive work and that participants considered the openness, interaction and integrity of the process as important as the outcome. He also contended that the group's value consensus provided a basis for members to exercise self accountability and accountability to each other. Members also handled serious matters such as lack of accountability or a value conflict, as a community rather than through a single leader. The challenge in using ignoring each other as a conflict management strategy in this study, compromises teamwork in that leaders do not examine each situation to core values. They are not accountable to their colleagues and cannot take any action they deem appropriate. Ultimately Mikgoro (1998), the use of Ubuntu in organizations results in a collective process of leadership and change that holds all members of the group responsible and accountable. In the case of ignoring each other and creation of a time bomb, this is in line with (William, 2005) who indicated that the 'iceberg' of latent and unexpressed conflicts included attitudes, values, feelings that manifested into hatred, fear, mistrust and intolerance among actors. This means that the situation in these schools may seem to be calm because conflicts have become immune. It is evident that conflicts in these schools have become immune hence sitting on a time bomb. On the part that schools are not operating as a system, this is in line with (Spillane and Oriana, 2005) who came up with the idea of distributed leadership as the notion that leadership is not the actions of the leaders per se but the

interactions between leaders and other agents. They contend that leadership is, therefore, an influencing relationship between leaders and followers that takes place in situations that can be described by their tools, routines and structures. From another theoretical perspective, systems theory or social constructivist perspective (Thyssen, 2003), leadership can be understood as the goal-oriented and specialized communication that aims at stimulating learning at all levels in schools. This communication concept is parallel to Spillane and Oriana's interaction concept because both focus on the relationship between leaders and teachers. The actions of the leader are only interesting if they are understood as leadership actions by the followers or co-leaders.

The interactions can be described by (Spillane and Oriana, 2005) as: collaborated distribution leaders work together in place and time to execute the same leadership routine; collective distribution leaders work separately but interdependently like in a game of football where each player performs separate functions in the same game or co-ordinated distribution leadership activities are performed in a particular sequence. It is evident that these leaders are not operating as a system. There is no systems' thinking in ignoring. It is essential for the establishment of a series of peace-enhancing structures among stakeholders, thus, consolidated democracy, restoration, justice and peace enhancing systems of communication, education and information. Not all of these particular structures would be necessarily essential in every context, but the point is that some kind of peace enhancing structures would be needed. By peace enhancing, it is meant those structures that would support, strengthen and sustain peace process over the long term. It is evident from findings that happiness and harmony in these schools was not sustainable.

#### 10.4 What alternative conflict management strategies can be proposed in dealing with conflict management issues in schools?

Figure 3: Responses from participants on the proposed alternative conflict management strategies in dealing with conflict management issues in schools

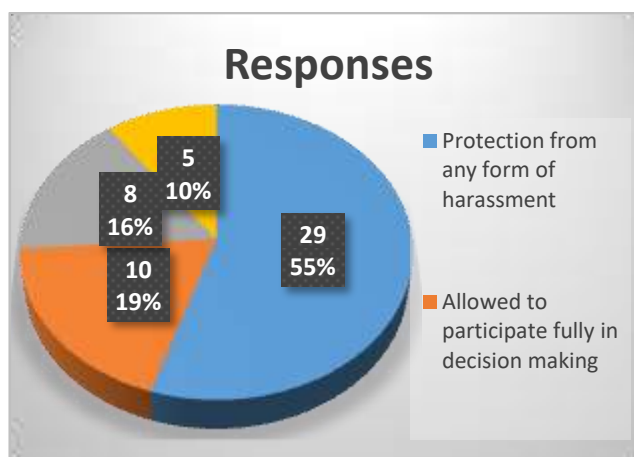


Figure 4 above shows responses from participants on the proposed alternative conflict management strategies in dealing with conflict management issues in schools. 55% represents 29 participants out of 52 participants who stated that they should be protected from any form of harassment. 19% represents 10 participants out of 52 who said that they should be allowed to participate fully in decision making in schools. 16% represents 8 participants out of 52 participants who said that apart from Headteachers other stakeholders should be recognised as leaders. 10% represents 5 participants out of 52 participants who said that Teacher Unions, Education Boards and School Councils should be strengthened.

Teacher Union leaders stated that they should be protected from any form of harassment in order for them to participate freely as they represented their members. Education Board leaders, Teacher Union leaders and School Council leaders said that they should be allowed to participate fully in decision making in schools. Furthermore, they said that apart from Headteachers, other stakeholders should be recognised as leaders and that Teacher Unions, Education Boards and School Councils should be strengthened. It is also evident that Headteachers should also be protected from attacks by Education Board leaders, Teacher Union leaders and pupils because emphasis on protection is just centred on other leaders.

**One Teacher Union leader had this to say:**

*In the first place, we would like our Headteachers to recognise us as leaders and that Teacher Unions should be used to manage conflicts in schools as long as we are involved in decision making. We want Teacher Unions to be strengthened so that our Headteachers know that the government has done its part by recognising us as leaders. Together, we can build our schools. Headteachers should stop the habit of threatening us by telling us that they will surrender and transfer us. It is a request with due respect as we you know that these are our leaders, to help us represent our members fully on matters affecting them.*

**One Education Board leader had this to say:**

*As for us, the major complaint is that we are not very much involved in decision making as far as we are concerned. We are also requesting Headteachers to take establishment of Education Boards seriously, otherwise as parents, we are not happy with the way Education Boards are running as government wants them to run. Instead of working together, we have no say in certain areas, especially when it comes to school fees. Sometimes we just receive letters that fees have been hiked and this scenario has created conflicts. We need to be treated as leaders too. Let us work together as a team.*

**One School Council leader had this to say:**

*School Councils are just on paper. In some schools, they are not even there. All we are told is that there is no need for School Councils since the Headboy and the Headgirl are already on the Education Board representing their fellow pupils, but we want an independent body with its own elected members. We want to be given a voice. Our teachers think they can think on our behalf. Sometimes we do not co-operate with them because they do not involve us in decision making. When we complain to the administration concerning teachers who do not want to teach, the teachers we complain against, threaten us. If we had a body, we would be protected. If School Councils are fully in place, we will be happy and even the riotous behaviour you hear about in newspapers will go.*

**One Headteacher had this to say:**

*I feel Teacher Union leaders, Education Board leaders and School Council leaders do not appreciate us. What do I mean? On the side of Teacher Union leaders, the problem is that they want to win all the time. Whatever they want to achieve, should be achieved against all odds. For example, I do not want to go into details here. Just as much as we appreciate Teacher Union leaders are leaders, but they should bear in their minds that they are our subordinates. Anyway, I appreciate the way the Union leader, who is with us here, addressed us. This is how it should be. I wish all the other Union leaders did the same. Let me not dwell much on this one. What I am emphasising on is that they should approach us with respect. Sometimes they approach us as if we are not their superiors. That is why sometimes we create barriers by ignoring them.*

*If we are to work together with Teacher Union leaders in order to uphold democracy and partnership, they should ensure that they also respect us by understanding our superior positions. On the side of Education Board leaders, I feel on behalf of my fellow Headteachers, we hold meetings all the times. Education Board meetings are scheduled every year. We are all Secretaries of Education Boards. The meetings are chaired by Education Board Chairpersons. This is simply indicating that Education Board leaders are involved or allowed to participate in school matters. I feel the problem is that they want us to accept everything they say. It is not just possible. They must understand that Headteachers cannot accept everything. On the issue of school fees, most of the times parents want to pay very little, but school requirements have gone up. When we try to reason with them, they react negatively. What we would like to see in these leaders is that they should be democratic too by allowing us to express our views. Like this, we will be able to move together. On the side of our pupils, you should not worry in anyway, we will address your concerns.*

Apparently, the findings are in agreement with Ting-Toomey (2001) who found out that the core values of an organisation include: respect for hierarchy; building relationships through reciprocal obligations. Generally speaking, where there is group orientation and harmony, conflicts may be minimised. In building relationships, (Hodgkinson, 1991), advises school leaders to lead and manage with proper reference to the broader environmental context of their communities. It is evident from findings that the mentioned leaders were not consistent or compatible with each other and this has led to the generation of inconsistencies and conflicts reported from time to time in these schools. Therefore, it is a fact that trust is nurtured through relationships, through information and through knowledge. From the findings, these leaders have concentrated on enhancing teaching and learning and fostering relationships comes at the bottom of their priorities, yet it is through mutuality that stakeholders sign up to common goals. Trust is the super glue that binds these elements together and connects the school's internal community with its outside communities. According to Riley and Stoll, (1995), trust cannot be assumed, but it has to be created and it has to be earned. Louis and Kruse, (1995), indicate that educational reforms are doomed to fail, unless trusting relationships are present among teachers, school leaders, parents and students. They further indicate that trust is leadership in response to the community.

These sentiments are also supported by Mulford (2005) who suggested, on the basis of his findings from a large Australian school leadership research project, that reforms should be related to one factor of distributed leadership. According to him, teachers should be involved in leadership in order to feel cared for and valued and to be involved in decision making. This factor indicates that development and learning should be a unifying focus and shared insights into what the school is doing and why it is doing it. By so doing, Teacher Union leaders are able to co-operate with Headteachers. It is evident that Teacher Union leaders are operating in fear and that there is no co-existence. This is in line with the 1996 Educating Our Future Policy that encourages and strengthens partnerships and democracy in educational development.

On the side of School Council leaders, they indicated that they should be involved in decision making. Their sentiments were in line with Save the Children (2002) which pointed out that girls and boys had the right to be involved in decisions affecting them. Furthermore, Government should ensure that girls' and boys' views are sought and considered in all matters that affect them. It further indicated that children of any age should be allowed to express their views. This means that decision making bodies, other institutions and families must listen to children and take their views. Contributing to conflict management strategies, Save the Children (2002), asserts that if children participate in matters affecting them it may help manage conflicts in schools as School Councils help children to co-operate with adults and fellow children. Save the Children also indicated that the whole ethos of the school

changed as pupils exerted a positive influence over one another through the structures that gave them responsibility for decision making. Furthermore, it indicated that anti-social behaviour became the responsibility of the class and consequently the authority of anti-social groups diminished. They concluded that teachers were able to spend less time tackling issues such as bullying, disruptive behaviour, truancy, vandalism and exclusions and teachers had more time for teaching, stress levels reduced, relationships between teachers and pupils improved and the learning environment became more effective. In this case, pupils felt responsible as partners in their own education and were able to make the most of the learning opportunities offered by the schools. Therefore, involving School Council leaders in decision making could be an alternative conflict management strategy which would protect them from any form of harassment.

## XI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 11.1 Conclusions

As a reminder to the readers, this study was looking at conflict management strategies among secondary school leaders. The problem that was identified for this study was that despite Ministry of General Education great investment in coming up with democracy and partnership as a way of encouraging educational leaders to live together, there were still conflicts reported from time to time in schools. The summary of the main findings is presented as guided by the research questions. This study has revealed that headteachers, Teacher Union leaders, Education Board leaders and School Council leaders had resorted to ignoring each other as a conflict management strategy which had helped them in terms of managing conflicts in their respective schools. This conflict management strategy had also helped them in the enhancement of teaching and learning in these schools. This study has also revealed that while these stakeholders were enjoying peace and had created enhancement of teaching and learning, there were challenges they were encountering. The main challenge which came out strongly was that Education Boards established by Ministry of General Education were not operated as expected. Because of this great challenge, Headteachers, Teacher Union leaders, Education Board leaders and School Council leaders resolved that they should be protected from any form of harassment if they were to live in harmony with each other hence proper management of conflicts.

### 11.2 Recommendations

- Headteachers, Teacher Union leaders and Education Board leaders should avoid ignoring one another because this compromises systems' thinking.
- Even if ignoring has contributed to the enhancement of teaching and learning within schools, the above mentioned leaders should live in harmony with one another.
- Education Boards should operate as expected.



- Headteachers, Teacher Union leaders, Education Board leaders and School Council leaders should be protected from all forms of harassment.

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