

CONFLICTS BETWEEN TEACHERS AT A LIBYAN SCHOOL: CAUSES AND ITS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES (QUALITATIVE STUDY)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the reasons behind conflict and the techniques that teaching staff members and managers use to resolve it. This study used the descriptive case study method and qualitative research. The research involved eight Libyan primary school teachers and managers. Semi-interviews were used to collect the data, which was then analyzed by thematic analysis. The result reveals that task conflict is the most prominent type of conflict. After investigating the reasons behind the disputes between teachers and managers, the findings show misunderstanding, breaking the principles, work overload, individual differences, and poor communication are the primary causes of their disagreement. The finding also shows that the strategies that are used to handle these conflicts are dominating, avoidances, collaboration, effective communication, accommodation, and compromising. This study has crucial implications: while dominating and avoidance might be better not used or used wisely, collaboration, effective communication, accommodation, and compromising should be used widely for their effectiveness

Keywords: Primary teachers, managers, conflict management strategies

Introduction:

The word "conflict" often evokes negative feelings in our thoughts. When we hear the word conflict, we often think of various conflicts, such as global wars or disputes between people over minor or major matters. However, conflict is a multifaceted phenomenon that can happen anywhere and in a variety of ways. Conflict is defined simply as the emergence of differences in ideas, viewpoints, and interests (Wallenstein, 2015). Rahim 2023 defines it as an interacting process that results in incompatibility, disagreement, or inconsistency inside or between social entities. Conflict is inevitable and can arise in homes, workplaces, and educational institutions. Normally, an organization has many employers and employees, and there is a possibility of conflict between them. Every interaction between two or more individuals has the potential to result in conflict. Due to conflict, members may find it difficult to communicate with one another, which will reduce commitment to completing duties and advancing the business. As a result, workers may become anxious and distrustful, which may affect their productivity. Recently, conflict has been shown to have positive impacts if it is managed in the right way.

Many recent studies carried out in many countries around the world study conflict on multiple perspectives (Anderson, 2023; Ashraf at all., 2023; and Whincup at all, 2023). However, there is no study about the conflict in primary schools in Libya. Therefore, this study will fill the gap and be a valuable resource for researchers who are interested in studying conflict in schools in general. It tries to investigate the reasons of conflict between primary teachers and managers and how they address this issue through various strategies.

Literature review

Handling any problem effectively using different styles is called a conflict management strategy. These approaches are employed to resolve a dispute in a way that prevents unfavourable outcomes. The purpose of conflict management is to prevent threatening impacts within the organization (Abdulraheem, 2020). When conflicts are handled properly, they can inspire creative thought, which makes them both beneficial and important (Kim and Leung, 2012). While it is crucial to be aware of each aspect of a conflict and to use an appropriate style of conflict management, it is just as crucial to understand how people view conflict, accurately diagnose and comprehend its types and causes, and choose a response strategy (Shanka & Thuo 2017). Each of these three important matters is discussed, respectively.

Types of Conflict

Any kind of organization may have some kind of dispute. These are task conflict, relationship conflict (Daft and Marcic, 2013), and process conflict (Robbins, 2014). The first type is task conflict. It has to do with both the goals and the topic of the task. It happens when there are disagreements between individuals over the objectives to be met or the nature of the duties that must be done. The second type is relationship conflict: Interpersonal interactions are the main focus of relationship conflict. It relates to the arguments that happen between different managers. When they are not compatible with one another, it leads to interpersonal conflict and personal dislike. The last type is process conflict. It refers to the process of completing a task. Surprisingly, these types of conflicts might be functional or dysfunctional. Both task conflict and process conflict are functional. They are

generally thought to be advantageous since they improve decision-making as well as problem-solving skills. When conflict leads to better decisions, it is beneficial because it provides an opportunity for the discussion of issues and the release of anxieties, creates an atmosphere suitable for self-evaluation and development, and inspires imaginative thinking in group members. Conversely, the existence of relationship conflict is considered dysfunctional because it is believed that the previously stated results have been greatly decreased (Daft and Marcic, 2013).

Causes of conflict

Conflict can arise from various sources. A major contributing factor is inadequate communication. Communication problems can lead to conflict (Daft and Marcic, 2013). Any team can experience poor communication while they are discussing different matters related to their work. This may lead to a dispute between them. In addition, conflict can appear due to individual differences and cultural differences (White, 2008). In one working place, many individuals might be from different areas with different cultures, thoughts, experiences, and beliefs. Such a reason probably might lead to an argument between them. Moreover, Dai and Chen (2017) add that misunderstandings and misperceptions cause some issues in the majority of interpersonal disagreements. Instead of making an effort to comprehend the viewpoints of others, people frequently assume what others mean by their actions and intentions without really knowing them. They also add that competition over resources like funds, services, or products causes arguments between different managers. Conflict is almost unavoidable when people or teams have to fight for limited or diminishing resources. The last reason might be due to different goals. Each employee and employer have their own goals connected to their job. These differences might lead to a dispute between them in their organization. Conflict between a manager and a subordinate, for instance, can arise when the subordinate's job is unclear and each side understands it differently (Whitlam & Cameron, 2012). To sum up, conflict can result from poor communication, competition, individual and cultural differences, goal differences, misunderstandings, competition over resources, and others.

Conflict management strategies

There are many approaches for handling and resolving disputes. These are conflict management strategies and conflict resolution, and both of them are similar. They might be different on four faces. Firstly, while "conflict resolution" is the process of ending conflict, "conflict management" aims to lessen the detrimental effects of disputes. (Redpath et al., 2013). Secondly, conflict strategies vary from forcing to the other extreme of conflict avoidance. Conversely, conflict resolution refers to a scenario in which parties involved in a conflict reach a mutual understanding to resolve their fundamental differences, acknowledge each other's ongoing status as parties, and put an end to any violent actions taken against one another. Thirdly, conflict management can occur prior to, during, or following a disagreement, but conflict resolution frequently occurs "after" the conflict arises (Wallensteen, 2015). Finally, negotiation, arbitration, bargaining, and mediation fit under the heading of conflict resolution. On the other hand, conflict management strategies have five main strategies. Skilled individuals adapt their approach to the particular circumstance. There are situations where each of the five styles is acceptable. When someone disagrees with others, these conflict resolution techniques are often helpful. (Daft and Marcic, 2013). These strategies are:

1- Avoiding style

It is characterized by low care for oneself and others. It is described as uncooperative (Wilmot and Hocker, 2001); it is ineffectual and unsuitable (Gross and Guerrero, 2000). When the administrator wishes to stay out of the conflict, they utilize this style. Under such a style, the administrator is neither interested in imposing his own behavior nor in assisting others in reaching their aims. When the issue is unimportant to the administrators, they will employ this approach, which is called the passive approach. Administrators who adopt an avoidance strategy don't feel satisfied with themselves or the other person (Farooqi et al. 2013). Rahim (2002) stated that using this method to make rash decisions is improper. If success is impossible to achieve, this approach is appropriate.

2 The dominating styles

It is also called forcing or competing strategy. Conducting this strategy shows that one has a high regard for oneself and a low regard for others. Rahim (2002) asserts that this is behaviour that is forced in order to win. When managers utilize a dominant style, they use harsh tactics to attain their aims and satisfy their own worries while also acquiring authority, all without regard for others. This style might not be suitable and effective in a democratic society (Wilmot and Hocker, 2001).

3The collaboration style

It is called integrating, or problem solving. This strategy's outcome is win-win. Both parties are winners. The collaborative style is crucial. When diverse viewpoints must be combined to create a comprehensive solution and when commitment from all parties is required for a consensus. It is suitable and effective because it gives both

parties access to the other person's perspectives on incompatible aims, allowing them to work together to find a solution that meets their requirements and achieves their goals. By using style, managers can generate positive results. Managers are able to generate positive results by incorporating style. However, it is believed that the diversity of human behavior and interests makes it challenging to implement an integrated style due to their differences (Griffin & Moorhead, 2007).

4 The compromising style.

It is considered a medium ground when self and other-care concerns are almost prominent. Depending on its nature, compromise can be either active or passive. Additionally, this tactic is seen as appropriate, successful, and relatively direct (Griffin & Moorhead, 2007). It is appropriate in situations where both parties have equally vital aims, when opponents are equally powerful and both sides wish to make a compromise, or when quick decisions must be made. Furthermore, some professionals believed it to be more giving up than desired. It is a mixture of agreeable connections between the parties. Rahim (2023) asserts that this approach works well when both sides have significant objectives to meet.

5 The accommodating style.

It shows a high level of concern for others and a low level of concern for oneself. Put differently, it's a tactic used by people to give up on their own demands and comply with the desires of others. It denotes a high degree of cooperation; the main goal of this strategy is to preserve the relationship. People who employ this tactic are seen as suitable but ineffective (Griffin & Moorhead, 2007).

Different studies from literature

In literature, there are different studies conducted in different countries, and these studies relate to the conflicts that happen in schools. This research investigates this issue from different perspectives and using different methods.

The study of Shanka and Thou (2017) examines the various strategies taken to handle and settle disputes between teachers and administrators in Wolaita government primary schools in Ethiopia. Their study is a quantitative study. Their data were collected using 146 questionnaires and 70 interviews. Their findings show that primary school conflicts can be categorized into three areas: institutional, work, and leadership. Institutional conflicts include inadequate resource distribution and infrastructure, work issues like low performance, lack of competence, and absenteeism. Work conflicts involve low performance, work overload, and poor implementation of policies. The research highlights issues with leadership, including false reports, poor rule implementation, poor communication, and a lack of involvement in decision-making, as well as training opportunities. They also found that conversations, force, punishment, compromise, avoidance, and ignorance are different strategies used to handle their conflict. In another study conducted in two Greek regions (Saiti, 2015), the findings demonstrated that interpersonal and organizational factors are the primary causes of school conflicts, which frequently occur in educational settings. Furthermore, the findings indicated that, compared to other areas, urban schools have a higher likelihood of experiencing these disputes. This study backs up the idea that developing a positive conflict management approach and improving student performance require integration, teamwork, and coherence.

Throughout their study, Morake and others (2019) found that the primary reason for conflict between teachers in Botswana's southern regions is personality conflicts, a communication breakdown, and scarce or nonexistent resources. Depending on the nature of the disagreement, the educational managers suggested using cooperation, avoiding, competing, and compromising techniques to resolve it. The finding implies that there is an issue when educational administrators take on leadership roles without receiving sufficient preparation previously. Another study's investigation was to ascertain how conflict management approaches relate to secondary school teachers' effectiveness. The study's target population consisted of male and female secondary school students in the Punjab Province. The results of the investigation showed a strong correlation between secondary school teachers' performance and their conflict management approaches. Additionally, data showed that teachers' success was positively correlated with integrating, obliging, and dominant styles, but that avoided and compromised styles had a negative impact on the effectiveness of teachers. They also found that the integrating, dominating, and accommodating styles have a favorable correlation with output. Teachers in secondary schools perform better at work when they use these dispute resolution techniques. Conversely, the avoidance and compromising approach to dispute resolution has a negative impact on teachers' performance (Faroqi et al., 2016).

The case study

Before revealing the finding of the study, the explanation of the organizational structures is provided making certain that readers are fully aware of the background circumstances. The data was collected from three different

public schools in Libya. These public schools are administered by the Libyan ministry of education which focuses on the management and organizational structure of the schools. The majority of participants in this study are from the same public school while the two participants are from two different schools. All the three schools are from the same city, Al_Zawia, and they are not far away from each other. All the three schools have only primary level (1-6) and preparatory level (7-9). They do not have secondary levels. Each school has a hierarchical organizational structure and is led by a director. Each level has their own director. The leader of primary level is different from the leader of the preparatory level. Before 2020, the system of administration consists only from one department related to the director and two secretaries. However, recently there are many departments and many managers cooperate together with the teachers, such as financial supervisor, store keeper, library manager, the manager of information technology and social workers. It is significant to note that the primary school level was chosen for this study's focus on investigating the conflicts that happen in these schools between teachers and managers.

The research's objective

The purpose of this study is to investigate 'How do teaching staff members and managers manage their conflicts?'. In order to address the primary research issue, the following questions were developed:

1. What types of conflicts usually happen between teaching staff members and managers?
2. What are the common sources of conflict between teachers and managers?
3. What strategies do teachers and managers use to solve their conflicts?

The study is an original research. It allows the reader to view and read the subject in all of its aspects. It is believed that the research will contribute to the subject of education management. The findings, the recommendations and implementation will provide insight for researchers, teachers, and school administrators.

Method

Research design

This research is a qualitative study and it was designed as a descriptive case study. A qualitative study is a collection of methods for gathering and analyzing data that seeks to understand and explore real-world issues. It also helps in generating a new hypothesis. In addition, participants' views, behaviors, feelings, and experiences are gathered in qualitative research (Tonon, 2015). Conversely, it is not like a quantitative study that addresses quantity or number, and which starts with hypotheses in order to support or refute them (Gray et al., 2007).

As a descriptive case study, this research was planned. An in-depth examination of a single person or small sample size is used in a qualitative descriptive case study, which limits its conclusions to that person or group in a particular context (Glesne, 2016). In order to investigate a particular aspect of a complicated phenomenon, this descriptive-qualitative methodology is employed. Case studies that are descriptive attempt to fully explain in detail an event within its specific context (Aytton, 2023). The descriptive case in this research is teachers from different primary schools and the study topic is conflict management. This topic is examined deeply and the findings only present the teachers who were included in this study.

Sample of the Research

The sample for this study consists of eight teachers and managers who work at different schools in Al-Zawia, Libya, during the autumn term of 2023–2024. One could argue that the research project's time frame restricts the number of participants, which could have an impact on the study's reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Maylor and Blackmon (2005) argue that a qualitative multiple participant study could have eight individuals in order for the results to be generally applicable. Purposive sampling and criterion sampling was used to select the sample. Purposive sampling is based on the evaluation of the researcher who will provide the greatest amount of data to achieve the study's objectives. Criterion sampling allows for the acquisition of rich data and detailed information (Etikan and Bala, 2017). As a result, the study's requirement is that teachers had to experience conflict in their school in order to share their opinions about the causes of conflicts and how to handle them. The aim of this research paper is to investigate how managers and teachers manage conflict between them. In order to address such a matter, the researcher decided to choose teaching staff members who have been teaching for more than two years. Although the conflict is inevitable, the researcher believes that having experienced members will absolutely help in addressing the objectives of this study in detail.

Data Collection Tool and Collection of Data

The tool that is used in this study is a semi-structured interview. Some of the open-ended questions were initially prepared by the researchers, while the rest were asked during the interview to explore the matter in more detail (Newcomer et al, 2015). Galletta (2013) states that semi-structured interviews are ideal for many valuable tasks, especially when several of the open-ended questions call for additional questioning. Semi-structured data

collection is used in the majority of qualitative descriptive studies since it is a dependable method compared to other qualitative research. The data analysis techniques are typically more categorical and less conceptual. Thus, student researchers would find this study design ideal for their research. The investigations can be carried out more quickly than with other study designs because of their simple methodology (Ayton, 2023).

The authors' interview questions were intended to investigate the causes and the types of conflicts that the teachers face with their colleagues, with their boss and with the rules of their schools. In addition, the teachers were asked how to manage the dispute that they had with their supervisors, their coworkers, and the regulations of their educational institutions. Two management professionals were asked for their thoughts in order to assess the internal validity of the research's questions. Following that, the pilot study was carried out using two primary school teachers to investigate the effectiveness of the questions. The investigation of the pilot study shows that two questions were not effective, so they were rephrased to obtain further details.

To confirm the validity and reliability of the study, two research experts looked over the data at each stage. The research findings were presented in detail, and the data were presented exactly as they were. In order to guarantee consistency, the researcher applied the data's coding and theming. The researcher was able to generate themes and analyze the data more easily by labeling and grouping comparable types of data using this technique.

Interviews with participants were conducted using different social media platforms. This tool was used because the researcher is not in the study context. Each teacher was met individually after finishing their work and when we agreed on a specific time. During the interview, the answers were written, and then the answers were translated from Arabic to English by the researcher, who specializes in this topic. Each participant was seen individually to conduct a detailed exploration of the matter, and interviews typically lasted between forty and fifty minutes.

Analysis of Data

The "thematic analysis" (TA) methods were used to analyze the data. It is defined as a technique for determining, evaluating, and understanding "themes," or meaningful patterns, in qualitative data. TA is used in experiential research to identify patterns in data related to participants' experiences, perspectives, and behaviors (Clarke & Braun 2017). According to Braun and Clarke (2013), there are six stages of TA. These are: 'familiarisation with the data', coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up'. Firstly, the interaction was thoroughly transcribed and read multiple times for a comprehensive understanding of the content. Then, the codes were tentatively identified. These codes correspond to the aspects of the data that seem significant and fascinating. These codes give an idea of the conversation's context, although they are more numerous and detailed than themes. The third step was finding the themes and connecting them with codes. Later, the themes are reviewed, defined, and named. In the last step, the analysis was used to address the research question, how do teachers and managers handle their conflicts?''.

Each teacher was given a unique number to represent their ideas in the survey; names were kept secret to ensure participant privacy. The first teacher was presented as T1, and the tenth teacher as T8. In an effort to give the research validity, the participating teachers' comments were given as quotes.

Ethical considerations

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and all participants were made aware of the study's aim. The informed consent form that participants signed stated that they were under no obligation to continue with this study and that their participation was entirely optional.

Findings

Three research questions listed in the research introduction served as the foundation for the presentation of the research findings. To answer the main question; how Libyan teachers and managers manage their conflicts? three main themes are presented respectively in this part: types of conflicts, causes of conflicts and strategies they use for managing their conflicts.

Theme one: types of conflicts

Under this theme, there are three subthemes according to three different types of conflict: task conflict, relationship conflict, and process conflict. According to the result, the majority of conflicts are task conflicts in which teachers have a dispute with other teachers regarding their work. Under the first subtheme, there are four subthemes. First subtheme, the majority of problems relate to 'problems from the teachers whom their children are taught by other teachers'. Secondly, issues relate to the 'attendance record'. Thirdly, issues relate to the class time. Fourthly, other issues relate to different contexts.

Firstly, five teachers mention that they have a dispute with ‘the teachers whom they teach their children’. These are teachers T1, T4, T6, T7, and T8. They say:

I had many problems with teachers who taught their daughters. If they find out that their daughters do not understand the lesson, they would like me to teach them in order to teach their daughters at home. I mean that the teachers come to me and ask me to explain something that they do not understand. **T1**

They come up to me in class and nervously inquire about their children's missing marks. Why did you reduce their children's marks even though they got a perfect mark on the exam? **T6**

They like to get into everything. During this year, approximately 7 to 8 teachers come to me to ask about their children whom I teach. Most of their questions are: Why did you give my son an incomplete mark in the English language subject that I teach? And every time I have to explain to them the reason, **T7**

It may occur as a result of a complaint from the teacher's son or daughter, telling the teacher's mother that one of the teachers is not good at teaching and giving information. **T8**

Second subtheme, four teachers state that most of the disputes that happen between teachers relate to ‘attendance record’. These are T2, T3, T6, and T8. During the interview, they say

Being responsible for the attendance and absence record, most of the problems happen to me regarding this matter. Some teachers come late to the school and I prevent them from signing. **T2**

Each teacher should come on time and leave on time. These are some of the principles of the school, and we should apply them. These principles are established by the Ministry of Education in order to carry on the education process; neglecting these principles will absolutely lead to corrupting our school. **T8**

Third subtheme, disagreements relate to the ‘class time’. This problem is mentioned by T1 and T5.

Yes, another problem happened, and it still happens sometimes between me and the teacher who has a lesson before me. Her lesson should finish, but most of the time she takes five minutes from the limited time of my lesson. **T1**

There was a problem that happened between me and a teacher last semester. The whole semester, on Wednesday, she took the time for my lesson. She told me that ‘this is her time, and it is not mine’. **T1**

Most of the problems occur when another teacher takes my class time. Most of the time, she takes 10 minutes, and I may have 35 minutes left for explaining my lesson, and this time may not be enough. This actually makes me annoyed. **T5**

Fourth subtheme, there are other disagreements that occur between teachers. These relate to the task type of conflict and relate to different contexts, as they were mentioned by many participants:

When I heard it, I was upset. I went to her, and I told her why you let the inspector get inside my class and evaluate my students instead of me. What you did is against the rule of the education ministry. **T1**

The only problem that bothered me was with the Islamic education teacher who teaches in the other classrooms. She had a circumstance, and as a result, I taught on her behalf. It took days, and I was exhausted, to do her job. **T3**

The problem that occurred between me and the teacher was because of the exam topic. We put the questions together, but our typical answers were different. It became problematic to determine which answers would be accepted. **T3**

Problems from some colleagues who are teaching the sixth grade primary students in the same academic year. When I ask about something in the curriculum or when I ask them to clarify some points for me, they do not give an answer and do not like to help me. This makes me hesitate to speak with them or ask them any questions. **T7**

Under the second subtheme, ‘relationship conflict’, there are a few cases that show that the conflict that happened between them relates to the social relationship between them and does not relate to their work. These are mentioned by two participants, T7 and T8.

Sometimes problems may occur between teachers as a result of their presence in their room during rest periods between lessons. **T7**

Some problems may also occur as a result of their presence and dialogue in one room, especially for female teachers, during their free time. These problems may be social and not related to the work. **T8**

Under the third subtheme, ‘process conflict’, there is only one case where a teacher and the boss mention it. This appears at the beginning of the study and during the conference between teachers when they discuss the distribution of the subjects. In other words, what each teacher is going to teach and how many classes will be taught by them. One teacher mentions it, and the boss talks about the same dispute:

Teachers who have experience do not argue or oppose the distribution of schedules, and this causes us to suffer psychologically. They force us to teach more classes than others under the claim that we are experienced teachers, and this creates discussion and debate between us. We are often not satisfied about that. I am also forced to teach mathematics, which is not my specialty. My specialty is science. Due to a shortage of mathematics teachers, I am forced to teach it. **T5**

Most problems occur at the beginning of the semester, when the schedule is distributed. Some teachers are dissatisfied with the division of subjects and the study schedule. They have disputes with each other, especially when they compare their work. **T8**

Theme two: causes of conflicts

Most of the conflicts that happen between the teaching staff members and the managers are identified as having five main causes: misunderstanding, breaking the regulation, **work overload**, individual differences, and poor communication. These are classified into five main subthemes according to the results.

Starting with the misunderstanding subtheme, many cases show a misunderstanding between the teachers. The majority of teachers ask other teachers (T1, T4, T6, T7) who teach their children about reducing their marks. The teachers who teach have to explain and clarify the reason. For example, as with what happened with teachers 6 and 7,

They come up to me in class and nervously inquire about their children's missing marks. Why did you reduce their children's marks even though they got a perfect mark on the exam? I have to clarify to them that participation in the class is the most important part of evaluation. **T6**

They like to get into everything. During this year, approximately 7 to 8 teachers come to me to ask about their children whom I teach. Most of their questions are: Why did you give my son an incomplete mark in the English language subject that I teach? And every time I have to explain to them why **T7**

Another subtheme: 'breaking the regulation' and the laws of the school is another reason behind the conflict between managers and teachers. This relates to breaking three main principles: 'attendance record, class time', and 'breaking the rules'. Many teachers and managers state that most of the disputes that happen between them relate to 'attendance records'. Many teachers, as stated, do not come on time. They come late. The manager T2 and the boss T8 clarify the point by saying:

Being responsible for the attendance and absence record, most of the problems happen to me regarding this matter. Some teachers come late to the school, and I prevent them from signing. **T2**

Each teacher should come on time and leave on time. These are some of the principles of the school, and we should apply them. These principles are established by the Ministry of Education in order to carry on the education process; neglecting these principles will absolutely lead to corrupting our school. **T8**

Not following the principle of 'class time' causes disagreement between teachers. This problem is mentioned by T1 and T5.

Yes, another problem happened, and it still happens sometimes between me and the teacher who has a lesson before me. Her lesson should finish, but most of the time she takes five minutes from the limited time of my lesson. **T1**

There was a problem that happened between me and a teacher last semester. The whole semester, on Wednesday, she took the time for my lesson. She told me that 'this is her time, and it is not mine'. **T1**

Most of the problems occur when another teacher takes my class time. Most of the time, she takes 10 minutes, and I may have 35 minutes left for explaining my lesson, and this time may not be enough. This actually makes me annoyed. **T5**

The teacher, the boss, and the inspector—all of them might 'break the rules' and this is what happened in case T1. T1 left the school on party day, and she should stay till the end of departure time according to the rules of the education ministry. Here is what she says:

When I heard it, I was upset. I went to her, and I told her why you let the inspector get inside my class and evaluate my students instead of me. What you did is against the rule of the education ministry. **T1**

Under the subtheme of work overload, the participants' speech may indicate that. This is clear from the speeches of teachers T3, T5, and their boss T8:

The only problem that bothered me was with the Islamic education teacher who teaches in the other classrooms. She had an urgent circumstance, and as a result, I taught on her behalf. It took 2 weeks, and I was exhausted to do both my job and her job as well. **T3**

Teachers who have experience do not argue or oppose the distribution of schedules, and this causes us to suffer psychologically. They force us to teach more classes than others under the claim that we are experienced teachers, and this creates discussion and debate between us. We are often not satisfied about that. I am also forced to teach mathematics, which is not my specialty. My specialty is science. Due to a shortage of mathematics teachers, I am forced to teach it. **T5**

Some teachers are dissatisfied with the division of subjects and the study schedule. They argue because they took more subjects than others. I do not divide equally and fairly because some teachers have more experience than others in the field of teaching, and the rest of the teachers do not have experience or competence, especially in teaching students in advanced stages. **T8**

Under another subtheme, individual differences as a reason for a conflict emerge from the data. This might be clear from the speeches of participants T3, T7, and T8.

The problem that occurred between me and the teacher was because of the exam topic. We put the questions together, but our typical answers were different. It became problematic to determine which answers would be accepted. **T3**

Sometimes problems may occur between teachers as a result of their presence in their room during rest periods between lessons. **T7**

Some problems may also occur as a result of their presence and dialogue in one room, especially for female teachers, during their free time. These problems may be social and not related to the work. **T8**

Finally, poor communication is only presented in one case that shows that one teacher asks other teachers for help but they prevent it. This might also show competition and grudges between them.

Problems from some colleagues who are teaching the sixth grade primary students in the same academic year. When I ask about something in the curriculum or when I ask them to clarify some points for me, they do not give an answer and do not like to help me. This makes me hesitate to speak with them or ask them any questions. **T7**

Theme three: strategies are used.

The majority of the strategies that are known to solve the conflict are used by the participants in different contexts. Under this theme, there are six subthemes: dominating, avoidances, collaboration, effective communication, accommodation, and compromising.

Starting with the dominating or forcing strategy, this strategy was mentioned by three participants. It was used by participant T1 in a suitable and appropriate manner with another teacher. It is mentioned by Manager 8 to enforce the principles and rules of the school. Conversely, it was used forcedly against participant 5, which led her to leave the school, and against participant 3 as well, instead of finding another solution to solve the problem, such as having substitute teachers, and here is what they say:

The first and second times, I knocked on the door, and I told her that it was my time now. But later, I started to get into the class and put my bag on the table inside the class. She does not understand. I have to do that. **T1**

Each teacher should come on time and leave on time. These are some of the principles of the school, and we should apply them. These principles are established by the Ministry of Education in order to carry on the education process, neglecting these principles will absolutely lead to corruption and the collapse of our school. **T8**

I was given more classes compared to other teachers, in addition to being forced to teach mathematics, which is not my specialty. My specialty is science. Due to a shortage of mathematics teachers, I am forced to teach it. **T5** They force us to teach more classes than others under the claim that we are experienced teachers, and this creates debate between us, and we are often not satisfied about that. Last year, I had to transfer from one school to another as a result of these problems that happened to me. I am now at another school teaching science, and I am in a better situation. **T5**

The only problem that bothered me was with the Islamic education teacher who teaches in the other classrooms. She had an urgent circumstance, and as a result, I taught on her behalf. It took weeks, and I was exhausted from doing her job. **T3**

The second subtheme is avoidance. Although it is believed that using this strategy might not be effective and the person might not be satisfied, as what happened with participants 7, 4, and 5, the manager's speech T8 indicates that avoidances might be used effectively if it is not his duty. As stated by them:

Problems from some colleagues who are teaching the sixth grade primary students in the same academic year. When I ask about something in the curriculum or when I ask them to clarify some points for me, they do not give an answer and do not like to help me. This makes me hesitate to speak with them or ask them any questions. **T7**

I always tell him about the problem that happened to me. He just listened to me, and he has never put any solution forward. I saw him listen to the other teachers and give solutions to the others, but he did not give any solutions to me. He started to avoid me each time. I really feel upset and annoyed. **T4**

It may occur as a result of a complaint from the teacher's son or daughter, telling the teacher's mother that one of their teachers is not good at teaching and conveying information. As an administrator, this is not my work. This is the work of the educational inspection. He is the one who evaluates the teacher, and his evaluation is taken into consideration. **T8**

The third subtheme is collaboration. It is used by many participants to solve the problems that they face. We met the director after the discussion. We decided that it is necessary to adhere to the attendance time, and only five minutes of delay are permitted. **T2**

Last year, we faced this problem, and we tried to solve it. We told the students to print the books themselves. In the middle of the school year, we identified the students who did not have books, and we copied the books at the school using the teachers' budget. **T7**

I had a problem as a result of uploading a photo of my son on the school's social media page. This is because his notebook was perfect and organized. The parents of another student who attended the school said that you put

the teachers' children at the top and neglected our children. Problems always arise as a result of comparing teachers' children with other students. We solved the problem by stopping the publication of photos of students on social media sites. We only published a photo of their note books with their names on it. **T4**

The fourth subtheme is effective communication. It is used by many teachers to handle their conflicts. They state:

At first, they refused to give me a record of attendance and absence, but when I explained the reason to them, they agreed and gave me the record to sign. **T6**

They come up to me in class and nervously inquire about their children's missing markets. Why did you reduce their children's markets even though they got a perfect mark on the exam? I have to clarify to them that participation in the class is the most important part of evaluation. **T6**

Most of the problems arise from teachers who teach their children. They like to get into everything. During this year, approximately 7 to 8 teachers come to me to ask about their children whom I teach. Most of their questions are: Why did you give my son or daughter an incomplete mark in the English language subject that I teach? And every time I have to explain to them the reason, **T7**

There was a problem that happened between me and a teacher last semester. The whole semester, on Wednesday, she took the time for my lesson. She told me that this is her time and not mine. I told her this was my lesson time, but she did not believe me, so I took her under the stairs to look at the time table to convince her that she took the time for my lesson. **T1**

The fifth subtheme is accommodation. Two participants in two different situations show a low level of concern for themselves and a high level of concern for the other teachers.

I don't like problems. I often knock on the door and wait until she finishes and goes out. I have to wait. **T5**

I had many problems with teachers who taught their daughters. If they find out that their daughters do not understand the lesson, they would like me to teach them in order to teach their daughters at home. I mean that the teachers come to me and ask me to explain something that they do not understand. The first time, when she called me at 11 p.m., I responded. **T1**

The sixth subtheme is compromising. This strategy is believed to be an effective technique for solving conflict. It is also called a win-win strategy. It consists of a moderately balanced area where self and other-care are present. The participant says,

The problem that occurred between me and the teacher was because of the exam topic. We put the questions together, but our typical answers were different. It became problematic to determine which answers would be accepted. After the dialogue, it was agreed to take the two answers into consideration. **T3**

Discussion

This part is divided into three main parts connected to the research question: types of conflicts, causes of conflicts and strategies used to handle them.

Types of conflicts

The finding reveals that task or work conflict is the most prominent type of conflict. It means that most conflicts that happen between teachers and managers relate to their work. Other disputes that occur are identified as relationship and process conflicts, but these are minor compared with task conflicts. The results of this prominent type of study are consistent with those of Shanka and Thuo's study (2017). Their results show that work is one of the main factors in conflict. Their study looked into different conflict management and resolution techniques employed in government primary schools in the Wolaita zone between teachers and school administrators. They found out that the sources of conflict that relate to work are pressure at work, unfair timetable scheduling, teachers' unhappiness with their jobs, and poor responsibility. All of these sources are similar to the causes of conflicts that happen between teachers and managers in Libya.

Conversely, another study shows that relationships or interpersonal factors are the main types of conflicts in Greek (Saiti, 2015). The main difference between task conflict and relationship conflict is that while task conflicts are functional, relationship conflicts are dysfunctional. When conflict leads to better decisions, it is beneficial because it provides an opportunity for the discussion of issues and the release of anxieties, creates an atmosphere suitable for self-evaluation and development, and inspires imaginative thinking in group members. Conversely, the existence of relationship conflict is considered dysfunctional (Daft and Marcic, 2013) because it has been shown to be disruptive in professional environments (Henkin and Holliman, 2009). Some researchers also noted that task conflict fosters creativity in interorganizational teams and improves team learning in areas like cooperative problem solving and interorganizational interactions (Garcia et al., 2018). However, an excessive amount of task conflict might result in cognitive strain or a negative mood, both of which are harmful to the creativity of the team (Ayoko, 2016). Therefore, it can be stated that task conflicts might be useful for Libyan schools as an organization if they do not occur excessively.

Causes of conflicts

Identifying the causes of conflict that happen inside any organization is helpful and useful for both leaders and managers. It helps them initially understand the nature of the source of conflict (Eslamdoost et al., 2020; Bajwa et al., 2020; Shanka & Thuo, 2017). In this study, most of the conflicts that happen between the teaching staff members and the managers are identified as having five main causes: misunderstanding, breaking the regulation, work overload, individual differences, and poor communication.

The study's findings are partially in agreement with the study that was conducted in schools in Bostana. This study was carried out to investigate the difficulties facing managers in handling disagreements (Morake et al., 2011). The results show communication breakdown, clash of personalities, and lack of resources lead to conflict in Bostana's school. While miscommunication and clash of personalities are similar causes to this research's result, lack of resources is not. Most of the Libyan participants mention they don't lack resources this year; they mention that they lacked books last year, and this did not cause any dispute between them because they were able to find a solution due to discussion on this issue.

Regarding poor communication, many studies have confirmed that miscommunication and misunderstandings are sources of disputes between teachers (Barmao, 2012; Isabu, 2017; Shanka & Thuo, 2017; Antwi, 2013; Sintapertiwi & Andika, 2023). According to Saiti (2015), effective communication is the most crucial element in ensuring increased effectiveness in school teacher performance within the teaching team. He also adds that high levels of understanding are needed to reduce disruptive conflicts and for better communication, and the rules can be applied more easily inside the schools and between the managers and teachers. Thus, it can be said that misunderstanding and poor communication are sources of conflicts that emerge between teachers and managers in different contexts.

Breaking the regulations and work overload that are practised in Libyan schools is another source of conflict. The investigation of the data reveals that most of the teachers do not obey the rules of their schools. The rules of the 'attendance record' and 'class time' are the most prominent rules that are not followed by the teachers. The data also shows that the leader might not follow other rules that are conducted by the Ministry of Education. The results of the investigation are consistent with the study of Shanka and Thuo (2017). The data in their study was collected from ten different schools in Ethiopia. They stated that poor implementation of education policies by teachers and poor implementation of rules and regulations by leaders produce conflicts in schools. Therefore, they suggest that teachers, managers, and leaders should implement and follow the rules. In addition, their finding in terms of work overload is also in line with this study, and it agrees with Antwi's study (2013), which was conducted in high schools in Ghana. The data from the semi-interview of Libyan teachers and managers show, for instance, that experienced teachers have more classes compared with non-experienced teachers. It also shows that if teachers have urgent circumstances, other teachers, who have their own work, take the absent teachers' work and become overloaded with work. This is unfair and probably makes them tired and exhausted from their work. Therefore, their performance might not be effective. To sum up, breaking the rules and work overload are possible sources that lead to disagreement, and these two sources are similar to other studies.

Individual differences seem to be another source behind the conflicts between teachers. However, the investigation of the data only shows one case where two teachers argue about identifying the typical answers to the final exam. They dispute because each has their own beliefs and knowledge. Individuals might be different in their languages, cultures, beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge, and this might lead to conflict while they are communicating. Most of the participants in this study are from the same place. They live near each other, they have the same language, and they nearly have the same culture. This might explain the reason behind the investigation: there is no significant dispute connected to their individual differences. There are also other studies that show that conflicts occur because of individual differences (Shanka & Thuo, 2017; Isabu, 2017; Yaras & Gunduzalp, 2021). The conflict that appears between two individuals in their school does not only affect them. According to Ward (2017, whenever two individuals do not get along with each other, such interpersonal conflict can affect everyone in the organization and their performance as well.

In addition to the five main causes that occurred in this study, there are various sources mentioned in other research. These are limited resources, overlapping authority (Isabu, 2017), inequality in the distribution of school resources, poor infrastructure, lack of competence in teaching, intolerance among workers, lack of responsibilities, lack of training, lateness and absenteeism, lack of involvement in decision-making, lack of clarity in the educational training policies and guidelines, lack of leadership skills (Shanka & Thuo, 2017), lack of reward systems (Antwi, 2013), unfair treatment (Sintapertiwi & Andika, 2023). In addition, it was added that school size is a probable source behind the conflict. As schools grow in size, teacher disagreements are more likely to occur. Saiti (2015) clarifies that small schools have better flexibility in making decisions. What he

means is that teaching staff members can meet and make their decisions easily. Conversely, those school-limited members may lack information and knowledge and this might lead to difficulty to find solution to their conflict. In addition to the causes that appeared from comparing and contrasting this study with different studies, the data shows four harmful effects on Libyan participants. One of the participants feels annoyed and upset by the avoidance of the leader. Another participant feels unwilling to communicate with others due to poor communication from others. The third case feels stressed and tired, and the fourth case is unable to work anymore. The fourth effect led the teacher to leave the school. This is a spurious loss to the school, especially if these teachers are qualified teachers. Other researchers show other negative effects of not handling the conflicts. Turan (2014) states that improperly managed disagreements have the potential to be quite harmful. In actuality, an improperly handled conflict process can result in unfavorable emotions and circumstances, including interdependence, reduced collaboration, jealousy among group targets, and instability. Ertürk (2022) mentions some destructive effects, some of which are similar to those described in this study, such as stress and anxiety, refusal to work, and the desire to leave school. The results of his study also add to the tiring and exhausted state of teachers due to conflict, burnout, decline in productivity and performance, decline in organizational commitment, loneliness, dissatisfaction, cynicism, lack of motivation, disappearance of moral behavior, withdrawal, and anger. Although the aim of this study is not to investigate the negative or positive effects of conflicts, the destructive and harmful effects of conflicts on Libyan participants make the researcher highlight them. It is aimed at warning leaders, teachers, and managers about the damaging effects of conflicts inside schools in order to know how to manage their conflicts.

Conflict management strategies

The majority of the strategies that are known to manage the conflict are used by the participants in different contexts. These are dominating, avoidances, collaboration, effective communication, accommodation, and compromising. Other studies have similar results. For example, the study's findings by Isabu (2017) show that their participants use avoidance, competition accommodation, and collaboration to manage their conflicts. Another study shows that teachers and managers use avoidance, punishing, compromising, forcing, ignorance, and discussions (Shanka & Thuo, 2017). The study of Morake and others (2011) states that most of his individuals use competing accommodations, avoidance, and compromising. From these results, it can be seen that most of the schools' leaders, managers, and teachers use similar strategies between them in their schools.

However, it is argued that using these strategies is seen as effective or destructive. Starting with the dominating or forcing strategy, this strategy was used by three participants. It was used by participant T1 in a suitable and appropriate manner with another teacher. when she gets into the class to force her to leave the class because it was her class time. It is practised effectively by the manager, the administrator, to enforce the principles and rules of the school. Conversely, it was used forcefully against participant 5, which led her to leave the school, and against participant 3 as well. Using the forcing strategy makes her overloaded with work and upset. Instead of finding another solution to solve the problem, such as having substitute teachers, she is overloaded with work. From this finding, it can be inferred that dominating strategies can be effective if used properly and destructive if they are practised improperly. In contrast, the researchers Farooqi and others (2016) argue that if the forcing style is used by heads, effective output in terms of teachers' work will be gained. The data from his study shows a positive correlation between using a forcing style and teachers' performance. Another study also reveals that forcing style can change workers' performance effectively (Rouzbahani et al., 2013). However, both of these studies use quantitative studies and do not use qualitative studies. In other words, both of them deal with numbers and neglect the feelings of the participants. Thus, dominating style should be utilized carefully when thinking about its negative, harmful, and destructive effects.

Avoidance is another strategy that is used to manage the disagreement between Libyan participants. Although it is believed that using this strategy might not be effective and the person might not be satisfied, as happened with many Libyan teachers, the boss's speech indicates that avoidances might be used effectively if it is not his duty. Although it is not his duty, it is believed that effective communication should be used to clarify that to the teachers instead of feeling upset and dissatisfied due to his avoidances. Another study shows the relationship between the avoidance style and the low performance of teachers (Abdulraheem et al., 2020). It implies that teachers' performance will suffer if heads follow this approach (Farooqi et al., 2016). It is also added that decision-making and creativity can be negatively affected if this style is dominantly used in organizations (Abdulraheem et al., 2020). Moreover, individuals who employ this method are viewed as being unfit to handle a situation that requires attention, and they are unlikely to be able to comprehend and resolve the issues of others due to their lack of concern for others and themselves (Jehn et al., 2015). To sum up, using this approach seems to be destructive. Therefore, leaders, managers, and teachers should take care when they use them inside their organizations.

Using collaboration, accommodation, and effective communication is helpful in managing conflicts. This present study and other studies confirm that using these methods is effective in handling problems. It is also believed that using these essential strategies can enhance school performance (Sailti, 2015). In addition, by using collaboration and integration, leaders, managers, and teachers will be able to solve the problems that they face and reach the aims of their schools (Momanyi, 2011). By applying accommodation style, individuals display a low degree of self-interest and a great degree of concern and respect for others. This shows the sacrifices made by some for others in order not to cause conflicts. Some matters might be simple and not cause conflicts. Moreover, using effective communication is a suitable strategy to handle conflicts. In order to resolve disagreements, communication is crucial. It is ensured that conflicts can be addressed in a way that benefits the schools by having open communication with all parties involved (Yaras and Gunduzalp, 2021). Ertürk (2022) states that effective communication helps the administrator and employees work in harmony. They don't refuse when work is given to them, and they cooperate together to achieve the mission and vision of their schools. Thus, collaboration, accommodation, and effective communication should be widely used inside schools.

Conclusion

This study revealed three main findings. It shows that task or work-related conflict is the most prominent type of conflict. It means that most of the conflicts that happen between teachers and managers relate to their work. Other disputes are identified as relationship and process conflicts, but these are minor compared with task conflicts. After investigating the reasons behind the disputes between teachers and managers, the findings show that misunderstanding and breaking the principles that relate to record attendance and class time are the most prominent causes that lead to disputes between managers and teachers. In addition, work overload, individual differences, and poor communication are other reasons that lead to disagreement. Furthermore, the strategies that are used to handle these conflicts are various. These are dominating, avoidances, collaboration, effective communication, accommodation, and compromising.

It should be stated that this study has certain limitations and that more research would be beneficial in the field of school conflict management in Libya. Additional data from other parts of Libya that function in distinct socioeconomic contexts might be required for a more comprehensive inquiry and to confirm the findings and analysis of the present study. The present study did not examine the impact of personal characteristics of Libyan school leaders, including gender, age, family status, educational background, and total years of service in public primary education. Thus, more investigation is required. Additionally, the personality and features of the school environment have a significant impact on how effective school leaders are, so more research on these factors and how they affect managing conflict in school would undoubtedly provide a deeper understanding of the factors that influence conflict management techniques. Finally, finding the best dispute resolution strategy for each educational level is a crucial area of study.

Implication

The finding implies that most of the problems that happen between teachers and managers relate to their work. This suggests that leaders, managers, and teachers should pay more attention to their work and should follow the principles and laws of their schools. Teachers should be consistent with the regulations of 'register record' and 'class time'. The study reveals that misunderstanding is another reason behind their disagreement, and it can be solved by effective communication. In addition, individual differences should be clarified to all of them in order to respect their beliefs, opinions, and thoughts. Moreover, work overload seems to be a serious issue not only for Libyan teachers but also in other countries, and the leaders of the schools should pursue solutions to solve this problem. Finally, and the most important is the implying of using conflict management strategies. While dominating and avoidance might be better not used or used wisely, collaboration, effective communication, accommodation, and compromising should be used widely for their effectiveness.

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