An Examination Of Conflict Management Strategies In Secondary Schools. A Case Study of Highfield-Glen Norah District In Harare Metropolitan Province

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Abstract:*The study was conducted against a background of lots of reports made to Zimbabwe's Ministry of primary and secondary education, pertaining to conflicts in its schools. Six (6) selected secondary schools in Highfield-Glen Norah District of Harare Metropolitan Province were investigated. The study used the mixed methods approach. The triangulation approach was used for collecting data through interviews and questionnaires. The target population comprised District education officers, School heads and their deputies, School Development Association (SDA), parents, students (pupils), community leaders such as local councilors. The quota sampling technique was used in order to accommodate all the respective key stakeholders. The major findings were; that conflict between parents and teachers, between pupils and teachers, between school administrators and teachers, teacher and pupil and pupil to pupil existed. All these stakeholders including the parent Ministry of Primary and secondary school showed keen interest in managing conflicts. It was also noted that conflicts were not always dysfunctional, but also played a positive role in the schools, hence its existence. Parents and school administrators were willing to assist students in their learning. Students themselves admitted that there are many indiscipline problems that existed among them. Communication from schooladministrators to teachers and teachers' involvement in decision making in secondary schools was generally poor. Class enrolments were very high with most classes having more than 50 students against the conservative size of 35 students. This culminated in a larger teacher-pupil ratio resulting in double sessions and burnout on the part of teachers. The community has a major role to play in conflict management in the school. It is recommended that a holistic approach of all the key stakeholders, such as having a school advisory board or council should be set up to improve inclusivity in decision making as well as corporate governance through regular meetings. Provision of resources should be able to minimize conflicts in secondary schools in Highfield-Glen Norah District of Harare metropolitan province.*

Key terms:*Examination, Conflict, Conflict management strategy, Disciplinary matter, Secondary school*

I. Background to the study

A school is a complex and dynamic organization with different individual and group dynamics. Many challenges arise from conflicts, which are inevitable in any school set up including tertiary institutions. Conflict culminates in friction, disagreement or discord arising within a group when the belief or action of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group(Lang, 2009). The problems associated with conflict can be found at both ends of school managers, teachers and even throughout the educational hierarchical structure (Sergiovanni and Starrat, 1987). Conflict between students is a common problem in secondary schools and adversely affect the involved students as well as affecting the schools from attaining their desired outcomes (goals).

Bronson (2009) describes secondary school students as adolescents who often take the conflicts of rebellion. This often results in problems with teachers and among students themselves in schools. Most psychologists including Bronson (2009) describe it as a problem of 'generation gap'. Basit et al (2010) explain that intergenerational conflict exists because experiences, attitudes and values of young people today are different from those of 30 years ago and different from those of their parents. The other reason is that adolescents and adults are fundamentally different in both moral and cognitive development. Bronson (2009) observed that there are two major sources of contention between adolescents and their parents, firstly, the parents' failure to show recognition of adolescent achievement and secondly, the adolescent's rebellion against parents control and school rules.

Basit et al (2010) further add that adolescence is a "pried of stress and the young people may have doubts about their status and future. It is a time where peer influence may conflict with that of the parents'. At school, conflict may arise between the students and the teachers because at times the former; do not write assigned work, come late to school, show signs of being restless, arrogant, truant andother deviant forms of behavior. Bowora and Mpofu (1995) observed that conflict can also develop between schools can be in the same geographical area but disliking each other. The surrounding community may favor to send their children to one school avoiding the other, and teachers also prefer to work at the nearby school than the other, this also creates conflict. Again, one school may be excelling in sports and examinations than the other and so conflict arises. Conflict between schools results in new methods, procedures and innovations for the school system. Contrary to the above, Benfor, Peterson, Mannis and Trochim (2008) described conflict as being essential, since they see this insight as paradox. The emergency of conflict in the school can lead to positive development of the school and would create a favorable school tone.

The demands for education after Zimbabwe's political independence in 1980resulted in a projected rise in school enrolment ratios and this led to the establishment of more secondary schools including satellite schools. The high demand for education created communication and administrative conflicts among staff, school administrators, responsible authorities and the parents. For instance, it resulted in the shortage of qualified labor, classroom accommodation and a decline in the quality of education. Conflicts in schools have at times resulted in government intervention leading to investigations or temporary closure of schools at times. These problems led to the establishment of School Development Committees (SDCs) in private schools and School Development Associations (SDAs) in government schools and these bodies are legislated through Statutory Instruments 87 of 1992 and 70 of 1993 respectively. These Statutory Instruments specify the roles and functions of parents in promoting the achievement of organizational goals. As a result, the community in which the school is located is quite an integral part, since it is the schools' sphere of influence. Lang (2000) asserts that the school's hinterland has great influence in the day to day function of a school.

According to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Office January 2016 statement, there was a worrying increase of school dropout cases. The rate of pupils dropping out of school had risen to over 13000, an increase of about 40 percent from the 2012 figure. Boys contributed the bigger number of 7083 while 6170 girls out of school for various reasons. The Ministry attributed the high drop out to mainly failure to pay school fees, unplanned pregnancies, child marriages, absconding, intoxication and conflicts. The problem was also manifested by many irregularities perpetrated by school authorities due to unorthodox practices such as financial mismanagement of school development levies. The Public Service Commission (PSC), the employer of government workers (civil servants) had expelled some school heads linked to the abuse of development levies. As at January 2016, 74 heads werebefore provincial disciplinary panels. The crackdown involved the PSC and the Primary and Secondary Education Ministry. In 2015, the Government started auditing all government and mission schools following indication of abuse of funds as well as flouting oftender procedures. The Ministry estimated that over U$1, 2 billion circulated in the learning institutions yearly and some heads, bursars and SDAcommittee members had been helping themselves to part of the sum.

The authority further explains that the community has interest in the school, since their children attend there, so moral values, academic achievement and the school climate affect its performance. The SDCs and SDAs should assist the school in improving the quality of education by building more classrooms, provide other educational facilities such as libraries, laboratories and transport facilities like buses and vehicles, computers and generators. The importance of SDCs and SDAs was highlighted by the Education Act (1991) which stated that a school development committee or association if approved by the Minister should be vested with the control of financial affairs of the school for which it has been established. The SDCs and SDAs were also permitted to employ staff working as general – hands and one bursar. The interference by parents in the affairs of the school has also created conflict between parents and teachers, pupils and teachers as well as teacher and teacher. This calls for expertise in conflict management by school administrators, Okotoni (2002). Large enrolment has also led to large numbers of teachers in the school, such that school managers have been faced with many supervisory tasks to be fulfilled in order to achieve school effectiveness. Basit, Rahman and Jumani (2010) point out that, lack of ability to perceive and supervise organizational classroom activities could be one of the factors that might conflict and a degree of instructional inefficiency.

The management of conflict has been observed with lack of skill in some secondary schools and with expertise in some schools. The researchers got inspired to conduct this study because it was assumed that conflict arises between head and teachers, teachers and pupils, between schools and the community and between the schoolsthemselves. Ithas beentherefore vital to establish the causes and effects of conflicts with a view to establish strategies that could enhance conflict management to improve school culture and learning effectiveness. The Highfield – Glen Norah District was the geographical area covered with secondary schools in the suburbs of Lochnivar, Southerton, Ardbennie, Parktown, Waterfalls, Highfield, Glen Norah, Southlea Park, Irvines, nearby other farms like Blackfordby, Crest and Hopley.

II. Statement of the problem
A conflict usually has devastating impact in a school, college or university. Ministry of Primary and secondary school has received many reports pertaining to conflicts involving school administrators and teachers, teachers and students, students and school administrators and among students themselves. The impact of these conflicts have resulted in extreme cases of; loss of life, demolished school buildings, riots, demonstrations, boycotts, increased hostilities at the work place, dismissal and suspension of students, administrators and teachers. All these lead to unconducive teaching and learning environments.

III. Research objectives
The study sought:
3.1 To identify cause of conflicts in secondary schools.
3.2 To identify the effects of conflicts in secondary schools.
3.3 To ascertain the effectiveness of current conflict resolution strategies being used.

IV. Research questions
The study intended to address the following ;
4.1. What causes conflicts in secondary schools?
4.2. What are the effects of conflicts in secondary schools?
4.3. How effective are current conflict resolution strategies?

V. Literature review
5.1 Overview of conflict
Bronson (2009:220) defines conflict as: "any disagreement or struggle between two or more organizational members or groups arising from the fact that they must engage in interdependent work activities and / or from the fact that they have different status, goal values or perception. Basit et al (2010) view conflict as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals. Berghof (2012)'s view is that; conflict occurs when an individual or one group issues pursues its interest in a way that frustrate another individual's or group's efforts at goal achievement. Batcheldar et al (2000) spell out that, conflict refers to all kinds of opposition or antagonistic interaction based on scarcity of power, resources or social position and differing value structure. Another view of conflict is that held by Bodtler and Jameson (2001) who sees conflict as resulting when there are incompatible goals, cognition or motions within or between individuals or groups and that lead to opposition or antagonistic interaction. Kasambira (1998:38) states that, conflict arises "whenever perceived or real interests collide." Chakanyuka (1999:23) states that conflict is a "struggle between the ideas and interests of the school and those of professional and classroom manager, that is, the teacher."

The authorities cited above, agree that there is a contradictory situation in personal ambitions, goals, resources and many other environmental expectations and the classroom manager in the school as well as between bureaucratic dichotomies in the school. Furthermore, Bowora and Mpofu (1995) as well as Bodtler and Jameson (2001), analyze the definition, pointing out that in conflict there is disagreement, incompatibility, opposition or antagonistic interaction. However, literature has revealed that the ways by which schools or organizations view conflict has changed greatly (Goulet, 2003). Again, there are positive effects of conflict which can also benefit secondary schools (Albert, 2002; Halloway, 2000).

5.2 Major causes of conflict (Henkin et al, 2000, Kasambira, 1998).
- Scarce resources e.g. finances
- Differences in goals
- Different values, perceptions and preferences (priorities).
- Power struggle.
- Communication problems.
- Individual styles e.g. autocratic
- Line and staff structures
- Ambiguities in the organization
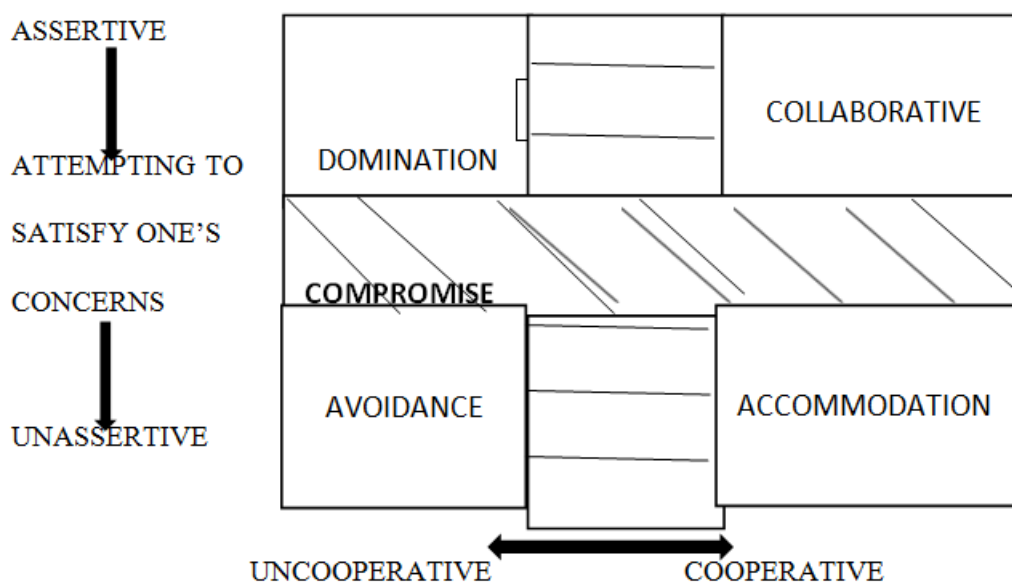
5.3 Conflict management approaches

Fig 1: Conflict modeladapted from Kasambira (1998) and Miller (2003).

Five strategies have emerged that could be adopted to manage conflicts at workplaces and even in schools (Miller, 2003). These are:

i) **Contending/competing or dominating** –Here the negotiator pursues his/her own outcomes strongly. He/she has little concern for whether the other party obtains his desired outcomes. Parties that adopt this strategy maintain their own aspirations and try to persuade the other party to yield. Threats, punishment, intimidation etc., are typical of the contending approach.

ii) **Yielding/Accommodating or obliging** –. Negotiators here show little interest in or concern about whether they attain their own outcomes, but are keen to see to it that the other party attains her/his outcomes. This involves the negotiator lowering his aspirations to "let the other win". This strategy may seem strange but it has its own advantages in some disputes, for example, if the conflicting parties are going to have a lasting relationship.

iii) **Inaction/Avoiding** – Those in this band show little concern about whether they attain their own outcomes, nor do they show much concern about whether the other party obtains his outcomes. Inaction is the same as withdrawal or passivity or retreat.

iv) **Problem solving/collaborating or integrating** –Here negotiators show high concern for attaining their own outcomes and great concern for whether the other attains her/her outcomes. Both parties actively pursue approaches to maximize their joint outcome from the conflict, so that both sides win.

v) **Compromising** -It represents a moderate effort to pursue one's own outcomes and a moderate effort to help the other party achieve his outcomes.

VI. Methodology

This study used the **mixed methodology paradigm** bycombining both quantitative and qualitative methods. This broadened the researchers' investigations bothin breadth and depth, while offsetting the weaknesses of each approach by itself (Berghof, 2012; Punch, 2014). One of the most advantageous characteristics of conducting mixed methods research is the possibility of triangulation, i.e., the use of several means (methods, data sources and researchers) to examine the same phenomenon (Orodho, 2009). Triangulation was used and comprised the use of the questionnaire and interview guide as the research instruments.

Descriptive survey was used as it enabled the researchers to collect data by covering a wide geographical area of Highfield–Glen Norah District drawn from suburbs of Lochnivar, Southerton, Ardbennie, Parktown, Waterfalls, Highfield, Glen Norah, Southlea Park, Irvines, nearby other farms like Blackfordby, Crest and Hopley.The **target population** comprised of secondary school heads and deputies, teachers, district education officials, school development committee (SDC), parents, pupils (students), community leaders like councilors and politicians. The**quota sampling technique** was used in the identification (selection) of 120 respondents (answered questionnaire) and 12 participants (interviewed). **Research Ethics** (principles) guided the researchers during the entire period of conducting the empirical phase and thereafter (Rubin and Babbie, 2014). These were; informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and the right to privacy. For the structured questionnaire, data presentation and analysis was done largely using descriptive statistics but for the

unstructured Interviews, data was analysed based on**Content analysis** and some narrative statements (Punch, 2014).

VII.   Major Results and Findings
7.1 Major causes of conflicts in secondary schools
Table 1: Major causes of conflicts in secondary schools

Causes of conflict	N=120	
	F	%
1. Head's incompetency in administration	50	42
2. Embezzlement/misappropriation of funds by Head and/or SDA	31	26
3. Students' indiscipline	90	75
4. Teachers and administration indiscipline	44	37
5. Improper association of teachers and administration	50	42
6. Inferiority or superiority complex	75	63
7. Poor academic performance	51	43
8. Favoritism by school administration	62	52
9. Inadequate resources	88	73
10. Large enrolment	77	64
11. Organizational structure	97	81
12. Non-payment of school fees	50	42
13. Parents guardians defending child's bad behavior	35	29
14. Failure to cover the syllabus	59	49

From the results, it shows that organizational structure is a major causing conflict in secondary school as students and teachers have to follow a certain hierarchy in order to get things done. In a secondary school according to Lang (2009), there is the Head of department, Senior Master/woman, Deputy Head and then Head, SDA, District Education officer and so on. All these have different roles and in most cases, they do not agree. Other areas of concern are inadequate resources, students' indiscipline, large enrolment (high teacher – pupil ratio) rising and teachers failing to cope with marking and discipline.

Of those interviewed, they cited students and parents as the major culprits.

One SDC chairperson, said *'' Parents and students complain of poor resources and sorry state of the schools, yet they do not honor their part of paying fees and sometimes we are forced to take legal action and that creates animosity''*

One councilor accused SDCs of not having selfish interests and operating outside their mandate by saying *''Some SDAs in secondary schools do not clearly know their responsibilities such that they may interfere with teaching and learning processes at the school and think that they are the in charge''*.

The above results and findings show that conflict is inherent in secondary schools and appears a complex phenomenon.

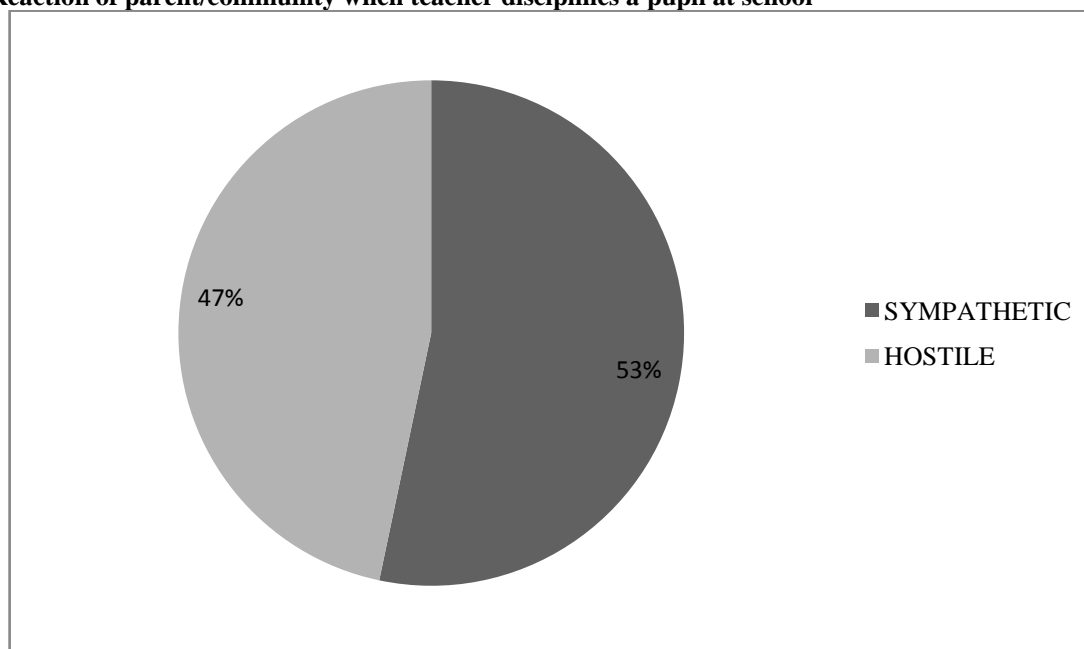### 7.2Reaction of parent/community when teacher disciplines a pupil at school

Fig 1: Reaction of parent/community when a teacher disciplines a pupil

The results show that a sizeable number of the parents/community reinforce bad behavior by supporting indiscipline at school by students (pupils) at times. They seem to sympathize with the student and become hostile to the teacher who reprimands the student. This will result in an increase in conflict between pupils and the teacher as well as between teacher and parents

One head interviewed said ''*The current crop of students is very mischievous and undisciplined. If you contact their parents by trying to come up with remedial action collectively, some will tell you that, leave my child as he/she is, I am the one paying fees and responsible for his/her upkeep*''

7.3 Common types of conflict at school
Table 2: Common types of conflict at school

Type of conflict	N=120	
	F	**%**
Teacher to teacher	63	53
Pupil to pupil	56	47
Parents to teachers	47	39
School administration to teachers	53	44
School to school	16	13
Teacher to pupil	84	70

The most common types of conflicts were; teacher to pupil which constitutes 70% followed by teacher to teacher, school administration to teachers and pupil to pupil. Wilson (2004) explains that teacher to pupil conflict is high because the teacher may fail to deliver to the satisfaction of the students in terms of data deficiency in his or her subject area or fails to plan. Students may also misbehave during lessons and the teacher could fail to properly manage the class. Deveraux (2003) asserts that school to school conflict is the usually uncommon because the teachers, students and parents mind their own business at their own school although there can be rivalry especially over sporting supremacy. This is a common school to school conflict.

7.4 Remarks about communication flow in the school
Table 3: Remarks about communication flow

Responses	N = 120	%
Very poor	19	16
Poor	33	28
Average	28	23
Good	31	26
Very good	9	8
Total	120	100

Communication was rather average and could be a contributory factor to some of the conflicts in schools as purported by Kinyego (2009). Parents also blamed school administration of not informing them on time especially changes emanating from the parent ministry. One parent said '' *We are not sure of the what is going to happen to our children who are writing their 'O' level (Ordinary level) exams next year (2017). We are hearing from newspapers, radio and television and other social communication platforms, that there is going to be a new mandatory curriculum, yet we should have been to be formally advised or told so that we plan. More so, we were not even consulted but it is more of hearsay and directive from those in authority*''

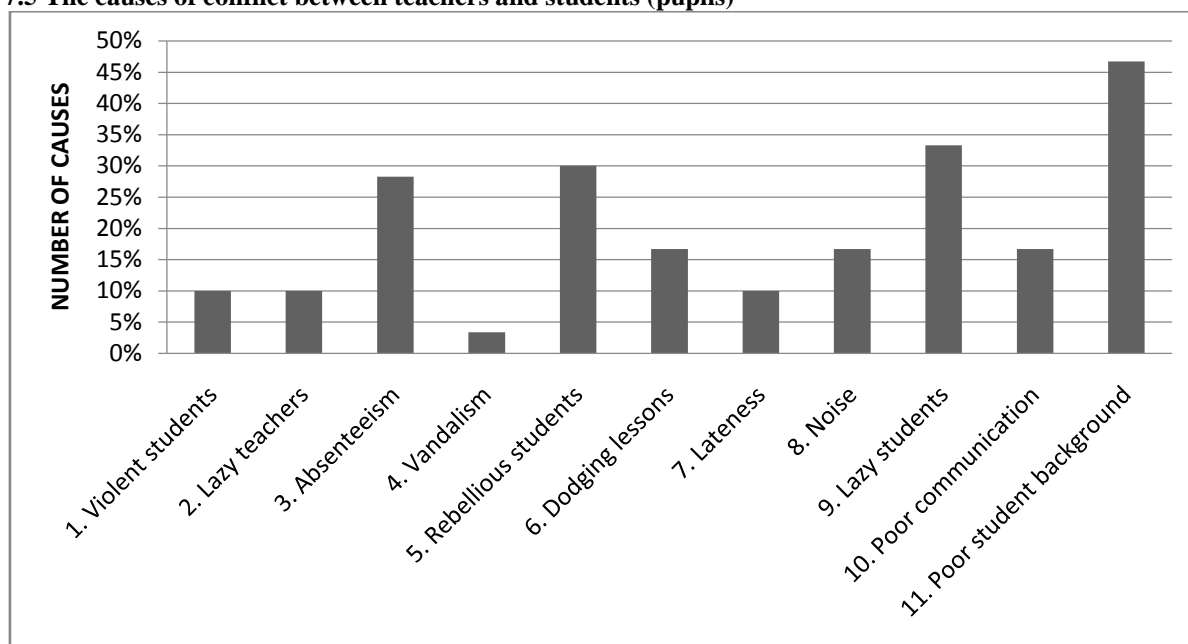**7.5 The causes of conflict between teachers and students (pupils)**

Figure2: The causes of conflict between teachers and students

The causes were multifaceted and differed on many aspects of personality, attitude and perceptions and this could explain why the teacher-student conflict was the most common type of conflict in secondary schools as supported by Henkin et al (2000).

One school head interviewed attributed the conflict of teachers and students to lack of parental guidance and upbringing. He said '*'Parents were now treating their children with kids gloves on the basis of misinterpreting the so called human rights and freedom of expression as enshrined in the National constitution''*.

7.6 The positive effects of conflict at school

Table 4: The positive effects of conflict

Effect	N= 120	
	f	%
Increase in pass rate	80	67
Professional growth	80	67
Creation of new goals	40	33
Unity and maturity	58	48
Change and innovation .	36	30

Results showed that conflict could bring many positives on the performance and general conduct of the school. Contrary to the sentiments raised by students and teachers, headmasters brushed aside conflict as a destabilizing factor that affects the smooth running of schools and was therefore retrogressive.

7.7 Strategies used to manage conflict s in schools

Table5: Strategies used to manage conflict s in schools

Strategy	N = 120	
	f	%
1. Disciplinary committee	120	100
2. Staff development or refresher courses	86	72
3. Provision of improved resources	90	75
4. Disciplinary action involving the inclusion of prefects	35	29
5. Open-door policy	78	65
6. Workshops e.g. opportunity to attend courses in conflict management	60	50
7. Parents' general meetings	70	58
8. Government policies and guidelines	78	65
9. Address by Head or meeting with aggrieved party	48	40
10. Adequate coverage of syllabus	63	53
11. Staying away or withdrawing from conflict	34	28

12. Application of Conflict management strategies covered in curricular during teacher training.	83	69
13. Arbitration/mediation through Ministry officials	106	88

A number of conflict management strategies were being applied in secondary schools, the use of a particular strategy could be dependent upon the gravity of the conflict, and the parties involved as well as the level of tension or hostility between the parties as suggested by Huoy et al (2005).

One deputy headmaster interviewed seemed to concur with the above. She said '*'We consider each conflicting issue separately, for example, if it warrants a disciplinary hearing, a verbal warning or in writing or mere counselling. If it is very serious, we alert our district education department to advise us accordingly''*

VIII.   Conclusion

Conflicts are inherent in secondary schools in the Highfield-Glen Norah District of Harare Metropolitan Province. And the causes are so diverse compounded by the large number of stakeholders such as pupils, prefects, parents, SDC, teachers, politicians, school heads, ministry officials, neighborhood or community, most of whom have different perceptions, priorities and goals towards education. Conflict was affecting the smooth running of secondary schools as well as affecting the culture and learning tempo.

IX. Recommendations

9.1 Inclusivity through enhanced corporate governance
Transparency and involvement of key stakeholders through establishing a school council which could be made up of Ministry District official, Head, Deputy, Bursar, Prefects (Head boy and Head girl), SDC chairperson, Teachers (Male and Female). School budgets and financial reports should be presented and captured in Minutes.

9.2 More interaction of parents, pupils, administration and teachers
Through; termly consultation days which should end up with a meeting especially with parents, Annual general meeting, Prize giving ceremony, Fundraising campaigns (events), Sporting activities etc.

9.3 Career guidance and prospects
Should be held even by inviting industry and commerce or tertiary institutions such as colleges and university, to spelt out their expectations such as on behavior, grooming and deportment

9.4 Suggestion boxes
A suggestion box in a school for the students and teachers should enable them to air their views and grievances without victimization.

9.5 Tolerance of different backgrounds and upbringing of pupils
There is need to accommodate the interests of various backgrounds especially of children especially taking into account that some could be heading families (child headed families) or are orphans etc.

9.6 Guidance and counseling
Wayward or deviant behavior by pupils or even teachers, require counselling as a corrective measure to minimize repetition of such bad behavior. Consultation days could be used so that both the teacher and parents/guardians have time to talk to the pupil

9.7 Broadening areas of participation through sports and clubs
This should create a situation of more interaction and possibly having a policy that each pupil joins at least one Proper communication

9.8 Disciplinary code
All pupils and even teachers, with key areas of concern raised during meetings with Parents, should understand school rules and regulations. The guidelines are provided by the parent ministry and should be used as terms of reference on disciplinary matters e.g. by school disciplinary committee. This should help the disciplinary committee to act in the confines of the appropriate ''jurisdiction'' e.g. reprimanding through suspension or expulsion,

9.9 Inculcating moral values
Having talks on *Ubuntu/hunhu*(social norms, values and ethics) e.g. even during a school assembly or organized combined classes' sessions by senior staff member or head or an external influential person who has a good track record of morality. Church programs through Religious studies through a Christian Society (Club) are very important.

9. 10 Parents monitored homework or assignments
There is need for a symbiotic relationship between the parent (guardian) and the teacher so that they complement each other's effort by ensuring that the student (child) schoolwork and progress is monitored. Parents and guardians should take interest in their children's work by regularly checking whether they do their homework seriously or providing assistance at times where possible.

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