

**EXPLORING PRINCIPALS' CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN PRIMARY  
SCHOOLS OF TIKOE CENTRE IN MASERU: A CASE OF TWO SCHOOLS**

**BY**

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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this dissertation has been read and approved as having met the requirements of the Faculty of Education, National University of Lesotho for the award of Masters of Education Management and Administration.

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this piece of work submitted for Master of Education at the National University of Lesotho has never been submitted for any degree at any University.

I also declare that it is a true copy of my investigations as all the assistance and references have been acknowledged.

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**Matsepo Ntepe**

As the candidate's supervisor, I hereby approve the submission of the thesis for examination.

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**Supervisor**

**September 2020**

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## **DEDICATION**

The study is dedicated to my late husband Mr. Rampai Vincent Ntepe, who passed away when I started this journey.

If it was not because of you I would not be where I am today.

May your soul rest in peace. We will always miss you.

## **ABSTRACT**

Conflict management can be the difference between harmonious and discordant relationships at any workplace. The study explored principals' conflict management strategies in primary schools at Tikoe Maseru. Qualitative method was adopted to investigate these strategies. Both focus group and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from participants. The findings reveal what has been indicated by both literature and the empirical research that conflict is everywhere and emanates from a number of sources. The key sources of conflicts in these areas were identified as limited resources, the double-shift system, gossip, gender bias and favouritism, resistance to change and subject teaching. It was also confirmed that integrating/collaborating and ignorance/avoidance were strategies that are often used by school principals in participating schools. Accommodation, compromising and competing/dominating are also used to resolve conflicts among teachers by school principals. The findings further reveal that school principals also lack skills in conflict management as there is no training or workshops held to equip them with such skills; hence they fail to manage conflict effectively in their schools. Therefore it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training should offer training to the school principals as they shoulder more responsibility in schools that practise double-shift system due to a lot of interactions. The system requires leadership that possesses skills since there are more challenges faced by these schools than in the normal schools in terms of conflicts, due to the changeover of the morning and afternoon classes. School principals are also recommended to reconsider the strategies they use when managing conflicts and come up with the best strategies for conflict management. This could help to avoid using inappropriate strategies or leaving some conflicts unresolved, thus triggering a repeat. MOET should also ensure that first priority in terms of providing teaching and learning materials is given to schools that practise shift- system since they are situated in overpopulated areas as well as operating in abnormal hours of teaching, which leads to property and furniture to deteriorate quickly.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Introduction

Conflict in a school environment is a serious global issue that deserves the attention it has received over the years. That is to say that many studies have been conducted on the issue by various scholars. These scholars as well as literature show that conflict is an inevitable problem that should be managed. Therefore, this chapter focuses on introducing the following sub-sections: background to the study, preliminary literature, statement of the problem, aim and specific objectives, research questions, rationale, significance and limitations of the study, definition of terms as well as a clear outline of the study. Lastly, these sub-sections attempt to further situate the study from a global to a local context as well as present the statement of the problem.

### 1.2 Background to the study

The introduction of the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy in 2000 resulted in increased enrolments in Lesotho's school system. The primary school sector in particular was not adequately prepared and ready to handle teaching the large numbers of learners. Additionally, there were inadequate physical resources like classrooms, desks, and textbooks to enable effective teaching. The Ministry of Education and Training had to devise strategies to address the challenge; hence it introduced the shift-system as practised in the Tikoe Centre.

Tikoe area is interesting to the researcher as it is situated in a densely populated area due to rural-urban migration. Most people who reside in this area are in search of employment opportunities in the textile industries in the area. The socio-economic status of most families is low, hence, parents and guardians cannot afford expensive schools usually known as "English Medium Schools". The two schools under

investigation seem to be the answer to their children’s educational needs for primary education. Makibi (2010) indicated earlier that the nature of teacher conflict management in the sixteen schools she studied was caused by Free Primary Education (FPE) due to overcrowding in schools. In Tikoe Centre, overcrowding in primary schools is extreme and this has resulted in the introduction of a practice called *Shift-System* that allows learners to share the limited resources to access education in order to address overcrowding in classrooms. The shift system, as practised in Tikoe area is explained in diagram form below.

**Table1.1**

**Shift-system class schedule**

GRADE LEVEL	SCHOOL PERIOD	CLASSES START	CLASSES END
One – Three	MORNING Session	7.00 am	12.00 noon
Four – Six	AFTERNOON Session	12.00 noon	5.00 pm
Seven	MORNING & AFTERNOON Session	08.00 am	2:00pm

The purpose of the system is to create classroom space and ensure that the teacher-learner ratios are manageable. However, as a researcher, I would like to share some of my experiences and observations as a teacher in one of these schools. Teachers seem to experience difficulty coping with the shift-system as conflict occurs regularly due to sharing of classes and the somewhat limited time for teaching and learning. The school starts, both in the morning and afternoon sessions, at awkward times for both teachers and learners. It has been observed that it is not easy for lower class learners to start school at seven o’clock in the morning. Grade One learners are very young and sometimes teachers have to wait for a long time for them before they can begin lessons. Most of them arrive late and that affects the teachers’ time tables for the day.

In addition, lack of punctuality and severe weather conditions pose a series of challenges. Some teachers arrive late and always complain, especially in winter when it is very cold. For learners in the upper classes, it is also difficult to come to school at twelve o'clock as both teachers and learners seem to lack the energy to start teaching and learning at that time of the day.

The midday classes also affect the school's extra-curricular activities such as sports and cultural events because teachers no longer work as a team during practice for such activities. They also complain that others do not participate during sports practice and that leads to conflict among the morning and afternoon class teachers.

Furthermore, sometimes the morning classes affect the afternoon classes due to the delay of learners to vacate the classrooms to be used by the other on-coming stream. In some cases, other teachers complain that those who come in the morning leave the classrooms untidy regardless of whether there is enough time to do the cleaning when classes end for any of the shifts.

Moreover, during school staff meetings, teachers usually spend time quarrelling about problems that are brought about by the shift-system. Principals, therefore, seem to be always challenged by having to address the challenges, and to do so, they need to possess knowledge and strategies to manage the situations. Rahim (2012) declares that conflict management is a key skill for all successful long-term relationships. It is a skill because if school principals have not acquired such, they will fail to manage schools, and therefore, conflicts would arise. He asserts that if principals employ conflict management strategies effectively, they would be able to get along with fellow teachers, see conflicts coming, learn productive responses, get more cooperation from all teachers and keep interpersonal conflicts from spreading to other parts of the school.

In essence, regardless of the problem of conflict in all the schools in Lesotho and other parts of the world, Tikoe centre seems to be among the worst because of the dense population in the area. Therefore literature and research confirm that conflict in schools

is a common problem. At the global level it can be established that the issues surrounding conflict are many and complex which implies that there is a need for more research in many areas. Countries that include the United States of America, France, Japan and the United Kingdom, advanced as they are, still experience conflict. Most scholars in many countries view conflict as a natural part of life, and therefore, a natural part of school life. They affirm that conflict occurs everywhere in everyone's life (Johdi & Abdulpakdee 2012; Karim, 2015; Thakore, 2013). They see conflict as neither good nor bad. It is only in the way it is handled that determines if it is negative or positive. They see conflict as inevitable, and could lead to unproductive results if not handled properly. Studies in these countries have focused on several issues concerning conflict in schools.

At the regional level (sub-Saharan African countries), the trend may not be different but is similarly massive in terms of conflict issues. Both literature and research at the regional level also point out the causes and strategies to deal with conflict at school as well as the challenges that the school principals face when managing conflicts in schools. Countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Botswana, Tanzania, South Africa and Zimbabwe have conducted several studies on the issue of conflict. They view conflict the same way as other countries. They only differ from one region to another and from one school to another. A number of studies on conflict management issues have been conducted in these countries. Therefore Lesotho is not an exception on conflict issues as some studies have been conducted, which confirms that conflict affects schools worldwide.

### **1.3 Preliminary literature review**

#### **1.3.1 What is conflict?**

Conflict is a global issue that has attracted the attention and interest of many researchers. It is viewed in different ways. In general, conflict is a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party (Wall & Callister, 1995). Oboegbulem and Idoko (2013) define conflict as a struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rivals. They declare that conflict entails discord in actions, lack of concordance in opinions in order to achieve one's own goal. Obi (2012) defines workplace conflict as an act of discontentment and contention which either the workers or employers of labor utilize to put excessive pressure against each other so as to get their demands. According to the above definitions, conflict is defined, among others, in terms of workplace, general terms, causes and explicit terms. For the purpose of this research, I chose Wagner and Hollenbeck's (2002) definition which I regard to be appropriate for my study on school principals' strategies of conflict management. They assert that in an organization, conflict can be defined as a process of opposition and confrontation that can occur between either individuals or groups, when parties exercise power in the pursuit of valued goals or objectives and obstruct the progress of other parties. Obi (2004) states that organizations such as schools and colleges have conflict potentials since they are made up of people with diverse interests. He views conflict as an in-built aspect of the organizational behaviour system. The literature will review conflict in three sections: globally, regionally and nationally.

#### **1.3.2 Studies conducted at international level**

In Malaysia, Johdi & Abdulpakdee (2012) investigated the perception of teachers and school principals towards the causes of conflict and effective methods to conflict management at an Islamic secondary school. The study used a survey questionnaire



and interviews. The results showed that principals perceived the main causes of conflict occurring in the school to have been ambiguously defined responsibilities, and teachers agreed that different perceptions were the major causes of conflict in the school. Both the principal and teachers strongly agreed that the most effective method to solve conflict is to identify the causes and take appropriate steps to the solutions.

A similar study conducted in Turkey by Goksoy (2016), identified school conflicts, reasons behind them, their impact and responses to conflicts. . The focus was on teachers. Some of the results showed that the majority of the teachers did not believe that conflicts at school can create opportunities to resolve conflict problems related to management. According to them, conflict is a phenomenon that hinders the realization of school goals and harms educators and students. The findings also revealed that teachers still adopt the traditional approach towards the concept of conflicts because the majority of teachers consider conflicts unnecessary and disturbing based on traditional views.

Likewise, Thakore (2013) in the United States of America investigated conflict issues in schools. His findings indicated that conflict cannot be avoided since it is an inevitable aspect of work teams. His study explored types of conflict; described the benefits, detriments and the causes of conflict. The study also presented the strategies to prevent and to effectively manage conflict. The focus was on teams at workplace. He declared the traditional view of conflict, that it is bad for organizations because it is disruptive, unnatural and represents a form of deviant behaviour which should be controlled and changed if the objective of the organization is to be achieved, and it can affect organizational performance. The results concluded that conflict may lead to functional or dysfunctional consequences, therefore, it is essential for management to explore various methods and techniques of conflict management. Furthermore, the study concluded that organizations should develop diverse, but appropriate strategies to resolve and manage conflict as it arises before it can escalate to unmanageable levels.

In the same manner, Bourne (2015) sought to identify and manage factors contributing to interpersonal conflicts between principals and teachers in secondary schools in Bermuda using a quantitative method. The results revealed that despite the fact that the physical environment of the school appeared healthy, and competition for limited resources was rare, intergroup and interpersonal relations were major sources. It was also found that management issues, personnel practices, work structure, employee development, culture differences and ethical concerns were the major causes of interpersonal conflict.

Among other objectives that Johdi & Abdulpakdee, (2012); Goksoy, (2016); Thakore, (2013); Bourne (2015) presented in their studies above, they had common intentions which entailed identifying both the causes and the strategies of managing conflicts in their diverse areas. They confirmed that conflicts originate from a number of sources, and that effective strategy needs to be used for conflict management in schools. Therefore, their studies seemed to be related to the present study. These studies revealed how other researchers perceived the causes of conflicts as well as the strategies of conflict management that can be used in other areas of the world. Therefore, this study explored the sources of conflict in two primary schools within the Tikoe area. Typically, it further confirmed that conflict is everywhere and unavoidable, hence, it needs to be managed using appropriate strategies. Safe to say that the work heightened the dire need for its takeoff which ensured that school principals in the Tikoe area are able to manage conflicts in the schools they are leading.

In India, Karim (2015) studied strategies of managing conflict by school leadership in a private English medium school of Baltistan. The focus was on stakeholders including teachers and learners using a qualitative method. The study was about exploration of the conflict management which advocates two approaches: (1) to manage conflict at school level that is to follow strict rules, regulations and penalizing on violation; (2) empowering stakeholders to resolve their own problems by themselves. The rules and regulations at the school were strict, binding and final on students. The results showed that empowering stakeholders to resolve their own problems by themselves is an

excellent strategy to manage conflict. The approach has proved that competence in conflict resolution skills can also lead to increased social and academic achievements in the short run and a more harmonious world in the long run.

Likewise, Karim's study is more relevant to my study since it confirms the literature that would be discussed later at the national level, which highlights that there are rules and regulations that control how everybody should behave in school. In Lesotho and other parts of the world, schools are controlled by laws and regulations that govern them. Karim's study also supports empowerment of stakeholders to resolve conflicts on their own. This study influenced my mindset positively by broadening my horizons with a skill of conflict management which further aimed at empowering school principals with the relevant strategies they can use to manage school conflict.

### **1.3.3 Supporting literature**

Literature at the global level, as confirmed by the researchers above, showed that conflict is inevitable among human beings. According to Rahim (2001a), conflict has been with us and has influenced our thinking from time immemorial. Rahim further shows that conflict issues received different degrees of emphasis from scientific societies during various periods of history. Rahim further indicates that it has been observed that organizational conflict (school included as an organization) is an important topic for both managers (school principals included) and scientists interested in understanding the nature of organizational behaviour and organizational process. It is 'considered to be functional and dysfunctional. Little or no conflict in an organization was shown to encourage stagnancy and mediocrity, however too much conflict is said to lead to organizational disintegration. Meaning that the extreme ends of conflict (too little or too much of it) are considered harmful to organizational effectiveness and could lead to the organisation's failure to maximise its potential.

As indicated above, conflict is essential for attaining and maintaining an optimum level of organizational effectiveness. Some writers have emphasized the dysfunctional consequences of conflict. Current studies, as indicated by Rahim (2001a), show that

conflict management skills are important for managers and management. He indicates that managers are interested in learning more about organizational conflict and its management. Literature further indicates that there is also a growing interest in teaching and research on conflict among scholars from various disciplines.

Robbins, S. Waters-March, T. Cacioppe, R. and Millett, B. (1994) declared that whenever two or more people interact, either as individuals or as a group, there is always a potential for conflict. They also suggested that conflict is an inevitable social occurrence because human beings have widely varying needs, interests and viewpoints. They further indicated that conflict can lead to both positive and negative results depending on how it is handled, and that it can be a catalyst for new ideas and creative approaches to solving problems. It can also be the starting point for developing more positive relationships among people that are part to a conflict. Robbins et al. further declared that conflict is perceived and analysed at four different levels: functionalist, structuralist, human relations and interactionist. In terms of the functionalist level, conflict can be avoided if managers identify the cause and focus on suitable strategies to avoid conflict in future.

Moreover, Robbins et al. explain the functionalist view of conflict as determined by the functionalist view of society. They interpreted the many forms of conflict that we observe in society as a natural part of the process of living together and resolving our social problems. Functionalist thinkers argued that the prevailing forms of social behaviour and social structure in a given society have developed as natural a manageable developments of the way that society has evolved (Robbins et al. 1994). Recent research clearly indicates that human relations' approach to conflict reduction does not necessarily lead to improved long-term relationships between individuals and groups. The approach maintains that conflict cannot be avoided, and therefore, has to be faced up to and worked through (Robbins et al. 1994).

Literature confirmed that conflict is inevitable and unavoidable. This affirmed what has been said earlier by many researchers: that conflicts are bound to occur in all human interactions and organizational behaviours since organizations such as schools have

potential for conflicts as they consist of diverse personalities. I consider both literature and researchers relevant and influential for my study as they try to prove that conflict is there and needs to be managed effectively with relevant strategies.

#### **1.3.4 Studies contacted at regional level (Sub-Saharan African countries)**

Kipyego (2013) in Kenya investigated conflict management methods used by secondary head teachers in Nandi central district. The objectives were to identify the causes of conflict management methods and determine techniques for conflict resolution in schools. The study adopted a survey design. The findings indicated that the major causes of conflicts in Nandi secondary schools were: unimpressive conditions of service, administrative incompetence of head teachers, misappropriation of funds, indiscipline of students, teachers or administrators, poor academic performance and inadequate resources. The major types of conflict mostly experienced entailed: conflict over image perceptions, role conflicts, political conflicts, conflicts over basic values, interpersonal conflicts and structural conflicts.

In a similar manner, Nnokam and Doe (2015) conducted a study in Nigeria to identify the principals and teachers' level of utilization of conflict management strategies and the following were identified: integrating, dominating, compromising and avoiding strategies on secondary students' conflict resolution and their related implications in the internal school administration. The study used survey design. The results revealed that the principals use the integrating and compromising strategies more frequently than teachers. Teachers' level in using avoiding strategies is higher than that of the principals. Teachers tend to overlook, to a large extent, the use of dominating strategies in the management of students' conflict. The study concluded that school managers are beginning to understand the legal implications associated in their administrative duties bordering on students' management.

Unlike other researchers regionally, Makaye & Ndofirepi (2012) in Zimbabwe focused on primary schools as opposed to secondary schools. Their study sought to establish

the causes of conflict amongst primary school heads and teachers and how such conflicts could be resolved in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. It also sought to establish their perceptions of conflicts, and their preference of conflict arbitrators. The study used survey method. The major findings were that conflicts exist in most schools as heads and teachers conflict with each other over unequal distribution or allocation of resources and grapevine or gossip. It also established that teachers and heads frequently conflict and most teachers were not satisfied with the ways in which problems were resolved. They preferred District Education Officers to resolve their conflicts with the school heads.

The studies cited above are relevant to my study as they confirm that conflict does exist. This created curiosity in the researcher to find out what could be the causes and strategies of conflict management in the schools under investigation. It also enlightens the researcher on what has and what has not been researched hence provides an opportunity to discover some gaps.

A different study was conducted by Ratau (2011) in Botswana examining the challenges facing managers in managing conflicts in schools in the South and Southern Central Regions of Botswana. Adopting the qualitative research method, the findings revealed that school managers do not perceive conflict as an inevitable phenomenon that is real in organizations. They lack skills that can enable them to turn conflict in their schools into a positive force that can bring positive change. In addition, Ignance (2014) in Tanzania used both qualitative and quantitative methods in a study which assessed heads of schools' strategies in managing conflicts in secondary schools. The findings revealed that heads of schools had little knowledge and skills on how to manage conflicts.

Lastly, in South Africa, Msila (2012) researched conflict management and school leadership using a qualitative study that focused on eight principals from four primary schools and four secondary schools in Gauteng province. The study found out that few principals were prepared adequately for conflict management. They tend to

misunderstand the role of conflict and maintain that it should be immediately avoided. The findings also revealed that school principals lack skills in conflict management yet they are expected to be able to creatively address conflicts in their schools.

These studies by Ignance (2014); Msila (2012) and Ratau (2011) concur that there are challenges school principals experience when managing conflicts in schools. They also affirm that school principals lack skills though they are expected to address conflicts effectively in schools. The studies highlight that there is a need to do more research on conflict management strategies as it seems that only few school principals are prepared adequately for conflict management. Therefore these studies are a good influence to my study to ensure that school principals are informed on strategies they can use to manage conflicts in schools they are heading- as stated earlier. These studies also heightened the challenges school principals experience when managing conflicts in other parts of the world. Therefore, they bring more motivation for this study to be conducted for the benefit of the school principals in my area, as they will gain some skills through this research.

Lastly, Mosomi (2013), in Botswana focused on a large number of stakeholders including religious sponsors. He used a quantitative method to find out the effects of the emerging conflicts between religious sponsors and head teachers, education officials, parents and School Boards of Governors in the management of public secondary schools in Nandi Sonta District. The findings indicated that most of the conflicts involved religious sponsors on one hand and other church sponsors and stakeholders on the other. Findings from various studies suggested that there is need for more research regionally. In Nigeria, Okotoni and Okotoni (2003) indicated that conflicts have become part and parcel of human organizations worldwide. They further declared that the issue of conflict management in school administration has reached a point where effective use of strategies can no longer be ignored.

Mosomi's study is also of significance as it shows that conflicts at school do not affect the school principal and teachers only but it can be harmful to every stakeholder in the

school. Therefore, school principals, being the middlemen between all the stakeholders, need to gain some skills in order to handle conflict when it arises between different stakeholders. This study emphasized the need for more research.

#### **1.3.4.1 Supporting literature**

There appears to be a lot of literature on conflict regionally (sub-Saharan African countries), and it shows that whatever individuals' interpretation of conflict, it is an inevitable feature of all organizational life and the ability to deal constructively with it is a key aspect of managerial success (Botha, 2013). He further declared that conflict is also part of a school's functioning and, in order to frame and manage it functionally, a variety of models that are applicable to the nature of the conflict and individuals involved should be considered. The four types of conflict that are applicable to school situations were addressed as interpersonal, intrapersonal, individual-institutional and intra-organizational conflicts. Three principles which are relevant to manage conflict in school were identified as coexistence, compromising and problem-solving (Behafar et al. 2008; Forgas et al. 2011). Botha (2013) indicated that these approaches enable teachers and school principals to reduce and eliminate those barriers that prevent the achievement of desired results.

Van Niekerk (2013) saw conflict as a universal phenomenon wherever a group of diverse people with unique natures work for the same organization. Conflict is not only good for the organization, but is essential provided it is well managed. (Jude 2008 and Guttman in Heselbein 2008) suggested that educational leaders encounter conflict situations daily, either as participants or as mediators. Maurer (1991) and Van Niekerk (2013) pointed out that the roles of these leaders in managing conflict requires exceptional interpersonal skills and the ability to think critically and creatively. The Thomas five major styles of conflict management that managers can adopt were identified (Cleary 2003; Greenberg & Baron 1995; Owens 2001; Tosi, Mero & Rizzo 2000). These will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.



Literature in the region (sub-Saharan African countries) is not different from what has been revealed at the international level, that conflict is inevitable. It is considered to be part of school functioning. Hence, I consider it related to this study as it confirmed what has been said by both regional and international researchers.

### **1.3.5 Conducted research at national level**

Lesotho is not an exception in terms of conflict as said earlier. As much as it is limited on issues of conflict, some studies have been conducted. Makibi (2010) examined the nature of teacher conflict and conflict management in 16 selected primary schools in Pitseng region in Lesotho. Data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings revealed that teachers experienced institutional, cultural and personal conflicts within the micro-politics of the school settings. The complexity of teacher conflict becomes evident in the intersection of factors such as educational policy, religion, cultural norms and beliefs, ideologies and social groupings within schools (Makibi 2010). Makibi further indicated that lack of support from school management was cited as a major problem in addressing teacher conflict in these schools. The findings also showed that teachers used strategies that were located mainly in three conflict management domains: integrating, obligating and compromising. Power dynamics within schools, religious and cultural ideologies, norms, beliefs and lack of support were viewed as barriers to effective conflict management.

Another study conducted by Nkome (2015) in Lesotho investigated the causes and effects of conflicts at Lerotholi Polytechnic in Lesotho. The study investigated how management effectively addressed the situation. The results revealed that management's leadership style was perceived as not fair, not transparent and not consultative, which brings a lot of hearsay and speculations among staff and the situation leads to conflicts and unrests. Some of the results showed that the management of the institution has not been proactive regarding teacher labour conflicts and other forms of unrest as it has not implemented some of the recommendations of the commissions of inquiry into those unrests. The findings also revealed that

management seemed to apply strategies for its own comfort and material benefits without considering the needs and interests of staff. As a result, in an attempt to protect their interests and fight for better working conditions, teachers embarked on industrial actions.

Lastly, Mofolo (2004) in Lesotho researched on conflict management practices among high school principals in Maseru town. The findings indicated that lack of training in managing conflict in schools was the main challenge among teachers and school principals. Mofolo's findings further indicated that teachers' training in Lesotho pays more attention to the content to be taught in class than other issues. Therefore, principals and teachers failed to use relevant strategies when managing conflict in schools.

Research in Lesotho is not different from other parts of the world in terms of conflict issues in schools. It supports what was said earlier that conflict exists and needs to be effectively addressed with relevant strategies. Also, there are several sources of conflicts in schools as indicated by international, regional and local researchers. The little research in Lesotho also encouraged my study as it could raise the awareness of school principals in Lesotho as well as inform the Education Officers on challenges faced by school principals in terms of managing conflicts in schools. It was earlier indicated that they lack skills. Literature on issues of conflict in schools is also limited in Lesotho.

#### **1.3.5.1 Supporting literature at national level**

For the purpose of this research I reviewed related policy documents that provided guidelines on the management of schools in general. Essentially, the management of schools in Lesotho is guided by both the Education Act 2010 and Teaching Service Regulations 2002 as they provide how conflicts in schools could be managed. The Act stipulates that the schools should be governed by School Boards and the school principal shall be responsible for the day-to-day running

of the school on behalf of the School Board or Management committee. The School Board membership should be more diverse and represent the community they serve.

The Teaching Service Regulations 2002 stipulate that the School Board or Management shall take out its duties in accordance with the Act. The regulation further states that a teacher employed in the service shall, during the period of employment, be responsible to the school board or management committee of the school to which it is allocated. Failure by any person to comply with these regulations shall be regarded as a breach of discipline, and such person may be charged with misconduct. That means everybody in school operates under a certain code of conduct of the teaching service. That shows how everyone should behave in order to keep harmony in schools.

Due to the introduction of the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy (2000), the Lesotho schools were found to experience challenges related to increased enrolments and the teacher-pupil ratio, therefore rendering them unable to meet their needs in terms of teaching and learning materials (there are limited resources) (Makibi 2010). Through my experience as a teacher, conflict situations seem to be a common feature in schools due to overcrowding of learners in classrooms thus school principals have an added responsibility to bring harmony in schools when conflicts arise.

Literature in this study is also of importance as it narrates how Lesotho schools are governed, and depicts the rules and regulations that control how everybody should behave in a school. The literature, along with the findings that will be shared later, provide guidance on how conflicts are handled. These, coupled with the Education Act of 2010 and the Teaching Service Regulations of 2002, provide knowledge on what is expected from all stakeholders as far as conflicts are concerned. The research will also shed light on the targeted group to find out if they are aware of these regulations that govern schools.

Most of the studies conducted however, focused more on the secondary rather than primary schools meaning there is a gap in the primary schools as recent studies

confirmed that conflict issues should no longer be ignored. Apart from that, these studies guide my work on the best methodology to use, as they highlight some of the methods that can be used for the present study.

#### **1.4 Statement of the problem**

This study seeks to explore strategies used by school principals to manage conflict in their schools. It has been stated in the background that the issue of conflict in schools is diverse and complex. The nature and magnitude of conflicts vary from one school to another as different studies show, both regionally and internationally. As indicated earlier, the issue of conflict management in school administration has reached a point where effective use of strategies can no longer be ignored (Okotoni and Okotoni 2003). That is, relevant measures for conflict management in schools need to be taken. Limited research in Lesotho suggests that there is a need to investigate issues surrounding conflict in schools, particularly strategies as school principals seem to lack skills to manage conflict (Mofolo, 2004).

As shown earlier, conflicts at the Tikoe schools create cliques among teachers and affect the quality of teaching and learning, and eventually academic performance of learners. High teacher-learner ratios, which lead some schools to practise the double-shift system in this area, might be another cause of poor cooperation among teachers. Therefore, we can draw that the presence of conflicts in these schools may affect their effectiveness and proper functioning. It is on this premise that the study sought to explore strategies utilized to deal with school conflicts.

#### **1.5 Main research question**

1. The study is guided by the following question: How do school principals apply strategies to resolve conflict in their schools?

#### **1.6 Sub-questions**

To pursue the research questions the following sub-questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What is conflict?

2. What are the impacts of having conflict at school?
3. Is conflict management a basic skill needed by school principals?

### **1.7. Research questions**

1. What are the causes/sources of conflict at Tikoe centre schools?
2. Which strategies are utilized by school principals when managing conflicts in their schools?
3. What challenges do principals experience in managing conflict in their schools?

## **1.8 Aim and specific objectives of the study**

### **1.8.1 Aim**

Based on the research questions, the aim of the study is to explore principals' conflict management strategies in primary schools of Tikoe centre Maseru.

### **1.8.2 Specific objectives**

The study has three key objectives and these are as follows:

1. To identify the causes of conflict at Tikoe centre schools;
2. To identify the conflict management strategies principals utilize when managing conflict at these schools; and
3. To establish the challenges principals experience in managing conflicts at Tikoe centre schools.

## **1.9 Rationale for the study**

The situations depicted above indicate that there is no harmony in schools, which affects effective administration. Teachers do not seem to cooperate among themselves and/or with the school principals. Therefore, the motive for undertaking this study is rooted in my experience as a teacher because such situations have been happening on a daily basis in my school and in the other schools around Tikoe centre.

The researcher was also motivated to undertake this study in order to highlight issues that bring disharmony in schools and disturb their daily operations. It is assumed that the findings would assist stakeholders and school principals to formulate strategies that

can be used to handle conflict in schools and bring harmony among teachers. Many studies have been conducted on conflict management and resolution but they did not concentrate much on strategies school principals use to manage conflicts, especially in primary schools. Then it became imperative to do a study that could help school principals to unearth those strategies that can be used to manage conflict to close such a gap in research.

### **1.10 Significance of the study**

The significance of this study is based on three areas: policy, practice and further research.

**Policy:** The study could inform policy makers on the calibre and credentials required for one to be principal. That means it could highlight on the kind of school principals needed and how best they can manage conflict at school.

**Practice:** The study could inform principals on the best practices on how to manage conflict in schools and empower staff on how to resolve conflicts.

**Research:** The study might not only be of importance for schools principals, but could also extend its significance to teachers and other schools in this region in which Lesotho is situated. This might inform practice in other parts of Lesotho and perhaps beyond.

### **1.11 Limitations of the study**

The study had the following limitations:

Firstly, it was possible that the findings were generalized since only sampled schools were used yet many schools countrywide were affected by conflict. That is, the study was applicable only to schools at Tikoe centre, which may not be sufficient to generalize for all schools in Lesotho. Secondly, some of the respondents were not agreeable to being interviewed. Lastly, the length of time taken to complete the study was affected by recent changes as facts keep on changing in schools. That is, data collection took a

longer time which affected the results as data keeps on changing if the study takes long to complete.

### **1.12 Definition of terms**

**Conflict:** Disputes that arise when two or more parties are involved.

**Conflict management:** A skill that is attained or applied when there is dispute or misunderstanding in any environment.

**Strategies of conflict management:** Mechanism that can be utilized when dealing with, or managing, conflict between people.

### **1.13 Outline of the study**

Chapter 1 introduces the study by situating it within the Lesotho educational context and includes the situation of Tikoe Centre as the main concern of the study. The chapter also presents the statement of the problem, aim and objectives of the study. Chapter 2 reviews policy documents and studies on conflict and management in Lesotho schools, regional as well as international and scholarly literature. Chapter 3, outlines the research design and research methodology employed. The chapter explores participants' perceptions through the use of semi-structured and focus group interview. Chapter 4 presents results and findings of the investigations as provided by participants. Chapter 5 constitutes the final chapter and entails a brief summary of the previous chapters and draws conclusions from the findings.

### **1.14 Conclusion**

The chapter has provided a brief overview of the introduction, background to the study, preliminary literature review, statement of the problem, main research question, sub-questions, aim and specific objectives, rationale, significance and limitations of the study. A definition of terms and an outline of the study were also provided. The next chapter will present the theoretical framework and the literature review as indicated in the outline.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

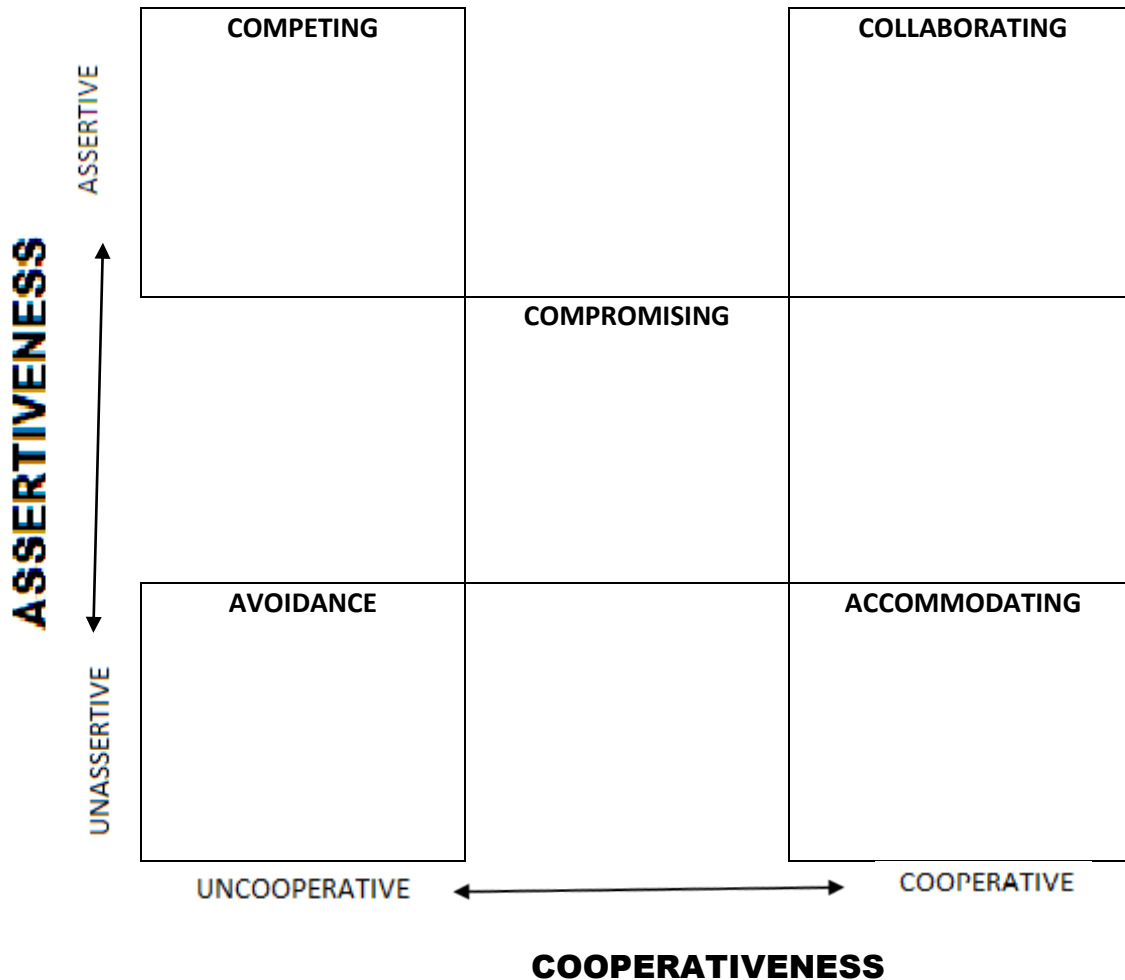
The previous chapter was introduced with the discussion of the sub-sections that include background to the study, preliminary literature review, specific objectives and statement of the problem. The sub-sections situated the study from the global to the local context. This chapter reviews related literature on strategies of managing conflict in schools. It begins first by presenting the theoretical framework, and then the empirical literature that includes causes of conflicts, strategies and challenges that are faced by school principals when managing conflicts. According to Creswell (2008), literature review is a written summary of journal articles, books and other documents that describe the past and the current state of information. A literature review is based on the assumption that knowledge accumulates and that we learn from and build on what others have done (Neuman, 2006). The related literature in this chapter will be reviewed on relevant sources that include articles, books and policy documents such as school Act 2010 and Teaching Service Regulations 2002. It is presented in three levels as the international, regional and national level.

#### **2.2 Theoretical framework**

The study will be guided by the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) (2010) which is widely used for studying strategies used to manage conflict and is based on five styles: competing, collaborating, compromising, accommodating and avoiding. The instrument assesses individual behaviour in conflict situations, that is, situations where two people appear to be incompatible. In conflict situations, the model describes a person's behaviour along two dimensions. First, an assertiveness which is the extent to which an individual attempts to satisfy his/her own concerns and second, cooperativeness which is the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other



person's concerns. These two dimensions of behaviour can be used to define five methods of dealing with conflict. The model is explained in the diagram below.



**Fig. 2.1. The Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)**

According to the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode (2010), **competing** is an assertive, uncooperative and power-oriented mode. According to this style, when competing, an individual pursues his or her own concerns at the expense of other people using whatever power is appropriate to win his or her positions. It means standing up for one's own rights and defending a position one believes is correct or simply trying to win. Behari (1997) submitted that the style is associated with a win-lose orientation use of

power and forcing behaviours to win one's position. Makibi (2010) maintained that competing is more appropriate during emergencies or if time is precious and a quick decision is needed. According to Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002), the use of power to manage conflict may lead to a forced or imposed solution, which may escalate or recycle the conflict because the user may retaliate. Deutseh (2005) asserted that the style can lead to repeated, widespread injustices if it is not managed well.

Another element is **collaborative**, it is both assertive and cooperative. An individual attempts to work with the other person to find a solution that fully satisfies the underlying concerns of both of them (Howell, 2014). The style further involves digging into an issue to identify the primary concerns of the two individuals and to find an alternative that meets both sets of concerns (Kassim, 2014; Kilmann, 2010). Rahim et al. (2001b) and Squelch and Lemmer (1994) confirmed that the focus of collaborating is negotiating, looking for the middle ground, and searching for solutions that satisfy or are acceptable to both parties. Rahim et al. further contended that the style has been identified with win-win synergistic problem-solving that entails openness, exchange of information and the examination of differences during conflict management situation. Behari (1997) and Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002) point out that the style is regarded as the most effective in managing conflicts in a school context. Makibi (2010) declares that it is useful when one does not want to have full responsibility but wants other parties to give their own views.

**Compromising** is intermediate, and both assertive and comparative. When compromising, the objective is to find an expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties through competing and accommodating, giving up more than competing, but less than accommodating (Kassim 2014; Kilmann, 2010). It might mean splitting the difference, exchanging concessions or seeking a quick middle-ground position (Kassim, 2014). Makibi (2010) analyzed the five strategies basing herself on the model proposed by Hall (1969), Pruitt and Rubbin (1986), Rohn (1983) and Thomas (1988). She declares that compromising is the style that involves give-and-take or win some-lose-some. According to Makibi, the conflicting parties lose something in order to

get something. Both parties may sacrifice by sharing outcomes to avoid conflict. Squelch and Lemmer (1994) argued that a compromising style may have some drawbacks if parties are not convinced that compromise can be necessary for both parties. For them, people may not be satisfied because both parties may end up with less than what they hoped for. Makibi further declared that a compromising style may promote cynicism, especially if there is no commitment to honour the compromise.

**Avoiding** is when an individual does not immediately pursue his or her own concerns or those of the other person. He or she does not address the conflict but takes the option of diplomatically sidestepping an issue or postponing it until a better time or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation (Kassim, 2014). Makibi (2010) posited that this style involves lose-leave, inaction, withdrawal, no-loser-no-winner. The conflicting parties may respond to conflict by neglecting or postponing it and not taking any action to address it with the hope that it would either go away or not cause harm (Davies, 2004). Ngcobo (2003) argued that avoidance behaviour lacks both assertiveness and cooperativeness. Davies (2004) explained that this type of conflict management strategy is not effective because in most cases the problem remains unresolved and may make conflict situation worse as inherent in it is poor communication.

**Accommodating** is unassertive and cooperative; it is the opposite of competing. When accommodating, an individual neglects his or her own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person, and there is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode (Kassim, 2014). He further argued that accommodating might take the form of selflessness, generosity or charity, obeying another person's order when you would prefer not to, or yielding to another point of view. Rahim et al. (2001b) state that the style manages conflict by allowing the other party to win in order to avoid conflict. It further involves working towards a common purpose to protect the relationship among conflicting parties. It aims to satisfy the concern of the other party. Naicker (2003) warns that this style could lead to retaliatory and negative attitudes towards the opposing party. Accommodating behaviour is not always a positive approach to address the conflict because it excludes the voice of one party (Kilmann, 2010).

Each conflict style has advantages and disadvantages (Huan & Yazdanifard, 2012; Lassier, 2010). The strengths and weaknesses of each style are as follows:

Collaborative style - The final decision makes all parties happy (Montoya-Weiss et al. 2001). On the other hand, the style may use longer time and put in more effort than other styles to make all parties satisfied.

Avoidance style - This style maintains the relationship between managers and subordinates. The weakness of the style is that it does not resolve the conflict (Montoya-Weiss et al. 2001). It worsens the problem instead of taking it away.

Accommodation - The strength of this style is that relationship is maintained by the users. On the other hand, the more effective ideas may not be used due to accommodating style.

Compromising style - The benefit of this style is that conflict can be resolved in a short time while the relationship is still maintained. The weakness is that, with compromising style, managers fail to do the right thing as they try to satisfy all concerned parties, taking suboptimum decisions (Huan & Yazdanifard, 2012). He further declares that if the style is misused, it may cause people to be greedy and ask several times to get their desires.

Competing - Its strength is that enhanced organizational decisions will be chosen if the forcer is correct rather than choosing less effective decisions. The weakness is that aggression and anger occur in its users. This is a negative conflict management style that would decrease team performance (Cohen & Bailey 1997; Huan & Yazdanifard, 2012).

The model seemed to be relevant to the researcher's study since it consists of different strategies school principals could utilize to manage conflict among staff depending on situations. According to Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002), the best way to manage conflict is to match the strategy with the situation. This could enable the school principals to use different strategies to manage conflicts among staff depending on the different situations in their schools.

## **2.3. Empirical literature**

This section of the literature review provides a discussion of the related empirical evidence on the strategies school principals use to manage conflict among staff in their schools. Conflict has been defined earlier in the background by many writers and scholars. Thakore (2013) also defines conflict as a disagreement between two or more individuals or groups with each individual or groups trying to gain acceptance of its view over others. The empirical evidence in this chapter will also be discussed in three sections: internationally, regionally and nationally.

In spite of many studies conducted worldwide, conflict is still a serious issue in schools. As highlighted in the background, several studies and literature have shown that conflict is inevitable. It is everywhere and many studies have been conducted during various periods of history worldwide.

Below is a snapshot of some studies that have been conducted on conflict in schools based on causes, strategies and challenges school principals experience when managing conflicts among staff in their schools.

### ***2.3.1 International level***

#### **2.3.2. Causes**

International scholars have different opinions on the causes of conflict in schools. According to Huxley Consulting (2005), understanding the root causes of conflict is important when the educational manager is trying to resolve disputes between two or more individuals or groups.

Johdi & Abdulpakdee (2012) cites Auerback and Dolan (1997), Rahim (2001), Champoux (2011), Janasz et al. (1997), Johdi and Mahamad and Rahim and Raman (2011) who identified the following organizational factors that are likely to cause conflict: (1) structural factors which relate to the nature of the organization and the way in which

work is organized. They are as follows: specialization, common relationships, status differences, jurisdictional, ambiguities and expectations; (2) Personal factors which relate to differences associated with organizational conflict. They are skills and abilities, personality conflicts, perceptions, diversity and personal problems and communication.

(Ipek (2000); Soyalp, (2001), in Goksoy (2016) argue that conflicts in schools are caused by disagreements, differences, friction and discrepancies based on differences of opinion, views and interests, which the researcher believes fall under personal factors as Johdi & Abdulpakdee (2012) pointed out.

Some scholars have agreed that the causes of conflict are deep rooted in our biology (Eder 1968; Collier 1975; Tadesse 1988; 1994; Schellenberg 1996; in Thakore 2013). They describe such an approach as an individual act rather than context of the act. Thakore also indicated that the idea is rooted in Freud who believed that violence is rooted in our basic nature as animals. He further noted that human conflict is inevitable not because it is part of social life, but for it is a biological fact lying within us all.

Bourne (2015) cites Gray and Stork (1984) who suggested several sources of conflict. These are limited resources, interdependent work activities, and differentiation of activities, communication problems, difference in perceptions and the environment of the organization. Bourne seems to agree with Johdi & Abdulpakdee (2012) and Goksoy (2016) on some of the causes listed above. That means their opinions are not too different in terms of what causes conflict in school.

The international studies above revealed that there are several causes of conflicts in different schools. Therefore, I consider them relevant to my study as one of the objectives of this study is to find out what causes conflict at Tikoe centre. That means through this research, relevant causes will be discovered, and as such, it would be easier to resolve the conflicts if the root cause is understood as indicated earlier by Huxley (2005).

### **2.3.3 Strategies school principals use to manage conflicts**

Olaleye & Arogundade (2013) articulate that different management strategies may lead to either desirable or undesirable outcomes depending on their effectiveness and ineffectiveness. Effective management strategy may result in desirable outcome such as smooth management, enhanced discipline and effective management of time, team spirit and effective use of resources, achievement of goals, good relationships and great value by stakeholders. However, they claim that when ineffective management is used, undesirable outcomes such as misallocation of resources, absence and frustrations may occur.

Elaborating on conflict management strategies, Johdi & Abdulpakdee (2012) indicate that conflict can be harmful to employee satisfaction and job performance if it becomes excessive and unmanageable. Johdi & Abdulpakdee declare that if conflicts that arise in schools and colleges are not taken care of, they could affect the educators as well as the students by creating unwanted divergence in their learning environment. They further assert that the principal is the person who holds the most important role in school. They experience many problems in school administration such as financial issues, school climate, school facilities and administration. He indicates that administration is one of them.

Johdi & Abdulpakdee (2012) further point out that conflict can appear in controlled or uncontrolled situations in schools, depending on the principal's management knowledge, experience, decisions, attitudes and characteristics. Johdi & Abdulpakdee (2012) also assert that school principals should learn more about conflict management to effectively manage their schools. In fact, Hacifazlioglu (2004) declared that all types of organizations need to have a suitable strategy for conducting conflict management. According to Johdi & Abdulpakdee (2012), conflicts that are managed well create a conducive workplace for workers where relationships, trust and respect prevail among them. Such an environment, according to Johdi & Abdulpakdee (2012), stimulates team spirit and increases productivity.

Various conflict writers have highlighted various ways of resolving conflict situations, many of which are relevant to school situations (Karim 2015). He identified five conflict-solving strategies as: smoothing, compromising, forcing, withdrawal and problem-solving. (Blake and Mouton 1994 cited in Karim 2015). Karim declared that school managers and leaders need to understand what is entailed in conflict management and need a high conflict competence to be able to be effective in their schools. He further pointed out that when conflict managers have determined and defined the nature of conflict, they should try and find ways of resolving it. Karim further asserts that if conflict is handled effectively, it can create a good learning experience. However, if handled ineffectively, it can quickly escalate to physical and emotional violence. He indicated that to manage conflict, skills like effective communication and negotiations are needed.

Goksoy (2016) cites Robbins and Judge (2012) who argue that conflicts which are destructive phenomena to be avoided according to traditional view, are positive forces necessary for organizations today to continue their existence. Goksoy is in agreement with Karim and Johdi & Abdulpakdee that conflicts are not desired because they lead to failure, tensions and negative results if not managed. He declared that the focus should be on how to manage the process instead of how to define it as a concept. That is how conflicts are resolved, and the approach used to manage conflicts is crucial. Goksoy holds the same view as Karim (2015) that conflict management uses the following approaches: accommodating, compromise, collaborating, avoidance and confrontation. Goksoy also agrees that the approaches used to resolve conflicts in a positive manner are crucial for organizational life because lack of success in conflict resolution would not only cause breakdown in the relationships among the personnel, but would also affect their performance, motivation and efforts negatively.

Thakore (2013) further elaborates what he said earlier that different people use different strategies for managing conflict. He declared that when people are in conflict, there are two major concerns that need to be considered: (1) achieving personal goal, and (2) keeping a good relationship with another person. These two concerns affect how one



acts in a conflict. He contended that with these two concerns, it is possible to identify the styles of managing conflict as: avoidance, smoothing, forcing and confronting. He also agrees that if conflict is not managed well it becomes disruptive or destructive. Conflicts would deepen and be more complicated unless they are resolved, and people involved in the conflict would experience negative feelings (Argon, 2014).

According to Bourne (2015), management and resolution of conflict in educational settings requires strategies that promote the amicable handling of disputes cooperatively, constructively and successfully in addition to the traditional disciplinary procedures. Ghaffer (2010) cited Johnson & Johnson (1996), who stated that when conflicts are resolved constructively all disputants are satisfied, the relationship between disputants is improved and the disputants' ability to resolve future conflicts constructively is improved. Mounton and Bonoma (1979) cited in Tesfay (2002) describe five styles for managing conflict as avoidance, accommodating, competing, compromising and collaborating.

With regard to management strategies, the above studies are related to my study. They propose conflict management strategies, which is one of the objectives of this study. The above views are important for this study, as they reveal what other researchers found previously as strategies that can be utilized to manage conflict in schools.

#### **2.3.4 Challenges experienced by school principals when managing conflicts**

According to Daresh (2002) and Green et al. (2003), most managers in the education system get these positions without any prior management training. Some get the positions because of their long service in the system, while others get them because of their flowering curricula vitae or having an excellent interview (Bramson, 2004). According to him, a principal is part of a management team who supervise, facilitate, make decisions, act as institutional leaders and are responsible for staff and student

welfare, and ensure great relations within the school. They are also responsible for managing day-to-day activities.

In the light of the above, it is important for the school management team (SMT) to know the source of conflict and strategies that can be used to reduce it in the workplace in order to overcome all the challenges. The study proves that principals face challenges when managing conflicts in schools. This influenced my study in order to bring solutions to the Tikoe centre area, as the school principals could gain some skills.

### **2.3.5 Conflict in school**

It was argued earlier that conflict is inevitable among human beings, as it has been with us and has influenced our thinking from time immemorial. Rahim (2001a) states that conflict originates from a number of sources such as task, values and goals. He further declares that it has been found appropriate to classify conflict on the basis of these sources for proper understanding of its nature and implications. He classified conflict into the following categories: (1) affective conflict, (2) substantive conflict, (3) conflict of interest, (4) conflict of values, (5) goal conflict, (6) realistic versus nonrealistic conflict, (7) institutionalized versus non-institutionalized conflict, (8) retributive conflict and (9) displaced conflict.

In terms of managing conflict, Rahim identified management of interpersonal conflict that involves changes in the attitudes, behaviour and organizational structure so that the organizational members can work with each other effectively for attaining their individual and/or joint goals. The management of interpersonal conflict is to deal with different situations effectively and set up appropriate mechanisms so that unresolved issues are dealt with properly. The interpersonal conflicts can be handled with various styles of behaviour. The first styles of handling conflicts in organizations were first conceptualized by Mary Fallet (1940) in 1926. She further conceptualized the three main ways of handling organizational conflict as: domination, compromising and

integration. Rahim (2001a) declares the secondary ways as avoidance and suppression.

As Robbins et al. (1994) argued, whenever two or more people interact, either as individuals or group, there is always a potential for conflict. They emphasized that recent research indicates that human's approach to conflict reduction does not necessarily lead to improved long-term relationships between individuals and groups. The approach pointed out that conflict cannot be avoided, and therefore, has to be faced up to and worked out. According to Robbins et al. (1994), the techniques designed to help in the resolution of conflict both at individual and group level, which will enable people to work more effectively with conflict, include negotiation and bargaining.

To sum up the discussion at the global level, literature revealed that conflict originated from a number of sources. In relation to conflict management strategies, literature pointed at the strategies of conflict as accommodating, compromising, collaboration, avoidance and confrontation. The majority agree on the above strategies that can be used to manage conflict and that each strategy can be utilized depending on the situation. I consider the above studies a good guide to my study as they pointed out what other researchers' opinions are on the same issue. Both literature and research at a global level reveal that school principals face some challenges when managing conflicts in schools due to lack of skills, hence they fail to manage it in their schools.

## ***2.4 Regional level***

### **2.4.1 Causes**

As indicated earlier, the trend concerning conflict issues globally may not be different from what is obtained regionally. A study by Makaye and Ndofirepi (2012) which sought to establish the causes of conflicts amongst primary school heads and teachers, and how conflict could be resolved came up with several sources of conflict. Nyamajiwa (2000) cited in Makaye & Ndofirepi (2012) identified several sources of conflict as goal

incompatibility, performance expectations and organizational structure. He declared goal incompatibility as the most frequent in an organization as the school and individual teachers may bring in their different time and goal orientations that may create a state of high differentiation. He asserts that goal incompatibility occurs when there is lack of agreement concerning how the task should be evaluated. Nyamajiwa also pointed out that conflict within an organization can be caused by limited resources.

Kipyego (2013) identified the causes of conflicts, types of conflict management and techniques for conflict resolution in schools. He indicated that a number of schools in Kenya have been experiencing a general wave of conflict and have affected many people. He identified the following as causes of conflict in schools: administration incompetence of head teachers, unimpressive conditions of service, inadequate resources, favouritism by school administration, poor academic performance, inferiority/superiority complex, indiscipline on the part of teachers and administration, indiscipline on the part of students and misappropriation or embezzlement of funds.

Ignace (2014) cited Schofield (1977) who argued that the causes of conflicts in schools between heads of schools, teachers and students involve: lack of proper communication with teachers, imposition of strict deadlines for various activities, differences in perception on management of certain issues in schools, poor physical working conditions, and lack of learning aids and psycho-social support when they are in need. According to Okotoni and Okotoni (2003), administration of secondary schools in the states was hampered by a high rate of conflicts in school. He declared the causes of conflict in the schools in the state as: inadequate welfare package for workers, forceful and compulsory retirement/retrenchment of workers, administrative incompetence, personal clashes, role conflicts and non-involvement of students in school administration.

Researchers in the region (sub-Saharan African countries) confirm what has been discussed at the global level. Limited resources have been stated by the majority of

researchers as one of causes of conflicts in schools. It will become clearer later how this study will fit into these discussions following the analysis of data.

#### **2.4.2 Strategies school principals use to manage conflict**

According to Makaye & Ndofirepi (2012), in recent years, a great deal of management attention has been directed towards the development of an effective way of managing conflicts in schools. Hanson, (1996); Rahim (1992) assert that several strategies have been suggested for resolving conflicts. These range from avoidance, non-attention, physical separation, limited interaction, compromise and confrontation. Makaye & Ndofirepi indicated that each of the conflict strategies is appropriate in some situations and inappropriate in others. They further pointed out that people who handle conflict effectively ascertain the unique characteristics of the conflict situation they are in and choose the appropriate strategy to use. They suggested that individuals often grow accustomed to using one primary conflict strategy and develop hard-to-change propensities towards conflict.

Robbins (2003) argues that conflict in an organization has no possible outcomes. The outcome may be functional in that conflict results in an improvement in the group's performance. According to Kipyeko (2013), if conflict is dysfunctional then the parties need to de-escalate it and if a conflict is too low then the parties need to make it more functional. These are done using conflict management techniques which use resolution and stimulation techniques to achieve the desired level of conflict. Kipyeko (2013) identified nine resolution techniques that can be used to achieve the desired level of conflict: (1) a super-ordinate goal; (2) altering the structural variable; (3) altering the structural variable; (4) authoritative command; (5) avoidance; (6) compromise; (7) expansion of resource; (8) problem-solving; and (9) soothing.

**A super-ordinate goal:** This involves creating a shared goal that cannot be attained without the cooperation of each of the conflicting persons.

**Altering the human variable:** This involves using the behavioural change techniques such as human relation training to alter attitudes and behaviours that influence conflict.

**Altering the structural variable:** This entails changing the formal organization structure and the interaction patterns of the conflicting parties through job redesign, transfers, creation of coordinating position and the like.

**Authoritative command:** This is where management uses its formal authority to resolve the conflict, then communicate its desires to the parties involved.

**Avoidance:** This involves withdrawal from, or suppression of the conflict.

**Compromise:** This is where each party of the conflict gives something of value.

**Expansion of resources:** When a conflict is caused by the scarcity of a resource. For example money, promotion opportunities and office space, then expansion of the resource can create a win-win solution.

**Problem-solving:** This involves face-to-face meeting of the conflicting parties for the purpose of identifying the problem and resolving it through open discussion.

**Soothing:** This entails playing down differences while emphasizing common interests between the conflicting parties.

Ignance (2014) cites Oyebade (1994), who asserts that conflict is inevitable, therefore, various conflict writers have highlighted diverse ways of resolving these conflict situations as many of these are relevant in school situations. Kilmann (1970) identified five techniques of dealing with conflicts in schools as competitive, collaborative, compromising, accommodating and avoiding. These techniques vary in degree of assertiveness and cooperativeness as explained earlier in the theory. Kiwia (1984) perceived conflict as the result of the absence of administrators' courses in conflict management, and this leads to poor approach for getting resolution. The essence here is to ensure that heads of secondary schools are able to meet with the daily routine challenges happening in their service area. Ignance argues that findings have shown that strategies used to calm the conflict in many secondary schools currently are of negative results. In other words, they do not help to solve the prevailing situations.

According to Nnonkan (2015), in Nigeria and other parts of the world, students are being controlled and guided by methods such as rules and regulations, school timetables, and curriculum content. These, however, affect students' behaviour and learning. He pointed out that teachers who implemented the organizational control pattern are also faced with other statutory duties, such as updating continuous assessment records, class registers, diaries and scheme of work. He further indicated that the principal and teachers do have constraints like any other member of the society as they may be required to be diligent, honest and responsible, irrespective of the conflicts that could arise while performing these roles. Therefore, when conflicts arise, they must be managed with a view to resolving them using either of the strategies: integrating, compromising, avoiding and dominating.

Mosomi (2013) indicates that the success of every school depends on its management. As indicated earlier in the background he was only interested in the effects of conflicts at secondary schools, so he did not provide causes and strategies. Okotoni and Okotoni (2003) suggest that the fact that most of the school administrators were not knowledgeable in conflict management, coupled with the absence of laid down procedures for conflict management in most schools, contributed to the high rate of conflicts and industrial actions in the schools. According to Okotoni and Okotoni, the nature of conflict that occurs in school administrations varies from one school to another. He, therefore, indicates that conflict appears to occur regularly in schools. As pointed out by experts on conflict management, conflict itself is not destructive provided it is well managed.

Msila (2012) states that school managers and leaders need to understand what is entailed in conflict management and need high conflict competence to be effective in their schools. According to Msila, when conflict managers have determined and defined the nature of conflict in a conflict situation, they try to find ways of resolving it. He indicated that various writers have highlighted different ways of resolving these conflict situations. He furthermore indicated that effective school principals would have the qualities highlighted in the conflict literature. Msila cites Blake and Mouton (1964) who

like many authors and researchers agreed on the five conflict-solving strategies: withdrawal, soothing, compromising, forcing and problem-solving.

In the same manner, the studies in the region pointed out to the different strategies that can be used to manage conflict in school. These are: accommodation, avoidance, competing, collaborating and compromising. This confirms that conflict exists in every school proving that it needs to be managed using relevant strategies that would be revealed by school principals in the Tikoe area.

### **2.4.3 Challenges experienced by school principals when managing conflicts**

Msila (2011) states that the challenges faced by school heads are to identify the problems endemic in their schools. He adds that the workloads of school heads are becoming unmanageable and as a result many school heads are unable to manage the performance of the school, leading to low achievement.

Another challenge Msile mentioned was that some school principals do not master the basic principles of school management. This may hinder the efficiency of the general administration of the school. Moreover, the initial training for some of the principals did not prepare them adequately in school administration and management. Kiwia (1984) in Ignance (2014) perceived conflict as the result of the absence of administrators' course in conflict management leading to poor approaches in conflict resolution. The essence here is that the heads of schools should be able to face and address the daily routine challenges happening in their service area. Ignance further reveals that heads of schools have little knowledge and skills on how to manage the conflicts hence they are expected to creatively address conflict in their schools.

According to Oyebade (1994), conflict is inevitable, therefore knowledge and skills on managing at any institution is required to enable managers to handle opposing ideas and challenges; whether fruitful or not. Okotoni and Okotoni (2003) point out that the fact that most of the school administrators were not knowledgeable in conflict



management, coupled with the absence of laid down procedures for conflict management in most schools, contributed to the high rate of conflicts and industrial actions in schools.

According to researchers in the region (sub-Saharan African countries), it is clear that even at the regional level, school principals still experience challenges when managing conflict in schools as they lack skills. Therefore, it confirms the need for more research on conflict management strategies in schools as mentioned earlier in the background. Management, coupled with the absence of laid-down procedures for conflict management in most schools, seems to contribute to a high rate of conflicts and protests in schools.

#### **2.4.4 Conflicts in school**

As indicated earlier in the background, literature confirms that conflict is a daily part of our lives, and part of the school too. Botha (2013) argues that fundamental to the eruption of conflict, is the experience of social threats at the workplace, which are treated by the brain with the same intensity as physical threats. With reference to the SCARF model of Rock (2012), the social threats pertain to status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness and/or fairness. Considering these social threats within the context of a school, conditions that cause conflict in school involves the following, among others: individual differences, limited resources, departmentalization and specialization, inequitable treatment, territory violations, environmental changes and distorted communication.

Literature also affirms that conflict management pertains to the application of a specified process to resolve conflict (Botha 2013). He indicates that this process can help to reduce the negative impact of conflict by restoring fairness, enhancing process effectiveness, ensuring resource efficiency, improving working relationships and maintaining the satisfaction of both parties as well as achieving desired results. According to Botha, it takes many forms ranging from small encounters to full-scale

battles, but no matter the form of the conflict, it can be resolved by means of effective conflict management. Therefore, the three principles relevant to managing conflict between teachers, learners and parents as indicated earlier in the background, are peaceful coexistence, compromise and problem-solving (Behfer et al. 2008; Forgas et al. 2011).

According to Steyn Van Niekerk (2013), the conditions that trigger the episode of conflict are referred to as the sources of conflict. Johnson (1994) divides the sources of conflict into six types: effective conflict, conflict of interest, (limited resources) conflict of values and beliefs, cognitive conflict, goal conflict and substantive conflict. Strategies employed by conflicting parties are greatly influenced by their perceptions of each other's behaviour (Johnson, 1994). He declares that management of conflict requires an understanding of how the situation developed since people differ in their ways of dealing with conflicts. Ken Thomas identified five major styles of conflict management that managers can adopt. These are: force, avoidance, accommodation and problem-solving (Cleary 2003; Greenberg & Baron 1995; Owens 2001; Tosi; Mero & Rizzo 2000).

The discussed literature proves that conflict exists everywhere, thus there is a need for this study to be undertaken for the benefit of Lesotho schools especially the Tikoe area. It would be interesting to find a different perspective from this context.

## ***2.5. National level***

### **2.5.1. Causes**

Though there is limited research in Lesotho, Mofolo (2004) discovered the following as the causes of conflicts in schools: **organizational structure**: scarce resources, departmentalization and specialization; **individual and group differences**: individual differences, differences in values, perception and expectations; **ambiguities**: role ambiguities, communication problems; and **authority structure**: power structure, departmental policies. I discovered that Lesotho's new integrated curriculum has

included the concept of conflict in Grade 6 learner textbooks, and the following are listed as the causes of conflicts: misunderstanding, poor communication, lack of planning, frustration and stress.

According to Makibi (2010), conflict has become a matter of concern worldwide as it has devastating effects on national stability. Makibi further indicates that in recent years, schools are experiencing discipline problems as well as conflict among teachers. According to Shale, Ntabeni, Mofuoa and Molapo (2006) in Makibi (2010), Lesotho was once a peaceful country, but of late, it has become a violent nation. Makibi further asserts that, nowadays there are eruptions of conflicts in Lesotho villages. According to Makibi there have been violent conflicts and deaths related to stock theft and political differences suggesting that Basotho are no more a peaceful nation. Hence why the conflicts are affecting teachers in schools too, as she indicated earlier. Makibi agrees with Mofolo on some of the causes of conflict discovered as individual differences, inequitable treatment of staff, and violation of territory, environmental changes and communication.

Nkome, (2015) argues that some of the causes of industrial conflict at Lerotholi Polytechnic are inadequate funds for the core business, which is teaching and learning materials, research and innovation. Nkome states that teaching and learning is not given the first priority in terms of allocation of resources, and as a result, compromises academic success and fuels conflicts between teaching staff and management. Inability for management to identify and apply a leadership style that is appropriate to the prevailing situations is also cited as a factor. Teachers argue that the institutional leadership styles did not match democratic principles of transparency, constituency and involvement of teachers in decision-making. Nkome also established that some conflicts emanate from a hostile institutional culture. For example, some of the teachers and administrative staff who are the products of the institution have grouped themselves as Fokothians and did not accept management from other staff who originate from elsewhere.

Makibi (2010), Mofolo (2004) and Nkome (2015) have the same opinions on most of the causes of conflict though they were investigating different levels of education. The data to be presented later may confirm or dispute these issues.

### **2.5.2 Strategies school principals use to manage conflict in schools**

Although it is stated earlier that there is limited literature in Lesotho, few researchers investigated conflicts. Spangler (2003) in Makibi (2010) declares that nations globally, including sub-Saharan African countries, are aborting on finding peaceful strategies for managing, resolving and transforming conflicts. Bennett Crowford & Cortwright (2003) in Makibi further indicates that many researchers believe that conflict is inevitable and can be beneficial. According to Makibi, researchers have designed effective strategies to minimize the dysfunctional nature of conflict and maximise its constructive functions and enhance good relationship and communication in schools. Makibi discovered strategies that teachers can use to manage conflict in school as avoiding, accommodation/smoothing, compromising, competing/power and collaborating/problem-solving.

Mofolo (2004) indicates that conflict solves few problems, creates many and breeds unhealthy conflict. However, if conflict is understood, it is easier to find ways to predict it, prevent it, transform it and resolve it. According to Mofolo, how conflict is dealt with makes it either productive or unproductive. This therefore suggests that school principals are increasingly called upon to manage conflict situations so that teachers can spend more time teaching and students more time learning. However, Mofolo states that managing conflict at school has been an old age challenge for educators and learning to deal with it is a lifetime skill which educators need.

Nkome (2015) argues that some leaders of higher education institutions are either not well grounded in management theories or do not realize their importance in day-to-day running of the institution hence face challenges in effectively preventing and better managing teacher labour conflicts. Therefore, to manage industrial conflicts he identified the following styles: the laissez-faire leadership style, the democratic or participative organizational style and autocratic or dictatorship leadership style. Nkome states that

management theories equip managers with leadership attributes which influence effective and efficient planning, organizing, leading, monitoring and evaluating of an organization's activities and resources.

Little research in Lesotho confirms what was said by both international and regional researchers which confirms similar strategies for managing conflict in schools as discovered by both global and regional scholars. According to these studies, conflict happens everywhere on a daily basis. Therefore the most important thing that needs to be done in Lesotho schools is an awareness to both school principals and teachers about conflict. Therefore, I believe this study will serve that purpose.

### **2.5.3 Challenges experienced by school principals when managing conflicts**

As indicated earlier that there is little research on conflict management, only Mofolo (2004) was found to be interested in challenges facing school principals when managing conflict in Lesotho schools. Mofolo is not different from international and regional researchers and believes that school principals lack training to manage conflicts at school. She declared that the present and future school principals are faced with serious challenges as far as conflict management is concerned. Mofolo further points out that school principals lack managerial skills in conflict because they were not specifically trained for the posts they are holding. What makes this even worse is the fact that there are no centres that offer any in-service training.

Mofolo's findings further indicate that teacher training in Lesotho focuses more on content to be taught in classes but school principals frequently experience conflict in their schools. Therefore, there is need for them to receive conflict management training. She further asserts that no single style of conflict management is suited to all situations; therefore, principals must be made aware of the alternative styles and circumstances in which they may be used. According to Mofolo this will enable them to deal with conflict when it arises in their schools.

Likewise, the above study confirms that school principals in Lesotho have challenges in managing conflicts in schools the same way as other countries worldwide. As indicated, they lack the training that enables them to manage conflicts in school.

#### **2.5.4 Conflicts in school**

In Lesotho and in most other parts of the world, schools are controlled and guided by rules and regulations. That is, there are laws and policies that govern schools. As indicated in the background, according to the Education Act 2010, schools should be governed by School Boards while the administration is concerned with the daily running of the school.

The School Board members are more diverse and represent the community they serve. It acts as a coordinator between the school and other stakeholders. The school boards have power to recommend to the appointing authority, the appointment, promotion, demotion or transfer of a teacher. They can also recommend to the appointing authority or proprietor, as the case may be, disciplinary action against a principal or head of department.

As mentioned earlier, the Teaching Service Regulations 2002 support that a teacher employed in the teaching service shall, during the period of employment, be responsible to the School Board or Management committee of the school to which he is allocated. It was also mentioned that the school principal is the secretary of the board and an ex-officio member of the governing body responsible for daily administration of the school. They are responsible for discipline of teachers under their supervision in line with the disciplinary code of conduct as well as maintaining and enforcing discipline in schools they are heading.

According to the Teaching Service Regulations 2002, failure by any person to comply with the regulations shall be regarded as a breach of discipline, and such person may be charged with misconduct as mentioned earlier. Clause (45) (1c) Therefore, both the

Act and teaching service regulations provide for how conflicts should be controlled in schools. That means everybody in school operates under a certain code of conduct of teaching service that clearly shows how everybody should behave in order to keep harmony in school.

As indicated earlier in the background, the Education Act of 2010 and teaching service regulations are also significant to the study, as they regulate how Lesotho schools are governed, and how everybody should behave in schools. They also provide guidance on how conflicts are managed. Therefore, it will be easier to conduct the study with the knowledge of what is expected from all stakeholders in terms of conflicts through these regulations. It will also determine if the targeted group is aware of these regulations.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the literature review of the study. First, the chapter discussed the theoretical framework within which the literature was grounded. The related literature in this chapter was reviewed internationally, regionally (sub-Saharan African countries) and regionally. It was reviewed in terms of causes, strategies and challenges school principals face when managing conflicts in their schools. The literature clearly points out that conflicts exist as many studies on conflict have been conducted worldwide. It is unavoidable and therefore requires the right strategies to be utilized for effective running of the school.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter two discussed the theoretical framework that was adopted in this study and the related literature on strategies utilized by school principals when managing conflicts in school. This chapter presents the research methodology and design which were followed in this study. The methods used to collect data are also presented and the justification as to why they were chosen is provided. The selection of participants is clearly shown and described. Population, sampling, and data analysis are also discussed. In conclusion, the chapter reviews ethical issues as well as trustworthiness in qualitative research.

#### **3.2 Research methodology**

The study employed qualitative research approach. Zohrabi (2013) asserts that qualitative approach is a form of social action that stresses the way people interpret, and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals. He adds that the approach makes use of interviews, diaries, classroom observations and immersions and open-ended questionnaires to obtain, analyze and interpret the data, content analysis of visual and textual materials and oral history. The main objective of qualitative research is to provide understanding of human behaviour, emotions, attitudes and experiences (Tong et al. 2012). A qualitative methodology focuses on words rather than numbers. This type of research observes the world in its natural setting, and interprets situations to understand the meanings that people make from day-to-day life (Wilia 2015). Punch (2013) concurs that the approach is a social science research that collects and works with non-numerical data and seeks to interpret meaning from these data that bring understanding to social life through the study of targeted population or places. Kothari (2004) asserts that qualitative methods enable the researcher to interact with the participants to get first-hand knowledge of the problem under investigation and an in-depth understanding of the issue.



The researcher used a qualitative approach as it seeks in-depth information concerning the problem under investigation. Therefore, the researcher considered both the qualitative methodology and a case study design best for the study since they have similar characteristics. They both provide a way to obtain in-depth understanding of the phenomena and enable interaction with participants to get first-hand information of the problem as mentioned above. The conclusions were drawn from participants' understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

### **3.3 Research design**

The study employed case study research design. According to Simons (2009) in Rebolj (2013), a case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy institution, programme or system in real-life. She adds that a case study should not be seen as a method in and of itself. Rather, it is a design frame that may incorporate a number of methods. The structure of a case study should be the problem, the context, the issues, and the lessons learned (Creswell 2014). According to Creswell (2009), and Haradhan (2018), a case study is conducted by using multiple sources like: questionnaires, interviews, observations, written accounts and audio-visual materials. Leedy (2002) declares that the main characteristic of case study is that it is narrowly focused and provides a high level of detail and subjective data to achieve an in-depth understanding. He further asserts that a case study may be specifically suitable for understanding a little known or poorly understood situation.

Therefore, the researcher used a case study as the nature of this study intended to generate knowledge to explore the strategies school principals use to manage conflicts at school and understanding the situation in the Tikoe area. In this study, only two schools participated. The interviews were held with the principals and deputy principals of the two primary schools namely: school T and school L. As described later in this chapter, the researcher sought to provide the details of the study by using multiple research instruments. The semi-structured interview and focus group were used to

obtain the participants' views. The chosen instruments answered the research question since they did not look for yes or no answers, but sought to answer the why and how questions posed. Therefore, the case study explained why the case is worthy of in-depth study and how it will contribute to human knowledge. That means it answered the why and how questions as well as providing a detailed description of the case under investigation. A case study design enables the researcher to gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of the existing conditions (Cohen et al. 2007). As a matter of fact, the results in this study helped the researcher to respond to the questions.

### **3.4 Data collection**

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information or variable of interest in a systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses and evaluate outcomes (Kabir 2016). The study employed two main instruments for collecting data namely semi-structured interview and focus group interview. According to Leedy (2002), in case study, the researcher collects extensive data on the individuals, programme, or events on which the investigation is focused. The data often includes observation, interviews, documents, past records and audio-visual materials. Descombe (1998) and Kabir (2016) assert that there is no single research technique that is adequate in itself in collecting valid and reliable data of a particular research problem. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, the study used semi-structured interviews and focus group interview to collect data as indicated. They were used to allow the researcher to systematically observe, interview and record processes as they occur naturally (Hoberg, 1999; Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010).

There are ways in which these two methods were used to collect data from the two schools under investigation. The semi-structured interview was used for school principals and deputy principals for both school T and school L. Teachers from both schools T and L were interviewed using focus group. The principal of school T was interviewed first, followed by the deputy principal. Later on the same day, the school principal and deputy principal of school B were interviewed. The following day the

researcher followed the same trend on the focus group. Teachers from school L were interviewed first and another group of teachers from school L were interviewed after. Apart from writing notes, the audio recorder was used for all the interviews to ensure that all information was adequately captured and safely stored.

#### **3.4.1 Semi-structured interview**

The semi-structured interview was employed to collect data from school principals and deputy principals in respect of the strategies they used to manage conflicts in school. In this study, both closed and open questions were used. According to Kabir (2016), in semi-structured interviews, the interviewer develops and uses an interview guide. He asserts that the semi-structured interviews provide reliable and comparable qualitative data. He further declares that semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observation, informal and unstructured interviewing in order to develop a keen understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions. For the purpose of this research, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

#### **3.4.2 Focus group interviews**

The focus group interview was employed to collect data from teachers. It is a method of data collection that is used to collect data for a specific topic. It is an in-depth field method that brings together a small homogeneous group (six to twelve persons) to discuss topics on a study agenda (Kabir 2016). He adds that a well-facilitated focus group can be helpful in finding out the 'how' and 'why' of human behaviour. According to Kabir (2016), the purpose of a focus group is to make use of participants' feelings, perceptions and opinions. Therefore, in this study, a focus group of eight teachers was conducted at each school as participants build each other's responses on the topic under investigation. Responses were recorded to avoid any information loss. Note-taking was also used to capture non-verbal data. Limited questions were prepared to allow emerging issues.

### **3.5 Population**

According to Taherdoost (2016), population is the entire set of cases from which the sample is drawn. He states that population is commonly related to the number of people living in a particular country. In this study, school principals, deputy principals and teachers from primary schools constitute a target population

### **3.6 Sampling**

Due to the large population size, the researcher used a sampling technique to select a small sample for the purpose of the investigation. In this study, a sample was drawn from school principals and deputy principals from the two schools, 16 teachers - from each school. According to Taherdoost (2016), taking a subset from a chosen sampling frame or entire population is called sampling. Leedy (2002) indicated that qualitative researchers are non-random in their selection of their data sources; instead, their sampling is purposeful. They select participants that will yield the most information about the topic under investigation. Therefore, the study used purposive stratified procedure to obtain participants in order to get the richest information to meet the purpose of the study. The school principals and deputy principals were purposely selected based on the value of power and responsibility they have in terms of handling conflicts in schools. Sender and Thorn (2012) define purposeful sampling as a technique in which researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in the study. Teachers yielded data through focus group interviews. Both male and female teachers were included from both schools to avoid gender bias (six females and two males from each school participated). Schools are described as “feminized institutions” because there are more female than male teachers (Skeleton and Francis, 2003; Makibi (2010). It will be discussed in detail in the next chapter as to why there were more female than male participants.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

Haradhan (2018) defines data analysis as a dynamic process weaving together recognition of emerging themes, identification of key ideas or units of meaning and material acquired from the literature. Data was analyzed from semi-structured interviews

and focus groups, and critical incidents were analyzed qualitatively. That means data collected from interviews which were transcribed, coded and recorded in categories. The study used Creswell's (2013) six steps of qualitative data analysis. According to Cohen et al. (2007), qualitative data is analyzed through an inductive process where research findings are allowed to emerge from frequent, dominant and significant events in raw data. Thematic approach was used to analyse the study. According to Henning (2009), thematic analysis is the process of tracing the thinking pattern of the interviewees and the pattern of action depicted in observing notes. Thematic approach takes a more exploratory perspective, encouraging one to consider and code all the data, allowing for new impressions to shape the interpretation in different and unexpected directions (Attride-Stirling (2001).

After collecting data, the researcher made sense of raw data collection through analysis and interpretation to make it accessible to the reader. The researcher first started by coding materials. Attride-Stirling (2001) defines code as a word or a short phrase that descriptively captures the essence of elements of the researchers' material. It is the first step in the reduction and interpretation. As the first step the researcher read and wrote memos on the field notes, transcripts, comments, observations and recordings to get the initial sense of the data.

The researcher read and re-read the transcripts several times in order to develop a list of codes or categories to be used in sequence and coding. This enabled the researcher to decide on the concepts that were used for codes to make data more manageable. According to Henning (2004), coding process, the data was segmented and labelled according to the way the researcher defines units of meaning so that those segments which have common or related meanings were drawn together in one place for analysis. After carefully reading and listening to the audio several times, the researcher looked for patterns and similarities in the behaviour, words or phrases from codes or categories. This coding was done by hand when reading through each interview transcript and I listened carefully to the recordings, and the interview transcripts were immediately transcribed while everything was still in mind, to avoid distortion or loss of data. The

relevant units with similar meanings were used in a way that accurately represented the meaning of the responses categorised under each theme. The themes were then linked and used as a basis for analysing data which is supported by both literature and research questions. That is, collected data was transcribed, coded and organized based on research questions and objectives of the study.

### **3.8 Trustworthiness of qualitative research**

Piliot & Beck (2014), define trustworthiness or rigor of a study as a degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study. In respect of trustworthiness of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed the following criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, verification and transferability.

#### **3.8. 1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings (Korstjens and Moser 2018). It establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of their original views (Anney, 2012; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They also add that credibility is the most important factor in establishing trustworthiness. Therefore, to ensure credibility participants were involved in interviews and focus groups. Both recordings and note-taking were used, I therefore repeatedly replayed the audio to understand participants' views as gestures and verbal responses were recorded. I checked and rechecked the notes taken during data collection to make sure that I got in-depth information to avoid loss of information. Being in contact face-to-face with the participants during interviews created an opportunity to understand their feelings and responses more since the study intended to produce believable results with enough evidence that would satisfy readers. Both beneficiaries and participants would have a view on results and compare them to reality to determine the trustworthiness of the study.

### **3.8.2 Dependability**

According to Bitsch (2005) and Anney (2012), dependability refers to stability of findings over time. Dependability involves participants evaluating the findings and the interpretation and recommendations of the study to make sure that they are all supported by the data received from the informants of the study (Cohen et al. 2011; Tobin & Begley 2004). It addresses the issue of reliability; the positivists employ the techniques to show that if the work were repeated in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results will be obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, (2012).

According to Shenton 2004, Pilot et al. 2006, Streubert 2007 and Moon, Brewé, Januchowski, Vanessa and Blackman (2016), researchers should document research design and implementation, including the methodology and methods, the details of data collection such as field notes, memos, the researcher's reflexivity journal and reflective appraisal of the project. According to Shenton, 2004 and Moon et al. (2016), detailed coverage of the methodology and methods allows the reader to assess the extent to which appropriate research practices have been followed. The study under investigation can be repeated in the same context to confirm its reliability by other researchers and reap the same results, as detailed information on the research methodology, research design and data analysis methods were provided. The particulars about the criteria for participants' selection has been provided. The detailed description provided in this research would make it possible for other researchers who would like to undertake the similar research to be able to do so. That is, preferred methods according to Shanton et al., which can allow repeated results with the same participants, were used. Hence, I believe the study was trustworthy.

### **3.8.3 Transferability**

According to Kumar (2011), transferability demonstrates that the research could be applied to other contexts. Korstjens & Moser (2018) assert that transferability concerns the aspect of applicability. They argue that the responsibility of the researcher is to

provide a thick description of the participants and the research process, to enable the reader to assess whether the findings are transferable to their own setting. Shenton, (2004) and Anney (2014) agree that without thick description it is difficult for the reader of the final account to determine the extent to which the overall findings ring true. As a researcher I believe the study contains enough contextual information about the topic under investigation, which I believe can be used by other schools or researchers investigating strategies school principals use to manage conflicts in school.

### **3.8.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability deals with the question of whether the research findings could be repeated with the same participants to confirm neutrality and to avoid bias (Koolin 2014). It is concerned with establishing that data and interpretation of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but clearly derived from the data (Korstjens & Moser (2018). According to Patton, cited by Shenton (2004), the concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity. He adds that here the steps must be taken to ensure that the results are the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. He further asserts that the role of triangulation in promoting such confirmability must be emphasized in this context to reduce the effect of the investigator's bias. Onwuegbuzie & Leech, (2007) and Anney (2012) declare that triangulation involves the use of multiple and different methods, investigators, sources and theories to obtain corroborating evidence. Shenton (2004) cites Miles and Herberman, who state that the beliefs undermining decisions made and methods adopted should be acknowledged within research, the reasons for favouring one's approach when others could have been taken be reported and the weakness in techniques employed be explained. To enhance confirmability of the initial conclusion and audit, trial can be completed throughout the study to demonstrate how each decision was made. This can be made through looking at the acknowledgements and reasons given by the researcher throughout the research why some methods were used more than others, Miles and Heberman cited by Shenton (2004).



### **3.9 Ethical issues in research**

The ethical issues in research such as: confidentiality and anonymity, informed consent and protection from harm need to be taken into consideration by researchers when conducting qualitative research. Research ethics, according to Johnstone (2000), involve requirements on daily work, the protection of dignity of subjects and the publication of the information in research.

#### **3.9.1 Confidentiality and anonymity**

In this study anonymity and confidentiality of participants were assured. Researchers must ensure that data is collected and processed in a way that protects the identity of the respondents. In other words, any reference to names, locations and other personal details (Keilmann; Cataldo; Seeley 2012) must be protected. They assert that confidentiality of information provided by participants to the researcher needs to be respected. They further state that since these data constitute private information, field notes, tapes, and questionnaires, they need to be stored in safe and secure locations. Data collected should be used only for the purpose agreed. During interview and focus group interviews I ensured respect on participants' dignity. I also assured participants that their identities and those of their schools would not be revealed as pseudonyms would be used instead of their real names and all participants were comfortable. In general, the nature and quality of participants' performance were kept strictly confidential in this study.

#### **3.9.2 Informed consent**

According to Keilmann, Cataldo and Seeley (2012), informed consent is when potential participants freely agree to be part of the project, with full understanding of the research activities and any risks or benefits attached to being part of it. They further state that it is only if the participants understand what they are told about the study and their participation that they can give their informed consent. They add that they should know that they have a right to withdraw from the study any time. Mantzoral (2013) states that

informed consent is the major ethical issue in conducting research. Therefore, during interviews and focus group discussions I explained to participants that their participation was voluntary. I allowed them to ask questions before we started to make sure they voluntarily participated with a clear understanding of the nature of the study. I also asked them if they would be free if I audio recorded the focus group discussion and the interviews as all the recordings and transcriptions would be treated as confidential. They agreed. That was to make sure that they did not feel forced.

### **3.9.3 Beneficiaries**

According to Beauchamp and Childress (2001), the ethical principle of beneficiaries refers to “Hippocratic” be of benefit, do not harm. Leedy (2002) asserts that researchers should not expose participants to undue physical or psychological harm. Treece and Treece (1985) and Shenton (2004) suggest that participants should feel as easy as possible so that they can express their feelings. Participants were told the objectives of the study as it aims at investigating strategies school principals use to manage conflict at school, therefore it means no harm to anybody except to improve.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

The chapter presented the research design and research methodology. The semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were also presented as data collection methods that were used in this study. The participants selected for this study were presented as school principals, deputy principals and teachers from the two schools at Tikoe centre. The methods of data analysis were also presented. Ethical issues as well as trustworthiness in qualitative research were also discussed. The next chapter will share the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presents an interpretation and analysis of the findings which will be shown in themes and sub-themes. As indicated earlier, the targeted population comprised four principals and sixteen teachers from two respective primary schools. All the views from both teachers and school principals will be supported by the existing literature as well as the theoretical framework adopted in this study. The schools that participated are large with the learner enrolment ranging from 924 – 1200 and a staff complement of about 24 teachers each.

As indicated in chapter three, the two schools were named as school T and school L. To draw some distinctions from the respective participants' views, both letters and numbers code were also used. From school T, codes for school principals interviewed were: PT for school T and PL for school L. The codes for deputy principals interviewed were, DT for school T and DL for school L. For the eight teachers in school T, their codes were TT1, TT2,3, 4,5,6,7 and 8, while codes for teachers in school L were LT1, LT2, 3, 4,5,6,7, and 8.

#### 4.2 Presentation of themes and sub-themes

##### **Theme 1: Interpretation of participants in terms of:**

- Gender
- Age
- Qualification
- Work experience

## **Theme 2: Types of conflict experienced**

## **Theme 3: Causes of conflicts**

- Limited resources
- Shift system
  - School assembly*
  - Learners' attendance*
- Gossip
- Gender bias and favouritism
- Resistance to change
- Subject teaching

## **Theme 4: Participants' explanations on whether there are policies, guidelines or structures that are used by school principals**

- School policy guidelines
- School disciplinary and law enforcement structures

## **Theme 5: Strategies used by school principals in these schools**

- Collaboration
- Ignoring
- Competing
- Compromise
- Accommodation

## **Theme 6: Challenges faced by school principals when managing conflicts**

- Teachers' personalities
- Lack of skills due to absence of training or workshops on conflict

### 4.3 Biographic data

**Table 4.1 Participants' biographic details**

<b>GENDER</b>	Description of Items	Frequency	
	Male	6	
	Female	14	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	
<b>AGE RANGE</b>	0 - 25 yrs	0	
	26 - 30 yrs	0	
	31 - 35 yrs	2	
	36 - 40 yrs	2	
	41 - 45 yrs	7	
	46 - 50 yrs	3	
	51 + yrs	6	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	
<b>QUALIFICATION</b>	Primary Teachers' Certificate (PTC )	3	
	Diploma in Primary Ed	10	
	B. ED Primary	7	
	Honours	0	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	
<b>WORK EXPERIENCE</b>	0 – 10 yrs	2	
	11 - 20 yrs	10	
	21 - 30 yrs	4	
	31 + yrs	4	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	

## **4.4 Theme 1: Interpretation of Table 1**

### *4.4.1 Gender*

The majority of participants were predominantly females as most teachers in primary schools are typically women. This is in keeping with the women's cultural role of taking care of children's upbringing in most families. It is a common responsibility across the globe. Female teachers play an important role as they handle all classes from pre-school to primary school level. According to Rashidi and Naderi (2012) in Isiahi (2013), female teachers are reported to be more supportive, expressive, maturing, informal and open towards students. Lacey, Saleh and Gorman (1998) asserted that female teachers spend significantly greater time encouraging and allowing student participation. Statham, Richardson and Cook (1991) argued that female teachers are able to create shared authority and maintain control in the classroom in a way that keeps their relationships with students intact. Male teachers on the other hand tend to be dominating, exacting and exercise greater control (Wood, 2012). According to Wood (2012), they emphasize more on group work and structured activities. Lacey, Saleh and Gorman (1998) suggested that male teachers use their authority at the cost of involvement by students with an authoritarian and task-oriented teaching style.

The information in Table 4.1 suggests that there are more female teachers than male teachers in primary schools. The data further emphasises that most women have conflict challenges in organizations/schools because they are more involved in conflicts than the male staff. However, from my experience, females are prone to conflicts by nature because of their intemperate/irritable personalities. They are vulnerable and emotional by nature. It is a global stereotype that only the vulnerable can love. It is this particular characteristic that allows them to play an evidently more significant role in the upbringing of children. That is, the parents are assured of the safety, love and care of their children. Lastly, one can say as a result of this ability to transform their weakness into an attribute safely assumes that schools dominated by women or females are more likely to experience stability and conflict-free situations.

#### *4.4.2 Age*

Most participants ranged from 41 to 45 years of age. Data revealed that all have potential to do their best or most creative work at any age (Snow 2014). This indicates that most participants who contributed in the study were the right people to be interviewed since they might have been in the field for a long time. Contextually, 51 and above years old are in the second largest group as shown in Table 1. They are more mature and have the capacity to deal with personal and social issues more comfortably in schools. They are in the position to assist and advise young teachers on conflict issues as senior teachers.

#### *4.4.3 Qualification*

The table illustrates that teachers who were interviewed were all qualified but at different levels. The majority of these possessed diploma qualifications. Their professional qualifications suggest that they have the academic background that could help them deal with conflicts when they are called upon to do so. Since conflict is inevitable in organizations, one would expect that these teachers have been exposed to strategies on how to deal with conflicts in their workplace. Therefore, it is a positive variable to realize that school teachers are qualified professionals in the field of education. They were the right participants for the purpose of the study. In addition, the different levels of education became useful in the focus group as they had understanding and knowledge on issues of conflict.

#### *4.4.4 Work experience*

The table also indicates that all the participants have over ten years of experience, which implies that they are experienced enough to deal with challenges that were outlined earlier in this study. Experience plays a pivotal role in our daily lives. As a result, we see experienced professionals being well placed or rather better equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to deal with any challenge unlike a novice teacher who has limited experience. One can speculate that conflicts in these schools can be tackled and resolved effectively because of the calibre of staff as they are more experienced. On the other hand, the key participants were experienced and

knowledgeable about the situation in the schools. They had been through a lot of challenges on the issues of conflict as literature confirmed earlier that conflicts happen on a daily basis in every organization. Therefore, it confirms that they have experience of different types of conflict. This means they may have seen conflicts between their colleagues and been involved in several conflicts themselves. According to the table, the right people with relevant first-hand experience were interviewed.

#### **4.5 Theme 2: Types of conflict experienced**

When asked whether they experienced conflicts in their schools, all the participants agreed that at their schools, conflict occurred often during meeting sessions, in classes as well as during extra-mural activities. They revealed that they experienced different kinds of conflict, but that the most common ones happened between teachers in classes, among colleagues, and between teachers and administration (interpersonal conflicts). They further pointed out that conflict within individuals (intra-personal conflicts) happens but not as often as interpersonal conflict. Mayer (2009) indicated that intra-personal conflict occurs within the self and emerges because the individual has difficulty in choosing personal aims. Stanley and Algert (2007) declared that interpersonal conflict is the most common and visible type of conflict in school and that calls for constant interaction and involvement between stakeholders. Therefore, the results confirm that interpersonal conflict affects teachers more often in the two schools.

#### **4.6 Theme 3: Causes of conflicts**

##### *4.6.1 Limited resources*

Responding to the question on the sources of conflicts, all respondents identified limited resources in their schools as the main source of conflicts. During my visit to these schools, I asked participants if they had enough classrooms and playgrounds. They all said there were not enough classrooms and playgrounds. These findings revealed that there were not enough classrooms and playgrounds as it appears to be a norm for playgrounds to be shared between both high school and pre-school learners at School L. At School T, learners used community playgrounds. Typically, this means that



learners travel a long distance in order to use community playgrounds. One teacher among the focus group at School T pointed out that,

*It is difficult to use community playgrounds because they are used by many people with different activities and other schools around, which makes it difficult to do our practices as they are occupied most of the time. Sometimes we had to team up with those schools to make our practices easier. TT1*

The researcher observed during lunch that there were many learners at pre-school, primary and high school level. DL pointed out that,

*We have many learners here and they are congested as one can see during break time.*

Teachers agreed that due to limited resources such as classrooms, textbooks, playgrounds, desks, tables, lockers and chairs, there are more conflicts in their schools and they are practising the shift-system in order to share the resources they have. Participants revealed that conflicts are more severe at the beginning of the year when teachers are moving to the classes they have newly been allocated.

*Teachers quarrel over using new and old furniture. If teachers are using new furniture in their classes in a certain year, and are supposed to move to the new class in the following year, they take along with them chairs or desks they have been using, which causes conflict with the new teacher who is supposed to move into that class. DL*

Likewise, teachers at school T confirm this by pointing out that,

*Due to little resources in our school, some teachers after being allocated classes, they own them and lock the lockers. It causes conflict as afternoon teachers are also supposed to use the same lockers to keep materials as they are practising shift-system. TT3*

According to Rock (2012) in Botha (2013), people tend to become attached to their own physical territory in work organizations. Rock adds that in a school situation, teachers

become attached to their own chairs in the staffroom and their own parking spaces. Many incidents of conflict erupt when for example, an “intruder” parks in the wrong parking spot at school.

Almost all the respondents mentioned limited resources as a major source of conflict in their schools. In fact, it was quite evident that limited resources were the major source because in all incidents of conflict many cited it as a major problem. These findings lead to the conclusion that little resources in the two schools cause conflict as indicated earlier that there are not enough classrooms and playgrounds which has led the two schools to practise the shift-system.

These findings confirm the assertion in the literature that meagre resources are a major source of conflict. According to Makaye & Ndofirepi (2012), although conflict exists in most schools, it is rife in situations where resources are meagre and such resources are unequally distributed or allocated. According to Tshuma, Ndlovu and Bhebhe (2016), provision and sharing of resources is a common cause of conflict. They stated that schools have limited resources that must be shared equitably among teachers and learners as some might get less than what they desire. Mullius (2010) stipulated that most school resources are limited, and as a result, teachers and school principals struggle to have their own share. This simply affirms what has been implied earlier that the greater the limitation of resources, the greater the potential for conflicts. Dick and Thodlana (2013) in Tshuma et al. (2016) argued that in schools, it is not feasible for all to get a budgetary allocation of funds that enable them to purchase all their requirements. Therefore, some are likely to get more or less; hence, the inequitable distribution of scarce resources creates conflicts between teachers, departments and management.

#### *4.6.2 Shift system*

The majority of teachers claimed that the shift-system itself causes conflict among teachers. As explained in the background, shifting is a system that is practised in order to share limited resources. Teachers revealed that through shifting, teachers interact with one another more often as they have to use the same classrooms. They indicated

that though they are expected to use the same classrooms in the morning shift and afternoon shift, they handled property differently in terms of cleanliness. The majority agreed that some of the afternoon teachers expect morning shift teachers to clean classrooms thoroughly by the time afternoon classes began which is apparently difficult because there is no time for cleaning between the two shifts. The morning shift staff also complained that afternoon shift teachers do not clean the classroom. The afternoon teachers claimed that there is no time for cleaning in the afternoon as there is too much traffic and transport challenges on their way home. Tsuma et al. (2016) confirmed that in some schools where there are double sessions, classes share the same classrooms and furniture. If one class using the classrooms first delays to vacate the classrooms in time or fails to hand over a clean and swept classroom for the next session, conflict between the two teachers might occur. Teachers often blame the school principal for not providing requisite resources, yet the same heads are quick to demand good results. TL4 had this to say:

*Really the shift-system causes conflict among us as we are not free to do things on our own. The way we handle property in our classrooms is not the same. Every time I leave my classroom I keep everything in order, for the next lesson but with other teachers it is not the same, you find dirty dishes on the table, learners' tables are everywhere, and if you try to talk to the concerned teacher, one may not like it therefore it causes conflict between us.*

A teacher in School L also stated:

*It is true that through the shift-system we are able to reach every learner as the teacher-learner ratio is met but time for teaching is limited which makes teachers to fight over limited time between the two shifts. TL1*

The majority of teachers claimed that the shift-system further diminishes and erodes cooperation among them because teachers no longer had the opportunity to work together as a team during extramural activities. It has divided them into conflicting teams (morning and afternoon). They indicated that those who teach older learners are

the ones who need to attend sporting activities while morning shift teachers with younger learners leave earlier. That means the support they used to have together is no longer practised unless they cancel the shift-system for some days to be able to do some practice together. It also affects some classes as afternoon learners had to come in the morning. Therefore, it causes confusion among learners and complaints among teachers.

*Sometimes a short meeting will be held towards five o'clock, where we will be told that we have to come in the morning on the following day for a certain practice. It causes confusion for us as teachers too because we are also parents at home. With that confusion, we end up with a lot of complaints and this causes conflicts with other teachers responsible for such activities. TT8*

A school principal in School L also indicated that the issue of the shift-system together with the limited resources cause teachers to interact more often in classes and this causes conflicts between them:

*I remember one occasion where one teacher refused to wash the dishes she used in class, then the other teacher complained. I had to intervene because the dishes were left in class for some days which made the other teacher uncomfortable. PL*

PL also states that with the practice of shifting, teachers preferred to be placed where they are comfortable depending on their different situations. For example, after maternity leave, teachers prefer to be placed in the afternoon shift. Then after some time they want to be changed to another shift that is suitable for their condition. It means the school principal will be satisfying the needs of one teacher and ignoring how other teachers feel or where other teachers need to be placed.

The deputy principal in School DT confirmed it by saying,

*With the shift-system, it becomes difficult when it comes to division of labour. Other teachers may refuse to be allocated certain activities and complain that they have a problem of transport at that time, which indeed gives the school*

*principal a problem when allocating duties as everyone wants to be placed where they are comfortable. If not, it causes conflicts.*

#### 4.6.3 School assembly

In relation to how they hold their assembly with the two shifts, at one school participants indicated that there was an assembly for the morning shift and another for the afternoon shift. In another school, they said that when they practised the shift-system they do not hold any assembly as learners make their daily prayers in their different classes. One deputy principal indicated that under normal circumstances at the assembly, young learners learn from their elders but with the shifting practice lower classes do not have any chance to learn from their elders.

The findings also confirm that both schools operate in an abnormal way as there are two assemblies for both morning and afternoon shift in one school. In another school there is no assembly at all for both shifts. This confirms that they operate in an abnormal way, as under normal circumstances, one assembly is held by all learners and teachers in the morning.

#### 4.6.4 Learners' attendance

I asked the participants about the learners' attendance under such circumstances and they all agreed that the attendance was good in the morning. It appears this is due to the fact that it is their usual time for school. However, it is bad in the afternoon as learners are left alone at home while their parents are in the factories. As explained earlier in the study, the Tikoe centre is in an area dominated by the textile industry with many factories around the area. Other learners hide behind the morning shift learners and go home with them and parents may not be aware that they are not attending. DT said:

*We are in the environment where parents are not fully involved in their children's education, shift-system also affects those who do not like school.*

All participants from both schools had one view that attendance is good in the morning because it is their usual time and parents are still at home about to leave for work.

I further questioned the teachers in line with what they do in order to ensure that learners' attendance is effective under these abnormal circumstances. All participants agreed that because they are conscious about this repeated absenteeism, they always make sure that parents are typically informed about this problem of learners who bunk their classes. They indicated that they always called or phoned parents if learners were not properly attending.

The findings reveal that the shift-system causes conflicts among teachers as they interact more often than in normal schools. This is because they have to share classrooms at inconvenient times. The findings also reveal that these schools operate in abnormal times with limited time, which causes confusion among both learners and teachers. Therefore, it creates more conflicts among teachers, and leads to poor performance.

#### 4.6.5 Gossip

Most participants agreed that gossip among teachers causes conflicts. They indicated that as teachers they fail to work harmoniously with one another because if they realize that something is wrong they do not face the concerned person to resolve the issue. Instead, they gossip about the issue with other teachers which causes more conflicts if the person being gossiped about hears about it. Therefore, gossip was revealed as one of the causes of conflicts in these schools. PL, during interview, had this to say:

*There are gossips almost every day, which sometimes get worse as the person being gossiped hears about it. Sometimes such gossips are true while in some cases they may not be true.*

TT1 pointed out during focus group interview,

*One time, my child got sick and I reported at the office that I had to take the child to the hospital. When I came back, I had a rumour that my partners were complaining, telling other teachers that the child is not sick, but I absented myself for nothing as I always do. I was so angry when I heard that and it caused a lot of conflicts with my colleagues because I had a sick child at that time.*

Du Plessis, and Cain (2017) noted that gossip and spread of untruths cause conflicts among staff. One staff member indicated that backstabbing and the spreading of false news causes conflicts among staff members. Makibi (2010) identified gossip as another source of conflict in schools. Makibi cites Gouveia; Vuuren and Grafford (2005) who define gossip as a talk that takes place between employees about other people's personal issues in the workplace. According to Makibi, gossip often has an impact on relationships in the workplace and may cause conflict and strain ethical values such as trust, respect and caring.

#### *4.6.6 Gender bias and favouritism*

In School T, teachers indicated that gender bias and favouritism cause conflicts among them as teachers. They looked more furious and pointed out that similar cases among teachers are treated differently by the administration. They further indicated that male teachers are more favoured than female teachers as most of the activities such as workshops are attended by male teachers, and that some of the issues which they believe involve them as teachers sometimes are discussed with male teachers which makes them feel left out.

According to Omboko (2010) in Kipyego (2013), school heads sometimes favour other teachers at the expense of others which results in discontentment among teachers. Smith (2013) in Tshumi et al. (2016) posits that favouritism in the workplace means giving preferential treatment to one or more employees. He further adds that in favouritism, decision makers consciously favour their friends at the expense of others who are more deserving. Lastly, Smith (2013) asserts that by not treating everyone equally, a manager is fostering a sense of resentment and separation that can demotivate employees and damage teamwork.

#### *4.6.7 Resistance to change*

It was further pointed out that conflicts are caused by resistance to change, especially by older teachers against younger innovative teachers in schools. It was further indicated that young teachers fail to get support from senior teachers who most of the

time are against new skills shown by these young teachers who are still motivated to apply what they gained from college. DT at School T pointed out:

*On several occasions when we have young teachers from college, we learn more from them as much as they learn from us, as some of them are talented, especially in the new technologies. But most of the time, they do not get support from our older teachers. Instead, they receive a lot of criticism. Therefore, it takes time for most teachers to accept that such a teacher is talented and can benefit the school.*

Apart from that, teachers indicated that when new things are introduced in schools, many teachers resist to change to new ways of doing things, which normally causes conflicts among teachers who are against whoever brought such a change.

*In 2017, there was a circular from the Ministry of Education that indicated that Grade 7 learners will no longer close schools earlier than usual, as learners will automatically be promoted to Grade 8 like other classes. Therefore, both teachers and learners will close schools with other grades from 1-6. That change brought a lot of conflicts between concerned teachers and management. TT4*

All members in the focus groups agreed that it caused a lot of bitterness and unhappiness among concerned teachers. They indicated that some teachers were angry with the school principals and said they should allow them to stay at home because learners were done with writing, as if the principal was responsible for the change. They indicated that it took time to accept that every teacher in Grade 7 would close schools at the end of the year like all other teachers.

According to Botha (2013), changes in an organization's external environment can cause major conflicts. Johdi and Apittree (2012) cite Auerbach and Dolan (1997) who agree that conflict can result when an experienced teacher works with a novice teacher or (a new teacher from school) who has good theoretical skills. Tsumi et al. (2016) confirmed that when a young graduate teacher displays the most current and advanced teaching techniques, an older teacher who graduated many years ago is likely to create some conflicts criticizing whatever change the young teacher came with.



#### 4.6.8 Subject teaching

In addition, subject teaching was also mentioned as another source of conflicts in participating schools. DL indicated that after the allocation of classes is done, some teachers in certain subjects such as mathematics refuse to teach such subjects, but instead, decide to teach something else, which causes conflicts in such a class. It was also confirmed in School T that after the allocation, some teachers usually fight to teach a certain subject which causes conflicts among them. Therefore, this caused the school principal to intervene by deciding who should teach such a subject depending on their abilities and capabilities in different subjects.

The findings above indicate that the key causes of conflicts at the two schools are as follows: limited resources, shift system, gossip, gender bias and favouritism, subject teaching and resistance to change. This confirms what Rahim (2002) indicated earlier that conflict originates from a number of sources.

### **4.7 Theme 4: Participants' explanation on whether there are policies, guidelines or structures**

#### 4.7.1 School policy guidelines

Responding to the question of whether school principals have policies or guidelines on how to deal with conflicts, all participants revealed that there are no policies nor guidelines to follow when managing conflicts in their schools. DT commented as follows:

*There are no policies that are followed in order to handle conflicts, we only base ourselves on the ethics and the professionalism of how teachers should behave in school.*

Another deputy principal from a different school also added that there are no policies as most of the time they handle issues of conflicts on their own which they think will resolve the present case to satisfy both sides. Teachers in the focus group confirmed that there are no guidelines which school principals use to manage conflicts.

According to Okotoni and Okotoni (2003) the fact that most of the school administrators were not knowledgeable in conflict management in most schools contributed to the high rate of conflicts and industrial actions in the schools.(cf.2.3.3).

In trying to find out if participants are aware of the Teaching Service Regulations 2002 and the Education Act 2010 that regulate how teachers should behave, most of the participants were either unaware or only slightly knowledgeable about such regulations. Others know that there are such regulations but do not know what is entailed in such documents. DT indicated:

*I can't say much about teaching service regulations but I am well familiar with the Education Act (2010) since there was a workshop that was held for school principals when it was introduced.*

The findings revealed that there are no guidelines and policies that guide school principals on how to manage conflicts at school level. However, it appears that at national level there are such policies in the Education Act 2010 and Teaching Service Regulations 2002 which guides teachers on how they should behave in school. This therefore emphasizes the lack of understanding on the side of management because if such policies and guidelines are available at school level it would be helpful for the teachers. This would enable easier access to them therefore making life easier for everyone as teachers will be more familiar with the provisions that guide good behaviour in their schools. Hence there could be stability and less conflict in such schools. Lastly, this practice could make it easier for them to familiarize themselves with the national policies entailed in the Education Act 2010 and the Teaching Service Regulations 2002.

#### *4.7.2 School disciplinary and law enforcement structures*

In line with the question of whether or not there are structures available to school principals when handling conflicts among teachers, all respondents agreed that there are some structures that they use to handle conflicts. PL posits that,

*Yes, we have disciplinary committees that we use for both teachers and learners. These disciplinary committees are made up of some teachers, school principal and the deputy principal.*

All participants agreed that the disciplinary committees are used whenever there is any form of conflict among teachers or whenever one teacher misbehaves. Moreover, they added that they are also used to discipline learners. If the issues are not resolved by the disciplinary committee, the case may be taken to the School Board. The majority of teachers indicated that though these committees are chosen every year when duty allocations are done, they are not often used when conflicts arise among teachers.

These findings suggest that there are no policies or guidelines utilized by school principals in order to manage conflicts. They also reveal that there are some structures (disciplinary committee) that help school principals in dealing with teachers' discipline and conflicts as well as learners' discipline.

#### **4.8 Theme 5: Strategies used by school principals**

##### *4.8.1 Collaborative strategy*

In trying to find out the strategies school principals use to manage conflicts in these schools, almost all the participants indicated that the conflicts that happen in their schools are different therefore they look at their situation and use the right approach. PL posits that,

*I cannot say I use a certain strategy but I always look at the issue, then resolve it depending on the situation. But what I normally do is to call the concerned teachers and hear from both sides.*

All principals had one view that when there are conflicts in school they call the involved teachers and talk to them to resolve the problem they have. PL further stated that,

*Even if I have conflict with one of the teachers I call such teacher and try to settle the issue between us.*

In their focus groups teachers confirmed that most of the time when there were conflicts school, principals would call the concerned teachers in order to hear from both sides to resolve the issue.

The study found that both school principals in the two schools involve both parties when there are conflicts. It is therefore clear that they use a collaborative strategy more often. Collaborating strategy focuses on gathering and organizing information at the same time; it encourages creative thinking and welcomes diverse perspectives (Nnokam and Doe 2015). Moreover, they indicated that the strategy enables the parties involved in conflict to pool all their differences on the table and examine them along with any data that might contribute to a resolution. Howell (2014) concurs that innovative ideas often emerge when people use collaborative approach to conflict management. Howell further asserts that in collaborative approach, individuals seem to be just as concerned with the wants of others. According to Isabu (2017), the intent of collaborative strategy is to find solutions to the cause of the conflict that are satisfactory to both parties rather than to find fault or assign blame. He argued that although this approach is not appropriate for all situations, when it is used appropriately it has the most beneficial effect on the parties involved. As indicated earlier in the background, this style is regarded as the most effective style of managing conflicts in a school context (Behari (1997); Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002); Makibi (2010).

#### *4.8.2 Ignoring/avoidance*

Another strategy that school principals use often in the two schools is the ignoring strategy. PL pointed out that they ignore most of the conflicts that happen in their school until they resolve themselves. DT confirmed it by indicating that,

*We ignore most of the conflicts because some teachers are always complaining. Sometimes when we realize that there is conflict among some teachers, we wait for such teachers to come and report it in office but they end up not coming until the issue resolves itself.*

DT further affirmed that they ignore some of the conflicts because sometimes there is no evidence for such conflicts.

I asked teachers if some conflicts are being ignored by the school principals. They all agreed that most of the conflicts that happen among teachers resolve themselves as they do not report them in the principal's office. They further indicated that sometimes school principals become aware of such conflicts but ignore them until they resolve themselves.

*It is true that conflicts do resolve themselves but sometimes some escalate if they are not resolved, and sometimes end up affecting many teachers which becomes very difficult to resolve at that stage. TT2*

Most of the teachers agreed that some conflicts do not resolve themselves but need school principals to carefully handle them to prevent them from going further, as this may sometimes affect teaching and learning.

The findings also confirm that the ignorance or avoidance strategy is often used by school principals to manage conflicts in schools. Nnokam and Doe (2015) asserted that conflict avoidance occurs when one party in a potential conflict ignores the conflicting issues or denies the significance of the conflict to his life. According to Oachesu (2015), in many cases people tend to avoid conflicts for fear of engaging in a tense situation or because they lack sufficient confidence in their ability to manage conflicts. She further added that this method is appropriate when dealing with minor conflict situations in order to reduce tensions, to gain time or when the person who has to manage conflict is in an inferior position in terms of hierarchy. In this situation, the principal or the teacher is unassertive and uncooperative and there is no intention to pursue one's own needs or the needs of the school. They argued that it connotes the process of withdrawing from conflict situations that might cause unpleasantness for the principal or the teacher.

Daves (2004) indicated earlier that avoidance strategy is not effective in most of the cases as the problems remain unresolved and may cause the conflict situation to worsen as inherent in it is poor communication. Howell (2014) argued that when avoiding style is used over a period of time it can lead to stagnation within a department as individuals will become less accountable for their actions. However, Howell further

added that avoiding approach can be the proper style to use in trivial conflicts with individuals whose relationship is inconsequential.

#### *4.8.3 Competing strategy*

In line with this particular strategy, the teachers indicated that the school principal's interference is usually necessary to resolve disputes among the teachers. One teacher depicted a scenario during the interview where three of her fellow teachers were fighting over teaching mathematics. The school principal, knowing the capabilities and incapacities, resolved that conflict by deciding who would teach the subject. Therefore, all school principals affirmed that they use their power to resolve some conflicts if it is necessary. One principal (PL) in School L said:

*Using my power over teachers is not the best option but I use it when there is no other option or in tense situations sometimes I compromise for the situation to settle.*

This extract confirms what has been stated earlier that school principals also use the competing strategy.

According to Isabu (2017), competing occurs when each party to a conflict tries to minimize its own gain and has little interest in understanding the other party's position and arriving at a solution that will allow both parties to achieve their goals. It is an attempt to satisfy one's own needs at the expense of the other persons. This can be done by using formal authority, physical threats, or by simply ignoring the claims of the other party. Isabu adds that the problem with the repeated use of this approach is that it breeds hostility and resentment. Howell (2014) contends that when dealing with this type of strategy frustration, irritation or argument may be used and conflicting parties may be removed from the situation by use of authority. Nnokam and Doe (2015) posited that the strategy is used by school principals to resolve conflicts by dictating what the subordinates will do. That is school management simply resolves conflict as it sees fit and communicates its desires to the teacher or students. The teacher will usually abide

by the supervisor's decision. According to Makibi (2010) it is an assertive and uncooperative strategy. It is a power-oriented mode.

#### *4.8.4 Compromising strategy*

Compromising strategy is also used by school principals to manage conflicts. PL during the interview pointed out:

*I said earlier if I had to resolve a conflict I put away all the authority status and talk to the teacher; if I had to apologize, then I do it. That means it is not everywhere I use my power as a principal but sometimes I compromise so that I can accommodate our differences.*

I asked teachers if there were some situations where their school principals happen to use compromising strategy when managing conflicts among them. Other teachers agreed that they do compromise in some situations but some declared that it is in rare cases as most of the time they used their power. Teachers also pointed out that when conflicts are resolved among them, one party had to compromise in order to come up with the solution.

Furthermore, literature also confirmed that both compromising and accommodating strategy are also utilized by school principals though not often. According to Makibi (2010), when compromising, the objective is to find an expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties through competing and accommodating, giving up more than competing but less than accommodating. Isabu (2017) said that this takes place when each party is concerned about not only its own goal accomplishment but also the goal accomplishment of the other party and is willing to engage in a give and take exchange and make concessions until a reasonable resolution of the conflict is reached. Nnokam and Doe (2015) assert compromising strategy as a middle of the road strategy that gets everyone talking about issues and moves closer to each other and to a resolution. According to Nnokam and Doe (2015), in the school system compromise is more effective when issues are complex and

parties in conflict are looking for the middle ground and willing to exchange concessions. Hence, they declared negotiation and compromising as the complementary skills.

#### *4.8.5 Accommodation strategy*

Accommodating strategy is also used though not often. Makibi (2010) defines accommodating as when the individual neglects his/her own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person. She indicates that there is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode. The strategy is regarded as the acceptance that the preservation of pleasant interpersonal affairs is more significant than forcing disagreements among colleagues (Howell 2014). Isabu (2017) suggested that accommodating occurs when the goals are compatible but the interactions are not considered important to overall goal attainment. According to Isabu (2017), the difficulty with the habitual use of accommodating approach is that it emphasizes preserving a friendly relationship at the expense of appraising issues critically and protesting personal rights. Bourne and Devon (2018) declare the strategy as the temporary style of conflict management where a school principal tries to buy time as he/she seeks cooperation in the school.

Findings in this study revealed that the school principals use the five strategies presented and discussed to manage conflicts in their schools but collaboration and ignoring/avoidance are used more often than the other strategies.

### **4.9 Theme 6: Challenges school principals experience when managing conflicts**

#### *4.9.1 Different personalities*

Responding to the question on what challenges school principals experience when managing conflicts, they indicated that it is not easy to resolve some conflicts due to the different personalities of teachers.



*Really resolving conflicts between teachers is not easy as sometimes both parties are bitter and angry with one another. As the school principal, I have to reach conclusions that will satisfy both sides which may not happen as sometimes one side may be satisfied while one side is not. With their different personalities to reach such conclusion is not that simple. It requires one to judge with honesty.* PL stated

School principals agree that because of the different personalities of the teachers, it becomes more difficult to mediate during conflicts. Pointed out DT,

*Their bitterness during this time of resolving their conflicts becomes extreme.*

Moreover, according to Steyn and Van Niekerk (2013), people who get caught up in disputes are usually frustrated and angry and tend to use hyperbolic language in their speaking and writing. They added that extreme behaviour can be part of a strategy to intimidate the other party.

Steyn and Van Niekerk (2013) further indicated that the educational manager should try to maintain an objective and professional attitude towards the parties, no matter how extreme the language used.

#### *4.9.2 Lack of skills due to the absence of trainings or workshops on conflict issues*

There are no trainings or workshops that are held for school principals on how to handle conflict issues. According to the findings of the study, it appears that all school principals had a similar view that there are neither workshops nor trainings that are held for them on how they should manage conflicts.

In response to the challenges school principals face when managing conflicts the majority of teachers affirmed that school principals had challenges in managing conflicts in their schools. They agreed that school principals lack skills in conflict management and sometimes use their emotions when handling conflict issues. TT3 from the focus group pointed out that,

*The way some cases of conflicts are handled by the principal will really show you as a person that they lack skills. Sometimes we get angry that they are not handling issues effectively but the truth is they don't get trainings in many issues that concern how they should manage many things; conflicts included.*

TL7 in School L had this to say,

*School principals hold a lot of responsibilities in every-day running of the school therefore they should possess some skills to manage conflicts effectively because if conflicts are not effectively handled, they affect the daily running of the school which is teaching and learning.*

DL also confirmed that by saying,

*As school principals, we lack skills as some of the conflicts require us to be knowledgeable on the issue which sometimes makes us handle such issues using personal feeling without realizing.*

According to Mofolo (2004), most of the trainings offered to teachers in Lesotho concentrate more on content to be taught in class than other issues. All school principals agree that there are neither workshops nor trainings that are held for them in terms of conflict management. I asked whose responsibility it is to offer workshops for the school principals and all participants said that such workshops should be offered by the Ministry of Education and Training.

Results revealed that school principals face some challenges when managing conflicts because of these different personalities of teachers, which makes things difficult for school principals to manage or to resolve conflict issues between the concerned parties. Apart from that it is confirmed that school principals lack the necessary skills to manage conflicts since no trainings are offered in order to assist them with conflict management.

*This is why we end up utilizing our own feelings/emotions when dealing with issues as massive as conflict in an academic environment. Said PL.*

Literature affirmed earlier in the background that some of the school principals are expected to effectively manage conflict although they lack the necessary skills. According to Msila (2012) as earlier mentioned, few principals are adequately prepared for conflict management. They therefore tend to misunderstand the role of conflict and maintain that it should be avoided. Ratau (2011) also stated that school principals lack skills that can enable them to turn conflicts in their schools into a positive force that can bring change. According to Oyebade (1994), conflict seems to be inevitable therefore knowledge and skills on managing at any institution are required to enable managers to handle opposing ideas or challenges.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted the overall findings of the study based on the research questions: data presentation, analysis and interpretation of the study presented in themes and sub-themes. The chapter also analysed and interpreted the data that was provided by the participants. The study further succeeded in answering the posed research questions accordingly. The next chapter will present the summary, recommendations and conclusion of the study.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION`**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The preceding chapter presented, analysed and interpreted data from the participants. This chapter presents the discussion of the findings of the study on exploring principals' conflict management strategies in primary schools of Tikoe centre. It provides a brief summary of the previous chapters. The summary of the main findings will also be presented based on the research questions and responses from participants. Lastly, the chapter will provide some recommendations as well as drawing some conclusions from the findings.

#### **5.2 Summary of the study**

Chapter 1 presented an introduction, background of the study, which included the situation at Tikoe Centre as the main concern of the study, preliminary literature, and statement of the problem, aim and specific objectives and research questions. The rationale and significance of the study, limitations, definition of terms were also discussed.

Chapter 2 focused on the theoretical framework as well as the empirical evidence on conflicts based on the international, regional and national levels.

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology and research design adopted for the study, population, sampling, data analysis, ethical issues and trustworthiness of qualitative research.

Chapter 4 focused on the data presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data in the form of themes and sub-themes.

Chapter 5 provides the summary of the entire study, main findings, conclusions and recommendations.

### **5.3 Summary of the main findings**

Based on the participants' views and perceptions, this section will focus on the summary of the findings obtained from the previous chapters. The summary of the results will be based on the research questions of the study.

#### **5.3.1. What are the causes/sources of conflicts at the schools in Tikoe centre?**

It has been highlighted previously in the literature review that in spite of many studies conducted worldwide, conflict is still a serious issue in schools. Several studies have been conducted in various periods worldwide. (cf2.2.)

Scholars at international level have discussed different causes of conflicts in schools. It was indicated that conflict emanates from a number of sources. Some researchers believe that it is important to understand the root cause when the educational manager is trying to resolve disputes between two or more individuals or groups (Hulux Consulting 2005). As a reminder Bourne (2015), suggested several sources of conflict as: limited resources, interdependent work activities, and differentiation of activities, communication problems, different perceptions and environment of the organization (cf2.2.3).

At regional level, several causes of conflicts were also discussed. Kepyego (2013) among others indicated that a number of schools have been experiencing a general wave of conflict which has affected many people. He identified causes of conflict that include: administration incompetence of head teachers, inadequate resources, favouritism and unimpressive conditions of service. (cf2.3.3).

As it has been said several times that conflict exists everywhere, some researchers have confirmed that Lesotho schools are not an exception. Mofolo (2004), among others, identified some causes of conflicts as: organizational structure, individual and group differences, ambiguities and authority structure (cf2.4.1).

In line with the above research question, the study under investigation revealed that there are several sources of conflicts in schools as indicated by literature in the past chapters. Contextually, the findings revealed limited resources as the main source of conflict in the two schools. Teachers supposedly experience more conflicts due to the scarcity of resources that include furniture and classrooms. They were also sharing playgrounds as well as using community playgrounds due to scarce resources. It has been revealed that through this sharing, the disputes escalate. (cf.4.5.1.)

The findings revealed that the shift-system was also a major cause of conflicts. Due to overcrowded classrooms in these schools, the Ministry of Education and Training introduced the shift-system, which however, seems to be slightly disadvantageous as it increases conflicts. Significantly, these schools operate in abnormal hours. Contextually, due to a lot of interaction between the two shifts, conflicts seem to have increased. t Again teachers fight due to lack of sufficient time because of the double shift-system as mentioned above. The findings also show that due to the double shift-system, teachers fail to get the normal hours of teaching compared to other schools, which operate under normal hours of teaching. Therefore, teachers fight over resources and limited time for teaching, and face the challenge of failing to produce outstanding performance. The poor attendance of learners contributed significantly to the poor performance in the two schools (cf.4.6.2.).

The study has established that there were no guidelines or policies guiding teachers on the code of conduct and interpersonal relations at both schools. It would seem that the two schools only relied on the Education Act 2010 and the Teaching Service Regulations 2002 as their guidelines. However, most teachers seem to be unfamiliar with these regulations and the Act. It was also revealed that there are some structures such as disciplinary committees that school principals use to manage conflicts at school (cf.4.6.1.)

### **5.3.2. What strategies do school principals apply to resolve conflicts in their schools?**

Concerning the above question, related literature at international level confirmed that conflict exists in every organization including schools. The literature affirmed that conflict is everywhere, and therefore needs different strategies to manage it for effective running of schools. As a reminder, Johdi & Abduipakdee (2012) indicated that conflict could be harmful to employees if it is not managed. Researchers further agreed that school principals should learn more about conflict management to effectively manage their schools. As indicated by Hacifazlioglu (2004) organizations need to have suitable strategies for conducting conflict management in their schools. (cf2.2.3).

Researchers further agreed that conflicts are not desired because they lead to failure, tension and negative results if not managed. Most researches in this level agreed on similar approaches that can be used to manage conflicts. Those include: accommodating, compromise, collaborating, avoidance and confrontation. (cf2.2.3).

At the regional level, literature confirmed that a great deal of management attention has been directed towards the development of an effective way of conflict management in schools. Researchers confirmed that conflict exists everywhere in schools, thus needs to be managed using relevant strategies. Makaye & Ndofirepi declared earlier that several strategies have been suggested for resolving conflicts. They listed them as follows: avoidance, non-attention, physical separation, limited interaction, compromise and confrontation. (cf.2.2.4).

Little research in Lesotho confirmed what was said by both international and regional literature, which confirms similar strategies for managing conflict in school. It was stated earlier in the literature review that there is limited literature on conflicts in Lesotho; very few researchers have investigated conflict issues in the country. According to Makibi (2010) and Mofolo (2004), similar strategies of conflict management were identified. (cf 2.4.3). In this study, findings revealed that collaborating and ignoring strategies are often the strategies utilized by school principals to resolve conflicts in their schools. Data revealed that whenever there is a dispute, school principals usually

collaborate with both sides and hold a hearing on the dispute. That is the collaborative strategy. The strategy was confirmed by the literature as the best to resolve conflicts (cf.4.7.1).

In line with avoidance strategy, the findings revealed that school principals avoid most of the conflicts until they resolve themselves. Data shows that some conflicts are ignored by school principals when there is no evidence; therefore, school principals ignore them. The results further indicated that sometimes when there are conflicts, school principals wait for such conflicts to be reported. If any of the concerned parties do not report or complain to the office, such conflict is ignored or declared void by school principals. Additionally, it was revealed that some conflicts are ignored as some teachers are always complaining or causing conflicts; therefore, school principals do not give attention to such conflicts until they supposedly resolve themselves. The results also indicated that not all conflicts resolve themselves when ignored, because if not addressed, some conflicts escalate and affect teaching and learning (cf. 4.7.2).

Competing is another strategy that is used by school principals to resolve conflicts. It was discovered that school principals sometimes used their power to manage some conflicts (cf. 4.7.3). The study further revealed that compromising and accommodating strategies are also utilized by school principals to manage conflicts (cf. 4.7.4).

### **5.3.3. What challenges do principals experience in managing conflicts in their schools?**

On the question of what challenges school principals experience when managing conflicts in school, the related literature was not different from the international and regional research. The research confirmed that indeed school principals in Lesotho lack training to manage conflicts at school. Mofolo declared earlier in the literature that school principals in Lesotho lack managerial skills in conflict management, as they were not trained for the post they are holding (cf. 2.4.3).



In the present research, findings revealed that the principals lack the necessary skills to manage conflicts. It was further shown that there is no training or workshops for principals on how to manage conflicts in schools which consequently leads them to manage conflicts through trial and error due to lack of skills. This is supported by Okotoni & Okotoni (2003) (cf. 4.8.2).

Lastly, the findings revealed that teachers' personalities make it difficult for principals to manage conflicts. School principals find it difficult to manage conflict and mediate issues between teachers because most of the time teachers are not willing to cooperate (cf. 4.8.1).

#### **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The results indicated that school principals lack skills to manage conflicts. It has also been revealed that there is no training offered to equip them with the relevant skills to handle conflicts. Therefore, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training should offer training to the school principals as they shoulder more responsibility in schools that practise the double-shift system due to a lot of interactions and the changeover of the morning and afternoon classes. The system requires leadership that possesses skills since there are more challenges faced by these schools than in the normal schools.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) should provide ongoing support in terms of conflict management to both school principals and teachers. Such support could generate more positive attitudes towards the double-shift system and help decrease conflicts.

Apart from that, the results show that the majority of participants, especially teachers, seem to be unfamiliar with the teaching service regulations of 2002 and the Education Act 2010. They do not know much of what is entailed in those documents, therefore, the MOET should hold some workshops for both teachers and school principals to discuss rules and regulations on how teachers should behave in school. This would bring some more understanding to teachers on how they should conduct themselves and make it easier for principals to manage conflicts. The school principals should also develop

some guidelines or policies that help them in conflict management at a school level so that teachers could know and see them on a daily basis to make it easier for everybody to know what is expected of them in terms of behaviour.

It is also recommended that the MOET should ensure that the first priority in terms of providing teaching and learning materials is given to schools that practise the double-shift system since their schools are situated in overpopulated areas. Moreover, they also operate in abnormal hours of teaching and, due to the longer school duration, property and furniture deteriorate quickly. To alleviate this situation, it is recommended that tents be used where there are no classrooms so that teachers should work harmoniously with fewer conflicts.

Moreover, it has been found that avoidance strategy is apparently used more often by school principals in these schools. Therefore, principals should reconsider the strategies they use when managing conflicts and come up with the best strategies for conflict management. This is important to avoid using inappropriate strategies or leaving some conflict situations unresolved, thus triggering a repeat. Literature has confirmed that avoidance is not recommended as the best strategy to resolve conflicts among teachers.

Furthermore, school principals should use disciplinary committees whenever there are conflicts in their schools. This is primarily because teachers indicated that disciplinary committees are not often used as an intervention measure in resolving conflicts. Additionally, principals should ensure that there is fairness and teachers are treated equally regardless of sex and favour since they are tasked with the responsibility to maintain harmony in the schools they are heading to avoid conflicts. Good and harmonious relationships among teachers rest upon effective school leadership.

Teachers should try to work on their different personalities as the findings revealed that sometimes it is difficult for the school principal to mediate when there are conflicts because of these different personalities. That could develop a sense of respect on the side of the principals and make it easier for them to resolve conflicts and create peaceful school environments.

Lastly, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training should improve working conditions for schools that practise the double-shift system to promote effective teaching and learning. Otherwise, the MOET may consider abolishing the system altogether due to the difficulties schools face with that mode of operation.

## **5.5 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, it has been said that conflict is inevitable and cannot be avoided as it affects schools worldwide. Several studies have been conducted as confirmed by the literature. For example, Thekore (2013) was discussed in the previous chapters. He investigated conflict issues and explored types of conflicts. The study also presented the strategies to prevent and effectively manage conflict. Some of his findings indicated that conflict cannot be avoided since it is an inevitable aspect of work teams. It was also found that Lesotho schools are no exception to this problem, including the Tikoe centre where the study was conducted. Despite many studies conducted worldwide concerning the issue, schools are still struggling with managing conflicts; hence the need for principals to be equipped with the strategies for managing conflicts effectively.

The Tikoe centre, being surrounded by people working in the factories, has caused schools around it to be overpopulated leading to high teacher-learner ratios, and an increase in the rate of conflicts among teachers. Moreover, this situation has led to the schools in this study to practise the double-shift system in order to share the scarce resources. Through this research, it was concluded that the main causes of conflicts in the two schools are: limited resources, the double-shift system, gossip, gender bias and favouritism, resistance to change and subject teaching. It was also concluded that ignoring and collaborating strategies are often used by school principals to manage conflicts in these schools.

Other strategies such as accommodation, competing and compromising are also used by principals depending on different situations. The findings also revealed that school

principals lack skills in managing conflicts since there is no training or workshops that equip them on how to handle conflicts in their schools. Therefore, these findings will be shared with both school principals and teachers at the meeting of the Tikoe centre schools. This will make them aware of the relevant strategies they could use to manage conflict situations. They would presumably be in a better position to handle conflicts effectively for the smooth running of their schools, which would possibly lead to improved academic results. The study will also enlighten other schools in Lesotho on strategies that can be used to manage conflicts in schools.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### School principals and deputy principals' interview

#### SECTION A

##### Background information

Name of the school	
Size of the school	
Number of staff	Male.....Female.....
Number of students	Male.....Female.....
Location	
<b>observations</b>	
	Classrooms.....
	Playing grounds.....
Assembly	
Staff Attendance	
Learners' Attendance	
<b>Bio Data</b>	
Gender	
Age	
Work Experience	
Credentials	

#### SECTION B

- (1) Are there any kinds of conflict in your school?
- (2) What kind of conflicts?
- (3) Where do they normally occur?
- (4) What are the sources?
- (5) How do you often deal with conflicts?
- (6) Do you have policies on how to deal with conflicts?
- (7) What kind of strategies do you use to manage conflicts?

- (8) Are there some structures that help you to deal with conflicts?
- (9) Are there some guidelines that help you to deal with conflicts?
- (10) What challenges do you face when managing conflicts in your school?
- (11) Are there some trainings or workshops that are held for school principals on how to handle conflicts?
- (12) If yes, how often?

## Appendix B

### Focus group interview for teachers

#### SECTION A

##### Background information

Name of the school	
Size of the school	
Number of staff	Male.....Female.....
Number of students	Male.....Female.....
Location	
<b>observations</b>	
Facilities	Classrooms.....
	Playing grounds.....
Assembly	
Staff Attendance	
Learners' Attendance	
<b>Bio Data</b>	
Gender	
Age	
Work Experience	
Credentials	

#### SECTION B

- (1) Are there any kinds of conflict in your school?
- (2) What kind of conflicts?
- (3) Where do they normally occur?
- (4) What are the sources?
- (5) How do you often deal with conflicts?
- (6) Do you have policies that help school principals on how to deal with conflicts?
- (7) What kind of strategies does your school principal use to manage conflicts?
- (8) Are there some structures that help school principals to deal with conflicts?
- (9) Are there some guidelines that help school principals to deal with conflicts?

- (10) What challenges do you think school principals face when managing conflicts in your school?
- (11) Are there some trainings or workshops that are held for school principals on how to handle conflicts?
- (12) If yes, how often?