



Original Article

## Head Teachers' Conflict Management Strategies and Students' Satisfaction with School Climate in Secondary Schools in Uganda

Betty Amito<sup>1</sup>, Dr. George Oriangi, PhD<sup>1\*</sup> & Gloria Lamaro<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gulu University, P. O. Box 166. Gulu, Uganda.

\* Author for Correspondence ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4744-4034>; Email: [g.oriangi@gmail.com](mailto:g.oriangi@gmail.com)

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.6.2.1222>

### Date Published: ABSTRACT

16 May 2023

#### Keywords:

*Conflict Management,  
Secondary Schools,  
Students' Satisfaction,  
Uganda.*

Over the last three decades, students' satisfaction with school climate has been a global concern for educationists and scholars. This study investigated the influence of head teachers' conflict management strategies on students' satisfaction with the school climate. A cross-sectional survey design with a sample size of 181 respondents was used. Data obtained using questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics to determine the nature of head teachers' conflict management strategies and the level of student's satisfaction with school climate, while linear regression was used to determine the influence of head teachers' conflict management strategies on students' satisfaction with school climate. Findings revealed that: paying little attention to students' complaints, ignoring students' complaints, and putting emphasis on conflicting parties to continue performing their tasks even if there is conflict were the most commonly used conflict management strategies, while the least commonly used strategies were taking charge in times of conflict and emphasising on areas of agreement between conflicting parties. Furthermore, students' level of satisfaction with the school climate was low. Additionally, giving priority to the views of members in settling conflicts ( $p = 0.037$ ) and liaising with student leaders to settle conflicts ( $p = 0.069$ ) were strategies of conflict management that had a significant influence on student's satisfaction with the school climate. In conclusion, head teachers need to consider the views of conflicting members and liaise with student leaders to manage conflicts so as to create a favourable school climate that can enhance teaching and learning. Finally, future studies may need to explore students' satisfaction in primary schools as well as in rural secondary schools.

#### APA CITATION

Amito, B., Oriangi, G. & Lamaro, G. (2023). Head Teachers' Conflict Management Strategies and Students' Satisfaction with School Climate in Secondary Schools in Uganda *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 6(2), 56-71. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.6.2.1222>.

#### CHICAGO CITATION

Amito, Betty, George Oriangi and Gloria Lamaro. 2023. "Head Teachers' Conflict Management Strategies and Students' Satisfaction with School Climate in Secondary Schools in Uganda". *East African Journal of Education Studies* 6 (2), 56-71. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.6.2.1222>

#### HARVARD CITATION

Amito, B., Oriangi, G. & Lamaro, G. (2023) "Head Teachers' Conflict Management Strategies and Students' Satisfaction with School Climate in Secondary Schools in Uganda", *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 6(2), pp. 56-71. doi: 10.37284/eajes.6.2.1222.

#### IEEE CITATION

B. Amito, G. Oriangi & G. Lamaro. "Head Teachers' Conflict Management Strategies and Students' Satisfaction with School Climate in Secondary Schools in Uganda" *EAJES*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 56-71, May. 2023.

#### MLA CITATION

Amito, Betty, George Oriangi & Gloria Lamaro. "Head Teachers' Conflict Management Strategies and Students' Satisfaction with School Climate in Secondary Schools in Uganda". *East African Journal of Education Studies*, Vol. 6, no. 2, May. 2023, pp. 56-71, doi:10.37284/eajes.6.2.1222

## INTRODUCTION

Student satisfaction with school climate has recently received increasing attention among researchers as schools continue to refine practices to be safer and more engaging (Higgins & Roche, 2014). Available literature shows that students' satisfaction with school climate has a positive association with head teachers' conflict management (Cornell & Limber, 2015). However, limited understanding exists of which head teachers' conflict management strategies have a significant effect on students' satisfaction with the school climate. Such information can help inform school managers on what to focus most in creating a better liveable school climate for students. Therefore, this study assessed the influence of head teachers' conflict management strategies on students' satisfaction with the school climate in Gulu City in Northern Uganda.

Historically, Rapoport (1960) pointed out that conflict is a theme that has occupied the thinking of man more than any other issue. Efforts on the evolution of conflict management started in the 1940s by Follett who suggested five main dimensions of handling conflict, namely: domination, compromise, integration, avoidance, and suppression. According to Owens (2001), the work of Follett marked a move from the traditional organisation theory of scientific management towards the human relations movement and

contingency theory. In 1962, Boulding came up with three dimensions of managing conflicts, namely: avoiding, conquest, and procedural resolution. Boulding (1962) went ahead to caution that conflict situations are frequently allowed to develop to almost unmanageable proportions before anything is done. This points to the need for people to consciously develop knowledge of conflict management to contain conflicts early enough before it escalates, particularly in school environments. While it will not be out of place to argue that the ideas of Boulding (1962) rightly reflected the works of Follett et al. (1942), they also show wider conflict management strategies that border on reconciliation and award.

Theoretically, this study is anchored under the group conflict process theory developed by Evertson and Harris (1992), which holds that most organisational conflicts are managed through negotiations, resolution, and stimulation. This theory posits that conflict management strategies are developed on a grid based on two basic dimensions intent (concern for one's own interests) and cooperativeness (concern for the interests of the other party). Five strategies of handling conflict based on these include: competing (which involves the intention to win at the expense of the other); accommodating (sacrificing one's own needs for others); compromising (which involves assertiveness and cooperation); collaborating (confronting a conflict and working through it with

the other party to reach a win-win solution); and avoiding which is characterised by uncooperativeness and unassertiveness.

Conceptually, Pashiardis (1998) defines conflict management as the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict. The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including performance in an organisational setting. Henry (2009) showed that head teachers' conflict management strategies could be measured using the following dimensions: smoothing, compromising, forcing, withdrawal, and problem-solving, while Follett (2003) identified three dimensions in conflict management, namely: collaborating, non-confrontation and control. Furthermore, Morgan (2005) and Thomas (2008) asserted that managers' choices of conflict management hinge on whether they wish to engage in assertive or cooperative behaviour while employing conflict management strategies such as avoiding, compromising, controlling, accommodating and collaborating.

Morgan (2005) indicated that avoiding meant ignoring conflict and letting fate take its course. It was based on the belief that conflict was unnecessary, inappropriate, and costly. Managerial behaviours associated with avoiding style include: ignoring conflict in the hope that it would disappear, putting problems on hold, invoking slow procedures, use of secrecy, and appealing to bureaucratic rule (Gordon & Ernest, 2009). Bisno (2010) defines conflict management as an operational plan to achieve a conflict reduction goal through controlling, compromising, avoiding, accommodating, and collaborating, while Moran and Lu (2001) define conflict management as a set of skills that assist individuals in dealing with conflicts as they arise in all aspects of their lives. Moran and Lu measured conflict management in terms of avoidance, collaborating, controlling, confrontation, reducing, resolving, mediation and negotiation. This study borrows from Bisno (2010) and Moran (2001) and will define conflict

management as a working plan aimed at lessening conflict through reducing, compromising, controlling, intensifying, resolving, accommodating, confronting, collaborating, and avoiding.

The strategies school head teachers use to manage conflict will always affect students' satisfaction with the school climate. Mukhtar et al. (2015), as cited in Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018), define student satisfaction as a function of the relative level of experience and perceived performance about educational services during the study period. The authors measured students' satisfaction in relation to academic performance; institutional factors like students' involvement in school activities; students' responses to their teachers; punctuality; commitment to school rules and regulations. Furthermore, Oliver and Desarbo (1997) define students' satisfaction as the favourability of students' subjective evaluation of various outcomes and experiences associated with education. They measured students' satisfaction using students' achievements and improved academic performance. This study adopts the definition of Mukhtar et al. (2015), as cited in Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018) and Oliver and Desarbo (1997), where students' satisfaction was measured by students' comfort, students' punctuality in school, student obedience to rules and regulations, students' commitment to tasks, students' performance in tasks and students' participation in school activities.

Finally, school climate is defined as the shared belief, attitudes and values that shape the interaction between students, teachers, and school administrators (Koth et al., 2008). School climate is manifested through school safety (i.e., clearly communicated rules and regulations, clear and consistent communication by school administrators and teachers). According to Cohen et al. (2009), school climate is the character and quality of a school's culture manifested by student safety and connectedness with the school, attendance, feelings

reported by students, school staff, student learning engagement, and students' wellbeing.

According to Burns (2008), in the African context, students' satisfaction with the school climate was one of the vital factors that determined students' perception of life and therefore how they responded to daily challenges. Pasi (2001) argued that a supportive and responsive school climate fostered a sense of belonging, promoted resilience, and reduced possible negative circumstances in school. These scholars added that social and emotional needs were congruent with learning needs. Therefore, these needs should be addressed so as to facilitate learning and therefore make students perform their tasks even if there is conflict. Brooks (1999) indicated that students were more likely to thrive when they had a sense of belonging, felt comfortable, and felt appreciated. Students who are satisfied with the school climate are punctual in school and in lessons, satisfied with their academic performance, developed their talents, loyal and obedient to school rules and regulations, free to participate in school activities, communicate with teachers, engaged in less violent behaviour, had fewer discipline referrals, reported feeling safer at school, and more willing to report potential threats to safety (Pasi, 2001). This paper is divided into six sections, and the following sections present the literature review, materials and methods, study results, discussion, recommendations and conclusion.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Head Teachers' Conflict Management Strategies in Secondary Schools

Various conflict writers highlight different ways of resolving conflict (Henkin et al., 2000; Derr, 1978; Bisno, 2010). Henkin et al. (2000) stated that conflicts could be managed through smoothing, compromising, forcing, withdrawal and problem-solving. While Derr (1978) asserts that conflict can be managed through resolving disputes, e.g., collaborating, bargaining, and power play. To

Morgan (2005) and Thomas (2008), a manager's choice of conflict management strategy hinges on whether he or she wishes to engage in assertive or cooperative behaviour. Using the assertive-cooperative model, Thomas (2008) identified five conflict management strategies, namely avoiding, compromising, controlling, accommodating, collaborating and proposed that a manager may use one or a combination of strategies to resolve conflict. According to Morgan (2005), avoiding means ignoring the conflict and letting fate take its course based on the belief that conflict is unnecessary, inappropriate, dysfunctional, and costly (Gordon & Ernest, 2009). While compromising involves looking for trade-offs and solutions acceptable to all in a give-and-take spirit (Bisno, 2010), controlling strategy uses power to dominate and ensure that one party wins at the expense of the other and its use has been so much limited to industries (Morgan, 2005). For accommodating, it is a highly cooperative and completely unassertive strategy and the manager attempts to satisfy the concerns of others while paying little or no attention to his/her own concerns. Accommodating is usually used when the manager finds out that he/she is wrong (Morgan, 2005).

Notwithstanding, Cunningham (1998) identified collaborating as one of the best methods of resolving organisational conflict because it incorporates the concerns of all parties and helps find out the root causes of the problem. However, investigating the underlying problems may take longer and may not prevent the conflict (Bisno, 2010). The above strategies have often been so much used outside the context of the secondary school setting. Thus, this study operationalised some of these conflict management strategies in the secondary school environment to determine the nature of conflict management by head teachers in Gulu City.

In the context of school climate, Follett (2003) showed that head teachers could use collaboration, non-confrontational, and control strategies for

conflict management. Controlling is appropriate when quick decisions are needed, in situations where unpopular decisions need implementation, and when the head teacher is sure of being right (Morgan, 2005). However, Bisno (2010) criticised controlling because it is inappropriate in modern organisational settings since it does not resolve the conflict. Although head teachers may have a preferred conflict management strategy, various strategies may be appropriate in different situations (Morgan, 2005). Analysis of the aforementioned studies indicates a need to determine the most commonly used conflict management strategies in secondary schools in Gulu City in northern Uganda that had long suffered from war during the period 1986-2006.

### **Level of Students' Satisfaction with School Climate in Secondary Schools**

Although not a new concept, interest in studying school climate has increased over the last three decades not only among researchers in other fields but also among educators (Thapa et al., 2013; Hasani, 2023). Thapa et al. (2013) review of literature on school climate showed that the patterns of norms, goals, values, feelings, fair discipline practices such as punctuality, loyalty, obedience to school rules and regulations, active and collaborative learning, school connectedness, and good physical layout of school could shape relationships in schools and provide an area of high level of student satisfaction with school climate.

According to a study conducted by OECD (2017) in the US and Kyangwe et al. (2023) in Tanzania, students' satisfaction with school climate explains the variation in students' performance. Stockard and Mayberry (1992) stated that students' satisfaction with school climate can be measured by the quality of learning, students' loyalty to school authorities, students' comfort with the school environment, and obedience to school rules and regulations. Students learn best where they feel safe, supported, challenged, and accepted (Huerta & Mills, 2010). Analysis of the above reports shows that when

schools focus on improving the school climate, students are more likely to participate in school activities. However, when school administrators impose planned school activities on students, it makes them dissatisfied with the school climate.

Furthermore, Freiberg and Stein (2000) asserted that school climate is the heart and soul of a school. Freiberg and Stein continue to state that a good school climate is one where students feel comfortable and attracted to the school and thus, giving life and revealing the values that the school cherishes. School climate is brought about by the interaction between the head teacher and teachers, among teachers and students and between the head teacher and students. Pasi (2001) observed that students who attended schools with positive climates engaged in less risk-taking and violent behaviour had fewer discipline referrals and school suspensions and reported feeling safer at school and more willing to report potential threats to safety. Hughes (2010) in his study conducted in Nigeria, noted that understanding students' behaviour was important. Foster and William (2008) concurred with the above view and indicated that head teachers should be concerned with the needs of the students both emotional and material. When students become aware that the administration is concerned about them, they will feel better. Assessment of literature on students' satisfaction with school climate indicates that most of the studies have been done in other parts of the world and little is known in the Ugandan context.

### **Conflict Management Strategies and Students' Satisfaction with School Climate**

Scholars and researchers commonly understand that head teachers' conflict management strategies have a profound association with students' satisfaction with the school climate. A positive school climate exists when everyone involved in the school feels wanted, valued, accepted, and secure (Koth et al., 2008). Additionally, Clark (2003) explained that the influence of head teachers' conflict management strategies on students' satisfaction with school

climate is evidenced by students' quick response when called upon, improved participation in school activities and improved academic performance. Henkin et al. (2000) found that collaboration-oriented conflict management strategies were associated with high levels of satisfaction, while the use of control-oriented strategies is associated with low levels of satisfaction. Furthermore, the use of strategies under non-confrontational dimensions of conflict management such as accommodating, compromising, and avoiding, were associated with moderate levels of satisfaction with the school climate.

Researchers of school climate, for example, Sabo (2006) observed that a positive school climate was related to the effectiveness of the whole school. In addition, Litwin and Stringer (2000) reported that it

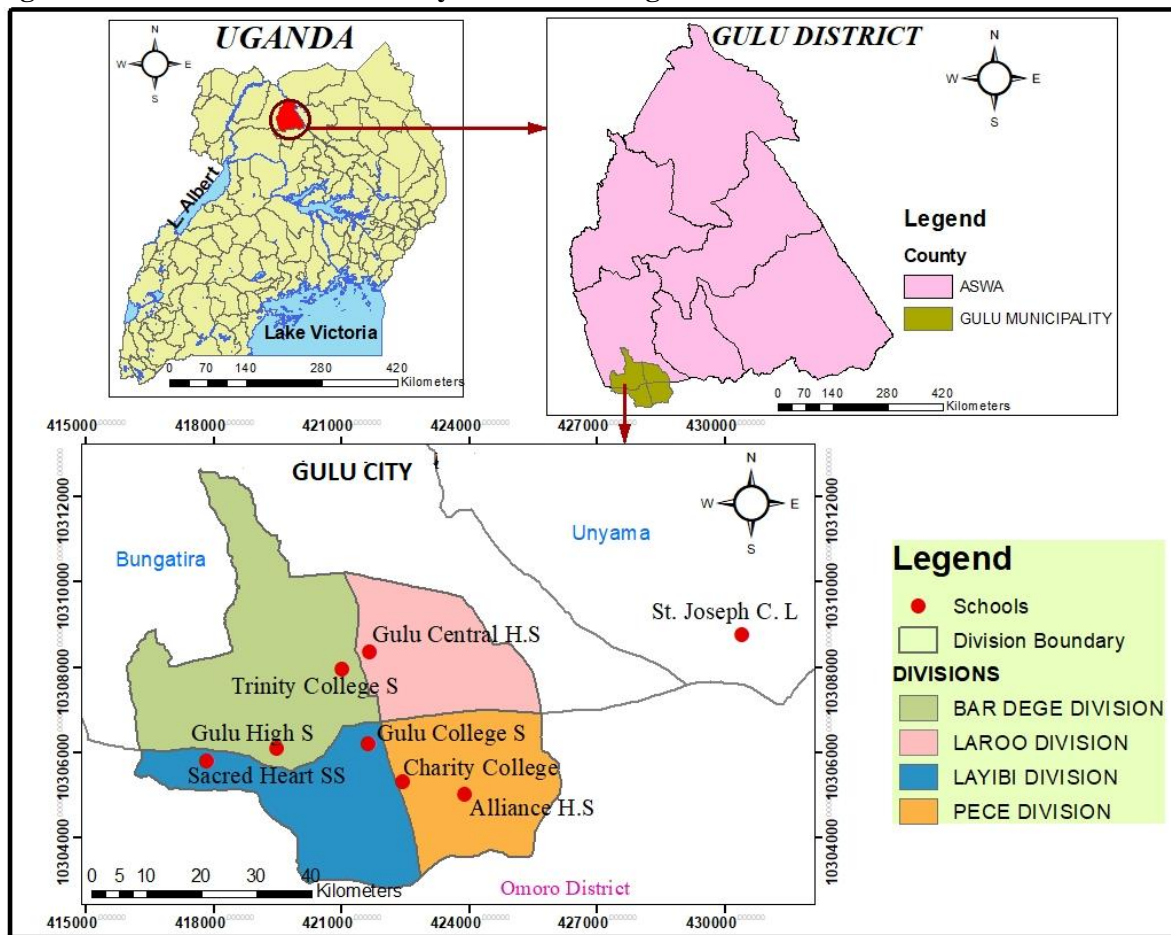
was possible to create a high level of student satisfaction with the school climate within a short period of time by varying conflict management styles. Despite studies showing an association between head teachers' conflict management strategies and students' satisfaction with school climate, limited understanding of the key factors of conflict management strategies that influence students' satisfaction with school climate exists.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Area

The study was conducted in selected secondary schools in Gulu City (Figure 1). Gulu was chosen because of the continuous occurrence of conflicts in schools.

**Figure 1: The location of Gulu City in Northern Uganda and the schools that were studied**



Source: (Self-generated geographical information science map, based on UBOS shape files, 2020).

### Study Design and Target Population

A cross-sectional survey research design was used (Oso & Onen, 2009) to capture opinions and knowledge on the demographic characteristics of respondents, head teachers' conflict management strategies and students' satisfaction with the school climate. The target population comprised 250 teachers and head teachers and 6,092 students. Headteachers were included in the study because they were directly involved in the management of conflicts. Teachers were included because they directly handle issues pertaining to students, while the inclusion of students was because they were the primary focus of the research.

### Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The study used a sample size of 181 head teachers, teachers and students. This included 8 head teachers, 75 teachers, and 98 students selected from eight schools. The sample size was arrived at based on Israel's (1992) sample size procedure. The study used a purposive sampling technique to select schools and head teachers based on perceived frequent occurrences of conflicts, while simple random sampling was used to select teachers and students. This was because it would give equal and independent chances for participants to be selected (Oso & Onen, 2009).

### Data Collection Methods

Researcher-administered questionnaires were used to obtain data on the head teachers' conflict management strategies and students' satisfaction with the school climate. The researcher approached the respondents from their schools at an agreed time and consent was obtained before engaging them in interviews. Each questionnaire interview took approximately 40 minutes.

### Data Analyses

Descriptive statistics, while employing frequencies was used to determine head teachers' conflict management strategies and students' satisfaction

with school climate, while linear regression was used to determine the influence of head teachers' conflict management strategies on students' satisfaction with school climate. Head teachers' conflict management strategies formed the independent variables (i.e., use of school rules and regulations, taking charge during conflict resolution, liaising with student leaders, giving priority to member's views, confronting conflict whenever it occurs, emphasising areas of agreement, listening to conflicting parties, ignoring students complains, minimising differences from conflicting parties and use of dialogue). Students' satisfaction with the school climate formed the dependent variable.

### RESULTS

This section presents study results on head teachers' conflict management strategies, students' satisfaction with school climate, and the influence of head teachers' conflict management strategies on students' satisfaction with school climate.

#### Conflict Management Strategies in Secondary Schools

Findings on head teachers' conflict management strategies (*Table 1*) revealed that they: pay little attention to students' complaints (13%), ignore students' complaints (13%), put emphasis on members to continue performing their tasks even if there is conflict (7%), giving priority to views of members during conflict (7%), liaising with student leaders (6%), emphasising on conflict consequences (6%), taking responsibility during conflict situation (6%), giving time to resolve conflict among conflicting parties (6%), imposing views on conflicting parties (5%), enforcing school rules and regulations (4%), use of dialogue (4%), investigating the causes of conflict (4%), and responding immediately to conflicts when they arise (4%). Reference can be made to *Table 1* for details on the performance of other variables on head teachers' conflict management. Therefore, the most commonly used conflict management strategies in

secondary schools in Gulu City include paying little attention to students' complaints, ignoring students' complaints, putting emphasis on members to continue performing their tasks even if there is conflict, giving priority to views of members during the conflict, liaising with student leaders, emphasising on conflict consequences, taking responsibility during a conflict situation, and giving

time to resolve conflict among conflicting parties. On the other hand, the least commonly used conflict management strategies include: taking charge in times of conflict, emphasising areas of agreement between conflicting parties, listening to conflicting parties, and giving an opportunity to students to discuss with administrators.



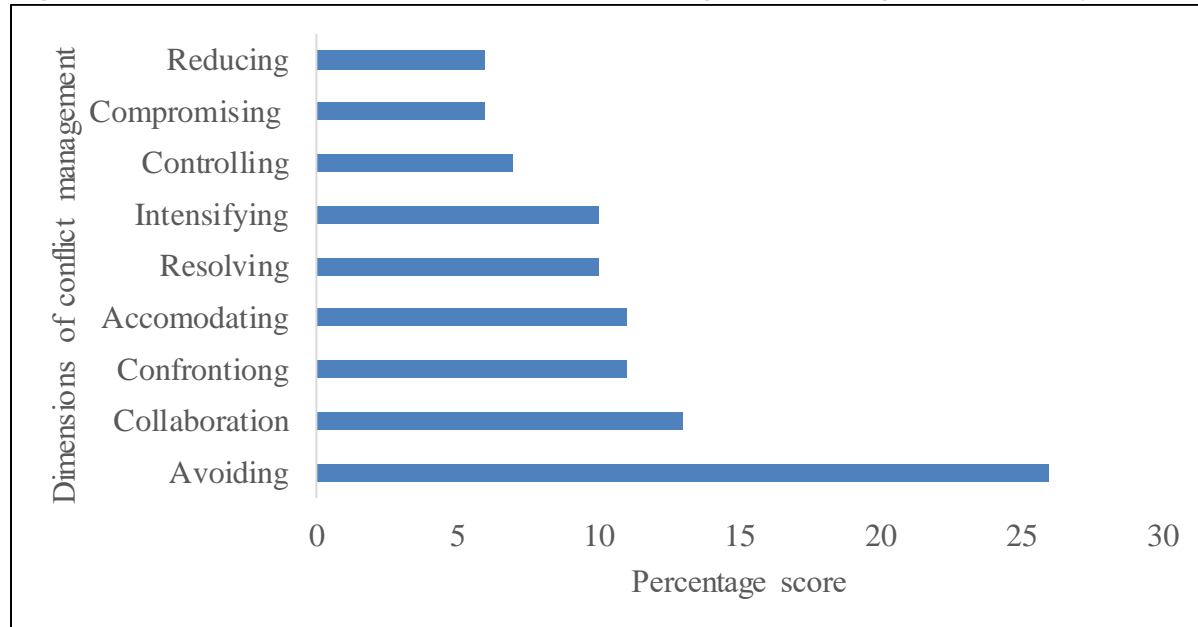
**Table 1: Head teachers' conflict management strategies in Gulu City**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Variable indicators</b>	<b>Variable in %</b>	<b>Dimension score in %</b>	<b>Ranking Dimensions from highest to lowest</b>
Controlling	Enforcing school rules and regulation	4	7	8
	Taking charge in times of conflict	3		
Collaboration	Liaising with student leaders	6	13	2
	Giving priority to the views of members during the conflict	7		
Confronting	Imposing views on conflicting parties	5	11	3
	Emphasising conflict consequences	6		
Compromising	Emphasising areas of agreement between conflicting parties	3	6	9
	Listening to conflicting parties	3		
Accommodating	Members continue to perform tasks even if there is a conflict	7	11	3
	Management minimises differences among conflicting parties	4		
Avoiding	Ignoring students' complaints	13	26	1
	Paying little attention to students' complaints	13		
Intensifying	Investigating the causes of the conflict	4	10	6
	Taking responsibility during a conflict situation	6		
Reducing	Opportunity is given to students to discuss with administrators	2	6	10
	Responding immediately to conflict when it arises	4		
Resolving	Dialogue is used to manage conflict	4	10	6
	Time is given to resolve conflict among conflicting parties	6		
Total		100	100	

In terms of dimensions of conflict management in secondary schools in Gulu City (*Figure 2*), findings revealed that they use avoiding (26%), collaboration (13%), confronting (11%), accommodating (11%), intensifying (10%), resolving (10%), controlling (7%), compromising (6%), and reducing (6%).

Hence, avoidance, collaboration, confronting, accommodating, intensifying, and resolving are the most commonly used dimensions of conflict management, while confronting, compromising, and reducing are the least commonly used strategies of conflict management strategies.

**Figure 2: Dimensions of head teachers' conflict management strategies in Gulu City**



**Students' Satisfaction with School Climate in Secondary Schools**

Findings on students' satisfaction with school climate (*Table 2*) revealed that, on average, 81% of students had a low level of satisfaction, 11% had a moderate level of satisfaction, and only 8% had a

high level of satisfaction with their school climate. Thus, the majority of students in secondary schools in Gulu City had a low level of satisfaction with their school climate. The implication of the above finding is that if up to 81% of students are dissatisfied, then it can result in strikes, poor academic performance, and late coming to school.

**Table 2: Level of students' satisfaction with the school climate in secondary schools in Gulu City**

Students' satisfaction with school climate	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Level of comfort studying in this school	14	10	76
Level of punctuality in schools and lessons	3	9	88
Level of satisfaction with academic performance	16	10	74
Level of the adequacy of space to develop talents and career	14	13	90
Level of loyalty and obedience to school rules and regulations	11	7	82
Level of comfort participating in student leadership in school	12	11	77
Level of freedom in participating in co-curricular activities	7	10	83
Level of freedom communicating with teachers and administrators	12	14	74
Level of response when called upon by the teacher or administrator	2	8	90
Level of being regular in attending lessons	5	10	85
Overall average percentage	8	11	81

### Head teachers' Conflict Management Strategies on Students' Satisfaction with School Climate

Results on the influence of head teachers' conflict management strategies on students' satisfaction with school climate (Table 3) revealed that giving priority to the views of members when settling conflicts ( $p=0.037$ ) and liaising with student leaders

to settle conflicts by administrators ( $p=0.069$ ) were the factors that had a significant influence on students' satisfaction with school climate in Gulu City. Both giving priority to the views of members and liaising with student leaders to settle conflicts by administrators are parameters under the dimension of collaboration as a conflict management strategy.

**Table 3: Factors on head teachers' conflict management strategies that influence students' satisfaction with school climate**

Conflict management strategies	Std. Error of the Coefficient	P-Value	VIF
School rules and regulations used to settle conflicts	.090	.831	1.480
Management takes charge during conflict resolution	.112	.544	1.385
Administrators liaise with student leaders to settle conflicts	.102	.069	1.536
Views of members given priority during conflicts	.092	.037	1.555
Board of Governors (BOG), parents, and other stakeholders discuss the conflict	.080	.833	1.209
Management imposes views on conflicting parties	.092	.121	1.375
Administrators confront conflict whenever it happens	.076	.675	1.268
Management emphasises areas of agreement during a conflict	.100	.256	1.261
Management listens to conflicting parties	.096	.158	1.186
Members continue to perform their tasks even if there is a conflict	.087	.380	1.639
Students' complaints are ignored by administrators	.095	.513	2.161
Management minimises differences between conflicting parties	.093	.573	1.383
Administrators take responsibility for the conflict situation	.113	.543	1.827
Management gives time to resolve conflict among parties	.096	.433	1.582
Dialogue is used to manage conflict	.092	.789	1.399
Constant	.868		
R Square	.293		
Standard error of the estimate	1.104		
Regression significance	.021		

Note: (a). The dependent variable is students' satisfaction with the school climate

(b). VIF is the Variance Inflation Factor, and P-Values was computed at  $p<0.05$

### DISCUSSION OF STUDY FINDINGS

This chapter presents the discussion of study findings on head teachers' conflict management strategies, students' satisfaction with their school climate and the influence of head teachers' conflict management strategies on students' satisfaction with school climate.

### The Nature of Head Teachers' Conflict Management Strategies

The major conflict management strategies by head teachers in secondary schools in Gulu City were: paying little attention to students' complaints, ignoring students' complaints, emphasising members to continue performing their tasks even if there is conflict, giving priority to views of members during a conflict, liaising with student leaders, emphasising on conflict consequences, taking responsibility during a conflict situation,

giving time to resolve conflict among conflicting parties, and imposing views on conflicting parties. However, the least commonly used conflict management strategies included: taking charge in times of conflict, emphasising areas of agreement between conflicting parties, listening to conflicting parties, and giving an opportunity to students to discuss with administrators.

To begin with, paying little attention to students' complaints and ignoring students' complaints were two of the most commonly used head teachers' conflict management strategies, probably because of the high teacher students ratio. Many complaints from students and some of which could be minor cases and when put together could practically be difficult to handle. Furthermore, many conflicts occur among students, and teachers may take it that schools are not conflict management grounds; sometimes teachers think that conflicts come but will settle down with time. Sabina Valente (2020) agreed with the above assertion when she stated that the increase in compulsory schooling and, consequently increase in the number of students per class has led to a greater number of unmotivated and indiscipline students which implies an increase in school conflict and little attention to such conflicts.

To add to the above, putting emphasis on members to continue performing their tasks even if there's conflict was one of the most commonly used strategies could be because of the need to focus on the key objective of the school, which is academics. Bornstein (2005) in his study reported that when people continue performing their tasks amidst conflict, it may definitely reduce their intensity so that teaching and learning are not affected. Similarly, giving priority to the view of members was yet another most commonly used conflict management strategy by head teachers. This could be due to the need to seek the opinions of conflicting parties on what could have led to the conflict and what could be the best way forward. This finding corroborates with that of Rubin and Sung (1994) in

Ghana who reported that seeking opinions of conflicting parties was emphasised.

Liaising with student leaders was also one of the most commonly used strategies. This is because student leaders could easily explore more from their peers as they socialise and thus, head teachers who liaise with student leaders are likely to get a lot of information about those student(s) involved in a conflict and how best to resolve it. However, the least commonly used strategies were: taking charge in times of conflict and emphasising areas of agreement between conflicting parties. Taking charge during conflict situations is the least commonly used, probably because the head teachers take this responsibility during conflict situations to reduce the negative consequences of conflict so as to bring peace, avoid enmity and bring down emotional blackmail.

More still, emphasising areas of agreement between conflicting parties was yet another least commonly used strategy could be because head teachers fear being perceived as weak administrators. Cunningham (1998) disagrees with this finding, indicating that it was necessary to look into the root causes of conflict(s) in order to come to a compromise between conflicting parties instead of working on assumptions.

In terms of dimensions of conflict management, the most commonly used dimensions of conflict management strategies in secondary schools in Gulu City were avoidance, collaboration, confronting, accommodating, intensifying, and resolving, while controlling, compromising, and reducing were the least commonly used strategies of conflict management. What seems to be clear in this finding is that several schools use an integrated approach where several dimensions of conflict management are used, thus, concurring with a report by Olatoye (2014) who noted that in both public and private schools in Nigeria, there was use of integrated approaches in conflict management. However, the most used conflict management

strategies may vary from headteacher to headteacher.

The use of avoidance as one of the most commonly used dimensions of conflict management is likely to be due to the fact that school managers believe that conflict will always take its course and with time settle down. Morgan (2005) agrees with this finding and notes that avoidance meant ignoring conflict and letting fate take its course. Morgan believes that conflict is unnecessary, inappropriate, and costly. However, Ryan and Deci (2000) disagree with this study's finding indicating that avoidance may not yield much because it can spark more grief among the conflicting parties.

Collaboration was another most commonly used strategy by head teachers probably in an attempt to please the foundation bodies. Cunningham (1998) concurred with this study's finding and indicated that collaboration aims at resolving conflicts by means that are analytical and it helps to get to the root causes of the problem. Furthermore, accommodating was yet another strategy used by the head teachers could be because the conflicting parties are always encouraged to bear with one another and continue working together in order to pursue the vision and the mission of the school. This finding agrees with a report by Morgan (2005), who noted that students and teachers in the school should always cooperate in order to promote a good school climate for everyone.

However, controlling was one of the least commonly used dimensions probably because in an attempt by head teachers to take charge of conflict resolution, the conflicting parties are not given a good chance to agree and come to a compromise and thus may become dissatisfied with the whole process of conflict management. Additionally, compromising was least used probably because school administrators do not want to use this strategy because of fear of being perceived as weak administrators before students. This finding concurs with that of Bisno (2010) who stated that compromising was a lose-lose strategy in which

contending parties gave up some of their original demands.

### **The Level of Students Satisfaction with the School Climate**

The study findings on students' satisfaction with school climate revealed that the majority of students in secondary schools in Gulu City had a low level of satisfaction with their school climate. This could be because students are given less attention to developing their talents and career; students dissatisfaction with the general school's academic performance in national examinations as compared to other schools' country-wide. This study finding is in agreement with a report by Griffin and Moorhead (2007), who found that students' satisfaction with the school climate was low. According to Brooks (1999), students were more likely to thrive when they were in a school to which they felt they belonged, comfortable, and appreciated by head teachers. Many students joined gangs in order to have a sense of identity. Related to this feeling of belonging was the importance of helping each student to feel welcomed, thereby reducing feelings of alienation and disconnectedness.

### **Head teachers' Conflict Management Strategies on Student Satisfaction with School Climate**

The influence of head teachers' conflict management strategies on students' satisfaction with school climate in Gulu City showed that giving priority to the views of members in settling conflicts and liaising with student leaders to settle conflict had a significant influence on students' satisfaction with school climate. Giving priority to the views of members in settling conflicts had a significant effect on students' satisfaction with the school climate, probably because members could feel loved and viewed as mature in contributing to how their conflicts can be settled. Furthermore, liaising with student leaders to settle conflicts had a significant effect on students' satisfaction with the school climate, probably because most student leaders try

to favour their fellow students and hence the resolutions end up in the student's favour. Both giving priority to the views of members and liaising with student leaders to settle conflicts by administrators are parameters under the dimension of collaboration in conflict management. Cunningham (1998) indicated that collaboration is an important form of conflict management in secondary schools.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Headteachers in secondary schools may need to use more of taking charge in times of conflict, emphasising areas of agreement between conflicting parties, listening to conflicting parties, and giving an opportunity to students to discuss their grudges with administrators, which are underutilised strategies in conflict management as established by this study.

Secondary school head teachers need to utilise more of giving priority to the views of members and liaising with student leaders to settle conflicts since these are the variables under conflict management strategies that the study revealed to have had a significant effect on students' satisfaction with school climate.

This study focused on the influence of head teachers' conflict management strategies on students' satisfaction with school climate only in secondary schools that were in Gulu City in northern Uganda. However, future studies may need to cover the whole country while investigating what is happening in primary schools as well as in rural secondary schools.

### Acknowledgement

The authors acknowledge the financial support given by the Carnegie Foundation of New York through the Consolidating Early Career Academics Program (CECAP) 2022-2024 in Makerere granted to Dr George Oriangi as a post-doctoral fellow from Gulu University in supporting the writing of this paper up to publication.

### REFERENCES

- Bisno, H. (2010). *Managing Conflict*. Sage Publications.
- Bornstein, M. H. (2005). *Handbook of parenting: Volume I: Children and parenting*. Psychology Press.
- Boulding, K. E. (1962). *Conflict and Defence: A general theory paper*. New York.
- Brooks, J. G. (1999). The Courage to be Constructivist. *Educational Leadership, Journal of Education Management*, 57(3), 320-328.
- Burns, J., (2008). *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Clark, R. E. (2003). Fostering the Work Motivation of Individuals and Teams. *Performance improvement*, 42, 21-29. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/pfi.4930420305>.
- Cohen, J., McCabe, E. M., Michelli, N. M., & Pickeral, T. (2009). School climate: Research, policy, practice, and teacher education. *Teachers college record*, 111(1), 180-213.
- Cornell, D., & Limber, S. P. (2015). Law and policy on the concept of bullying at school. *American Psychologist*, 70(4), 333-343. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038558>
- Cunningham, W. G. (1998). Conflict Theory in Northern Ireland. *Unpublished M. Litt Thesis. University of Auckland*.
- Derr, C. B. (1978). Managing organisational conflict: Collaboration, bargaining, and power approaches. *California Management Review*, 21(2), 76-83.
- Evertson, C. M., & Harris, A. H. (1992). What We Know About Managing Classrooms. *Educational leadership*, 49(7), 74-78.

- Follett, M. P., Metcalf, H. C., & Urwick, L. F. (1942). *Dynamic administration*.
- Follett, M. P. (2003). *Constructive Conflict Dynamic Administration*. New York. The State University of New Jersey.
- Foster, W. & William, G. (2008). *Education Leadership and the Struggle for the Mind*. Nashville: University Press Inc.
- Freiberg, M. C. & Stein, G. (2000). *Organisational Climate and its Influence upon Performance: A Study of Australian Hotels in South East Queensland*. PhD Thesis Griffith University.
- Gordon, B. & Ernest, R. (2009). *Theories of Learning*. New York: South New York Meredith Publishing Company.
- Griffin, R. W., & Moorhead, G. (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). (2007). *Organisational Behaviour: Managing People and Organisations*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York.
- Hasani, K. B. (2023). Challenges Facing Primary Schools' Learners in Morogoro Municipality when Communicative Approach is used in Teaching English Language. *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 6(1), 90-102.
- Henkin, A. B., Cistone, P. J., Dee, J. R., (2000). Conflict Management Strategies of Principals in Site-Based Managed Schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 38, 2.
- Henry, O. (2009). Organisational conflict and its effects on Organizational Performance. *Research journal of business management*, 2(1), 16-24.
- Higgins, C., & Roche, W. K. (2014). Networked pay coordination and the containment of second-tier pay bargaining: Social partnership in Ireland at the height of the economic boom. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 35(4), 667-693.
- Huerta P.E. & Mills S.J., (2010). School-Based Decision-Making Councils – Conflict, Leader power and social influence in the vertical team. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 39, (1), 47-66.
- Hughes, L. (2010). *The Principal as a Leader*. Don Hills: Macmillan College Publishing Company.
- Israel, G. D. (1992). *Determining Sample Size*. Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of food and Agriculture Sciences. EDIS. University of Florida.
- Koth, C. W., Bradshaw, C. P. & Leaf, P. J. (2008). A Multilevel Study of Predictors of Students' Perceptions of School Climate: The Effects of Classroom Level Factors. *Journal of educational Psychology* 100 (1), 96-104.
- Kyangwe, L., Onyango, D. O., & Alloph, J. M. (2023). Strategies to Enhance Teachers' Job Satisfaction in Secondary Schools in Butiama District, Mara, Tanzania. *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 6(1), 120-132.
- Litwin, G. & Stringer, R. (2000). *Motivation and Organisational Climate*, Cambridge, MA: University Press.
- Moran, P. R., & Lu, Z. (2001). *Teaching culture: Perspectives in practice* (pp. 34-47). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Morgan, P. (2005). Academic and Behavioural Difficulties at School: Introduction to Special Issues. *Behavioural Disorders* 38 (4), 193-200.
- OECD (2017). *Economic Cooperation and Development on the Programme for International Students' Assessment*. Ireland.
- Olatoye, R. A. (2014). A Comparative Study of Public and Private Senior Secondary School Students' Science Achievement in Katsina State, Nigeria. *Journal of Educational and Social Research MCSER Publishing, Rome-Italy Vol. 4 No.3*.

- Oliver, R. L. & Desarbo, W. S. (1997). Processing of the Satisfaction Response in a suggested Framework and Research Proposition. *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behaviour*, 2, pp.1-16.
- Oso, W. Y & Onen, D. (2009). *A general Guide to Writing Research Proposal and Report*. (Revised ed). Kisumu: Jomo Kenyatta foundation.
- Owens, R. G. (2001). Organisational Behaviour in Education. *The journal of Behavioural Disorders* 38 (4), 193-200.
- Pashiardis, P. (1998). Moving Towards a Quality School Climate. *International Journal of Education Management*, 12, (1), 14-22.
- Pasi, C. B. (2001). Leadership Motivation and the Drivers of Share Price: The Business Case for Measuring Organisational Climate. *Leadership and Organisational Development Journal*, 24, (7), 380-386.
- Rapoport, A. (1960). The First Conflict Resolution Movement. An attempt to Institutionalise Applied Interdisciplinary Social Science. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Vol. 35. No. 4.
- Rubin, P. D., & Sung, H. K. (1994). *Social Conflict Escalation: Stalemate and Settlement*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Ryan, M. R., & Deci, R. (2000). *Self-determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development and Wellbeing*. University of Rochester.
- Sabina, V. (2020). *School Conflicts: Causes and Management Strategies in Classroom*. Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Sabo, C. (2006). *Cultural Influences on Conflict Management Styles between West Africans and Americans*. Unpublished PhD Thesis.
- Stockard, J., & Mayberry, M. (1992). *Effective educational environments*. Corwin Press, Inc., 2455 Teller Road, Newbury Park, CA 91320 (paperback: ISBN-0-8039-6012-3; \$20; cloth: ISBN-0-8039-6011-5).
- Thapa A, Cohen J, Guffey S, Higgins DA (2013). A Review of School Climate Research. *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 83, No. 3, pp. 357–385 DOI: 10.3102/0034654313483907.
- Thomas, K.W. (2008). *Conflict and Conflict Management*. In M.D. Dunnette (Ed.), *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Weerasinghe, I. M. S., & Fernando, R. L. S. I. (2018). Critical factors affecting students' satisfaction with higher education in Sri Lanka. *Quality Assurance in Education*.