

## **DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT BETWEEN SCHOOL HEADS AND DEPUTY HEADS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN THE MINISTRY OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION, MASHONALAND CENTRAL ZIMBABWE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The research focused on the "Dynamics of Conflict in high schools between School Heads and Deputy Heads, in Mashonaland Central Province." The study was based on two theories: Conflict Theory Framework and Transformational Leadership Theory. One of the objectives of the study was to identify sources of conflict between School Heads and Deputy School Heads in high schools. The other objective of the study' was to come up with possible strategies for resolving conflicts between School Heads and their deputies in high schools. The researchers employed a phenomenological design. A questionnaire was employed to gather data from school leaders regarding the roots of conflict and tactics for conflict resolution between School Heads and Vice School Heads in high schools. The researchers gathered replies from individuals using a purposive sampling method. The school leaders demonstrated an impressive response rate of 89%, although the Vice School Head's response rate was 74%. Inadequate communication, distrust, and procurement procedures are the main causes of conflict between School Heads and vice School Head chiefs, according to the study. Gender, role conflict, leadership style, and the erosion of authority are other significant factors that contribute to conflict between School Heads and Deputy Heads in High Schools. This study presents various tactics to resolve problems and enhance relationships between School Heads and their deputies, including discussion and mediation procedures, as well as the cultivation of communication skills among school leaders. The study also determined that conflicts and misunderstandings can be mitigated by explicitly defining the roles and responsibilities of School Heads and their Deputies. The report also advocated for the establishment of pathways for leadership development to enhance communication and leadership skills. Conflict can be mitigated by fostering collaboration, teamwork, and regular meetings among school staff members. Active listening and the acceptance of compromise are crucial in the decision-making process for effective conflict resolution. Effective communication of the school vision and concepts by School Heads to their subordinates is crucial for improving relationships and fostering trust according to the findings from the study.

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The research focused on the "Dynamics of Conflict in high schools between School Heads and Deputy Heads, in Mashonaland Central Province." The study was based on two theories: Conflict Theory Framework and Transformational Leadership Theory. One of the objectives of the study was to identify sources of conflict between School Heads and Deputy School Heads in high schools. The other objective of the study' was to come up with possible strategies

for resolving conflicts between School Heads and their deputies in high schools. The researchers employed a phenomenological design. A questionnaire was employed to gather data from school leaders regarding the roots of conflict and tactics for conflict resolution between School Heads and Vice School Heads in high schools. The researchers gathered replies from individuals using a purposive sampling method. The school leaders demonstrated an impressive response rate of 89%, although the Vice School Head's response rate was 74%. Inadequate communication, distrust, and procurement procedures are the main causes of conflict between School Heads and vice School Head chiefs, according to the study. Gender, role conflict, leadership style, and the erosion of authority are other significant factors that contribute to conflict between School Heads and Deputy Heads in High Schools. This study presents various tactics to resolve problems and enhance relationships between School Heads and their deputies, including discussion and mediation procedures, as well as the cultivation of communication skills among school leaders. The study also determined that conflicts and misunderstandings can be mitigated by explicitly defining the roles and responsibilities of School Heads and their Deputies. The report also advocated for the establishment of pathways for leadership development to enhance communication and leadership skills. Conflict can be mitigated by fostering collaboration, teamwork, and regular meetings among school staff members. Active listening and the acceptance of compromise are crucial in the decision-making process for effective conflict resolution. Effective communication of the school vision and concepts by School Heads to their subordinates is crucial for improving relationships and fostering trust according to the findings from the study.

Follett (1924) made the observation that conflict is an inherent and unavoidable component of human interactions. In the context of educational institutions, conflict can originate from a various source. According to Leithwood et al. (2007), evaluating the efficiency of school leadership requires taking into account the relationship that exists between school head and a Deputy Head. Research has shown that conflicts between administrators can have far-reaching consequences, negatively impacting student learning outcomes, teacher morale, and the overall school climate. When administrators are in conflict, it can create a ripple effect, undermining the collaborative and supportive environment necessary for effective teaching and learning.

Strong school leadership is one of the most important factors that determines the success of any educational institution. According to Hallinger and Heck (2010), the School Head and the Deputy Head are responsible for the management of resources, the provision of instructional leadership, and the implementation of measures to ensure that the learning environment is pleasant. The relationship between School Heads and Deputy Heads is often complex and fraught with potential for conflict. When disagreements arise between these two key leaders, the consequences can be far-reaching, impacting not only the administrators themselves but also the entire school community.

According to Bolman and Deal (2013), conflict in schools can have an effect on the morale of teachers, the outcomes of student learning, and ultimately, the overall school environment. Additionally, disagreement can lead to a deterioration in school performance, an increase in the incidence of employee turnover among teachers and administrators, and negative consequences on the academic performance of students. The research by Leithwood et al. (2010) demonstrates that school leadership significantly influences student learning outcomes. Marzano et al. (2005) assert that good school leaders must adeptly manage challenging

situations, including conflict resolution, inside their institutions. Effective school leaders should always be aware that conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interactions although its resolution is crucial for maintaining a positive and productive school environment. It is imperative that School leaders should have conflict resolution abilities in order for them to promote a good and productive school climate which promotes a conducive learning environment. Teachers thrive in an environment where the School Head and Deputy Head work collaboratively and harmoniously. When these leaders are united and support each other, teachers feel valued, empowered, and motivated to teach at their best, ultimately benefiting the students. In the same vein, students experience inspiration, motivation, and support as they learn when school leaders are at peace. Furthermore, parents and the broader community feel respected, resulting in better collaborations and a more unified school community. In essence, effective School Heads and Deputy Heads be made aware that conflict resolution is a multifaceted process that not only fosters a positive and productive school climate but also involves resolving issues and disagreements between themselves, which ultimately promotes a harmonious and collaborative leadership team. Teachers, students, parents, and the larger community are among the stakeholders whose success and well-being are subsequently enhanced by such a peaceful environment. Thus, School Heads and Vice School Heads should promote dispute resolution and a healthy school culture to foster academic success, social development, and emotional wellness. However it must be clearly, stated that conflict resolution needs continuous effort and commitment from both ends. Preventing conflict and fostering harmony and productivity in schools requires proactive, responsive, and adaptive leaders. In the end, school leaders play a pivotal role in resolving disputes and shaping the school culture, setting the tone for a positive, productive, and collaborative learning environment.

According to Glickman et al. (2010), conflict between School Heads and vice School Head can be a barrier to effective school leadership. It has been demonstrated through research that disagreements frequently occur between school administrators and their deputies in a variety of educational environments (Cranston, 2013). Effective school leaders are the cornerstone of a positive and productive educational environment, and their ability to manage conflicts and shape school culture is paramount. This is particularly crucial when it comes to resolving disputes and conflicts that may arise between administrators, teachers, students, and parents. By possessing strong conflict resolution skills and fostering a collaborative school culture, school leaders can create an environment that promotes academic excellence, social growth, and emotional well-being. Therefore, examining the role of school leaders in conflict resolution and school culture is essential, particularly in the context of this study, which aims to investigate the dynamics of conflict between School Heads and Deputy Heads in Zimbabwean high schools.

## 2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Developed by Coser (1956), the CTF posits that conflict is an inherent and inevitable aspect of human interaction. Summel (1904) also argued that conflict is a natural and a necessary aspect of human relationship. Similarly, Galtung (1959) is of the same opinion when he stressed that conflict is a natural force and that it is inevitable aspect of human societies. This framework suggests that conflicts arise from differences in values, interests, and power dynamics, which can lead to tensions and disputes between individuals and groups. In the context of school

leadership, the CTF can help explain the underlying causes and consequences of conflicts between School Heads and Vice School Head heads. The CTF is particularly relevant in this study because since it highlights the inevitability of conflict in human relationships. The theory also identifies the role of power dynamics, values, and interests in shaping conflict. The theory also provides a framework for understanding the complex and often nuanced nature of conflict in school settings.

**Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT):** Formulated by Bass (1985), it asserts that effective leaders inspire and motivate their people to realise a collective goal. This idea posits that transformational leaders demonstrate four essential characteristics that inspire and motivate their followers via their vision and beliefs. Transformational leadership philosophy emphasises that leaders must enable their people to realise their full potential while fostering creativity, innovation, and critical thinking. Transformational leaders also exhibit empathy, support, and care for the well-being of their followers. Within the realm of educational leadership, the TLT elucidates the collaborative efforts of school School Heads and vice School Heads in fostering a constructive and effective school culture. School leaders can mitigate conflicts with Vice School Head heads by demonstrating transformational leadership behaviours, which include:

- ✓ Cultivating a collective vision and sense of purpose
- ✓ Empowering Vice School Head heads to realise their full potential
- ✓ Promoting creativity, innovation, and critical thinking
- ✓ Exhibiting empathy, support, and concern for the well-being of their followers

This study seeks to offer a thorough knowledge of the intricate dynamics of conflict and leadership in educational environments by merging the CTF and TLT.

## 2.1 Sources of conflict

Gushykunst and Ting-Toomay (1988) assert that ineffective communication between School Heads and deputies can result in misinterpretation or misunderstanding of intentions, ultimately leading to conflict. Bolaman and Seah (2013) also supported up the idea that poor communication is the root cause of conflict, highlighting that if the Vice School Head head and the head of the school have different communication styles, miscommunications might arise and lead to conflict if left unchecked. Inadequate communication can lead to a failure to clarify and make the decision-making process visible, which can produce tension and dispute between the School Head and Vice School Head. In conclusion, the claim that insufficient communication might result in conflict between school School Heads and Vice School Head School Heads warrants careful consideration.

Karz and Kahn (1978) defines role ambiguity as unclear or overlapping roles and responsibilities between individuals or groups. In the context of school leadership, role ambiguity can occur when the roles and responsibilities of School Head are not clearly defined or communicated. Hallinger and Heck (2010) found out that role ambiguity is the greatest predictor of conflict between School Heads and Vice School Head heads et al (2010) also found out that unclear roles and responsibilities are common source of conflict between School Heads and Vice School Head heads. However, it must be made clear that role ambiguity creates power

struggle between heads and Vice School Head heads as they fight to have control and authority. In the finale analysis role ambiguity is dangerous as it creates power struggle and confusion may lead to a clear conflict. Mulford (2003) asserts that ambiguous duties and responsibilities can generate friction and conflict between school School Heads and Vice School Head School Heads.

Hallinger and Heck (2010) assert that conflict arises from differences over decision-making, authority, resource distribution, or power struggles. Mintzberg (1993) defines power struggle as the conflict that arises when people or groups contend for control or influence over decision-making processes regarding the allocation of resources or territory. When it comes to decision-making, resource distribution, and ultimate control of school operations, power struggles between School Heads and Vice School Head heads can arise.

According to the findings of Leithwoodmetal. (2010), individual differences within an organisation, such as variances in personality characteristics or values, might be accompanied with conflict. Personality clashes are defined by Bolman and Deal (2013) as disputes that emerge between individuals as a result of differences in their values or personality traits respectively. Disagreements may arise between the school and the Vice School Head due to personality differences within the framework of school leadership. Leaders who differ significantly in their characteristics, values, and methodologies are likely to conflict with a Vice School Head leader with an opposing disposition.

Ineffective leadership can be undermined by mistrust or a lack of trust between the head and Vice School Head head as stated by Tschannen-Moran (2024). According to Bryk and Scheinder (2002), trust is a crucial element of successful school leadership, and a lack of it causes conflict and impedes efforts to improve the school. A poisonous workplace that is conducive to a heated argument can arise from a lack of trust between the head and Vice School Head head of the school. In conclusion, defensiveness brought on by a lack of trust can also make it impossible to communicate honestly and openly.

Earley and Weindling (2015) assert that School Heads and Vice School Head heads may lack sufficient training and support for conflict management and enhancing working relationships. Malford (2005) found that school leaders with inadequate training and support are more prone to conflicts with colleagues. Furthermore, Hay and Miskel (2013) suggest that the organisational culture of schools can also exacerbate conflicts between the School Head and Vice School Head head. Such conflicts are typically more evident when they is lack of openness, transparency and trust

Fulan (2015) posits that external pressure might engender conflict. Leithwood et al. (2014) also discovered that external pressure can result in conflict. External influences are variables originating from outside the schools, such as government policies, parental expectations, and community demands, which are sufficiently potent to incite conflict. External pressure can induce conflict through several mechanisms, including heightened stress, role saturation and conflicting perspectives

## **2.2 Strategies to resolve conflict between School Head and the Vice School Head head**

Bolton (1997) emphasised the significance of reframing conflict to concentrate on the issues rather than the individuals involved as a method for conflict resolution. Deutsch (1973) posits that reframing is the most effective method for facilitating cooperative conflict resolution. Ury (1991) posits that reframing conflict entails reducing emotional intensity by redirecting attention from personal attacks to constructive dialogue. Reframing compels conflicting parties to move beyond personal attacks and defensiveness, facilitating constructive dialogue aimed at resolving the underlying issues that trigger conflict.

Cloke and Goldsmith (2011) emphasised the necessity of integrating assumptions and clearly defining the conflict to facilitate effective conflict resolution. Defining conflict compels individuals to comprehend the fundamental underlying issues, interests, and forces that drive the conflict. Pruitt and Rubin emphasised the significance of defining conflict to facilitate cooperative conflict resolution. Thomas (1992) posits that personal conflicts may be intense and emotional; however, concentrating on the task or issue can alleviate tension and foster cooperation. Fisher and Ury (1981) discussed the importance of shifting focus from individuals to the task at hand. This approach of shifting focus from individuals to the underlying issue fosters confidence among conflicting parties, thereby facilitating constructive dialogue devoid of intense conflict. However, by redirecting attention away from the actual problems, the parties involved can realise that conflict is about the tasks or issues at hand rather than personal assaults or feelings.

Senge (1980) underscored the significance of teamwork and group learning. Argyris (1990) emphasised the significance of collaborative learning and problem-solving in conflict resolution. In this scenario, all sides must perceive the conflict as a mutual problem to be resolved collaboratively, rather than as a competitive win-win situation. By cultivating a communal mind-set, both parties can begin to perceive one another as partners rather than enemies. Consequently, they will be compelled to collaborate in order to devise an innovative resolution to their problem.

According to the Project Management Institute, a fundamental competency of a leader is the ability to manage disagreement in the workplace. Fisher and Ury ( ) emphasise the significance of proficient conflict resolution abilities in addressing workplace issues. Kob and Willam (2000) emphasised the necessity of cultivating conflict management skills, especially for women, to effectively negotiate intricate organisational dynamics. In this context, conflict management courses should be more interactive and customised to address the specific requirements of the company. In conclusion, workshops can significantly enhance communication and cultivate a more harmonious, conflict-free atmosphere.

As the most efficient method for resolving conflicts, Argyris (1990) highlights the value of strong communication in the workplace as the most effective technique to resolve conflicts. When viewed from this angle, it is plausible to assume that effective communication serves as the basis for the successful resolution of conflicts. In situations when individuals are able to communicate effectively with one another, misunderstandings are addressed and cleared in a manner that is both clear and succinct. It is also acceptable to draw the conclusion that people who have great communication skills are better able to control their feelings, which in turn leads to a reduction in the amount of conflict that they encounter.

## 2.3 Significance of the Study

This study will enhance administrators' morale by mitigating conflicts in schools. Disagreements between Vice School Head heads and School Heads, however, can have a detrimental effect on teachers' job satisfaction and morale. Strategies for preventing or resolving conflicts and fostering a pleasant work environment may be devised using the study's findings. Effective school leadership is essential for promoting student development and achievement. By analyzing the dynamics of conflict between School Heads and Vice School Head heads, the paper advances knowledge of organizational behavior, conflict resolution, and school leadership while offering suggestions for developing successful school leadership and raising student achievement.

## 3.0 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to fill the knowledge vacuum that exists regarding conflicts that occur between directors of schools and Vice School Head directors, notably in Zimbabwe. In spite of the fact that these conflicts have a major impact on the learning outcomes of students (Leithwood et al., 2007), the underlying causes of these conflicts and the tactics for resolving them are still not well investigated. The primary objective of this study is to analyse the factors that lead to disagreements between school administrators and Vice School Head School Heads, with the end goal of developing solutions that are both efficient and successful. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to improve educational outcomes by enhancing school leadership, promoting constructive relationships, and investigating the mechanisms of conflict that occur between School Heads and Vice School Head heads.

### 3.1 Research Questions

- ✓ What are the causes of conflict between School Heads and Vice School Head Heads in Mashonaland Central Province?
- ✓ What strategies can be employed to resolve conflicts between School Heads and Vice School Head heads of High Schools in Mashonaland Central?

### 3.2 Research objectives

The research seeks to establish the following:

- ✓ To identify the sources of conflict between School Heads and Vice School Head Heads of High Schools in Mashonaland Central Province
- ✓ To explore strategies for resolving conflicts between School Heads and Vice School Head heads of High Schools in Mashonaland Central Province.

### 3.3 Research philosophy

A phenomenological method was used by the researchers. Creswell (2009) characterizes phenomenological research design as an investigative approach aimed at uncovering the essence of human experiences pertinent to the issue under examination. In this regard, the phenomenological approach offers a concise and understandable description of human experience. The information gathering process with School Heads and Vice School Head

heads was made easier by the phenomenological approach. Ormord (2011) asserts that the objective of phenomenological research design is to collect information directly from participants, emphasizing their viewpoints. Both school administrators and Vice School Head administrators participated in this study because they had relevant expertise with the problem being studied.

### 3.3 Sampling

This researcher employed a purposive sampling. In accordance with the definition provided by McMillan and Schumacher (2010), purposeful sampling entails selecting research participants on the basis of their knowledge and background pertinent to the field of investigation. Participants in the research included both the heads and the Vice School Head heads of high schools in Mashonaland Central. The participants in this study were selected based on their potential prior experience as school administrators and their previous involvement in conflicts between School Heads and Vice School Head heads.

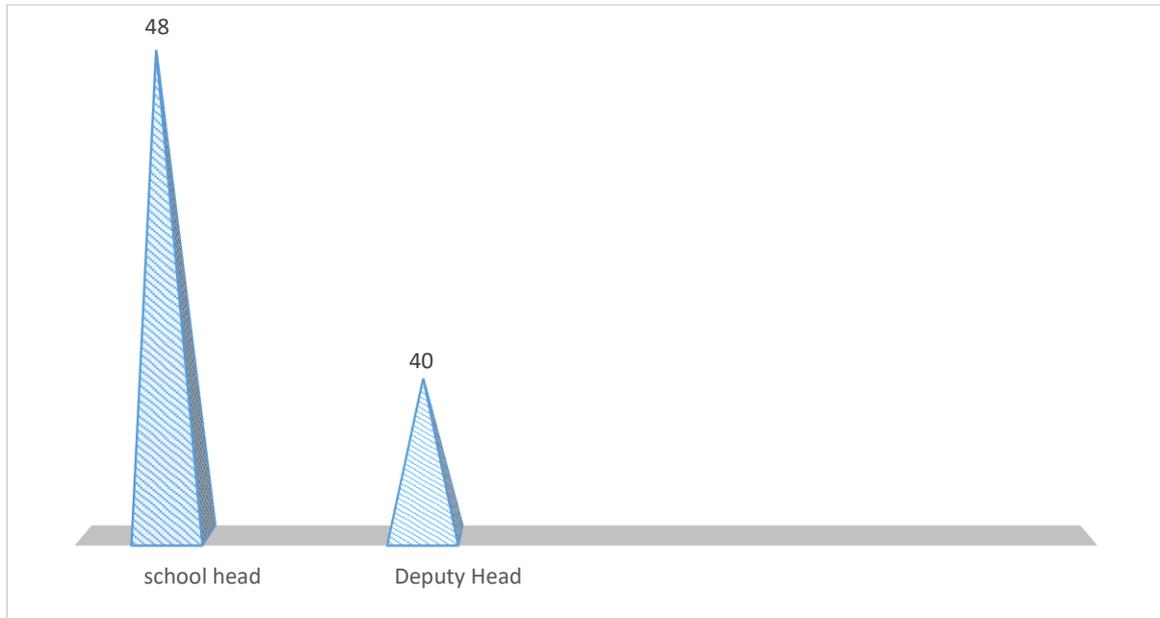
### 3.4 Population of the study

Burns and Gove (2003) define the population of a study as the complete set of individuals, objects, or events that exhibit particular characteristics pertinent to the researcher. The study's population encompasses the complete group of individuals or elements intended for analysis to derive conclusions (etal, 2008). The research involved a sample of 84 school School Heads and 84 vice School Heads. The selection of the School Head and Vice School Head heads exhibited a diverse mix of urban and rural contexts, enabling a thorough analysis of the sources and intervention strategies aimed at resolving conflicts between heads and their deputies. The study's findings are pertinent to educational institutions in both rural and urban settings in Zimbabwe.

## 4.0 DATA COLLECTION

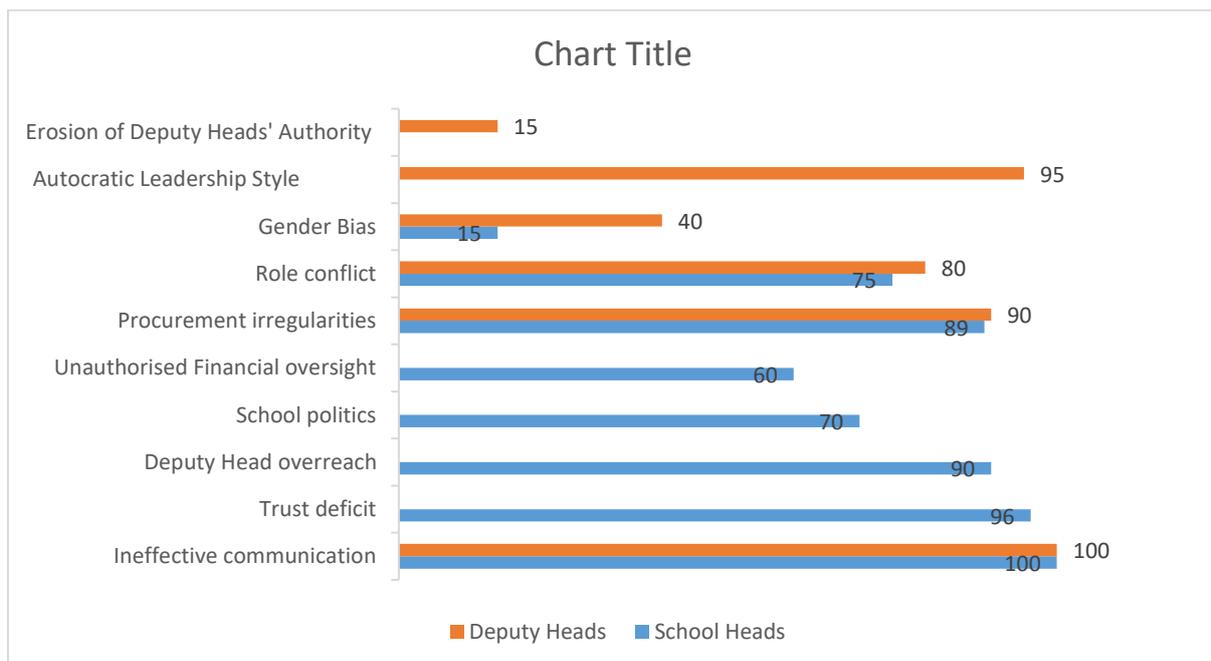
The researchers utilized a questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. Bsabbie (2016) asserts that questionnaires are an effective instrument for gathering data from a substantial population, particularly when the research topic pertains to attitudes, opinions, or behaviours. The researchers aimed to gather insights from school leaders and their deputies regarding their sources and tactics for conflict resolution. An additional advantage of employing a questionnaire in this study is that it was the sole feasible instrument that the researchers could remotely administer to gather critical data from school Heads and vice-School Heads in various places. Kerlinger (1973) asserts that questionnaires provide uniformity in interviewing all participants, hence diminishing bias and enhancing reliability. The inquirer solicited the participants' perspectives on the origins and the methods for resolving deputy head conflicts in high schools.

### 4.1 Respondent's rate of Questionnaires



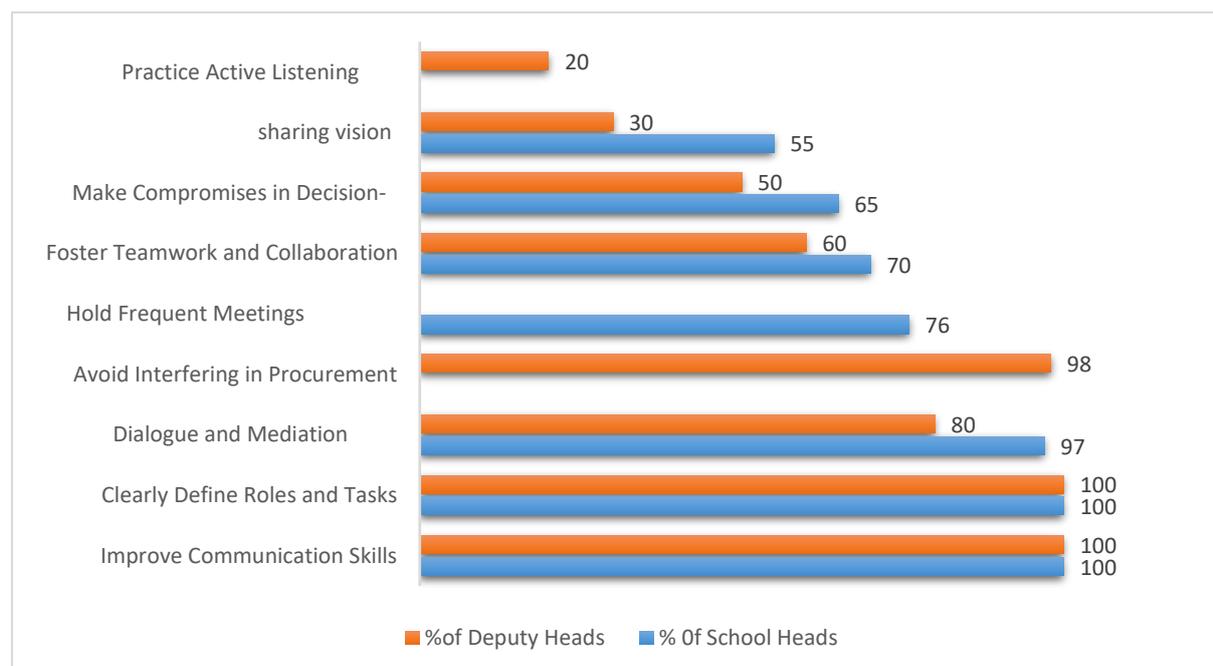
Among the surveyed School Heads, 48 out of 54 (89%) provided responses, indicating a substantial response rate. Considering the elevated response rate, it is probable that school leaders were significantly engaged in articulating their perspectives on the conflicts that emerge between heads and deputy heads in secondary schools. Conversely, only 40 of 54 deputy heads responded, resulting in a response rate of 74%, which is comparatively lower. The slightly decreased participation rate from deputy heads, while still acceptable, may indicate a minor decline in interest or engagement with the survey topic among this demographic.

#### 4.2 Sources of Conflict from Heads and Vice School Head Heads



Poor communication is cited by 100% of School Heads and Vice School Head heads as the main cause of conflict, according to the statistics. The relationship between School Heads and Vice School Head heads appears to be significantly impacted by a lack of good communication. Lack of trust was cited as another conflict by 96% of School Heads and 90% of Vice School Head heads. 90% of both groups also cited procurement procedures as major points of contention. This suggests that disputes over procurement procedures and a lack of trust are also significant and pervasive challenges in the relationships between School Heads and Vice School Head heads. They have different opinions on other factors of conflict, like leadership style, even if both groups agree that poor communication and a lack of trust are significant problems. As depicted in the figure above, 95% of the Vice School Head Heads identified the leadership style of the School Head as a source of conflict. In this context, Vice School Head Heads believe that if the leadership styles of School Heads are not conducive to good collaboration, conflict is inevitable. Undermining one's authority is another source of conflict in schools, according to the research, which found that 90% of School Heads believed that Vice School Head heads undermined their authority, while only 15% of Vice School Head heads said that School Heads did the same. According to this, Vice School Head Heads may not see their acts as undermining, but School Heads may feel intimidated by them. Forty-five percent of School Heads recognized role conflict as a source of discord, suggesting that they may perceive Vice School Head Heads as either overstepping their bounds or inadequately completing their responsibilities. The information indicates that disputes between School Heads and Vice School Head heads could be influenced by gender dynamics. Because of their gender, 15% of School Heads said that Vice School Head heads undercut their authority. This shows that certain disputes could be influenced by gender bias.

### 4.3 Strategies to reduce conflict between School Heads and Vice School Head heads in schools



Positive working relationships between Vice School Head heads and School Heads are based on effective communication. An incredible 100% of respondents said that improved communication skills are necessary for resolving conflicts and building stronger relationships. Effective strategies include dialogue and mediation, which are endorsed by 97% of Vice School Head heads and 80% of School Heads, respectively explicitly delineating roles and tasks is crucial. All responders (100%) consider enlightenment on the roles of the Vice School Head head and head to be essential, highlighting the importance of preventing miscommunications and disagreements. However, there is potential for advancement. 100% of the Vice School Head heads stated that it is essential for leaders to enhance their communication skills, particularly when interacting with subordinates. It is recommended that heads avoid interference in procurement procedures, as indicated by 98% of Vice School Head heads who emphasized the necessity of clearly defined roles and areas of responsibility. Cooperation and teamwork are essential for fostering a positive school climate. Respondents indicated that frequent meetings are highly valued by 76% of School Heads, while 70% of Vice School Head heads prioritize teamwork as a collaborative approach. Concessions and attentiveness are essential for improving relationships. Key tactics identified in this study include active listening, noted by 20% of participating School Heads, and compromise in decision-making, highlighted by 90% of Vice School Head heads as an additional strategy. Effective communication of ideas and vision is essential; 55% of Vice School Head heads indicate that heads must convey their ideas to them, while 30% of heads report that sharing their vision with subordinates is another important strategy. Ultimately, the implementation of these strategies by heads and Vice School Head heads will enhance the school environment, benefiting students, teachers, and the broader school community by addressing areas for improvement

This study investigated the causes and consequences of conflict between School Heads and Vice School Head heads. The findings indicate that poor communication, lack of trust, and procurement procedures are the primary sources of conflict. Additionally, leadership style, undermining of authority, and role conflict were also identified as significant sources of conflict. The study also suggests that gender dynamics may play a role in some conflicts.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- ✓ Improving communication skills is essential for resolving conflicts and building stronger relationships between School Heads and Vice School Head head
- ✓ Implementing dialogue and mediation strategies can help resolve conflicts and improve relationships.
- ✓ Explicitly delineating roles and tasks can help prevent miscommunications and disagreements.
- ✓ Providing training and development opportunities for School Heads and Vice School Head heads can help improve communication and leadership skills.: Fostering a positive school climate through frequent meetings, teamwork, and cooperation can help reduce conflict and improve relationships.
- ✓ Practicing active listening and compromise in decision-making can help improve relationships and resolve conflicts.
- ✓ Effective communication of ideas and vision is essential for building trust and improving relationships between School Heads and Vice School Head heads.

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