Conflict: Factors and Resolution Strategies Adopted by Administrators of Schools for Visually Impaired Students

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Abstract

Children with visual impairment face tremendous problems in the society as well as in their schools. Their visual limitation develops various types of conflicts between their teachers, peers and school administrators. Objectives of this study were to identify various factors leading to conflicts among administrators, teachers, and students with visual impairment in their schools, and 2) report various adopted conflict resolution strategies by administrators for teachers and students. A sample of thirty school administrators was conveniently selected from the schools of visually impaired students of Punjab. An open ended questionnaire was used to interview school administrators. Findings showed that students with visual impairment have conflict with teachers with regard to their instructions and on various services provided to them by administration. It was also found that teachers were facing conflicts not only between them but also with their principals. Counseling strategies have been proved best to resolve the conflicts among the teachers, students and administrators.

1. Introduction

Conflict is a condition of clash between two or more individuals or parties. It has been defined in many different ways. Lewis (1992) expressed it as disagreement between two or more people. It occurs when two or more people take different and opposing positions in a situation, expressed verbally or in actions. It ranges from a very mild disagreement to complete breakdown in a relationship.

Human needs or identity theory assumes that deep rooted conflict is caused by unmet or frustrated human needs for security, identity, recognition, participation and autonomy. Community or intercultural theory assumes that conflict is caused by mistrust and hostility between different groups. Whereas conflict transformation theory assumes that conflict is caused by real problem of inequality and injustice through competing social, cultural and economic frameworks. Although it does not necessarily imply hostility, it is the existence of competing or incompatible options. While difficult for some to believe, conflict is not always a bad thing. Properly handled conflict can provide numerous benefits to individuals such as increased motivation, enhanced problem/solution identification, increased knowledge/skill, and incentive for growth. However, when poorly handled, conflict can decrease productivity, erode trust, increase secrecy and reduce information flow, and cause decision-making paralysis (Pickering, 2000).

Conflicts can be destructive and constructive. Destructive conflict is typically characterized by ineffective communication and work relationships leading to tension, argument, low performance of team members and hostility. Unaddressed, destructive conflict may spread throughout the work place, whereas, the constructive or creative conflict is characterized by effective communication and strong relationships. There is deep respect for and valuing of each other's ideas and perspectives. People have the mindset and skills to work together well with colleagues.

The nature of conflicts which occurs in schools is multifaceted. Conflict is often occurs in schools as a result of their large size, limited resources, and greatly diverse populations. The population of schools consisted of administrators, teachers and students. Many conflicts occur between teachers and students, among the teachers and between the teachers and administrators. Many administrators, teachers and students are caught up in conflicts every day as they do not know how to manage time, resources and teasing behavior, jealousy, and physical aggression of each other.

The ability to successfully minimize and resolve conflict is an important skill for school administrators to develop. Since conflict is inevitable in schools, administrators must be prepared to deal with it. There are different strategies and methods suggested by the literature to manage the conflicts in the schools.

According to Greenhalgh & Chapman (1986) conflict management is a process of removing cognitive barriers to agreement : agreement between two parties. Hanson (1991) suggests administrator awareness of the various strategies of conflict management. The selection of strategies will depend on the situation. Conflict management techniques often focus on changing structure, changing process or both. Some of the important strategies are: increasing degree of interaction, modifying the reward system, right of appeal, and appointment of a neutral third party. This approach to conflict management is predicated upon the idea that diagnosis of the situation is necessary as a basis of action. Another view of conflict management is the contingency view .According to this view there is not one best way of managing conflict under all conditions, but that there are optimal ways of managing it under certain conditions (Owens, 1987). An important aspect of conflict management, then, is to consider (a) alternative ways of managing conflict and (b) the kinds of situations in which each of these various alternatives might be expected to be the most effective.

Thomas (2006) provides what might be considered one of the most useful models of conflict management utilizing the contingency approach to conflict diagnosis. This typology examines five styles of conflict management. Two basic dimensions of behavior that can produce conflict are identified: attempting to satisfy one's own concerns (organizational demands in the case of administrators) and attempting to satisfy others' concerns (individual needs of the members). From this analysis, five major perspectives are identified which may be used in conceptualizing conflict and behaviors commonly associated with those perspectives. These perspectives/management styles are identified as avoidance, compromise/sharing, competition/ domination, accommodation and collaboration/integration (Gibson & Hodgetts, 1986). The basic conflict resolution process is preceded by identifying issues, understanding interests, problem-solving and reaching on an agreement. This study is an effort to identify different conflicts faced by the administrators of special schools of children with visual impairment.

Visual impairment is known as visual loss that constitutes significant limitations of visual capability resulting from various causes/diseases. In Pakistan, separate schools have been established for their education where they face various challenges. Consequent result of visual loss causes various problems with reference to education of students with visual impairment in their schools. Sometime these problems are also seems as a reason of conflict development between their teachers, class fellows and school administrators. In this article efforts have been made to highlight those conflicts which were faced by the teachers and students between them and with school administration as perceived by school's administrators.

2. Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the conflicts faced by the administrators with their students and teachers,
2. Conflicts faced by students with their teachers and administrators and
3. Identify the resolution strategies adopted by the administrators of special schools for both of them.

3. Methodology

This study was based on information collected from the school administrators of students with visual impairment (special schools). Population comprised of school administrators/principals including both male (n=19) and female (n=11) aged (25 to 55 years old) having Bachelor to M.phil degrees. Survey method was used to identify the schools and their administrators. Thirty administrators of special schools of Punjab (Faisalabad=06, Lahore=06, Rawalpindi/Islamabad=05, Multan=03, Attock=04, Hassan Abdal=01, Kahuta=01, Kotli Sattian=01, Shuja Abad=01, Taxilla=01, Muree=01) with visual impairment were elicited to record their responses. Fourteen (14) open ended questions were developed to interview administrators on to identify various reasons of conflicts among administrators, teachers and students. Possible resolutions strategies were used by school administrators are also reported at the end. Data has been analyzed and narrated on the basis of frequency and percentage.

4. Results

Data analysis and results on percentage basis is given below:

Conflicts Faced by Teacher and Students with School Administration	
Teachers	Students
Majority (53.3%) of the respondent were on view that mostly teachers develop conflicts to each other due to professional jealousy. (26.7%) teachers developed conflicts to each other on the basis of salary, whereas (20 %) are reported without any conflict by school administrators.	With reference to given statement on Braille teaching to visually impaired students the opinion of the administrators was equally divided on fifty percent (50%).
Majority (53.3%) of the respondent responded that teachers have conflict with administration because of subject assignment and duration of periods to teach in classes. (20 %) didn't response on this statement and (26.7%) were not clear about the exact situation.	Majority (60%) of the respondents said that students with V.I. have conflict related to mobility training with their teachers. (40%) students were reported without any problem, dais the principal.
Majority (40%) of the respondent responded that teachers of school with visual impairment show conflicts because of unawareness about the special needs of students with visual impairment, however, (30 %) were reported teacher's awareness and (30%) were not clear about this situation.	Majority (65%) of administrators stated that students in the school develop conflicts with their teachers due to lack of awareness of their teachers about their special needs.
Majority (56.6%) of the respondent responded that teachers of schools with visual impairment faced difficulty because of unavailability of trained and relevant staff to operate technology in the classes or mobility instructors and (43.3%) administrators said that teachers didn't complaint any problem to them.	Majority (63.6%) of administrators reported that students with visual impairment have conflict with teaching methodology of their teachers. However, (36.4%) reported satisfaction about teaching methodology used by the teachers.
Conflict Resolution Strategies used by School Administrators for : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students: Majority of the school administrators (70%) used "Counseling" as conflict resolution strategy between them and students with visual impairment and (30 %) compromised the situation as reported by them. • Teachers: Majority of the school administrators (86.6%) used "meetings with teachers" as conflict resolution strategy between them and teachers of students with visual impairment and (13.3 %) compromised the situation as reported by them. 	

5. Conclusions

The focus of conflict resolution by the school administrators helps for the development of healthy and peaceful learning. In spite of dealing with disability, in this study it was found that counseling for students with visual impairment helped the administration to continue without problem. It was also found that arrangement of meeting with teachers also helped heads of the schools to promote positive climate in the school setting.

6. Recommendations

The researchers are of the view that similar studies should be conducted in all schools with special need to identify different factors that may generate conflicts, and effort could be made to overcome them with best resolution strategies for better learning of the students.

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