

Research Article

Mediation Practices of School Principals in the Private School

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Abstract: The mediation of disputes within schools is a critical responsibility of principals, particularly in addressing and managing conflicts among faculty and staff to sustain a positive and productive educational environment. This study sought to examine and illustrate how principals in private institutions perform their mediating roles in resolving interpersonal and professional disputes among their teaching and non-teaching personnel. A qualitative research design was employed, involving three private schools chosen through purposive sampling to ensure diverse yet relevant perspectives. Data were gathered using in-depth interview questions, and responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. The analysis revealed four major themes: understanding root causes and implementing effective problem-solving strategies; fostering proactive communication and active listening; demonstrating impartiality, assertiveness, and adaptability in decision-making; and developing collaboration and mediation competencies among school leaders. The findings emphasize that conflict mediation is not merely a managerial task but a vital leadership skill that shapes the overall school climate. The study concludes that effective school leadership requires a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to conflict resolution—one that integrates empathy, fairness, and strategic communication to manage differing attitudes, strengthen professional relationships, and promote a harmonious and peaceful school atmosphere conducive to learning and growth.

Keywords: mediation practices; school principals; private school; mediation; conflict resolution

1. Introduction

A school is a vibrant setting where staff, teachers, and students interact to foster learning and personal growth. The principal, who acts as a vital mediator and balances the demands and expectations of multiple stakeholders, is at the center of this community.

Principals of schools have a significant influence on how the learning environment is shaped. They're essentially the leader of the entire school community, wearing many hats to ensure things run smoothly and effectively. As the primary leaders in educational institutions, principals are responsible for a wide range of tasks, and one of those tasks is managing conflicts. Conflict is a natural phenomenon and a continuous organizational behavioral process that occurs when individuals or institutions interact. It is an unavoidable consequence of the increase in institutional size, including educational institutions, the diversity of their qualifications and skills, and their differences in attitudes and behavior patterns (Zaitoun et al., 2023). Omisore and Abiodun (2014) added that conflicts occur in organizations due to competition for supremacy, leadership style, scarcity of common resources, etc. According to the study of De Dreu and Gelfand (2008), conflicts in teams can sometimes lead to positive outcomes like improved performance, especially when the conflict is constructive.

According to some findings (Chiner et al., 2025), successful mediation involves a combination of communication proficiency, conflict resolution strategies, and the ability to foster a collaborative atmosphere. In addition, principals must navigate diverse interpersonal dynamics and varying levels of conflict intensity, which necessitates a nuanced approach to mediation (Somaraju et al., 2022; Emynorane et al., 2024). Student outcomes, teacher job satisfaction, and organizational culture are all impacted by the effectiveness of mediation skills (Otieno & Humri, 2024). Previous studies have not examined how school principals in private schools manage conflict in their faculty and staff. Nakata, Vuopala, and Weinberger (2025) highlight that schools, like other organizations, are composed of individuals with varied

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generational backgrounds. Thus, understanding the mediation practices of school principals in private schools is vital for enhancing leadership effectiveness and promoting a positive school climate (Adams & Velarde, 2020; Aravidou et al., 2025).

This study examined the particular mediation techniques used by private school principals by drawing on Conflict Theory. By looking at the phases of conflict and several methods for resolving them, the study will pinpoint the essential abilities administrators use to successfully handle conflict in the school.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the mediation practices of private school principals. Provide a specific response to the research question: How do private school principals handle staff and faculty conflicts? What specific conflict management strategies do private school principals employ to handle root causes and underlying issues of conflicts among faculty and staff? How do private school principals utilize proactive communication and active listening techniques to prevent and resolve conflicts within the school environment? How do private school principals exhibit objectivity, aggressiveness, and flexibility when mediating conflicts, and how do these traits affect the results of efforts at resolution?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Informants

This study aims to describe how private school principals mediate conflict among faculty and staff, drawing upon a qualitative research design as outlined by Creswell (2014). The informants of the study consisted of three (3) school heads, each bringing a diverse range of academic qualifications and leadership experiences. One of the principals holds a bachelor's degree and is still pursuing her Master's degree, providing a foundational perspective on school administration based on practical, hands-on experience. The other two (2) principals have advanced their knowledge by earning master's degrees, equipping them with insights into educational theories and leadership strategies. Their varied academic backgrounds contribute to understand educational management, allowing them to approach school leadership from different intellectual standpoints.

In terms of experience, the principals also exhibit significant diversity. One of the school heads has less than five years of experience as a school principal, offering a fresh approach to school leadership. In contrast, the other two principals have served in their roles for 11 to 15 years, bringing seasoned perspectives and a wealth of experience. The combination of relatively young and seasoned leaders makes for a dynamic group of informants, allowing for the balancing of creative ideas with tried-and-true techniques and guaranteeing that the study covers a wide range of leadership philosophies and practices in school administration.

Table 1 presents the profile of the informants who participated in the study. The three school principals come from diverse educational backgrounds and varying years of experience. Principal Bianca holds a Master's degree and has served as a school principal for 14 years. Principal Melissa also possesses a Master's degree with 5 years of experience in the role. Meanwhile, Principal Maribel has a Bachelor's degree with additional units toward a Master's degree and has 10 years of experience as a school principal. This variation in educational attainment and leadership tenure among the participants provides a broad perspective on conflict mediation practices in private schools

Table 1. Profile of the informants.

School Principals	Educational Background	Years as School
Bianca	Master's degree	14
Melissa	Master's degree	5
Maribel	Bachelor's degree with units in a Master's degree	10

2.2. Ethical Consideration

This study emphasizes the importance of ethical conduct for all the informants. Informed consent was obtained from each informant, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's objectives, methods, potential risks, and benefits. The privacy of informants and their institutions will be strictly protected through confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process. Data collected will be securely stored and used exclusively for the study. Additionally, the researcher adhered to professional ethical guidelines, ensuring fairness,

objectivity, and respect for all individuals involved.

2.3. Data Collection

The researcher crafted an interview question answerable in no less than five sentences on how school principals in private schools manage conflicts among their faculty and staff. The final version of the written interview included ideas and recommendations after experts reviewed the interview question. The informants received the interview question form through Google Forms. To give them enough time to think back on their experiences and deliver well-considered, thorough answers, informants were invited to submit their answers within a four-week deadline. Following the submission, an in-depth one-on-one interview was conducted with the informants to further explore their responses, clarify ambiguities, and delve deeper into specific conflict management strategies and challenges. After gathering the written and interview data, the responses were carefully analyzed to identify recurring themes, strategies, and patterns, offering valuable insights into how principals address and resolve conflicts within their schools.

2.4. Data Analysis

To address the research topic, an analysis was performed on the data collected from various sources. Each written interview that was retrieved was labeled with the identities of the informants. After gathering three (3) interview forms from three (3) informants, the researcher analyzed the data. The interview data were examined using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach: 1) familiarization; 2) coding; 3) generating themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) reporting. The researcher meticulously reviewed the informants' responses and read the collected material multiple times to gain familiarity and comfort with it. The researcher coded the informants' replies for easier access and categorized them based on their similarities and differences. Following a thorough analysis of the responses, themes were identified and named. The analysis process lasted for two months.

3. Results

Effective management of conflicts in private schools often begins with principals recognizing the underlying causes of disputes. Principals emphasize the importance of timely resolution to prevent tensions from escalating and to maintain a constructive environment. As Principal Bianca explains, understanding the full context by gathering comprehensive information is essential: "I understand first the context of the conflict by gathering all relevant information." This thorough understanding enables principals to identify common sources of conflict, such as miscommunication, differing expectations, personality clashes, power imbalances, resource allocation issues, ethical or professional standards, and organizational change. Principal Melissa highlights that "by identifying these sources of conflict, as a principal, they can customize their responses and interventions." Through this approach, school administrators assist disputing parties by exploring potential solutions together, reaching mutually acceptable resolutions that facilitate collaborative efforts beneficial to all involved.

A key component of mediating conflicts lies in proactive communication and active listening. Principals must carefully attend to each party's perspective to gather relevant information before taking action. Principal Maribel emphasizes the importance of clarification and validation in fostering a constructive atmosphere: "I listened carefully to their concerns and asked questions to clarify their positions," which helps involved individuals feel heard and understood. Alongside this, empathy plays a crucial role in building trust and openness, as Principal Melissa states, "... this is a safe space for all of us. What we have talked about here will remain here." This empathetic environment encourages participants to express their emotions and concerns honestly, laying the foundation for effective conflict resolution.

Maintaining impartiality, combined with assertiveness and adaptability, is highlighted as crucial for a fair and effective mediation process. Principals stress the importance of neutrality to ensure that all voices are heard and valued, avoiding any perception of bias. Principal Bianca notes, "each party is given a chance to express their views," and asserts that defining ground rules and guiding discussions help maintain control over the resolution process. Assertiveness enables principals to clearly express thoughts and set limits without aggression, while adaptability allows them to modify their approach based on the unique circumstances of each conflict. As Principal Melissa shares, "...let's take a moment to talk about what's been

bothering you, and then we can discuss possible solutions together. I want to make sure we both feel heard and work towards a resolution that works for everyone...”

Lastly, collaboration and mediation skills are essential in not only resolving conflicts but also in preventing their escalation. Principals employ conflict de-escalation techniques, using calm body language, tone of voice, and word choice to create a peaceful environment. Principal Maribel reflects, “...I understand, this is a difficult issue, and I’m not here to take sides. My goal is to help both of you reach an agreement that works for everyone.” Building consensus is seen as pivotal to reducing conflict and fostering ongoing cooperation. Encouraging open and honest communication between parties strengthens relationships and supports productive dialogue. Principal Maribel emphasizes, “...I encouraged them to communicate openly and honestly with each other...” Principals also establish structured mediation processes, including setting ground rules, facilitating open dialogue, and guiding parties to mutually accepted agreements. Principal Bianca underscores the importance of follow-up, stating, “... I make sure that the agreement is implemented and I address any lingering issues.” Such consensus-building efforts ultimately save resources by avoiding prolonged disputes and contribute to a positive school climate.

Figure 1 presents a thematic map illustrating the mediation practices of school principals in private schools. The map visually organizes and connects the four major themes that emerged from the study, showing how each contributes to effective conflict management and resolution within the school setting. These themes include: (1) understanding root causes and problem-solving, (2) proactive communication and active listening, (3) im-partiality, assertiveness, and adaptability, and (4) collaboration and mediation skills.

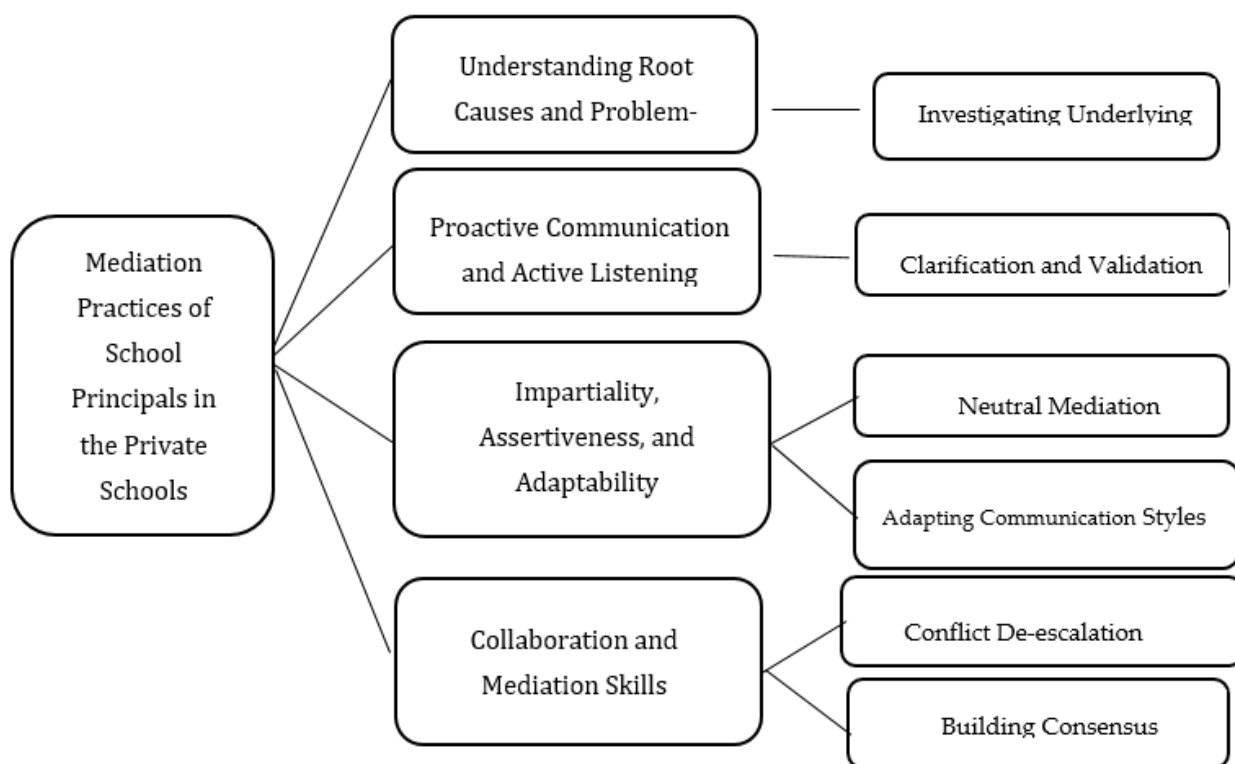


Figure 1. Thematic map of mediation practices of school principals in private schools.

The figure highlights the interrelated nature of these themes, suggesting that successful mediation relies on a balanced integration of analytical thinking, effective communication, fairness, and teamwork. It demonstrates that principals begin by identifying the underlying issues of conflicts, proceed to facilitate open dialogue through active listening, maintain neutrality and flexibility throughout the process, and ultimately promote collaboration to achieve lasting resolutions. Overall, the thematic map provides a comprehensive visual summary of how school principals navigate conflicts through a systematic and empathetic mediation approach.

4. Discussion

The mediation practices of school principals in private schools are tested during conflicts among their faculty and staff. The findings of this study detailed four (4) significant themes such as understanding the root causes and problem-solving, proactive communication and active listening, impartiality, assertiveness, and adaptability and collaboration and mediation skills, and six (6) meaningful categories such as investigating underlying issues, clarification and validation, neutral mediation, adapting communication styles, conflict de-escalation techniques and building consensus. After a thorough investigation, the researchers were able to put the results of this investigation into the literature and the outcomes of earlier studies that are similar to this.

One essential practice used by school principals to resolve conflicts is looking into the underlying causes of conflicts. School principals who took the time to understand the deeper causes of conflict, such as miscommunication, resource allocation issues, or interpersonal tensions, were better equipped to resolve disputes effectively. This approach aligns with findings from some scholars (Somaraju et al., 2022), who emphasize the importance of uncovering underlying concerns to prevent superficial solutions that might not address the root causes of conflicts. According to several studies, including those by Korsch, Frühholz, and Herrmann (2016), school administrators can uncover hidden motives and conflicting priorities that are sometimes missed in more cursory conflict resolution techniques by delving further into the issues at hand. This is in contrast to a more reactive, "fire-fighting" approach, where principals focus on resolving immediate issues without addressing long-term concerns. Research by Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) suggests that while immediate issues may be resolved through standard problem-solving, not addressing underlying tensions can lead to recurring conflicts, which this study's findings suggest can be avoided through proactive investigation of the deeper issues.

Clarification and validation remain essential components in conflict management, and recent research continues to explore their respective roles in fostering resolution. According to a study by Thomas (1976), resolving misunderstandings before they solidify into positions is essential to preventing escalation. Clarification is the process of attempting to understand one another. This aligns with the work of Karanikola and Panagiotopoulos (2025). They argue that when individuals engage in clarification, they can address the root causes of disputes, leading to more collaborative outcomes. In contrast, validation, or acknowledging the emotions and viewpoints of others, is highlighted by Larsen, Helland, and Holt (2023), who suggest that validation reduces negative emotions and increases cooperative behaviors in conflict scenarios. This opinion is supported by Scheppa-Lahyani and Zapf (2023), who show that cooperative problem-solving is made easier when parties feel understood and validated. However, a study by Ricciardi, Kornienko, and Garner (2022) adds nuance to this discussion, suggesting that while validation is vital in emotionally charged conflicts, clarification may be more effective in conflicts that are primarily cognitive or task-based. Thus, while both clarification and validation are crucial, their application may vary depending on the emotional and cognitive dynamics of the conflict.

Neutral mediation has been widely recognized as an effective conflict management strategy, particularly in situations where there is an imbalance of power or communication barriers between parties. Recent studies, such as those by Kressel (2014), emphasize the importance of neutrality in fostering trust and fairness during mediation, arguing that it allows both sides to feel heard without the mediator taking sides. This viewpoint is consistent with previous research by Boule (2005), who emphasizes that a neutral position guarantees the mediator does not support one party over the other, so preventing prejudices from affecting the result. In contrast, Pruitt and Carnevale (1993) discuss the potential of neutral mediation in reducing the escalation of conflict by encouraging cooperation rather than competition, which is essential in preserving relationships. However, Fisher, Ury, and Patton (2011) introduce a more competitive angle, arguing that in some contexts, a focus on "winning" may be necessary to motivate parties to reach an agreement, especially in high-stakes disputes. This contrasts with the collaborative approach emphasized by neutral mediation, which focuses on mutual understanding and resolution. These differences illustrate the various ways mediation can be applied, with neutral mediation often being more appropriate in settings where long-term relationships and cooperation are prioritized, such as schools or workplace environments.

Adapting communication styles in conflict management has become a key focus in recent research, as it allows individuals to navigate interpersonal conflicts more effectively by

tailoring their approach to the context and the parties involved. The ability to change communication styles, such as switching from an assertive to a more collaborative approach, can greatly lower conflict escalation and enhance negotiating results, according to a study by Saikrishna (2025). This aligns with a prior study by Olson and Rothman (2001), who put out the Antagonism, Resonance, Invention, and Action (ARIA) model, which stresses tailoring strategies to the unique identity requirements and situations of each party. This paradigm emphasizes how crucial flexibility is when dealing with particular circumstances of conflicts. However, research by Brett and Gelfand (2006) suggests that while adapting one's communication style is generally beneficial, it may also be challenging if the parties have strongly divergent preferences or if one party's style dominates. But Rahim (2017) argues that a one-size-fits-all strategy, in which people rigidly follow a specific communication style, can be less successful in complicated disputes, particularly when emotions are running high. These varying perspectives highlight that while flexibility in communication is important, its success largely depends on the conflict context and the participant's willingness to engage in adaptive dialogue.

Conflict de-escalation techniques (Brett, 2007) were another central theme in this study, with results showing that these techniques are essential for reducing the emotional intensity of disputes and facilitating resolution. Applying techniques including reframing, speaking in a soothing tone, and concentrating on shared objectives assisted participants in controlling their emotions and lowering the possibility that the dispute would worsen. This is consistent with Brett's (2007) findings that de-escalation techniques are critical in preventing conflicts from becoming more entrenched, especially when emotions run high. Gross (2002) similarly suggests that emotional regulation is key to effective conflict resolution, as it allows participants to stay focused on the issues at hand rather than on their emotional reactions. However, there is a contrasting perspective in the literature, where some scholars argue that emotional suppression or reframing can sometimes lead to unresolved feelings or issues being ignored (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001). The results of this study indicate that while de-escalation is necessary, it must be balanced with addressing underlying emotional concerns. In this sense, de-escalation strategies ought to be employed as a means of fostering a more favorable atmosphere for conflict resolution rather than as a means of avoiding it altogether.

Finally, building consensus was found to be a critical element in resolving conflicts, aligning with the literature on the benefits of collaborative approaches. Fisher et al. (2011) argue that consensus-based negotiation leads to more sustainable and mutually agreeable solutions, as all parties are involved in the decision-making process. This study supports that view, showing that when participants were encouraged to work together and build solutions that addressed everyone's concerns, the resolution was more likely to be accepted and implemented. De Dreu and Van Vianen (2001) also highlight that when people are actively involved in resolving a conflict, they are more committed to the outcome, which makes the solution more durable. However, reaching a consensus is not always easy. Sometimes reaching an agreement can be challenging, particularly when participants have strong opinions or when making compromises is interpreted as a show of weakness or submission (Brett, 2007). This indicates that building consensus is a powerful tool for conflict resolution, it requires patience, skill, and the willingness of all parties to engage in the process, making it a sometimes challenging but ultimately rewarding approach.

Although this study offers insightful information about how school principals might mediate disputes between staff and teachers, it should be noted that it has several limitations. First, the research focused only on private schools, meaning the findings may not be generalizable to public schools, which often have different structures, policies, and resources. Additionally, the study's sample size of school principals was small, which limited the range of viewpoints and experiences that could be represented. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data from principals may also introduce bias, as individuals may present their conflict resolution practices in a more favorable light. Additionally, the study did not investigate how gender, age, or cultural factors affect mediation practices, which may have an impact on how well conflict resolution techniques work. Moreover, there were unresolved concerns regarding the sustainability of solutions because the study did not evaluate the long-term results of conflict resolution initiatives. Lastly, the perspectives of faculty and staff members were not directly captured, which means the study may have missed valuable insights into how they perceive the effectiveness of their principal's mediation efforts. These limitations suggest further research, with a broader scope and diverse methodology, is necessary to deepen our understanding of conflict resolution in educational leadership.

5. Conclusions

Mediation practices of school principals in private schools are vital to preserving a welcoming and secure workplace for every member of the school community. As they mediate unavoidable conflicts in the workplace, these principals encounter obstacles and opportunities. The vital role of school principals in private schools as skilled mediators, highlights the importance of effective conflict resolution practices in fostering a positive school environment. School Principals are essential in resolving disputes among personnel and staff by using a variety of mediation strategies that encourage equity, comprehension, and cooperation. Through their mediation practices, they not only resolve conflicts but also contribute to the overall well-being and cohesion of the school community. They can resolve conflicts effectively and foster trust among employees because of their proactive communication, active listening, and impartiality. Principals' mediation practices help prevent conflicts from escalating and ensure that resolutions are effective and long-lasting. The value of school principals as leaders who can handle intricate interpersonal relationships and strike a balance between various viewpoints to establish a peaceful learning environment. By employing thoughtful mediation strategies, principals can foster an atmosphere where cooperation thrives, and conflicts are seen as opportunities for growth and improvement. As principals invest time and effort into developing strong mediation skills, they can significantly improve faculty relationships, leading to a more productive and positive school climate. Additionally, these practices also help the school as a whole because attaining educational objectives requires a stable and encouraging work environment. As principals, they are equipped with the necessary tools to manage conflict effectively and lead their schools toward success. Through their leadership in mediation, they play a critical role in maintaining a healthy school culture that benefits both staff and students. Principals contribute to the school community's continued unity, resiliency, and concentration on reaching its common objectives. It is evident that effective mediation practices are a cornerstone of successful school leadership, ensuring that conflicts are managed constructively and do not disrupt the school's mission and vision.

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