Conflicts in Education: A Phenomenological Study on Management and Resolution Practices of School Heads

Cora L. Balgos[1]; Remigilda Gallardo[2]

[1]Researcher

Abstract: This qualitative study explores the challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights related to conflict resolution within educational settings. Drawing on interviews with five school principals, the research identifies key themes crucial for effective conflict management in schools. Findings reveal that clear and open communication emerges as foundational in addressing conflicts, facilitating understanding among stakeholders, and fostering a collaborative environment. Adopting collaborative approaches, participants emphasized the significance of teamwork in achieving balanced and sustainable solutions to conflicts. Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of emphasizing empathy and respect for all parties involved, promoting positive relationships and conducive learning environments. The implications suggest that educational policymakers should prioritize integrating conflict resolution education into school curricula and professional development programs for educators. School administrators are encouraged to implement structured mediation processes and foster open communication channels to support conflict resolution efforts effectively. Teachers are advised to enhance their conflict resolution skills through continuous professional development, modeling constructive behaviors for students. Students benefit from programs that promote empathy and teach conflict resolution strategies, contributing to a positive school climate and personal development.

How to Cite: Cora L. Balgos; Remigilda Gallardo (2025). Conflicts in Education: A Phenomenological Study on Management and Resolution Practices of School Heads *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology,* 10(6), 946-951. https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jun924

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflicts in educational settings were a natural part of the complex relationships between staff, students, and parents. This research explored the experiences and perspectives of those involved to reveal the strategies used in resolving such conflicts. Effective conflict management was essential, as unresolved issues negatively impacted student learning, teacher performance, and institutional effectiveness. Schools worldwide faced challenges due to cultural differences, unclear policies, and varying educational expectations. In Europe, student diversity led to unique conflicts, while in North America, academic pressures and resource disputes often caused tensions between educators and parents.

In Asian countries like China and India, educational conflicts often arose from academic pressure, unequal access, and traditional teacher-student dynamics. In the Philippines, conflicts were influenced by socio-cultural factors, including linguistic diversity, economic inequality, and the impact of the K-12 system. Cultural values like pakikisama often led to avoiding rather than resolving issues. Urban-rural disparities in resources and involvement added further challenges. In the

City of Mati, conflicts reflected national trends but were intensified by cultural and linguistic differences among its diverse student population.

Understanding conflict management in education required a nuanced approach that considered the diverse contexts in which conflicts occurred. From international settings to the local context of the City of Mati, this phenomenological study explored the strategies and practices used in different educational environments. It aimed to contribute to more effective conflict resolution methods that accounted for cultural, socio-economic, and institutional differences.

This study examined conflict in educational settings by exploring the experiences of school principals, particularly in the City of Mati. It aimed to identify both formal and informal strategies used in managing and resolving conflicts. Effective conflict management was found to be crucial for positive educational outcomes, school effectiveness, and community wellbeing. Poorly handled conflicts harmed student learning and staff morale, while well-managed ones supported a healthy school environment. The study provided practical

insights to help educators and policymakers develop more effective conflict resolution strategies.

This study investigated how school principals manage and resolve conflicts on education setting. Understanding this is crucial for developing more effective conflict resolution strategies and enhancing the overall educational environment. The following research questions guided this inquiry:

➢ What are the primary challenges faced by school principals in managing and resolving conflicts within educational settings?
➢ What coping mechanisms are employed by school principals in in managing and resolving conflicts within educational settings?
➢ What insights can be drawn from the experiences of school principals in managing and resolving conflicts in educational settings?

The literature revealed that school conflicts were complex, arising from interpersonal issues, cultural differences, and policy challenges. Effective strategies like mediation, negotiation, and restorative practices were key to maintaining a positive school climate, with school leaders playing a vital role. A culture of open communication and mutual respect supported better conflict management, while training teachers and involving students enhanced outcomes. Technology also emerged as a growing factor, offering new tools and challenges in conflict resolution.

This study was grounded in Conflict Theory by Karl Marx and Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura. Conflict Theory provided a critical framework for examining how power imbalances, resource disparities, and competing interests among stakeholders—such as teachers, students, parents, and administrators—led to conflicts within educational settings. It allowed for an in-depth analysis of the societal and institutional inequalities that influenced the nature and resolution of these conflicts. Complementing this, Social Learning Theory emphasized the role of observation and imitation in learning behaviors, highlighting how individuals in schools adopted conflict resolution strategies by observing others.

II.   METHOD

The study used a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to explore the subjective experiences of school heads in managing educational conflicts. This design allowed for a deep understanding of the nature of conflicts and the strategies used for resolution by focusing on participants' lived experiences and perspectives. It was chosen to capture the complexity and nuances of conflict situations within educational settings.

This study was guided by four key philosophical assumptions: ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. It adopted a constructivist ontological stance, recognizing that reality is subjective and shaped by individual experiences, which aligned with the aim of understanding diverse perceptions of educational conflict. Epistemologically, it followed an interpretivist approach, focusing on the participants' subjective meanings and building close researcher-participant relationships to gain deeper insights. Axiologically, the study acknowledged the researcher's values and employed reflexivity to address potential biases and ensure authenticity. Methodologically, it used a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore and capture the lived experiences of individuals involved in educational conflicts.

The researcher's assumptions were rooted in the principles of qualitative research, influencing the study from the formulation of research questions to data interpretation. Central to these assumptions was the belief in the subjectivity of experience and the importance of interpreting individual perspectives. By adopting an interpretivist stance, the researcher recognized that each participant's experience of conflict and resolution was shaped by their unique background and personal history.

The study involved five school principals as research participants for in-depth interviews, a number chosen to ensure manageable yet rich data collection suitable for phenomenological analysis. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals with direct experience and knowledge of conflict management in educational settings. The inclusion criteria required that participants be currently practicing school principals with at least three years of experience and direct involvement in managing conflicts involving students, parents, or staff.

The study employed in-depth interviews followed by a focus group discussion as its data collection methods, both guided by structured interview questions to ensure consistency and relevance. Individual in-depth interviews were first conducted with five school principals who met the inclusion criteria, allowing them to share their personal experiences, perspectives, and strategies regarding conflict management in a confidential setting. These semi-structured interviews provided rich, detailed data. Following the interviews, a focus group discussion was held with a small group of the same principals to explore shared experiences, common challenges, and collective insights.

The data analysis process in this qualitative study on conflict management and resolution in educational settings was conducted systematically to ensure depth and rigor. It began with data preparation, including the accurate transcription and review of audio recordings from interviews and focus group discussions. The researcher then immersed in the data through repeated readings to become thoroughly familiar with the content. A systematic coding process followed, using both deductive and inductive approaches to identify meaningful text segments. These codes were then organized into themes that captured common experiences and strategies related to conflict. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to the study's objectives and theoretical frameworks to understand their significance and connection to the research questions.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the interviews identified five main challenges that school principals encountered in managing and resolving conflicts within educational environments. These included communication breakdowns, interpersonal tensions, differences in teaching approaches, limited resource distribution, and insufficient support systems.

The study found that school principals used several key strategies to manage conflicts and maintain a positive school climate. These included fostering open communication, setting clear guidelines, encouraging collaboration, promoting respect, and showing empathy. Principals stressed the importance of active listening, impartiality, and flexibility to ensure fair and constructive conflict resolution within the school environment.

The experiences of school principals revealed three key insights into effective conflict management in educational settings: the importance of clear and open communication, the use of collaborative approaches, and the emphasis on empathy and respect. These strategies played a vital role in resolving conflicts constructively and fostering a supportive school environment. Additionally,

Cultural values, such as the emphasis on maintaining harmonious relationships, influenced the principals' conflict resolution styles.
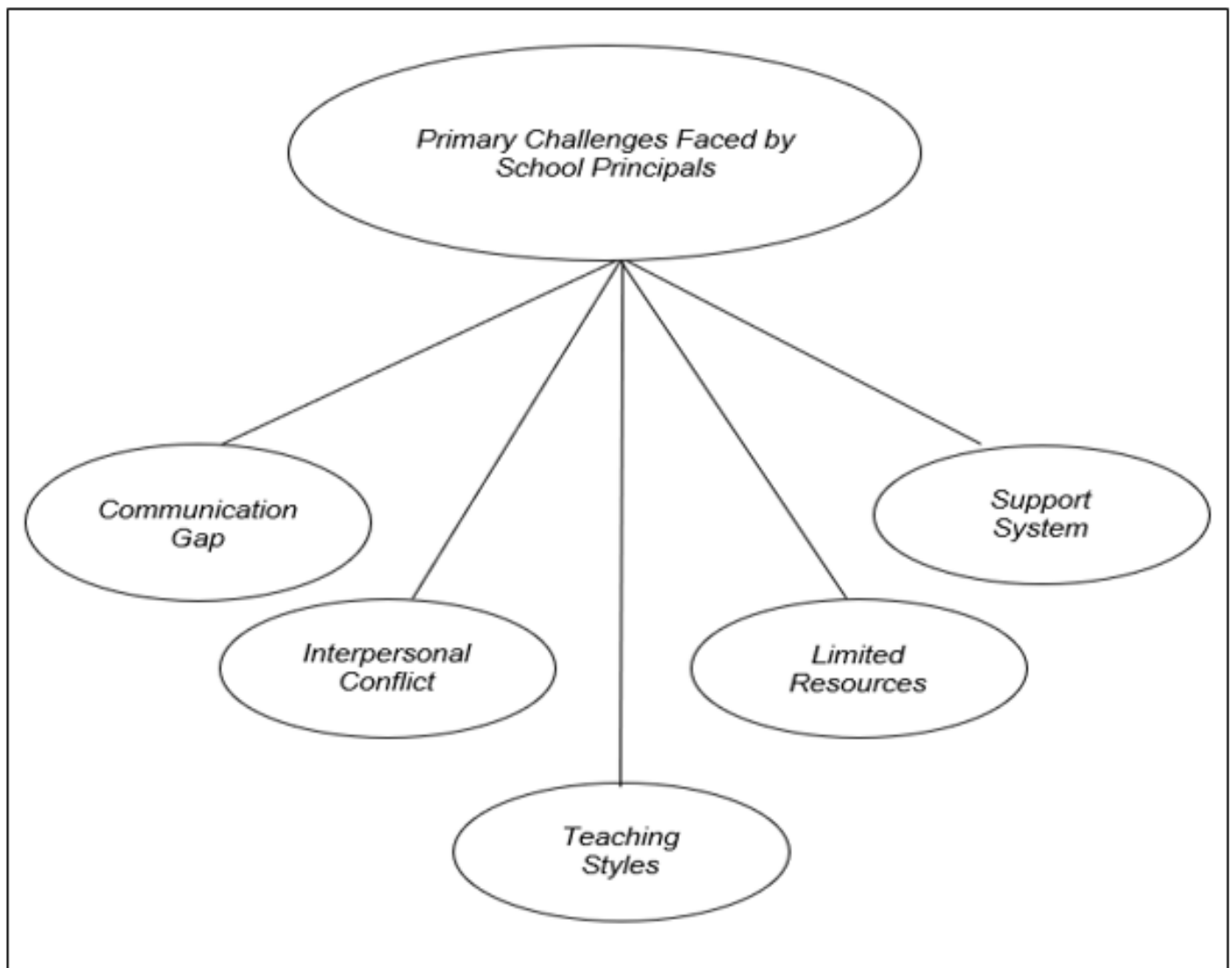

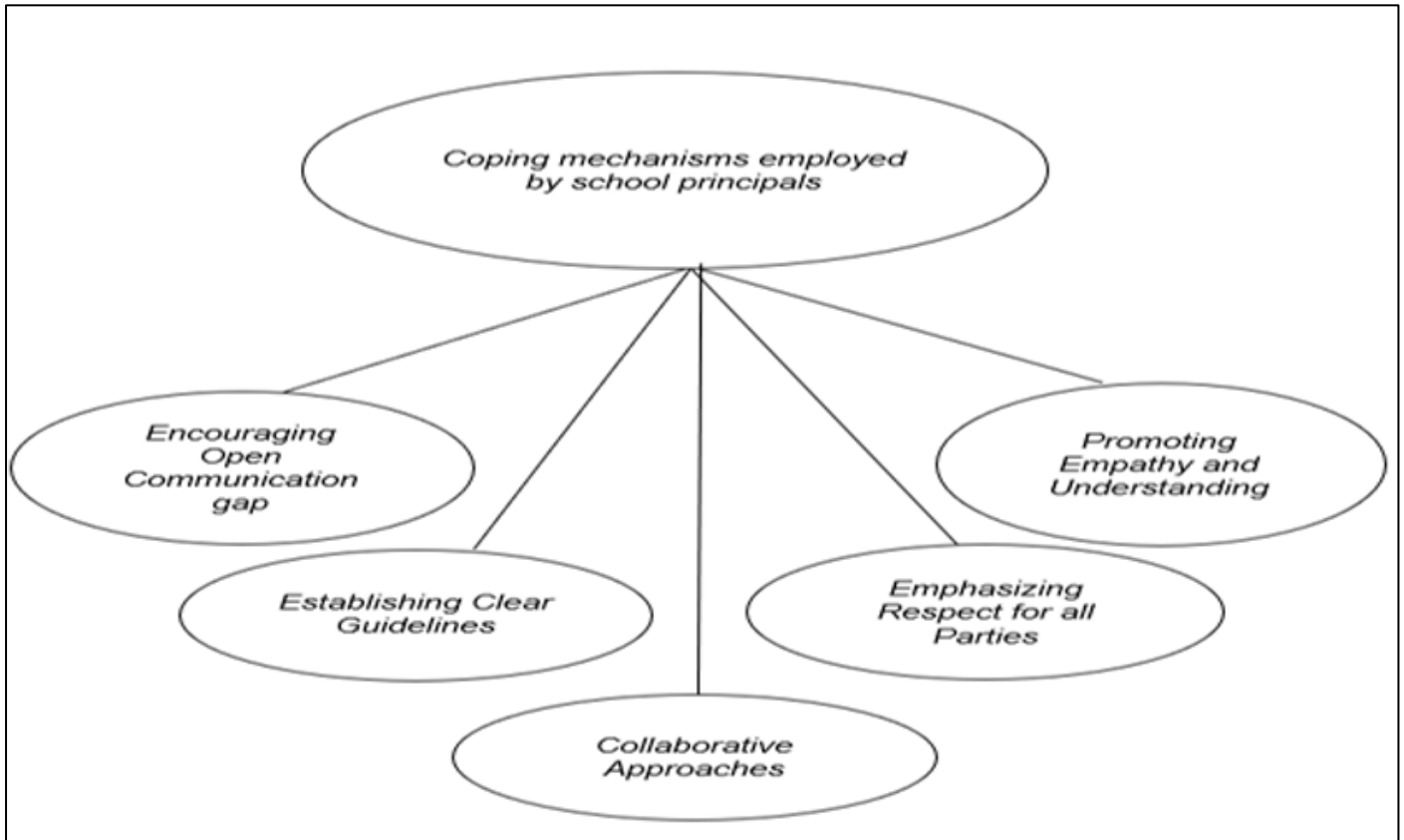Fig 1 Primary Challenges Faced By School Principals

Fig 2 Comping Mechanism Are Employed By School Principals in In Managing and Resolving Conflicts within Educational Settings
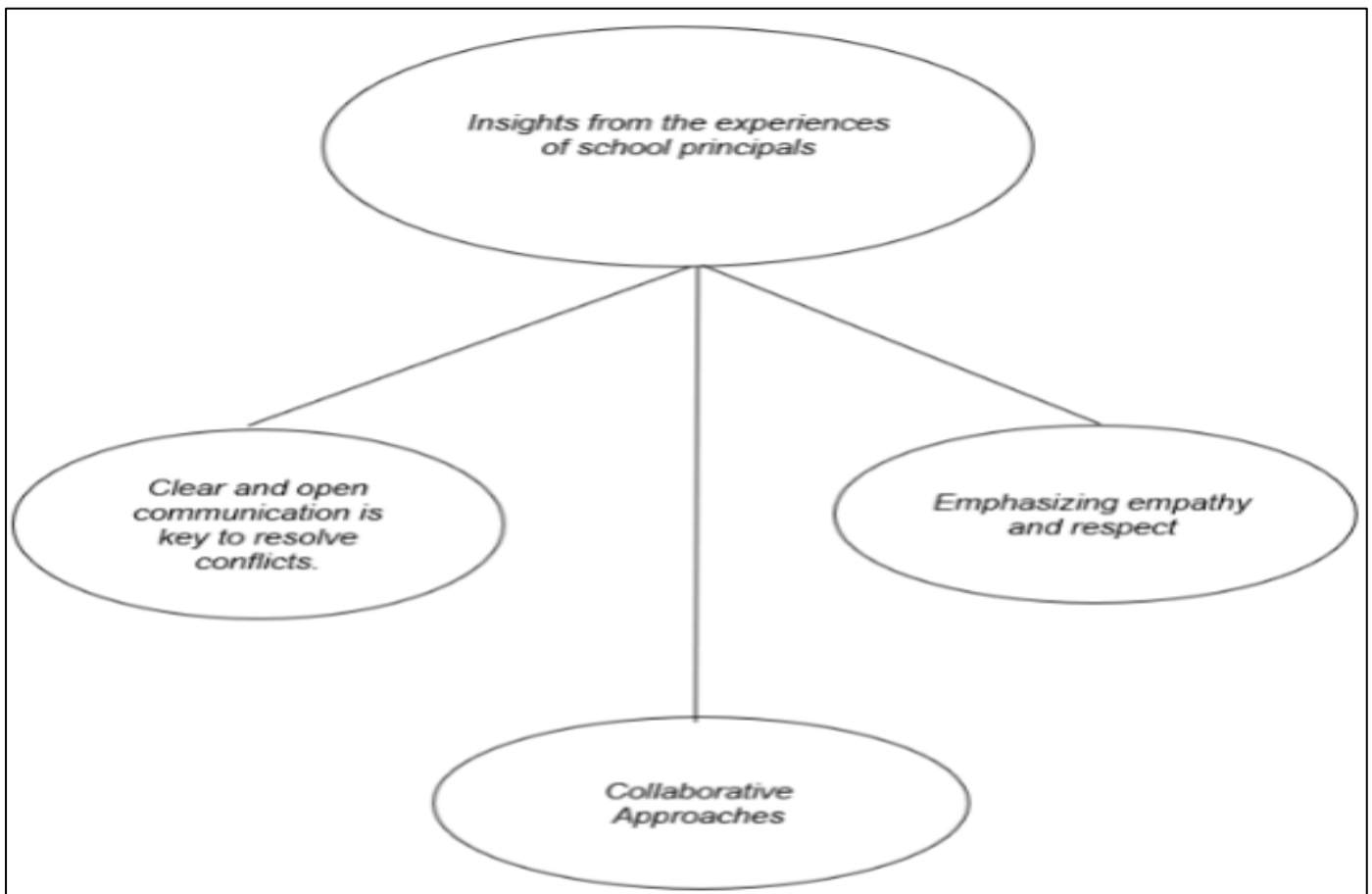

Fig 3 Insights Drown From the Experiences of School Principals

The findings of the study suggested several important implications for educational leadership and practice. First, addressing communication gaps was essential. School leaders needed to strengthen communication channels and encourage open, transparent dialogue among all stakeholders to improve conflict resolution and build a more unified school community.

Second, the promotion of collaborative approaches played a crucial role in managing conflicts effectively. Providing professional development focused on teamwork and collaborative problem-solving could help educators and staff prevent conflict escalation and foster a cooperative school culture.

Third, the effectiveness of coping mechanisms highlighted the need for flexible, situation-specific strategies. School leaders and educators were encouraged to continuously evaluate and adjust their approaches based on the nature of each conflict and the individuals involved. This adaptability ensured that responses remained timely and aligned with the evolving needs of the school environment.

Future efforts in education could focus on integrating conflict resolution into school policies, training, and curricula. Education departments might develop comprehensive programs and provide resources to train educators in managing conflicts effectively. School heads could prioritize professional development in conflict resolution to equip staff with practical skills and promote a harmonious school environment.

Teachers were encouraged to enhance their communication, empathy, and mediation skills through ongoing training, while students could participate in peer mediation programs to build leadership and responsibility. Future research may explore culturally responsive strategies and assess the long-term impact of conflict resolution practices across various educational contexts.

REFERENCES

[1]. Amie-Ogan & Nma, Mejia & Arpon (2021). Psychology and Social Development, 9(1): 99-109. Conflict Management Styles of School Heads and Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Efficiency. International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews.

[2]. Bandura, A. (1977). Social Learning Theory. General Learning Press.

[3]. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2016). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77-101.

[4]. Bryman, A. (2016). Social Research Methods. Oxford University Press.

[5]. Chen, L. (2019). Educational Conflict and Resolution in the Chinese Context. Asian Education and Development Studies, 8(2), 134-147.

[6]. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. Sage Publications.

[7]. Cruz, I. (2022). Understanding Conflict Resolution in Philippine Educational Settings. Manila Education Review, 12(4), 78-89.

[8]. Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research. Sage Publications.

[9]. Eisenberg, T., & Miller, J. (2017). Effective Strategies for School Conflict Resolution. Journal of Educational Administration, 45(3), 287-301.

[10]. El-Gayar, O., & Moran, M. (2018). Impact of mobile technology on learning outcomes in higher education. Journal of Educational Technology Research, 42(3), 245-259.

[11]. Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2016). Navigating Cultural Conflicts in the Indian Education System. Journal of Indian Education, 46(1), 9-23.

[12]. Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2017). Managing Conflict in Multicultural Classrooms: Strategies for Teachers. Journal of Multicultural Education, 34(2), 145-158.

[13]. Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2020). Conflict Resolution in Schools: A Contemporary Perspective. Journal of School Psychology, 34(3), 267-291.

[14]. Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2014). Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research. Sage Publications.

[15]. Kumar, R., & Parveen, F. (2020). Navigating Cultural Conflicts in the Indian Education System. Journal of Indian Education, 46(1), 9-23.

[16]. Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic Inquiry. Sage Publications.

[17]. Lopez, A. (2023). Education and Conflict in Davao City: A Local Perspective. Mindanao Educational Review, 17(2), 58-72.

[18]. Marx, K. (1848). The Communist Manifesto.

[19]. Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation. Jossey-Bass.

[20]. Morrison, S. (2022). Advancements in Educational Leadership: A Case Study Approach. Educational Leadership Journal, 38(2), 112-125.

[21]. Moustakas, C. (1994). Phenomenological Research Methods. Sage Publications.

[22]. Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 42(5), 533-544.

[23]. Reyes, F. (2021). Conflict Management in Philippine Schools: Challenges and Opportunities. Philippine Journal of Education, 100(1), 56-75.

[24]. Saldaña, J. (2015). The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers. Sage Publications.

[25]. Santos, M. (2023). Disparities and Conflicts in Philippine Education: A Case Study. Davao Journal of Education, 15(1), 33-47.

[26]. Smith, J. P., & Smith, S. M. (2018). Cultural Conflict in the Classroom: Strategies for Teacher Awareness and Action. Education Today, 45(1), 22-29.

[27]. Van Manen, M. (2016). Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy. Routledge.

[28]. Villanueva & Moleño (2022). Administrator's Conflict Management Styles and the School's Climate among the Secondary Schools of Davao Occidental. Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies, 26(2), 9-27.

[29]. Vangelisti, A. L. (2014). Communication and emotion: Essays in honor of Dolf Zillmann. Routledge.

[30]. Wang, M. T., & Degol, J. L. (2016). School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes. Educational Psychology Review, 28(2), 315-352.