

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLES IN MANAGING CONFLICT AT SMP NEGERI 2 GUNUNGSITOLI BARAT

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh adanya konflik interpersonal di lingkungan sekolah, baik antar guru maupun antara guru dengan kepala sekolah, yang berpotensi mengganggu proses pendidikan. Fokus penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis secara deskriptif peran-peran yang dijalankan kepala sekolah dalam mengatasi konflik interpersonal di SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat. Tahapan penting penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, dengan subjek kepala sekolah dan guru. Langkah awal adalah melakukan observasi menggunakan instrumen angket (skala Guttman Ya/Tidak) yang dirancang berdasarkan indikator teoretis untuk mengidentifikasi jenis dan bentuk konflik yang terjadi. Setelah konflik teridentifikasi, peneliti melanjutkan dengan wawancara mendalam berdasarkan temuan observasi tersebut untuk mengeksplorasi peran spesifik kepala sekolah dalam menanganinya. Temuan utama dari observasi berhasil mengidentifikasi sepuluh bentuk konflik interpersonal, seperti perbedaan pendapat, perbedaan kepentingan, perbedaan pola pikir akibat latar belakang budaya, dan komunikasi yang tidak jelas. Temuan kunci dari wawancara mengungkapkan bahwa dalam menangani satu konflik, kepala sekolah tidak hanya menggunakan satu atau dua peran, melainkan mengkombinasikan tiga, lima, atau bahkan seluruh perannya (seperti edukator, manajer, dan pemimpin) secara simultan. Disimpulkan bahwa untuk mengelola konflik secara efektif, kepala sekolah disarankan untuk memaksimalkan seluruh peran kepemimpinannya secara terintegrasi.

Kata Kunci: *Peran Kepala sekolah, Penanganan Konflik, SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat*

ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the existence of interpersonal conflicts in the school environment, both between teachers and between teachers and the principal, which have the potential to disrupt the educational process. The focus of this research is to descriptively analyze the roles played by principals in resolving interpersonal conflicts at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat. The key stages of this research used qualitative methods, with principals and teachers as subjects. The initial step was to conduct observations using a questionnaire instrument (the Guttman Yes/No scale) designed based on theoretical indicators to identify the types and forms of conflict that occurred. Once the conflicts were identified, the researchers continued with in-depth interviews based on the observation findings to explore the principal's specific role in handling them. The main findings from the observations identified ten forms of interpersonal conflict, such as differences of opinion, differences of interest, differences in mindset due to cultural background, and unclear communication. Key findings from the interviews revealed that in handling a conflict, principals do not use just one or two roles, but rather combine three, five, or even all of their roles (such as educator, manager, and leader) simultaneously. It is concluded that to manage conflict effectively, principals are advised to maximize all of their leadership roles in an integrated manner.

Keywords: *Principal's Role, Conflict Management, SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat*

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals and society by fostering the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that support personal and collective development. Education is often defined as a structured process for acquiring intellectual and moral competencies that contribute to social, economic, and cultural growth. In line with this, education is also described as a conscious and systematic effort to develop students' physical and spiritual potential to help them live independently and responsibly. Therefore, the function of education is not merely an academic pursuit but also a comprehensive effort to shape individuals capable of contributing positively and constructively to the wider society (Sembiring et al., 2025; Wea & Toron, 2025). This noble vision of education serves as the foundation for all activities organized within the formal system, demanding a well-managed environment so that these goals of character and intellectual formation can be optimally achieved.

The school functions as the primary institution responsible for carrying out this fundamental educational mission. As a formal educational institution, the school systematically organizes guidance, teaching, and training programs designed to help students develop their full potential—morally, intellectually, socially, and physically. Within this school ecosystem, the principal holds a central and highly decisive leadership role in ensuring that these noble educational goals can be realized in daily practice. The principal is defined as an educator, leader, manager, supervisor, and motivator who is fully responsible for creating an effective and conducive learning environment (Primansyah et al., 2025; Zaenuddin et al., 2025). Experts affirm that the principal is the key figure in building conditions that support meaningful learning and holistic student development, acting as the navigator who directs all school resources toward achieving a shared vision (Hanan et al., 2025; Setiyanti et al., 2025; Zaenuddin et al., 2025).

In the Indonesian context, the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 6 of 2018 explicitly emphasizes that principals must carry out managerial, entrepreneurial, supervisory, and social functions. This demand is reflected in the five core competencies they must possess, as identified by Solihah and Iskandar (2023), which include personality, managerial, entrepreneurship, supervision, and social competencies. A principal's effectiveness heavily depends on their ability to balance and integrate these various competencies. They must be able to act as role models, innovators, problem solvers, and primary collaborators within the school community. Abduh et al. (2019) further emphasize that principals play seven main roles: as educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator. When these ideal roles are performed effectively, the school is expected to nurture professional teachers and produce students with strong character and high social responsibility.

However, the reality in the school environment often deviates far from this idealism. Many principals face complex interpersonal challenges, involving conflicts between teachers, among students, and even between teachers and parents. Saffarudin (2013) classifies school conflicts into several types, including conflicts among teachers, among students, and between teachers and the principal. Similarly, Aisyah (2017, in Camelia, 2023) categorizes conflicts into personal, interpersonal, interest-based, realistic, and nonrealistic forms. These conflicts, if left without effective management, can significantly disrupt the teaching and learning process, weaken team collaboration, damage the positive school climate, and ultimately hinder the achievement of educational goals. The gap between the expectation of a harmonious leadership role and the reality of disruption due to conflict is a crucial problem in many educational institutions.

This gap was confirmed through empirical observations conducted by the researcher during the "Kampus Mengajar" (Teaching Campus) program at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat (August–December 2024). These field observations revealed various frequently occurring interpersonal tensions in the school environment. These problems manifested as misunderstandings between teachers and the principal, low levels of professionalism among some teachers, a fairly high rate of tardiness, and weak teamwork. Furthermore, an unhealthy competitive culture among the teaching staff was identified. These factual phenomena indicate a significant gap between the ideal leadership role expected of a principal—as a manager, motivator, and supervisor and the practical challenges they face in managing human resource dynamics at the school (Setiyanti et al., 2025; Sumiati, 2025).

To address this practical gap, it becomes crucial to examine in-depth how principals specifically execute their roles in managing the interpersonal conflicts that occur in school. Although various previous studies, such as those by Solihah and Iskandar (2023), have extensively discussed the principal's leadership role in a general context, there remains a limitation in the literature. Specifically, not many studies have examined how these leadership roles (such as the role of educator, manager, or supervisor) are practically and specifically applied in interpersonal conflict situations in Indonesian schools. This research gap underlies the urgency of this study: to see the real-world application of leadership theory in actual conflict management practice.

Therefore, the new value offered by this research is its focus on analyzing the principal's role in managing interpersonal conflict at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat using a qualitative approach. As explained by Soerjasih (2017), qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon through direct interaction, participatory observation, and in-depth interviews with the actors in the field. Through this approach, the research aims to describe concretely and in detail how the principal executes their various leadership roles—such as the educator role in nurturing teachers, the manager role in decision-making, or the supervisor role in evaluating problems—when directly confronting staff conflicts. Thus, this research is expected to contribute new and practical insights regarding effective conflict management strategies within the context of school leadership in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to describe in depth the role of the principal in handling interpersonal conflicts in the school environment. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to directly understand the situation in the field through interaction with the research subjects. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat, located on Jl. Orahili Lot, Dahana Tabaloho, Gunungsitoli Barat District, Gunungsitoli City, North Sumatra. The research activities were carried out from April 14 to July 10, 2025, in accordance with the time needed to obtain complete and accurate data. The subjects in this study included the principal and teachers while the object of the study was the role of the principal in handling interpersonal conflicts in the school environment. The subjects were selected purposively based on their involvement and relevance to the issues being studied. To obtain valid data, this study used several main instruments, namely observation sheets, structured interview guides, Guttman scale questionnaires, and documentation. Observations were used to record various forms of interpersonal conflict that arose between teachers and between teachers and principals. Interviews were conducted directly with principals and teachers to gain an in-depth understanding of the steps and strategies taken by principals in handling conflicts that arose. Questionnaires were used as a tool to validate the interview results by assessing the consistency of the informants' responses, while documentation in the form of

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archives, photos, and activity notes was used as supporting data to reinforce the results of the observations and interviews.

The data collection technique was carried out through four main stages, namely observation, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. Observations were conducted in a structured manner using a previously developed interpersonal conflict indicator guide. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the role of principals in managing and resolving conflicts at school. Questionnaires were used to obtain additional data from teachers as a form of verification of the results of the principal interviews. Meanwhile, documentation served as supporting evidence to reinforce the validity of the data obtained from various sources. The collected data was then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researchers selected and simplified data relevant to the research focus. The data presentation stage involved compiling the research results in a descriptive form to make them easy to understand and interpret. Next, the conclusion drawing stage was carried out by interpreting the meaning of the analyzed data to obtain a clear picture of the role of the principal in managing interpersonal conflicts at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat. Thus, this method is expected to produce a deep and comprehensive understanding of how principals carry out their role in maintaining harmonious relationships among school members.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings obtained through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat. The data collected was then analyzed qualitatively to describe in depth the forms of interpersonal conflict that occurred at the school and the role of the principal in managing and resolving these conflicts. The research results are first presented in the form of verbal descriptions that illustrate the actual conditions in the field, followed by a discussion that interprets the results based on previous theories and research.

Results

A. Identification of Forms and Triggers of Interpersonal Conflict

The research conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat during the period of April to July 2025 successfully identified various forms of interpersonal conflict occurring within the school environment. Through participatory observation and documentation analysis methods, it was found that conflict triggers were highly varied, including differences in views or opinions during meetings, clashes of interest between individuals, and differences in mindset caused by non-uniform cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, internal factors such as striking personality differences and the presence of personal pressure on individuals also contributed. These findings also noted that personal mistakes that were not well-resolved, as well as action conflicts related to policy implementation, frequently became sources of friction. Unclear or provocative communication, along with general dissatisfaction with working conditions, were also identified as additional factors exacerbating the atmosphere. Individual characteristics and attitudes that did not align with the prevailing social norms in the school further complicated interactions.

From the various forms of conflict identified, in-depth observation results indicated two forms of conflict that were most dominant and frequently emerged at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat. First were differing views regarding the implementation of school tasks, where teachers often had different interpretations concerning work priorities or methodologies. Second, conflicts rooted in personality differences, occurring both among fellow teachers and between teachers and the principal. These fundamental character differences often hindered

collaboration. Furthermore, qualitative data analysis found that the root cause of most of these tensions was a lack of open and transparent communication. When communication channels were blocked, minor differences easily developed into larger misunderstandings. This situation created an environment where negative assumptions could easily grow, causing friction that should have been resolvable through simple dialogue to instead escalate and disrupt the focus on educational goals.

B. Analysis of the Principal's Multi-Faceted Role in Conflict Management

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with the principal, it was revealed that the conflict management strategy implemented was flexible and adaptive. The principal tended not to use a singular approach, but rather prioritized persuasive and dialogical approaches to bridge differences. In every problem-solving instance, the principle of deliberation for consensus was the primary foundation. The principal actively sought to create a safe dialogue space where all parties felt heard and valued. Moreover, setting an example became an important instrument; the principal endeavored to demonstrate how to be open and professional when facing differences. This priority on openness proved effective. Interview results showed that this strategy made it easier for teachers to accept the final decisions made jointly. The principal consciously avoided the authoritarian use of power, recognizing that coercion would only solve the problem on the surface and potentially leave negative residue.

A key finding from this research is that the principal was not fixated on only one or two specific roles in handling conflict. Instead, they dynamically combined several roles at once, tailored to the needs and complexity of the situation at hand. Interview data confirmed that the principal acted as an educator who provided understanding, as well as a leader who showed direction. In technical aspects, they acted as a manager who organized resources for solutions. Not only that, the principal also took on the roles of an innovator seeking new solutions, a motivator who inspired a collaborative spirit, and, most importantly, as a skilled communicator who functioned as a neutral mediator in every disagreement. This flexibility in playing various roles allowed the principal to respond to the nuances of each conflict appropriately, ensuring that the interventions were not only effective but also constructive for long-term relationships.

C. Data Validation and Teachers' Positive Perceptions of the Principal's Performance

To strengthen the qualitative findings, this research utilized a questionnaire distributed to twelve teachers. The results of this quantitative data showed a high degree of consistency with the findings obtained from interviews and observations. The absolute majority of teachers provided very positive perceptions of the principal's performance in handling interpersonal conflict. Data indicated that more than ninety percent of respondents agreed that the principal had carried out their role exceptionally well. Specifically, the teachers highly valued the principal's ability to be objective when viewing a problem, to remain impartial, and to always provide wise guidance in finding solutions. The principal's ability to consistently position themselves as a fair mediator in every disagreement that arose among teacher colleagues was the point most appreciated by the respondents. This quantitative validation lends strong weight to the research findings, confirming that the benefits of this participatory leadership style were genuinely and widely felt by the teachers.

Data triangulation from three different sources—field observations, in-depth interviews with the leadership, and teacher questionnaires—produced a coherent and comprehensive picture. These findings convincingly strengthen the research's validity, as each method mutually supported the same conclusions. The teachers generally assessed that the principal had succeeded in creating a fair, open, and highly communicative work atmosphere. This positive work climate was a direct result of the applied conflict management style. The results of this study clearly affirm that the principal holds a very important and strategic role in maintaining

and nurturing harmonious working relationships at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat. The leadership's ability to wisely manage interpersonal friction proved to be a determining factor in creating a school environment that is conducive, stable, and supportive for all school members. Without appropriate intervention, the minor conflicts identified had the potential to escalate and damage team collaboration.

Discussion

Research results at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat identify that interpersonal conflict is a natural organizational dynamic. The conflict triggers found were highly varied, including differences in views during meetings, clashes of individual interests, and differences in mindset due to non-uniform cultural backgrounds. Internal factors such as striking personality differences and personal pressure also contributed. This finding aligns with the general view that educational institutions often face friction due to differences in goals, ways of thinking, and socio-cultural backgrounds. Observation data also noted that unresolved personal mistakes and conflicts related to policy implementation frequently became sources of friction. Furthermore, unclear or provocative communication and general dissatisfaction with working conditions were additional factors that worsened the interpersonal atmosphere within the school environment (Hartati et al., 2025).

From these various forms of conflict, in-depth observation showed two forms that emerged most dominantly. First, differences in views regarding the implementation of school tasks, where teachers often had different interpretations of work priorities or methodologies. Second, conflicts rooted in personality differences, both among fellow teachers and between teachers and the principal. These fundamental character differences often hindered collaboration. Qualitative data analysis found that the root cause of most of these tensions was a lack of open and transparent communication. When communication channels are blocked, minor differences easily develop into larger misunderstandings, creating an environment where negative assumptions thrive and disrupt the focus on educational goals (Simangunsong & Habeahan, 2025; Sumantri et al., 2025).

Interview findings indicate that the principal at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat is able to combine various roles in resolving conflicts flexibly and adaptively. The principal acts not only as a manager who organizes and directs performance but also as a wise and innovative leader. This is in line with the view of (Fauziana et al., 2024) which explains that an ideal principal performs seven main roles: educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator. In practice, the principal applies the principles of participative leadership, which prioritizes the involvement of all parties in decision-making, including when handling differences of opinion that arise among the teaching staff (Fauziana et al., 2024; Hanan et al., 2025; Zaenuddin et al., 2025).

Specifically, when conflict arises from differences of opinion, the principal acts as a mediator who invites the related parties to dialogue. In this situation, open communication and an emphasis on common goals become priorities. When facing conflicts due to cultural background or personality differences, the principal acts as an educator who instills the values of tolerance, empathy, and mutual respect. Meanwhile, when friction emerges from miscommunication or work dissatisfaction, the principal takes on the role of motivator. This role is carried out by providing positive encouragement and reinforcing the work enthusiasm of teachers so they remain focused on their professional responsibilities, demonstrating adaptive managerial skills in understanding the nuances of each problem (Ashari et al., 2024; Kumbaraningtyas et al., 2025; Sumiati, 2025).

The approach used by the principal consistently avoids the use of authoritarian power. The prioritized strategy is a persuasive and dialogical approach to bridge differences, where the

principle of deliberation for consensus becomes the main foundation. The principal actively creates a safe dialogue space where all parties feel heard and valued. This attitude demonstrates emotional intelligence in understanding the psychological condition of the teachers involved in the conflict. Thus, conflict resolution touches not only administrative aspects but also emotional and social aspects, ensuring that the intervention is constructive for long-term relationships among colleagues at the school (Azizurahman et al., 2025; Nurhasanah et al., 2024; Salam et al., 2025).

To strengthen the qualitative findings, data validation was conducted through a questionnaire distributed to twelve teachers. The results of this quantitative data showed a high degree of consistency with the interview and observation findings. The absolute majority of teachers, over ninety percent of respondents, provided a very positive perception of the principal's performance in handling conflict. Specifically, teachers highly appreciated the principal's ability to be objective, impartial, and always provide wise guidance. The ability to consistently position oneself as a fair mediator in every dispute between colleagues was the point most appreciated by respondents.

Data triangulation from three different sources field observations, in-depth interviews, and teacher questionnaires produced a coherent and comprehensive picture, simultaneously strengthening the research's validity. Teachers generally assessed that the principal had successfully created a work climate that is fair, open, and highly communicative. This positive work climate is a direct result of the conflict management style applied. The results of this study confirm that the principal's effectiveness in carrying out their role has a direct influence on teacher motivation and the learning atmosphere. Good conflict management not only prevents divisions but also serves as a means of forming a healthy organizational culture oriented towards improving the quality of education.

KESIMPULAN

This research conclusively demonstrates that interpersonal conflict at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Barat, triggered by diverse factors ranging from differences in perspective to personality clashes, was effectively managed by the principal through an adaptive and flexible approach. Rather than using authoritarian methods, the principal consistently applied participative leadership and dialogical strategies. The principal proved capable of shifting roles, acting as a mediator during differences in views, an educator to address cultural friction, and a motivator when confronting miscommunication. This persuasive approach, prioritizing deliberation for consensus, was validated through data triangulation, where over 90% of teachers expressed positive perceptions of the principal's objectivity and fairness, contributing directly to a healthy work climate and a communicative organizational culture.

This finding confirms that conflict management in schools is not merely an administrative function but an essential leadership competency. However, this study is a qualitative case study at a single location, limiting the generalizability of its findings. Therefore, future research is highly recommended to use a quantitative design with a larger sample. It is necessary to measure the statistical correlation between specific conflict management styles (e.g., mediator vs. motivator) and measurable dependent variables, such as work stress levels, job satisfaction, or teacher retention. Comparative studies between schools implementing dialogical approaches and those that do not would also provide valuable insights into the long-term effectiveness of this leadership strategy in improving educational quality.

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