

INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT AMONG TEACHERS IN COMMUNITY
SCHOOLS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Kshitiz Khanal* for the degree of *Master of Philosophy in Development Studies* presented on *25 January 2026* entitled *Interpersonal Conflict among Teachers in Community Schools: A Narrative Inquiry*.

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Interpersonal conflict among teachers is an important aspect in teacher's professional development in context of Nepal. The study explores stories of teachers and their perception, understanding of interpersonal conflict in their day-to-day work life. This research highlighted that interpersonal conflict in the workplace affects the quality of work of teachers in community schools.

This study used narrative inquiry to investigate interpersonal conflict among teachers in community schools with observation and in-depth interviews. I conducted field work in two community schools with five teachers of Kathmandu Metropolitan City. I believed in relational realism by following constructivism as epistemology and interpretivism as research paradigm. To present the stories in line with the research question, I grounded my study on Kim's framework for narrative analysis, specifically Mishler's typology of "*imposing a told story on the telling*."

I used Dahrendorf's authority-relation conflict theory and social identity theory as the theoretical framework to analyze workplace conflict. Authority-relation theory explained how formal and informal power structures cause structural friction, while social identity theory highlighted how diverse group memberships exacerbate these tensions. Together, they comprehensively explain how interpersonal conflict emerges from the intersection of institutional authority and personal identity

The study revealed that persistent relational and structural factors such as seniority based informal authority, or new teacher- old teacher relationship ingrained

in schools' culture influenced interpersonal conflict among teachers. Conflicts emerged from perceived challenges to dignity, authority, informal power dynamics, gendered expectations, resistance to change, and differences in teaching approaches. When conflict arose, teachers respond through self-doubt, avoidance, withdrawal, and silence showing that the response mechanisms included detachment, passive compliance, adaptability, conflict, and negotiation.

The stories showed that interpersonal conflict in community schools impacted collaboration and the well-being of teachers. Policymakers and education leaders, who aim to enhance school environments as workplaces, can utilize this study as evidence. It also adds empirical and theoretical knowledge to educational research in Nepal.

.....

25 January 2026

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शोधसार

विकास शिक्षामा दर्शनशास्त्रको स्नातकोत्तर डिग्रीका लागि क्षितिज खनालको शोधप्रबन्धको शिर्षक "सामुदायिक विद्यालयका शिक्षकहरू बीचको अन्तरव्यक्तिगत द्वन्द्व: एक संकथन" ११ माघ २०८२ मा प्रस्तुत गरिएको थियो ।

उप. प्रा. सुरेश गौतम, पीएचडी
शोध निर्देशक

नेपालको सन्दर्भमा शिक्षकहरूको पेसागत विकासमा उनीहरू बीचको अन्तरव्यक्तिगत द्वन्द्व (Interpersonal Conflict) एक महत्त्वपूर्ण पाटो हो। यस अध्ययनले शिक्षकहरूका कथाहरू र उनीहरूको दैनिक कार्य जीवनमा अन्तरव्यक्तिगत द्वन्द्वप्रतिको उनीहरूको बुझाइ र दृष्टिकोणको खोजी गर्दछ। यस अनुसन्धानले कार्यस्थलमा हुने अन्तरव्यक्तिगत द्वन्द्वले सामुदायिक विद्यालयका शिक्षकहरूको कामको गुणस्तरलाई असर गर्छ भन्ने कुरालाई उजागर गरेको छ।

यस अध्ययनले सामुदायिक विद्यालयका शिक्षकहरू बीचको अन्तरव्यक्तिगत द्वन्द्वको अनुसन्धान गर्न अवलोकन र गहन अन्तर्वार्तासहित संकथन (Narrative Inquiry) को प्रयोग गरेको छ। मैले काठमाडौं महानगरपालिकाका दुईवटा सामुदायिक विद्यालयका पाँच जना शिक्षकहरूसँग स्थलगत कार्य सम्पन्न गरें। मैले ज्ञानमीमांसाको (Epistemology) रूपमा निर्माणवाद (Constructivism) र अनुसन्धान प्रतिमानको (Research Paradigm) रूपमा व्याख्यावादलाई (interpretivism) पछ्याउँदै सम्बन्धपरक यथार्थवादमा (Relational Realism) विश्वास गरें। अनुसन्धान प्रश्नको आधारमा कथाहरू प्रस्तुत गर्न, मैले मेरो अध्ययनलाई किमको कथात्मक विश्लेषणको रूपरेखामा, विशेष गरी मिस्लरको "सुनाइएको कथालाई बनाइमा थोपर्ने" वर्गीकरणमा आधारित गरें।

मैले कार्यस्थलको द्वन्द्व विश्लेषण गर्न सैद्धान्तिक रूपरेखाको रूपमा ड्यारेन्डोर्फको 'अधिकार-सम्बन्ध द्वन्द्व सिद्धान्त' (Authority-Relation Conflict Theory) र 'सामाजिक पहिचान सिद्धान्त' (Social Identity Theory) को प्रयोग गरें। अधिकार-सम्बन्ध सिद्धान्तले कसरी औपचारिक र अनौपचारिक शक्ति संरचनाहरूले संरचनात्मक घर्षण निम्त्याउँछन् भन्ने कुराको व्याख्या गर्‍यो, भने सामाजिक पहिचान सिद्धान्तले कसरी विविध समूहको सदस्यताले यी तनावहरूलाई बढाउँछन् भन्ने कुरालाई उजागर गर्‍यो। यी दुवैले सामूहिक रूपमा, संस्थागत अधिकार र व्यक्तिगत पहिचानको अन्तरसम्बन्धबाट अन्तरव्यक्तिगत द्वन्द्व कसरी उत्पन्न हुन्छ भन्ने कुरालाई विस्तृत रूपमा व्याख्या गर्छन्।

यस अध्ययनले विद्यालयको संस्कृतिमा जरा गाडेर बसेका निरन्तरका सम्बन्धपरक र संरचनात्मक कारकहरू जस्तै वरिष्ठतामा आधारित अनौपचारिक अधिकार, वा नयाँ र पुराना शिक्षक बीचको सम्बन्धले

शिक्षकहरू बीचको अन्तरव्यक्तिगत द्वन्द्वलाई प्रभाव पार्ने कुरा पत्ता लगायो। प्रतिष्ठामा आएको चुनौती, अधिकार, अनौपचारिक शक्तिको गतिशीलता, लैङ्गिक अपेक्षाहरू, परिवर्तनप्रतिको प्रतिरोध र शिक्षण दृष्टिकोणमा भएका भिन्नताहरूका कारण द्वन्द्वहरू उत्पन्न भएका थिए। जब द्वन्द्व उत्पन्न हुन्थ्यो, शिक्षकहरूले आत्म-शंका, बेवास्ता, पछि हट्ने र मौनता मार्फत प्रतिक्रिया दिन्थे, जसले उनीहरूको प्रतिक्रिया संयन्त्रमा अलगाव निष्क्रिय अनुपालन, अनुकूलनशीलता, द्वन्द्व र सम्झौता/वार्ता समावेश छ भन्ने देखाउँछ।

यी कथाहरूले सामुदायिक विद्यालयहरूमा हुने अन्तरव्यक्तिगत द्वन्द्वले शिक्षकहरूको सहकार्य र भलाइमा असर पारेको देखायो। कार्यस्थलको रूपमा विद्यालयको वातावरण सुधार गर्ने लक्ष्य राख्ने नीति निर्माता र शैक्षिक नेताहरूले यस अध्ययनलाई प्रमाणको रूपमा उपयोग गर्न सक्छन्। यसले नेपालको शैक्षिक अनुसन्धानमा अनुभवजन्य (empirical) र सैद्धान्तिक ज्ञान पनि थप्दछ।

११ माघ २०८२

.....
क्षितिज खनाल

उपाधि उम्मेदवार

This dissertation entitled *Interpersonal Conflict among Teachers in Community Schools: A Narrative Inquiry* was presented by *Kshitiz Khanal* on 25 January 2026.

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I understand that my dissertation will become a part of the permanent collection of the library of Kathmandu University. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work, and it has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree at any other university.

.....

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25 January 2026

DEDICATION

To my daughter and to my partner, who motivated me throughout the process

And

To all the educators who have dedicated themselves to the service of people.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CAS	Constituent Assembly Secretariat Nepal
CEHRD	Center for Education and Human Resource Development
GoN	Government of Nepal
KMC	Kathmandu Metropolitan City
KUSOED	Kathmandu University School of Education
SEE	Secondary Education Examination
UNESCO	United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization
VP	Vice Principal

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the context in which the study was carried out, a problem it aims to mitigate, and questions it is expected to address, ensuring that the study is novel and grounded. This chapter sets out to explain the concept of interpersonal conflict with a focus on interpersonal conflict in the workplace. The chapter also presents the context of community schools, discussing how this study will contribute to strengthening school management and policymaking. Similarly, the chapter also presents why this study is important and structures the story by outlining the research question.

Background of the Study

Nepal strives to ensure equitable and high-quality education to all. A strong education system is essential for any nation to even begin making progress towards that. For Nepal a strong education system would only be possible if public schools in Nepal transform themselves to become the cradle of knowledge. This is especially true because around 66% of all school going children in Nepal go to community schools (Center for Education and Human Resource Development [CEHRD], 2025). However, community schools in Nepal have been marred with critical issues like insufficient infrastructures, low motivation among teachers and institutional mis-managements which have severely affect the quality of educations in these institutions (Baral, 2021; Pokhrel, 2023; Yadav et al., 2024). Adding to this, institutional phenomena like workplace conflict among staff receive little attention from school leaders which further erodes the quality.

Throughout decades studies have shown that interpersonal conflict within schools damage institutional cohesion, affect teachers' motivation, hampers collaboration among them, and reduce institutional trusts all of which severely impact student's learning outcome (Cain & Du Plessis, 2013; Devon & Andrew, 2018; Fields, 1998; Qodir et al., 2025; Umbreit, 2006). In this context it is imperative to identify, understand and address workplace conflicts at schools to improve its effectiveness and efficiency. This becomes more urgent in context of Nepal where staff dynamics are highly influenced by structural norms. The norms shaped by factors such as seniority, gender expectation, or access to resource constantly influence and shape

relationships and decisions in schools (Pherali, 2012; Puri & Chhetri, 2024; Shahi, 2021). These dynamics are bound to produce interpersonal conflict which is not adequately addressed by studies in outside setting. Hence, this study aims to understand the interpersonal conflict at workplace in community schools as a structural phenomenon shaped by cultural and social norms prevalent in communities of Nepal, that affect quality of education.

Inception of the Study

My professional experience spanned over a decade. In this period, I have worked with five different institutions. My roles ranged from a marketing boy for an electronic distributor to a MEAL manager leading the MEAL team across four countries. While each experience was unique in its demand, opportunities, and work culture, I found one aspect common in all. In each single institution I worked at, there was always the presence of interpersonal conflict. I have been in conflict with my colleagues in each of these institutions.

Taking a step back, I recalled that this experience was not unique to me. I had a cousin who was in the banking sector from 2012 to 2020. Every now and then she would complain about one colleague or the other who she had an argument with. In 2020, when she opted for an early retirement, she had spent eight years in the same bank, but there was hardly a week in those eight years when she did not have a conflict with a colleague.

I then thought of my mother. My mother started her professional journey late in her life following the death of my grandfather. She was already over thirty-three when she joined her first formal work around 2006. My mother did not have any ambitions around her work; she did not think of promotion or recognition. She used to say, *“I got a chance to work at this age. That alone is a huge achievement.”* She was content with her position and work. Yet she was not spared from conflict at her workplace. While she was less aggressive in her tone, time and again she would say, *“I think I want to quit the job,”* and when my father asked why, more often than not the reason would be some disagreement or argument she had with her colleague.

Fast forward to 2021, one of my nephews joined an office amidst COVID. He was from a generation that is known for speaking their mind, and he was personally very confrontational. Within a few months, even he started complaining about how there was one girl who he felt was making it difficult to work with the team. Then there was another guy who he had a spat with and said, *“has no competency but acts*

like he is the smartest in the room.” To add to the twist, all this was happening when he was working online. He had never met any of his colleagues in person except for one. Three generations and one and a half decades apart, this experience of interpersonal conflict in the workplace remained unchanged. The characters, the causes, and the result might have differed. But this phenomenon of interpersonal conflict in the workplace remained the same.

Recently I worked in organizations that support governments in the improvement of education systems. As part of my work, I travelled to community schools across Nepal and frequently interacted with school leaders, teachers, and other local stakeholders. During most of those interactions, I identified teachers' motivation as a key barrier to quality education. Likewise, school leaders were also not so confident in the practicality of collaborative teaching approaches through teachers. This information left a huge impression on my mind.

Few years passed and by 2024 my professional role required me to support local civil society organizations to design interventions in Madhesh and Lumbini provinces to address weak community engagement in education. In one of the assignments, I had to engage in extensive literature reviews to help design an intervention for school leadership development. That is when I came across authority-based conflict theory. The theory grabbed my interest with its positioning that conflict arose from relationships between those who hold authority through informal structure and those in perceived subordinate positions who do not.

I have a habit of listening to podcasts when I ride my bike. I was listening to a leadership podcast around the same time as I came across the authority-relationship conflict theory. In that podcast the speaker mentioned that one of the key indicators of an effective leader or manager is the ability to understand and respond to interpersonal differences and conflicts within a team. That evening, seeing my nephew and mother and recalling their experience, I began asking myself if people like them working in a well-resourced office struggled with interpersonal conflict because it was clear that the institution and the institutional leaders were either unaware of it or unable to manage it. What did this mean for community schools in Nepal? How equipped were schools and stakeholders to recognize and respond to such dynamics? The conversations I had over the years resurfaced. I asked, "Could interpersonal conflict be a factor undermining teacher motivation?" Could meaningful progress in

improving the education system be made without first addressing whether schools are healthy, supportive workplaces for the people responsible for delivering education?

As authority-based conflict theory related strongly with my personal experience of working in organization, and also with observations of school environments, I felt there was value in exploring this phenomenon. This mixture of personal history, professional exposure, and introduction to the theory shaped my decision to examine interpersonal conflict within community schools.

Interpersonal Conflict at the Workplace

Interpersonal conflicts in the workplace, including schools, are results of factors including role differences, resource allocation, and variance in professional philosophies (Dogan, 2016; Khan et al., 2024). In an organization there are differences in perception and values of staffs like some staffs prioritize institutional compliance, traditional practices, hierarchical structure, while others prioritize professional autonomy, modern teaching practices, and classroom management approaches (Chen et al., 2022; Fiegener & Adams, 2023; Park, 2023). Similarly, conflicts among teachers also emerge when there is differences in experience levels, subject matter expertise, and approaches to collaborative work (Ruiz et al., 2021).

Such diversity, in terms of work styles, experience, and world view, is the hallmark of the modern-day workplace environment. It is also a defining characteristic in educational institutions. This diversity brings differences in belief systems, norms, and values, all of which are proven factors for conflict that have a direct impact on productivity, morale, and institutional efficiency (Khan et al., 2024; Ruiz et al., 2021). At schools they bring to the forefront the difference in perspectives, pedagogical approaches, management approaches and professional expectations (Alagbela, 2025; Hsieh et al., 2024; Park, 2023).

Workplace conflict is of increasing interest to organizational leaders and managers due to its potential to hinder efficiency (Bacud, 2024; Sintapertiwi et al., 2023). It manifests as friction between staff over differences in beliefs, entitlements, and fairness, among other factors (Bacud, 2024). In schools, conflict negatively affects the working environment, teachers' job fulfillment, and their overall well-being (Appelbaum et al., 2022). Studies highlight the importance of addressing conflict in the workplace to ensure institutional efficiency and goal attainment (Sintapertiwi et al., 2023; Tamunodiepiriye et al., 2022). This issue should also concern education leaders and stakeholders striving to improve school education.

Drawing from existing literature and personal experience, it can be said that interpersonal conflict is inevitable in a workplace because it is associated with the idea of individuality, where each person is different from others. Taking a reference from Hindu Mythology, teamwork or organization building can be compared to the *Samundra Manthan* (Churning of Ocean), which produced both *Amrit* (the nectar of immortality) and *Kalakuta* Poison. A crucial component of this mythology is also that *Amrita* was attained only after the poison was managed (Wilson, 1895). Similarly, in an organization, interpersonal conflict can be viewed as the poison that must be managed. Without managing it, an organization cannot hope to attain its ultimate goal. The complexity of interpersonal conflict compounded by other contextual factors within a workplace thus demands a deeper understanding of the prevalence, cause, and effect of interpersonal conflict in the workplace. This understanding is even more important in critical sectors like education, especially schools.

Nepal's Community School Education

Nepal's education system is also experiencing significant staff diversity challenges. Between 2020/21 and 2021/22, the government hired 70,785 new basic and secondary teachers, excluding those hired through private funding sources (CEHRD, 2021, 2022). Adding these additional teachers to community schools might make things more difficult in relation to workplace conflict. The possible interpersonal conflict can increase dissatisfaction with jobs, lower motivation, and decrease productivity, all of which can damage the quality of teaching and student learning (Kooij et al., 2018; Ng & Feldman, 2008). Furthermore, such conflicts may discourage knowledge sharing, resource sharing, and collective action.

The Constitution of Nepal 2015, specifically schedule 8, and the subsequent Local Government Operation Act 2017 has given the responsibility (and rights) for the management of community schools to local government (Constituent Assembly Secretariat [CAS], 2015; Nepal Law Commission [NLC], 2017). However, the policy directives and financing are still derived from federal government. This means are required to follow federal rules for school management. In community schools, traditional teaching practice and conventional professional mindsets remain effective while federal policy is incorporating more modern components (Puri & Chhetri, 2024). Furthermore, in recent years, modern and newer professional approaches are increasingly challenging traditional practices and mindsets (Ruiz et al., 2021). This

has not combined traditional leadership with contemporary administrative methods which are not always complementary (Dickson, 2023).

The recent practices of teacher recruitment have also played a role in the dynamics of conflict. There is a chance that the recent recruitment practice has made conflict situation more probable. Government-led recruitment drives and contractual hires by local governments, combined with evolving professional standards, have resulted in a workforce mixing experienced educators with recent entrants (Shahi, 2021). This growth in number of new teachers, most of whom have progressive mindsets into a traditionally structured institutional structure creates tension when their approaches clash, which in turn highlights the challenge of integrating diverse experiences within one institution (Cennamo & Grander, 2008; Lub et al., 2014). This can particularly be more challenging if older teachers see approaches of newer teachers as challenge to their authority.

Such conflict is what Dahrendorf (1959) describes in his Authority-Relations Conflict Theory: Conflict arises from the unequal distribution of authority within groups. He states that the traditional notion of authority reflected by position, or formal powers, should not be the whole definition of an authority. Authority is more fluid in nature and includes control over resources, informal influence and reach on decision-making, access to leadership, and social capital within a group (Binns, 1977; De Kadt, 1965).

Looking at the operational context of community schools in Nepal, it can be said that similar informal authority exists. The social norms, like the supremacy of elders or patriarchal practices, among others, indeed assign this informal authority to certain groups as evident by the studies by Puri and Chettri (2024) and Shahi (2021). These authorities have the potential to create quasi-groups, like those stipulated by Dahrendorf (1968), of teachers who, though formally occupying similar authority positions, do not share the same space within the informal structure, which means they also do not have the same level of latent authority, creating competing individuals or groups. Thus, in the case of community schools in Nepal, informal authority structures can contribute to conflict as it creates the ideal ground for conflict similar to those highlighted by Binns (1977), Cennamo and Gardner (2008) and Lub et al. (2014). With this complexity around interpersonal conflict in schools, this study aims to understand how teachers experience it and how it affects them through narrative inquiry. This approach helps in a deeper understanding of the subjectivity of

teachers' experiences. Additionally, this study will explore teachers' stories to gain insight into how they identify and respond to intergenerational conflicts.

Statement of the Problem

To make the education system stronger, it is important to understand interpersonal conflict among teachers as it can have significant effects on well-being and effectiveness of teacher, which in turn affects learning outcomes. Researches have showed that relationships at work, particularly those that is formed around conflict, have a major influence on job satisfaction and general performance (Bella, 2023; Glilekpe et al., 2022). This is true in the educational setting as well. Studies have shown that inter-staff conflict leads to work-related stress which affect teachers' satisfaction, motivation, and efficiency resulting in quality decline of education (Dogan, 2016; Emil & Marwan, 2022). The issue of interpersonal conflict in the workplace in schools and its effects is especially severe in developing or developed countries where schools often have problems with governance, resource allocation, professional development, and modernization (Abdullah et al., 2025; Yidana, 2022).

Despite growing recognition of the effects of interpersonal conflict on schools, there are very limited studies done in Nepal's community schools on the issue. Most current research is on conflicts related to resources and politics inside Nepal's educational system. Others are focused on international educational contexts, leading to a shortage of evidence on how workplace conflicts manifest specifically among teachers in community schools of Nepal. Studies show that interpersonal conflicts at the workplace can lead to reduced job satisfaction among teachers, cause stress, and also exhaust teachers (Cansor et al., 2021; Noori et al., 2024). However, there is a lack of research in local context that examines this phenomenon in community schools of Nepal.

This knowledge gap is very concerning since workplace relationships highly influence organizational effectiveness, including in educational settings. They can also impact learning outcomes (Kang & Mavrogordato, 2025; O'Shea, 2021). Without understanding how workplace conflicts develop and manifest in Nepal's community schools, educational stakeholders will have incomplete knowledge for creating effective interventions.

Significance of Study

Empirical evidence from diverse educational contexts has shown that workplace relationships are the strongest predictors of teachers' satisfaction. Studies

confirm that institutional environment and relationships have significant positive effect on job satisfaction, while interpersonal conflicts at the workplace have a negative impact. (Cansor et al., 2021; Noori et al., 2024; Tommandru et al., 2024; Zhao & Jeon, 2024). This holds true to Nepal's educational context as well. The introduction of significant number of new teachers - 70,785 between 2020-22 (CEHRD, 2021, 2022) into the education ecosystem adds to the volatility as they begin interacting and building relational dynamics within institutional structures established around traditional norms and practices. Thus, understanding the conflict dynamics at this juncture will be relevant for stakeholders to identify and address the issues.

Nepal's planned educational reforms which focus on improving teacher quality, and promoting innovative approaches to teaching to enhance learning outcome will require addressing interpersonal conflict at workplace in community schools. The results of this study's findings can be used to inform the development of policies and practices aimed at reforming the school management and operation approaches to ensure agility in the system and staff. Learning about how teachers interact with each other might help make plans and policies that will help retain teachers, help them grow professionally, and enhance the overall effectiveness of schools.

Similarly, the study also investigated how conflicts develop and manifest. Understanding these findings will contribute to improving school leadership practices. The study will help by identifying how school administrators can better manage conflicts. This will help foster a more inclusive and collaborative working environment benefiting community schoolteachers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore and understand experiences of community schoolteachers regarding interpersonal conflict.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers in community schools narrate their stories on interpersonal conflict at the workplace?
2. How do teachers in community schools describe professional relationships under interpersonal conflict?
3. How do teachers respond to interpersonal conflicts in community schools?

Rationale of the Study

The phenomenon of interpersonal conflict among teachers in community school have not received adequate attention either in knowledge generation or as a matter of concern for improving quality of community school. Despite the potential of such conflict severely affecting learning outcomes and overall school environment, in context of Nepal, studies nom interpersonal conflict among teacher remains very limited. Therefore, understanding this phenomenon within this existing context and its effects is essential to devise strategies, policies, and actions to address the problem effectively.

Likewise, the study is theoretically framed to understand interpersonal conflict among teachers as a structural phenomenon whereby institutional factors like norms power and hierarchy, operational within community schools are detrimental to cause, and response of teachers to interpersonal conflict. In context like Nepal where structural norms and socio-cultural practices are conducive for interpersonal conflict it is imperative to understand how interpersonal conflict are shaped by the institution individuals are associated with including their workplace. Thus, this study will provide insights into how institutional structure of community schools share interpersonal conflict among teachers which can informal institutional reform to improve community schools in Nepal.

Furthermore, by examining the lived experiences of teachers, the study aims to understand interpersonal conflict among teachers through their interpretation of it. This approach also enables us to understand how interpersonal conflict unfolds and how events shape each other. Additionally, since the study aims to understand how institutional and socio-cultural norm influence interpersonal conflict, a rich depth on the understanding of the complexity of these factors and their relation to interpersonal conflict is essential. Narrative inquiry is thus suited to investigating such complex and layered phenomenon.

Thus, this study fills the existing evidence gap on conflict between teachers in Nepal's community schools. By centering on teachers' experiences, it offered practical insights into how schools can foster collaboration, professional respect, and effective conflict resolution strategies.

Structure of the Study

The study has seven chapters. The first chapter provides a background on the study; the second chapter is dedicated to the review of related literature to support the

design and presentation of the study. The third chapter is on research methodology, detailing the processes of design and data collection as well as the analysis processes. Chapter four, five, and six focus on presenting the stories and interpretations in line with the research question. Chapter four is about the opinion and experience of interpersonal conflict among teachers. Chapter five is focused on understanding cause and effect, and the sixth chapter is about the coping strategies of teachers for interpersonal conflict. The seventh and the final chapter present the conclusion, and overall reflections form the study.

Chapter Synthesis

This chapter establishes the context for understanding interpersonal conflict and situating it within the community school context of Nepal. In discussing how the study was ideated and broader discussion on workplace conflict as an organizational phenomenon, along with contextual information, this chapter also outlines the statement of problem, purpose and research questions that frame the study for using narrative inquiry by clarifying its focus on exploring how interpersonal conflict are lived and experienced by community teachers in their day to day professional lives.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the literature review on the issue of interpersonal conflict in the workplace and the importance of teacher well-being for better learning outcomes. Based on the literature the theoretical framework and research gap are also presented in this section. The chapter is structured to provide a thematic review on the interpersonal conflict at workplace focusing on community school and to understand School as an institution. This is followed by a review of literature on interpersonal conflict in organization.

Thematic Review

The research on interpersonal conflict in organizations is well established with evidence across studies showing that such conflicts significantly hamper organizational synergy and staff wellbeing. However, its specific implications for community schoolteachers specially in Nepal have received limited attention as a field of study. In global context as well, the existing body of literature predominantly focuses on corporate environments (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008) and broader aspects of workplace conflict (Lub et al., 2014). In the case of Nepal, even in corporate setting, research is much scarcer.

Interpersonal conflict at workplace is a serious operational challenge for organization management. Researches by multiple scholars have shown that interpersonal conflicts at workplace can damage work relationships, affect well-being, and reduces productivity (Bella, 2023; Glilekpe et al., 2022; Tamunodiepiriye et al., 2022). Not just at personal level but even at institutional level interpersonal conflict has implication as found by Appelbaum et al. (2022). His study showed that if conflict is not managed effectively the institutional synergy could not be established, which was crucial for successful organizational management.

This phenomenon becomes more complex in educational settings. Recent studies show that interpersonal conflict at workplace increase stress, lower motivation and compromise the quality of teaching (Abdullah et al., 2025; Nifriza et al., 2024; Tommandru et al., 2024; Yidana, 2022). Additionally interpersonal relationships are also key dimension contributing to teacher's job stress alongside workloads, professional recognition, and time and resource constraint (Abdullah & Ismail, 2019).

Teachers who were experiencing interpersonal conflict at work were also experiencing psychological difficulties, and burnouts more often than those who did not experience it (Cao et al., 2025; Lee & Chae, 2024). One study among elementary school teachers found that interpersonal conflicts at workplace was among the five main job stressor components for teachers (Dwianasari et al., 2022). While studies in educational setting do highlight the impact of interpersonal conflict among teachers at individual level, they do not provide similar depth in understanding how teachers respond to such situations and how those responses affect the overall work practices among teachers.

Regarding causes of interpersonal conflict in community schools, studies conducted in different educational contexts have identified several. In Nigeria it was found that the interpersonal conflicts in public schools were caused by intergroup relations, personal practices, school's governance structure and cultural differences (Ogharen et al., 2022). Other studies on similar issues has identified additional factors including competition for resource and position, poor communication, and practices of favoritism by school leaders (Mapolisa & Tshabalala, 2016; Seong Yi Jeon, 2024). The existing literature provides strong evidence of why interpersonal conflict occurs. However, the inter-relation among these causes is not investigated at similar depth. This is important because for instance practice of favoritism may significantly influence the outcome of the competition of resource and position affecting both result and intensity of conflict. Most of these studies look at the causes of interpersonal conflict in isolation or as an objective factor. This limits a more comprehensive understanding of causes as these approaches are inadequate in understanding the complexity and interpretation of the causes as a layered and subjective factor.

Looking into the South Asian context, female teachers were disproportionately impacted by interpersonal conflict at workplace. The causes of these conflicts includes cultural defined gender roles, and social hierarchy such as caste, ethnicity, and religion besides the ones mentioned above (Gilani et al., 2021; Syed et al., 2019). However, even in South Asian context the inter-relation of the causes is not adequately explored In Nepal, head teachers' leadership style was found to have significantly influence teacher relationships with teachers in high-achieving schools reporting more positive interpersonal dynamics compared to their counterparts in low-achieving schools (Khanal, 2021). More pressingly, the available literature in Nepal is

limited in exploring interpersonal conflict within education setting. There is scarcity of literature that focuses on interpersonal conflict in education setting as the core area of investigation. The scarcity is more acute in presenting the teacher's perspective on how they interpret interpersonal conflict at workplace in community schools in Nepal.

Referring to the studies, it can be said that conflict is a dynamic and pervasive phenomenon stemming from prevalent norms and practices. With lack of research focused on conflict among community schoolteachers in Nepal, there exists a gap in comprehending the complexities of this problem in the field of education. This research aims to shed light on the effects of interpersonal conflict by examining the views and opinions of teachers on the issue.

Interpersonal Conflict: Nature and Manifestation

Interpersonal conflict are situations where individual experience discord and dissonance often characterized by negative affects like stress (Gilin Oore et al., 2015). At work it is generally observed when parties view each other as having conflicting interests, identity, sense of worth (Gordiienko-Mytrofanova et al., 2023).

Interpersonal conflict is a situation where there are colleagues who have disagreements due to differences in perspectives, goals, values, or approach to work. These often include as a result of perceived threats or incompatibilities in the workplace (Hoogenboom et al., 2024; Valdes, 2023). It is common occurrence where people disagree driven by incompatible needs or desire and cause stress leading to negative emotional state (Bao et al., 2016). A common theme around definition of interpersonal conflict at work is that it is about disagreement and tension between colleagues, driven by incompatibility in perception especially around goal, values, growth, behavior, and dignity. This conflict manifests usually as emotional and psychological stress.

At school setting this conflict is a complex phenomenon that has evolved with the changes in systems, practices, and dynamics. Especially in resource and opportunity constraint context individuals often compete using this limited resource and opportunities to pursue personal goals and growth. This tussle is further compounded in context that are politically charged or polarized (Denti et al., 2024; Dogan, 2016; Maljanović Hrustemović & Hadžić, 2024; Wimbush & Duffield, 1985). Based on this empirical evidence in relation to the operational context of community school in Nepal, the situation is highly conducive for interpersonal conflict among

teachers in community school. The lack of studies however limits understanding on the extent of prevalence, its nature, and manifestation.

Teacher's Relationship and Learning Outcomes

A key prerequisite for a thriving school environment is teacher collaboration. Collaboration among teachers is important because it allows them to share knowledge and provide support to one another which is essential for effective teaching and learning. Empirical evidence also shows that teacher cooperation can improve the learning outcomes for students. One such study (Moolenaar, 2012) shows that students in schools where teachers cooperated frequently performed better on standardized tests than students in schools with less collaboration. Another study (Yoon et al., 2007) discovered that collaborative teacher professional development programs increased student success. Likewise, healthy professional relations between teachers are attributed to better student management, improved learning outcomes, higher job satisfaction, and better efficiency (Fullan et al., 2015; Ingersoll, 2001).

Interpersonal conflict in the workplace is a growing problem, and public schools are also vulnerable to this with teachers from different backgrounds working together. This can lead to conflict as teachers have different values, beliefs, and work styles. Furthermore, teachers also have different experiences and have different outlooks. As a result, they may have different expectations about work and how it should be done.

Workplace interpersonal conflict may negatively affect public school operations in number of ways. Because teachers in conflict find it difficult to work together, one of the primary impacts is a drop in the motivation and collaboration required for good teaching-learning. As a result, they may not be able to collaborate, share information, adapt, or be as creative as they would be if they were not at odds.

The lack of motivation or morale can also lead to reduced job satisfaction with teachers looking for other opportunities and at risk of quitting.

Hence, the workplace for teachers must be free of conflict and promote collective actions among teachers toward a common goal. Therefore, mitigation of conflict becomes essential to improve the school environment. To ensure this, it is equally important to study the extent of prevalence, and its effects in a specific context to better address the problem.

Community School in Nepal as a Workplace

Nepal's community schools carry their own dynamics. Top-down decision-making is common in community schools, and choices are heavily influenced by the strength of informal authority and personal relationships. These create several problems like lack of cooperation among staff, limited use of evidence in planning, and organizational politics (Acharya & Sigdel, 2024; Neupane, 2018). Likewise, social norms such as the traditional respect for elders often means that senior teachers and administrators hold authorities, which may limit the voice and innovation of younger teachers (Dhakal & Bhattarai, 2020; Regmi, 1993). Additionally, a gap among workforce caused by limited digital literacy among older educators can create friction with newer, tech-savvy teachers pushing who might push for pedagogical modernization (Baniya et al., 2022). Similarly, community schoolteachers come from different political and economic contexts and experiences. Many senior teachers who are still working began their careers during the politically unstable period of Nepal's in late 2000s and 2010s. These groups often place higher value on job security and traditional teaching methods. On the other hand, younger teachers often have more modern training, digital skills, and exposure. These different experiences influence not just work values but also willingness to work together, which might lead to tensions over roles, responsibilities, and reform adoption. (Agrawal & Jain, 2020; Gharti, 2023; Khatri, 2023). These tensions may then create friction over curriculum design, classroom management, and even day-to-day communication.

So, in community schools, conflicts can manifest as resistance to shared vision, avoidance of collaboration, or exclusion of certain groups from decision-making and benefit sharing. These influence student learning because interpersonal conflict can create a divided faculty, reducing alignment on strategies and goals. In community schools, where school leadership may already find it difficult to adapt to changing structures and political and economic contexts, interpersonal conflict hinders the implementation of collective pedagogical reforms and inclusive practices (Gharti, 2023; Vaux et al., 2006).

Theoretical Framework

The study was based on two theories: Dahrendorf's Authority-Relation conflict theory and social identity theory. The combination of these theories provides an effective lens for understanding the cause, manifestation, and impact of interpersonal conflict among teachers in community schools.

The choice of Dahrendorf's authority-relationship primarily made because the study aims to understand interpersonal conflict among community schoolteachers as an institutional phenomenon. This theoretical framework allows the study to understand how institutional norms, and formal and informal authority operating within the school setting influences the interpersonal conflict among its workforces. As discussed in previous chapters, the community schools in Nepal are characterized by layered and complex structural dynamics defined by traditional norms around hierarchy, power, or gender role expectations create inequalities that may result in conflict. Additionally, Dahrendorf (1959) forwards the idea that traditional notions of authority usually defined by formal positions or hierarchical power alone do not define authority. Authority are more fluid and includes control over resources, informal influence, access to decision making, access to leadership and social capital within groups. (Binns, 1977; Dahrendorf, 1959; De Kadt, 1965; Ikrom, 2016). This will thus enable the study to understand the institutional structures operating within community schools in the form of these informal authorities that act as a source or explain interpersonal conflict.

The decision on the use of authority-relations conflict theory was also significantly influenced by careful review of the other popular theoretical frameworks for understanding interpersonal conflict. One such theory is Task-Relationship conflict framework forwarded by Jehn in 1995. The theory helps understand conflict at workplace from two distinct lens i.e. task based which are disagreements around ideas, goal, methods and relationship based which are emotionally driven (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1995; Jehn et al., 1999; Moldovan, 2020; Oruç, 2024) . This theory thus looks at conflict at a personal level with institution as context rather than influencing factor (Loughry, 2014; Shahzad et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2017). Similarly, Micropolitical theory is useful in understanding the power dynamics, alliances and resource competition and decision-making practices within schools (Ball, 2012; Blasé 1993, 2002; Blase & Anderson, 1995). It is relevant in context of Nepal to understand how school governance or leadership operates and how individual navigate the organizational settings determined by personal influence and power. But the theory focuses on the use of power and influence and does not how formal or informal authority structures so as the influence interpersonal conflicts (Achinstein, 2002; Boyd, 1987; Flessa, 2009). Additionally, Conflict management style theory and organizational justice theory were also reviewed. Conflict

management style theory focused on behavioral strategies but did not adequately focus on how responses are shaped by existing structures or institutional norms (Blake & Mouton, 1994; Collinson, 2003; Deetz & Simpson, 2004; Rahim, 2003; Thomas, 1992). Similarly, Organizational justice theory was suitable to examine how individual's reaction and behaviors are shaped by their perception of fairness within work setting. While this theory can provide insight into how an individual's perception creates or affects interpersonal conflict and reaction to it, this theory does not adequately examine how norms and practices are detrimental to institutional decisions. (Adams, 1965; Colquitt, 2001; Cropanzano et al., 2001; Deetz, 1992; Greenberg, 1987; Holtz & Harold, 2009). Hence, authority-relationship theory was chosen over these theories.

Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), will provide additional insight into how teachers' group identity/memberships and professional identities contribute to interpersonal conflict. Tajfel and Turner (1979, 2001) argue that group association plays a part in how individuals derive their personal identities within society and define interpersonal actions based on the perceived association to groups i.e. actions like favoritism and discrimination are defined by the perceived membership to in-group or out-group. At workplace factors like age, experience, socio-demography characteristics, perceived professional goal, pedagogical philosophies, or other contextual homogeneity leads to formation of groups. Researches have demonstrated that this group (social) identity have influences on conflicts at workplace (Korostelina, 2015; Yang et al., 2022). Thus, this theory will help explain how group-based identity in professional settings connect with interpersonal conflicts among teachers when they perceive threats to group identity and status.

Therefore, for the study these theories were employed to work complementarity to each other in providing a framework for understanding interpersonal conflict among teachers. While Authority-Relation theory explained the structural causes of conflict, the social identity theory explained how interpersonal conflict operated in a context with diverse group identities. Together they will establish a strong framework for the study that will enable a comprehensive understanding of how interpersonal conflict emerges and manifests from the complex interactions of authority and personal identity.

Research Gap

There are literatures that provide valuable insight into the interpersonal conflict in workplace and in educational setting. However, this literature, especially the ones in educational settings, is primarily done in international context. Western literature in interpersonal conflict at workplace is done in context that are highly advanced in terms of management, and accountability with limited effect of informal authorities (Blase & Blase, 2002; Dahiru et al., 2018; Firman et al., 2022; Oyinlade, 2025; Pangestu et al., 2021; Tsuyuguchi, 2025). In contrast, the situation in Nepal is quite different. Nepali institutions are distinguished by the strong impact of informal authority, which is fueled by social and cultural conventions that place a premium on obedience and hierarchy (Acharya & Sigdel, 2024; Ghimire, 2025; Thapa, 2016; Yadav et al., 2024). Therefore, transferring the findings from western setting might not be effective in the context of Nepal.

Additionally, community led school management and governance are complex as within this one system there is presence of community leadership, administrative staff, local government oversight, and the informal authorities (Baral, 2021; Neupane, 2018; Pokhrel, 2023; Yadav et al., 2024). This structure is quite different from corporate environments, where a clear hierarchy and decision-making power are often used to clarify a linear structure (Beheshtifar & Zare, 2013; Klimes, 2015; Oyinlade, 2025; Sauders, 2002). This limit means that the transfer the knowledge from corporate settings to community education setting in Nepal might not be adequate.

Additionally, the knowledge on interpersonal conflict among teachers in community schools in Nepal is further limited by lack of research on the issue as a phenomenon that are influenced by authorities and relations defined by structural norms. Most of the existing research on conflict in the workplace has focused on the resource conflict (Belgasm et al., 2025; Thapa, 2016; Tweedale & Staufenberg, 2024). A comprehensive understanding of the underlying institutional norms and practices as causes as well as an analysis of the interrelationships between causes are frequently hindered by the existing literature's strong tendency to understand the causes of conflict from an objective perspective, such as communication or workload. This is made more difficult by lack of research on the subject that draws on teachers' experiences and narratives.

A critical part of the education system, teachers are key actors in educating and shaping the minds of the next generation (Tsuyuguchi, 2025; United Nation

Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2019). Understanding the causes and effects of interpersonal conflict among them is necessary to better develop mitigation strategies, as it can negatively impact the quality of education that students get (Foghang & Titanji, 2022; Kostara et al., 2025; Mwidege & Tangi, 2021). Therefore, it is important to study the interpersonal conflict among teachers in public schools, especially in a context where the available literature or research is scarce.

Chapter Synthesis

This chapter defines the concept of interpersonal conflict at workplace, and reviews empirical evidence to contextualize interpersonal conflict at workplace to school setting. Literary evidence shows the importance of synergy between teachers, impact of such synergy on learning outcomes, and how community schools should also be viewed from as a workplace. By anchoring the study in Dahrendorf's authority-reaction conflict theory and Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory, the chapter sets the theoretical framework for the study whereby interpersonal conflict will explore as institutional phenomenon that is driven by social identities.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents a discussion and description of the participants chosen for the study, as well as an overview of research design, data analysis, data collection, and procedures. The methodology is presented to provide a comprehensive picture of what was done for designing the study, data collection processes, and data analysis. The chapter also introduces the participants of the story along with processes involved in ensuring quality and ethical standards for the study.

Research Paradigm: Interpretivism

The philosophy of this study was based on the constructivist epistemology of the interpretive paradigm. Through interpretive ontology, researchers put forward the idea that reality was not an objective entity but reflected individuals' experiences, interactions, and interpretations which were subjective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1994). Thus, the study focused on the depth of teachers' experiences, perceptions, and narratives of interpersonal conflict in their workplace. Throughout the research, the emphasis remained on understanding interpersonal conflict as multi-dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon, shaped by unique perspectives and experiences of teachers from different authority standing and groups.

Narrative inquiry through lived experience is also consistent to the use of interpretive ontology. According to, Clandinin & Connelly (2004) and Wei (2023) narrative inquiry puts individuals at the forefront by prioritizing personal stories and perception at the center. This complements the interpretive ontology which values individual interpretation and perception. The study's exploration of how teachers perceived and responded to interpersonal conflict in the institutional context of community schools and to understand ways in which individuals made sense of their experiences validated the use of interpretive ontology. Thus, narrative inquiry based on lived experience strengthens the ontological standing of the study as narrative inquiry accounts for the temporal, contextual, and interdependence of a subject of investigation.

The adaptive approach to "seeking answers" to construct knowledge afforded by the constructivism epistemology (Creswell, 2009; Thanh & Thành, 2015) also aided in ensuring the understanding of the phenomenon under the study was gradually

co-created with the participants through story sharing, interviews, reflections, dialogue, and interpretations. In this study, researchers used their perspective and experience to understand and interpret phenomena through investigating and meaning making of experiences, realities, and perspectives of subject individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts (Creswell, 2009).

The constructivism epistemology thus enabled the researcher to use a subjective perspective and to delve deeper into reality constructed by teachers, that is, how they made sense of interpersonal conflict and how their interpretations were influenced by their environment. Hence, the blend of interpretive ontology and constructive epistemology made the information generation, and analysis grounded, reliable, and seamless with subjective interpretations and inclusion of nuances along with general themes. The ontology ensured the focus remained on understanding the subjective realities of teachers, and constructive epistemology guided the process of knowledge construction through narrative inquiry.

Narrative Inquiry

The study was ideated and designed with the understanding that interpersonal conflict was an experiential phenomenon. It uses lived experience narrative inquiry as the study aims to understand interpersonal conflict as part of the workplace i.e. conflict is “*part of being-in-context*” (Kim, 2016). As such its nature was subjective to individual, and it was also highly personal in its constructions shaped by experience of working within the context. The idea for the study, as outlined in the first chapter, was derived from the notion that interpersonal conflict at workplace and its causes are perceived, experienced, and defined, at individual level through experience. This notion was fostered by the reaction or representation of interpersonal conflict at workplace by my family members.

Kim (2016) states that narrative inquires is one of the best approaches if the concern of a study is the experience and the subject matter is highly dependent on personality, context, emotions, interpretations other subjective social or personal characteristics of the individual experiencing it. Additionally, narrative inquiry was an approach framed around meanings individuals gave to their experience through their personal stories of lived experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Wei, 2023). Because of these strengths and compatibility with the study's conceptual framework, narrative inquiry was a perfect method for examining how teachers dealt with interpersonal conflict at work.

According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990, 2006), narrative inquiry is based on the idea that people live their lives through stories. So, by using this method, the researcher had the ability to examine the nuanced nature and complexity of interpersonal relationships and document how teachers perceived, handled, and resolved conflicts in their work lives (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Narrative inquiry was also relevant for its ability to illuminate the social, temporal, and contextual dimensions of experience, making it ideal for examining sensitive, context-dependent phenomena such as workplace conflict between generational groups (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Wei, 2023).

They make sense of their experiences by telling and retelling them. Narrative inquiry studied experience as a story and involved thinking narratively as well as collecting stories. It focused on three key dimensions: temporality (past, present, and future), sociality (personal feelings and social context), and place (the specific environment). Focus on these dimensions by narrative inquiries are important because that stories were connected to time, social relationships, and setting (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

The study used one-on-one interviews to “*enter participants’ narrative world*” (Kim, 2016), encouraging teachers to share their experiences and feelings about interpersonal conflict. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) and Kim (2016) state that narrative inquiry is a collaborative process where the researcher and participant worked together to create meaningful stories. Hence, one-on-one interviews created space for such collaboration. Similarly, the study also included observations of teachers in their natural work environments which provided valuable context. The observation helped researchers to connect the stories shared during interviews to the context and environment, which enhanced story creation process.

Mertova and Webster (2007) emphasized the importance of “*critical events*” in narrative inquiry. They define “critical events” as significant moments in participants’ stories that shape their understanding and responses. The study used similar “critical events” in the teacher’s lives to understand their experience and relate how interpersonal conflict affected teachers’ work.

Interpretive paradigm was used to interpret the results. Identifying patterns and meanings in the data while respecting each participant’s unique experience was central; to this (DeGiano et al., 2025; Denny & Weckesser, 2022). The purpose of

interpretative paradigms to comprehend various realities was reinforced by narrative inquiry's emphasis on participant voices (Wei, 2023).

As suggested by Connelly and Clandinin (2006) and Wei (2023) a reflective and dialogic approach was used to engage participants in their natural environments, aligning with narrative inquiry's emphasis on the importance of place and context. Multiple sources of data, such as interviews and observations, were combined to provide a full picture of the phenomenon.

Through interviews and observations, the study explored how interpersonal conflict challenged teachers in their daily work. To get from raw data to findings, the gathered stories were examined using methods such as broadening, burrowing, and storing/restoring (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Wei, 2023). Key moments in teachers' narratives that demonstrated how conflict shaped their experiences were identified with the use of Mertova and Webster's (2007) emphasis on critical events. The intricacy and richness of the teachers' narratives were captured by this technique. The meaning making process followed Mishler's typology (2009) as suggested by Kim (2016). In summary, drawing on the work of Kim (2016), Mishler (2009), Connelly and Clandinin (1990, 2006) and Mertova and Webster (2007) ensured that this narrative inquiry was both theoretically sound and practical for exploring interpersonal conflict among teachers.

Study Area and Participants

The research was limited to Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC). The targeted participants of the study were teachers at community schools within KMC. One of the reasons for focusing on Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) is that in their recent initiatives have sought to enhance teachers' capacity in innovative and modern teaching practices. One of KMC's initiatives to support professional growth, mentoring, and cooperative learning settings is the Teacher College Program, which was launched in 2024. These initiatives aim to encourage knowledge sharing and mutual respect, mitigate conflicts and enhance harmony in Kathmandu's community schools. Hence, a narrative exploration of teachers' experiences around interpersonal conflict can be useful for local government by serving as a knowledge base for similar efforts in other local governments. However, it should also be noted that the community schools in Kathmandu have a different operational context due to their access to resources and connectivity compared to schools in most of the rural areas.

This means that the stories from these stories may not adequately reflect those of rural community schools.

The study selected participants using purposive sampling, which was appropriate for qualitative studies that required in-depth exploration of specific subgroups (Etikan et al., 2015). Purposive sampling strengthened the relevance and depth of the data gathered by enabling the deliberate selection of individuals who had firsthand knowledge of the topic being studied. A total of five participants from two schools were interviewed.

The selection of the participants began with school visits. The researcher reached out to seven schools with clear communication on the objective, timeline, and use of the study. Out of the seven, three schools showed willingness to support. Once the researcher received this, school visits were planned to understand the context and to engage with staff and teachers to identify participants who could deliver rich information against the research question. Across the three schools, the researcher identified 17 potential participants. However, the majority (10) did not show willingness to talk or provide information, and two teachers from one of the three schools could not be reached at the time of data collection (because schools were shut down due to the Gen-Z movement in September). The remaining five participants from the two schools were then interviewed.

The number of participant was based on the principal of information power that says more information the sample holds, relevant for the actual study, the lower amount of participants is needed (Malterud et al., 2016). This strategy also aligns with Kim's (2016) assertion that narrative inquirer should refrain from prescribing to ideas like saturation and representativeness as narrative inquiry is about "*depth of storied experience*" and not the breadth.

The study was designed with a very precise focus on exploring interpersonal conflict among community schoolteachers within prevalent authority structure (both formal and informal) using narrative inquiry. This focus limits the scope of understanding teachers experience of interpersonal conflict. Through purposive sampling the study selected participants because they had experienced interpersonal conflict within the context of community schools as workplace. Meaning all the participants were selected because they held more information relevant for the study than others.

Similarly, Kim bases her recommendation for sample size on the argument that the more participant one includes the less narrative depth can be sustained. Thus, the choice of sample was made based on the ability to sustain the engagement with participants for the depth of the information. A larger sample would have made interactions and engagement with the participants less frequent or fragmented them split in short session. Both these would have significantly impacted on the quality of engagement. To ensure the depth of the engagement the interview was preceded by extensive observation of the school and, more particularly, staff room observations. The researcher spent at least three days at each school identifying participants, understanding staff dynamics and understanding the overall school environment. The researcher embedded information from these observations as questions or probes during the interview. Additionally, average one-on-one engagement time was about nine hours for each participant spread across 4 to 6 days (depending on participants preference).

Out of the five participants, two were female and three were male. Further, two male and one female were below the age of 40. Two of the teachers were new to the profession with under three and a half years of experience, while two others had spent over one and a half decades teaching.

Introduction of the Participants.

Pseudonyms were used to protect participant's identity. The pseudonyms were chosen to reflect demographic characteristics and to maintain the human identity of participants.

Gopi

A teacher for more than two decades years, Gopi, was highly experienced. He had worked in schools across several districts in Nepal. Gopi showed high satisfaction with his career choice but also demonstrated some regrets.

Kamal

Kamal is almost a mid-career teacher. He considers himself outspoken and direct, and he is confident. He portrays himself as capable and is updated on politics. These self-perception and characteristics shaped how he experiences, navigates and interprets interpersonal conflict.

Mina

Mina had been teaching for more than a decade. Unlike most of the teachers who were interviewed she viewed teaching just as a profession. She taught because

teaching was what she had always done. She did not associate teaching with her personal values, sense of achievement, or satisfaction. She viewed it as a job that earned her living.

Ram

Ram was a young teacher who is relatively new to the profession. He viewed teaching as both a temporary role and a backup if things did not work out as planned. Yet despite this practical attitude, Ram expressed an interest in trying new ideas in the classroom and giving students opportunities beyond textbooks.

Sita

Sita was a young teacher with less than five years of experience. She moved to Kathmandu after marriage. Before teaching, she worked in a different field. Teaching emerged as a practical and timely choice for her after when she first joined, now it had become her passion. Sita, with her passion was highly shaped by her care for students, emotional investment in them, and a sense of responsibility.

Researcher's Positionality

Narrative inquiry approach recognizes that the researchers as individuals can influence the process of storytelling (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Kim 2016; Wei, 2023). Kim (2016) states that a researcher's background can shape trust, interpretation, and power dynamics between the researcher and the narrator. Therefore, analytical presentation of how a researcher's presence shaped the interaction with participant is crucial.

I came with professional background of working in development sector focusing on improving education system strengthening. As such I was knowledgeable on the legal and operational framework of community schools. Potential participants were made aware of this in the very first meeting. This worked as an ice breaker between the participants. The participants were able to use examples and context to share their stories that would be understandable only to the person who knows the community schools in Nepal. Furthermore, I also felt that this allowed for smooth story telling as the participants did not have to interrupt a flow to explain technical or school/teaching specific contents. However, I also felt that the awareness about my professional background led the participants to frame their stories more around technical frames which otherwise could have been shared with deeper emotional framing.

Similarly, as an outsider who is seeking stories, a power dynamic was created where I was seen as an investigative authority. This was indicated by moments of hesitation, preference to indirect reference, or topic redirects during initial contacts. I took this as a natural process of narrative inquiry and a common approach shaped by culture and norms. The effects of this were reduced with extensive time I spent with the participants to build relationships and trust. However, it was not completely mitigated this realization has also shaped the interpretation to aptly present what was expressed as well as what was constrained.

My personal experience of working in similar cultural settings and engagement with community schools also influenced how I interpreted the narratives. This was beneficial as it sharpened my observation on the other hand, it also meant that I was at constant risk of assigning meanings to dimensions or issues influenced by my experience. To mitigate this, I kept extensive field notes of both my observations and interactions. This allowed me to keep track of how I interpreted things. I revisited that interpretation with every new observation, information or interaction, and revisited it to move away from my personal inclinations.

Entering Participants' World

The primary source of the story was participant interview. The interviews were done one-on-one and in person. These interviews were semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews are particularly effective in narrative inquiry, as they provide a guiding framework while enabling participants to share their experiences in their own words (Seidman, 2013).

An area of conversation was developed to assist the interview to follow up on research questions. Additionally, the questions and probing were also shaped by the information gathered through the observation visits and interactions with other teachers and administrative staff. The observation notes were particularly important in situating the participants within the school context during analysis. The interviews were conducted only after consent was received from the participants. (Clandinin, 2018). On average the one-on-one engagement time was about nine hours for each participant spread across 4 to 6 days (depending on participants preference).

Field notes were kept after each formal and informal discussion in this study because they are one of the crucial methods for gathering data and the foundation of narrative research designs (Kim, 2016).

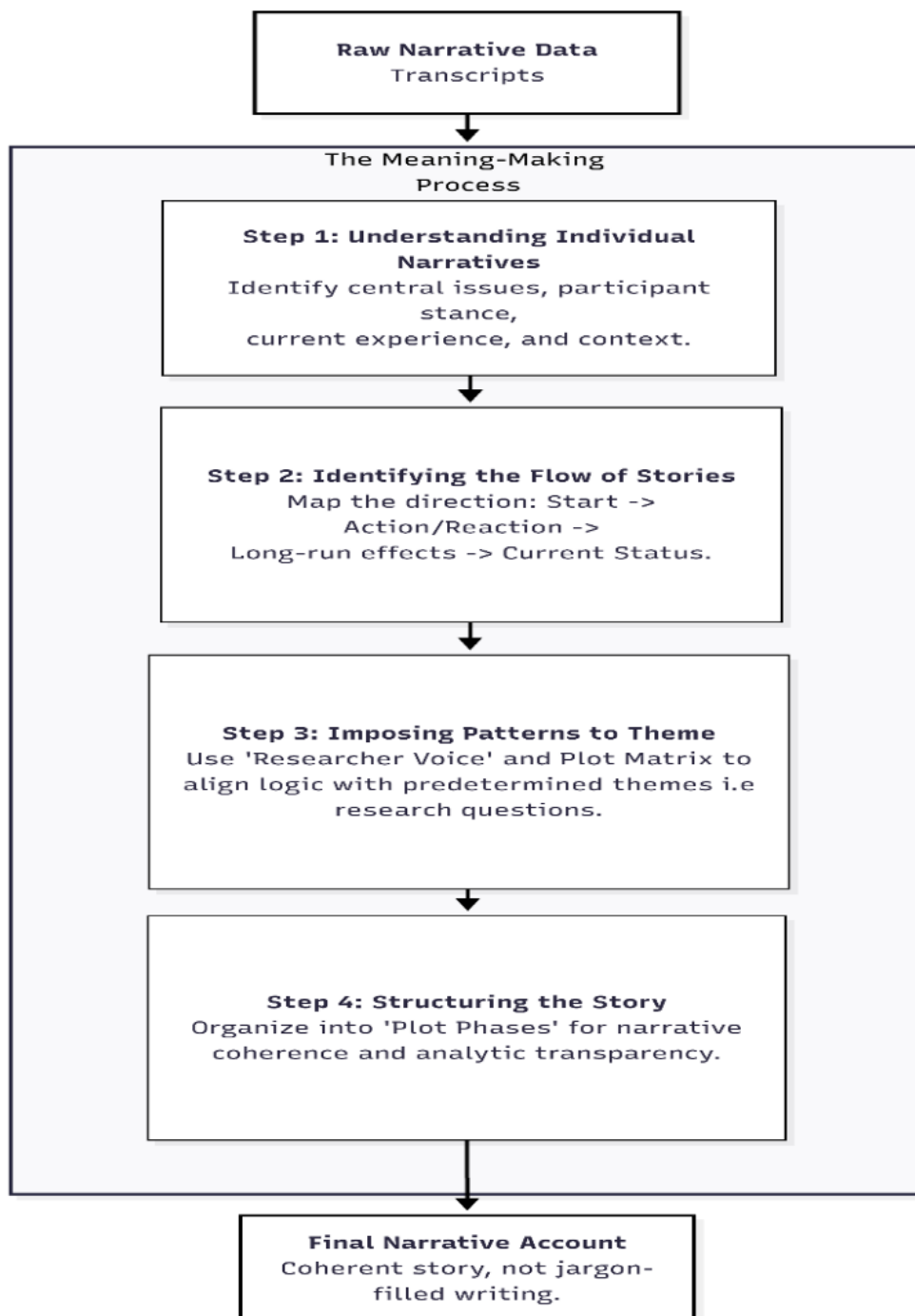
Meaning Making Process

The meaning making process followed the guidance provided by Kim (2016). More specifically Mishler's typology (2009) i.e. "*Imposing a told story on telling: Identifying a story patterns*" as suggest by Kim (2016) was used. Under this typology story patterns are identified during the story writing phase to give it a structure. It is primarily selected because it is best suited if there were some predetermined themes that we would want to structure the presentation of the story. It is imperative to understand that this use of patterns and predetermination of them is not done in the design or story collection phase. They do not shape the design of the study, selection of participants, or interactions. The predetermined themes are only done when writing the narrative story to give it structure and coherence. For this study the predetermined themes for structuring the stories were the three research questions it set out to answer. This method was also useful because it allowed for identification of "*shared pattern*" across multiple participants (Kim.2016)

Under this typology the meaning making process underwent four distinct steps as outlined by Kim (2016) and Mishler (2009).

Figure 1

Illustration of the Typology Used for Meaning Making



Step-1 Understanding Individual Narratives

Before the stories were imposed within theme, a thorough review of each narrative experience was done. This was done to understand the overall story of participants regarding interpersonal conflict. This was important to understand each participant from the lens of interpersonal conflict. This process also helped to identify other emerging themes, logics, connectors, pivots, and context of each story. At the

core of this step was to understand the central issue around interpersonal conflict, what was the participant's stance, and what the participant was experiencing now in relation to the issue and the stance. (Kim, 2016; Mishler, 2009)

Step-2: Identifying The Flow of Stories

Once individual stories were understood around the three questions, the next step was to identify what direction each story took. i.e. How it started (Context, issues, people), what happened immediately after (Action/reaction, escalation, deescalation), what happened in longer run (ripple, relationship, work, approach, condition, normalization) What is the status (resolved, unresolved, deferred). This helped to position each participant within the interpersonal conflict. This question also helped to see an overarching pattern. (Kim, 2016; Mishler, 2009)

Step-3 Imposing Patterns to the Theme.

The third step was focused on identifying patterns and logic that responded to the predetermined theme. For example, for constructing stories for the first theme i.e. experience and opinion, each narrative was re-reviewed to identify information that responded to the questions of what was the nature of conflict? How did the participant experience it as? What were the conditions? What was the response? What was their opinion regarding these?

Like stated in Kim (2016) this process involved understanding and identifying logics of events to build a narrative around experience and not just focusing on "listing the quotes." This suggestion has also been incorporated into the overall structure of the stories where narrations are prioritized rather than excessive use of quotes. "Using quotes Sparingly and functionally" (Kim, 2016; Mishler, 2009). As suggested by Kim (2016) and Mishler (2009) three considerations were taken to structure the stories; how the interpersonal conflict unfolded? How did the participants view themselves and the other parties within the structure of school (Positioning)? and connection and meanings of feelings and events shared?

So, to develop the story the coding did not just focus on quotes that directly responded to the questions but the Idea of "*My voice*" as a researcher (Kim,2016) was used to plot logics from the narrations. Additionally plot matrix was used to impose patterns into the three predefined themes.

Step 4- Structuring the Story

This step was crucial to transform the imposed pattern into a coherent and analytical presentation of the participant's narratives. Here, the contents were

organized to clearly communicate the findings as plot phases. This step is about creating “narrative coherence and analytic transparency, Readers must be able to see the story unfold in a structured way without mistaking it for thematic coding” (Kim, 2016).

As mentioned earlier, the three themes were treated as story phase. Then the plot logics (what happens here) are pulled together to answer what occurred, how participant navigated into, through, or out of the plot (Kim, 2016; Mishler, 2009). As suggested by Kim (2016) it was written as a story and not jargon-filled academic writing.

Quality Standards

The quality standards of the study were primarily based on the idea of Methodological congruence as presented by Kim (2016). Kim’s proposition for quality standards of a Narrative inquiry is based on the notion that the alignment of quality standards should be with dimensions like understanding, coherence, plausibility and resonance as narrative inquiries are concerned with experience, and interpretations as evidence. Similarly, she also emphasizes to attain the methodological congruence, quality should be embedded in design, field work, and in analysis and should not be assumed to be attainable by adding rigor to analysis.

To meet the quality standards of the narrative inquiry as outlined by Kim (2016), the study was framed to answer the questions about experience of teachers and meaning assigned by them to the subject of study i.e. interpersonal conflict at workplace. This framing is explicitly spelled out in research questions. The study also prioritized experience of interpersonal conflict in workplace when selecting participants rather than representation or any other dimensions. Likewise, during field level data collection deliberate efforts like choice of location, multiple visits, and use of areas of conversation rather than structured questions all allowed participants to reflect, be open and emotional, and to use the interaction for self-understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, during analysis, as suggested by Kim (2016), the study ensured quality by prioritizing participants’ meaning making and opinion rather than facts as stated followed by constructing a plot logic for narrative coherence. These were then synthesized using analytical writing structure with judicious use of quotations.

In addition to aforementioned steps for methodological quality, the study also ensured the process was credible, trustworthy, and authentic, with priority given to natural settings during interviews, interactions, and observation. The focus was also

on linking findings with the context, to ensure that the information gathered was credible and trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As part of quality assurance, the study also addresses potential power dynamics between teachers during interviews. To manage these dynamics and create a safe and respectful environment for all participants, interviews were conducted individually in a neutral, supportive setting. While initial discussions were carried out on the school premises, the in-depth interviews were conducted outside (3 in the home of participants and 2 at a café) in line with the participants' preference. The researcher remained attentive to any signs of discomfort or hesitation, ensuring that all participants felt respected and empowered to share their perspectives honestly as suggested by Seidman (2013). Likewise, clear communications on purpose, use, and plans for the study were maintained with all the stakeholders to ensure trustworthiness in the information, system, and approaches used. Furthermore, all the interactions and observations were well-documented and carefully analyzed, and daily field notes were maintained.

To complement these quality standard procedures the three quality pillars of narrative inquiry as recommended by Clandinin (2018) temporality, sociality, and spatiality were also embedded in the entire process.

Temporality

A person's life and all its events are in temporal transition (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004) as such the past, present, and future are all interconnected. The idea of temporality suggests that the event in the past shapes the actions in present, while still holding potential for affecting future (Adair & Schulenkorf, 2013; Maggetti et al., 2013; Van Der Riet & Haydon, 2017). The study maintained constant awareness of this concept of temporality in the framing of research questions, interactions, interviews and analysis. The structure of the story is also reflective of this approach.

Sociality

The concept of sociality enables a narrative inquirer to value the importance of judiciousness in building relation between researcher and the participant, and respect to the emotions and feelings not just during interactions but also analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; Downey et al., 2014). Therefore, careful thought and ample time was given to first building a rapport with each participant, which included multiple visits and talks, efforts to have a more humanized understanding of the participant through hobbies, beliefs, ideas, etc., and it entailed understanding the personality of the participant.

Place

Location can serve as a strong anchor for memories while at the same time define their behavior (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Value of place in narrating stories should be evident in story collection as well as analysis to maintain a quality standard of research (Czyżowska & Gurba, 2021). In understanding the experience, it is also equally important to understand where the experience happened as place can affect what people do including their response to conflict situation (Maggetti et al., 2013). Hence, the study also investigated how places or context have shaped the interpersonal conflict.

Ethical Consideration

Deep personal storytelling is the key to a narrative inquiry. This very requirement also made ethical considerations even more important. Written consents were secured from all participants for data collection, and only the researcher will have access to personally identifiable information. The participants were thoroughly oriented on the study's nature, scope, content, and purpose. They were appraised for all possible risks and steps the study will take to ensure confidentiality. The participants were also oriented towards their right to withdraw consent at any time of data collection and were given the opportunity to ask questions. Participation was voluntary.

Confidentiality was strictly maintained and carefully managed. Participants were given the option to choose whether to share specific details of their stories. In no circumstance were their identities and any sensitive information shared. Additionally, participants were given a clear understanding of how their stories would be used in the research and would be allowed to withdraw their consent at any point during the data collection process. Likewise, a safe and respectful environment was created for the participants during all interactions and observations.

Chapter Synthesis

The philosophy of the study is based on constructive epistemology of interpretive paradigm. The methodology of the study is heavily grounded in Kim's framework providing the foundational methodological philosophy for the study. Complementing this methodology, and as one of the recommendations by Kim, Mishler's typology for story crafting offered the structure for unpacking the raw information into a coherent narrative. By applying Mishler's models, the study moves

beyond simply summarizing what the participants said, allowing for a rigorous examination of the structure and context of their narratives.

CHAPTER IV

THE EXPERIENCE AND OPINION OF INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

This chapter deals with the experience and opinion of the teachers from community schools in Kathmandu regarding interpersonal conflict in their workplace. Stories of five participants from two community schools are presented here followed by the interpretation based on the theoretical framework.

Losing Ground with Grace: Gopi's Delima

It was around August 2024; an all-staff meeting was called to order right after the first terminal examinations were completed. Gopi thought it would be a usual meeting for updates on the marking and results. However, teachers were informed that the school would not require all teachers to enter the results in excel sheet send a complied results to the administration. The teachers were given access to school computer lab. As the principal gave the instructions, he paused. He then openly pointed to Gopi and two other senior teachers and announced that two younger people there would assist them with the entries. Gopi did not find what this disrespectful from the principal but nonetheless he said, *"It felt uncomfortable"*. Being mentioned publicly as someone who needed assistance with doing his work was a moment he did not forget.

Months passed, and the new academic year was set to begin in April-March 2025. Gopi came to school with excitement *"I am always excited about new sessions. I don't know why"* he said. His excitement was, however, short-lived. In the first meeting before the classes began, teachers were informed that classroom instruction would now require presentation, audio, and video materials. With the smart board, the school was now recommending these as the preferred mode of teaching.

Gopi was overwhelmed by this announcement. *"I was lost and dumbfounded"*, he recalled. *"I had no idea how I would manage this."* Remembering how that made him feel he said *"I felt like the schools wanted to push us old teachers aside. Like, subtly wanting us to retire."* To add to this, once again, in front of all staff members, he was asked to seek support from other teachers. He admitted that it was sound and practical advice but nonetheless it hurt his dignity.

Since then, Gopi had been constantly asking for help. While he is appreciative of the assistance, it constantly encroached in his sense of self-worth. The conflict he

experienced was not in the form of arguments but a continuous subtle change that had compelled him to rethink his place as an experienced teacher and question his dignity and identity.

The conflict he faced stemmed from the widening gap between him and his other colleagues in their approach to teaching. Technology had been the driver of this gap. Gopi admitted he was not comfortable with technology. He said, *“I don’t even know how to properly use my phone and people expect me to use smart boards and laptops to teach.”*

Gopi expressed a deep sense of appreciation for his colleagues. They had put in genuine effort to help him wherever and whenever possible. However, as one talked about this one could notice, this assistance often left him feeling helpless. He said, *“Sometimes someone says, ‘Sir, this is simple,’ and laughs. For them it means nothing, but that laughter pinches your heart.”* It showed that the act of support by younger teachers became a source of a sense loss of dignity for Gopi. He further added *“With 22 years of experience, I should be supporting the less experienced teachers, but now I am the one asking for guidance.”* This sense had made him reconsider his role as a teacher and was one of the reasons for him considering retirement.

Gopi’s experience of interpersonal conflict had another dynamic as well. While the sense of loss of dignity made him question his role, internal politics that had been happening in schools’ settings had been shaping his relationships.

Gopi recalled an incident about eighteen months back. The school received an opportunity to send two teachers for a five-day training program on the use of low cost no cost material for pedagogy. The training came with a sizable allowance and was given by a respectable international organization.

The principal listed the names of the teachers who would be attending the training at the staff meeting. He selected two female educators who had never taken part in such trainings previously and were relatively new to the profession. This was in line with the school norm of prioritizing new teachers and those who had not had a chance for external training. Gopi recalled noticing murmurs around the room at that very moment. However, the principal brought things to order.

After the meeting, Gopi started noticing that the mood and conversations in the staff room were centered around the decision by the principal. He recalled how teachers began speculating about how the selections were made and who had

influence on decision making. *“Certain people were saying that the selections were actually made by the vice principal and the teachers were selected because of their closeness to him,”* said Gopi.

As the days passed, this dissatisfaction became more overt. By the third day, two teachers went to the principal and questioned the selection process arguing that the selection was based on personal preferences. To this, the principal called the teachers for an emergency meeting and remembered what the principal asked Gopi to said, *“He asked directly; Anyone who has not participated in any trainings since joining the schools please come forward. Nobody did, we all knew it was just those mams (female teachers).”*

Gopi thought this was the end of it, but he was shocked to find out two days later that one of the female teachers was replaced. He remembered talking to that teacher and finding out that the principal was pressured by SMC chair to make the replacement. *“The teacher used political affiliation to influence the decision,”* said Gopi. Though it was an agreed norm to prioritize opportunities for staff who did not have such exposures teachers or even SMC did not adhere to this norm. Gopi related this incident to a trend he had been observing for over a decade now, where politics and affiliations were becoming a part of day-to-day school operations. He expressed frustration and said *“I hate people to ruins the sanctity of school and the profession which such shameless act. I stay away from these practices and people.”*

Gopi is a self-proclaimed “traditionalist” He comes from the group who accepted political participation of teachers but outside of school. He said, *“Event when I started my career, teacher engaged in politics. But it was more concerned with state and government. Now the politics is part of the day-to-day operations of schools”*. He found this deeply unsettling and was resentful of such practices, he said:

People demand that teachers should not be affiliated with political parties. I don't think that is right. Even teachers have personal rights. The problem is teachers engaging in school level politics. Fighting over who becomes principal, and who becomes the chair of the management committee. If your guy is not in position, do everything to make the life of the one holding the position difficult. These are the termites (Dhamira) who are ruining our schools.

Gopi is highly resentful of teachers who engage in school level politics, he *“cannot tolerate”* teachers gossiping, playing around with issues for personal gains or

engaging in organizational politics. Gopi sharing his opinion on such practices said, *“Our focus should always be on teaching and serving the community not to play politics at your workplace for personal gains. These things spoil the environment. I have seen many schools ruined by internal politics.”*

He was aware that this refusal to engage, and very visible resentment to colleagues engaging in such activities has had some teachers not having relationships with him or even see him as arrogant. All this has made him more emotionally distanced and has led him to reduce communication within his workplace.

Thus, Gopi’s experience of interpersonal conflict is highly personal and is situated within himself. His story shows that change in institutional practices and norms can create a situation whereby teachers find themselves facing conflict. However, such conflicts are not always manifested overtly and may grow and stay within an individual experiencing it.

A Tussle of Authority and Ego: Kamal’s Conflict

The conflict Kamal talked about revolved around a request for leave about 4 months back. He needed leave to settle a long-standing family dispute about ancestral property. He planned a six-day visit to his village to resolve a property dispute. He timed the visit to coincide with the visit of a political leader he knew personally to the area, and Kamal believed that this person’s presence would help him settle the dispute with an advantage to him. He had enough remaining days left and was confident that he would get approval as he was well within his rights.

To make sure, he tallied his remaining leave days and applied accordingly. He went to the vice-principal’s (VP) office to get approval for the leave. Kamal, with a visible anger on his face, recalled that moment when the vice principal said He could not approve such long leave at that date as it overlapped with the leave date of Tom (name changed). The vice principal rejected the leave request that Kamal desperately needed to settle over two years of dispute.

Citing an overlapping of leave with the first two days of the timeframe Kamal requested and arguing that having both teachers absent at the same time would affect classes, the VP’s decision could have a lasting effect on Kamal’s family life. But he said, *“I was not sad or dissuaded, I was furious. Only I know how I controlled myself for exploding. I was well within my right, and I had no mind to let anyone violate that.”*

The VP asked Kamal to postpone his leave for two days so the overlap could be avoided. Kamal did not accept this suggestion. He recalled how he countered and argued that he had submitted the request properly, had legitimate personal reasons, and had earned his leave. He even offered to speak with the other teacher directly to negotiate an arrangement. He said:

I hadn't taken leave since the start of the academic year. Also, there is no rule that says two teachers cannot take leave at the same time. But still considering the practical issues I said I would talk to (the other teacher) and work it out with him.

To add fuel to the fire, the vice principal immediately rejected the idea, saying the other teacher's leave was already approved and recorded in the system. Recalling this, Kamal with a hint of anger, said:

What system was he talking about? As if I don't know how the system works. You tell me, is there anywhere in the world where a person cannot change the date of leave after requesting it? What if I don't need leave? I understand everything. I know how people think and function.

From Kamal's perspective, the refusal had nothing to do with administrative limitation. It was personal. He emphasized that the VP never liked him, and described how they have never gotten along, and that this incident was another example of the VP treating him unfairly. He attributed the entire conflict to the vice principal's attitude, saying, "He did it knowingly to make things difficult for me." The incident with the leave stood out to Kamal not just as an administrative issue but as an example of how he felt treated within the school. As the conversation progressed it became clear that the incident was merely a more visible side to a prolonged and ongoing conflict Kamal was in his workplace.

It was also visible through his narrative that his own personality may have contributed to the tension. When talking about his experience of working with the vice principle he recalled when about a year back, he suggested changes to class schedules so that more intensive subjects like Math's are done early in the morning (he believed that would increase student engagement). Recalling this he said:

Last year also when I suggested rearranging the class schedule to move more demanding subjects like Math in first or second period, he almost jumped at me giving nonsensical reasons. He is always like that, when I try to advise

him, he gets defensive. Maybe because he is fairly new to the post. I have also stopped making efforts.

At another point while talking about school leadership he said, “*Some people have the positions but not the brain*”. He did not say this as sarcasm but gave out a sense that he wholeheartedly believed it to be the case. At different points of conversation Kamal displayed similar belief that the vice principal was not as competent as he was. Kamal’s way of describing the vice principal was sharp, dismissive, and close to disrespectful. Therefore, it is also possible that such an attitude might have fostered the vice principal’s resentment (if that existed) towards him.

Kamal saw himself as a principled person who spoke his mind. But it did not show any awareness of how the pride he took and displayed could also come across as arrogance. His political connections added another layer to this dynamic. He often spoke about politics and his connections with politics. Almost in a boastful manner. He gave out a sense of entitlement that others should recognize for these political links. When the administration handled his leave request like a routine matter instead of demonstrating what he considered appropriate flexibility or respect, he saw it as a deliberate challenge to his status. He said:

They can't push me around just because I am just a subject teacher. If I feel I am being wronged by someone I will fight back. That is my nature. And it would not take me long to defeat them.

The leave dispute itself lasted only a few days with the principal interjecting and Kamal working with the other teacher to reschedule. But Kamal, clearly, still resented. He spoke sharply about the vice principal and admitted that he avoided interacting with him. He viewed the administration as rigid, unfair, and inconsiderate of teachers’ personal needs. He saw the conflict as disrespectful and personally targeted. He did not consider the possibility that his own personality may have fueled the conflict.

Kamal remained convinced that he was treated unfairly and continued to believe the vice principal acted out of personal vendetta. The truth to this could not be confirmed by conversation with Kamal alone. However, interpersonal conflict for Kamal was experienced as a question of dignity, recognition, and authority. Kamal’s experience revealed that interpersonal conflict can be rooted not just in overt hostility but in personality clashes, and unspoken judgments. He interpreted the conflict as

incompetence of leadership and a personal disrespect. But the underlying causes of conflict may as well have arisen from how he positioned himself in relation to colleagues and authority figures. His story showed that conflict might take the form of arguments or direct confrontation but could be shaped by ego, pride, perceived sense of respect/disrespect, and differing interpretations of what “being right” is.

Conflict Through Care: Mina’s Quest for Conditional Fairness

Mina’s most overt conflict with another teacher happened about a year back. It was an ordinary school day for Mina; she came out of the staff room to go to her class. On the way she noticed a student who she knew well not just as a student but also through family ties, sobbing in front of a class door. She approached her and immediately noticed a teacher she described as relatively new (the teacher however had several years of experience). Mina went to talk with the student.

Mina recalled that the girl could not stop sobbing even when talking. The girl informed Mina that she had not completed homework because of all the fuss at home with her brother’s wedding. Mina said that she too was aware and had attended the function. Talking about the incident, Mina said that what unsettled her was not the punishment itself but to whom the punishment was given. She further added *“That girl is one of well performing student. She is very disciplined and dedicated. She is not the kind that creates trouble or misses homework.”*

Later that day, Mina talked to the teacher. Recalling the conversation she said, *“I approached him and said Sir, I saw you made Saru (name changed) stand outside the classroom today. She is a good student, looking at her track record. We should be lenient to such good students.”* She further shared her thoughts on punishment. Mina believed that punishments are necessary, but considerations should be made based on the student in question. Going back to the incident, Mina felt that she made a good suggestion based on experience and judgement, but the teacher did not agree. She recalled how the teacher argued that excuses and leniency would set bad precedent for other students. She thought it was the end of it.

She described herself as a *“peace-loving type”* who stayed away from controversies or interpersonal issues she said that she chooses not to argue further and left saying *“It was just a suggestion from a fellow teacher based on her experience. Its ok if you do not agree but this might demotivate good students.”* Mina thought that the issue was over, however, it was not the end. She noticed that the teacher avoided her. Not just him but she also said that she began noticing changes in how some other

teachers as well, whereby they tried to avoid talking to her “*Maybe because the sir told them that I was a nosey person,*” said Mina. Explaining this She added “*We all get defensive very quickly. If you say something, they avoid you for days. People talk behind backs.*” She further said “*This prevents people from presenting disagreements or provide suggestions. They just keep it to themselves.*”

Despite portraying herself as someone who had been able to stay away from interpersonal conflicts at school, her story revealed that she was very involved with the interpersonal dynamics in schools. She was quite aware of what’s happening around her and how interpersonal relationships played out. She said:

Small things are happening everywhere. When I face such issues, I don't go shouting or anything. I say it nicely. I also say I personally. If they don't listen, then they are also fine. You cannot change grown-up people. All are teachers, teaching people.

Despite this, Mina felt she was distant from the interpersonal dynamics that shaped the relationship between teachers.

She saw her workplace as “like any other workplace”. These characteristics of that workplace in her own narration were jealousies, difference in opinion, misunderstandings which for her are “*small things that happen everywhere*”. This opinion was interesting because she portrayed ignorance on the gravity of its impact on an individual. She herself had quite an opposite experience where this small thing was not small at all.

Mina described how different temperaments had different approaches to student management. However, she firmly believed that her approach was the right way, i.e. punishments should be based not on the mistakes, but who made it, with good performing students getting leniency.

Although Mina portrayed herself as someone who let go of things quickly, one could see the frustration and anger in her when she recalled when her suggestions were brushed off. For her the conflict was not just when she approached the teacher, but a more profound conflict occurred when she walked away after a single line of disagreement or defensiveness. That reaction brewed emotions within her that still shaped her everyday relationships characterized by avoidance and silence. Conflict was still present within her, but she either could not or chose not to acknowledge it.

Mina’s story showed that conflict among teachers was characterized by avoidance, non-collaboration, and continuation of unresolved tensions privately.

Teachers could go weeks and months without talking to each other, which also spilled over into relationships with other teachers. Likewise, for Mina a more concerning issue was that even students noticed these fractures. She said with a hint of concern and shame, *“Students know everything. The notice when teachers don’t talk. They are clever.”*

Challenging the Status Quo: Ram’s Struggle

Ram Faced a conflict around February-March 2025. The incident involved an inter-school science fair competition after receiving an invitation from a peer teaching in another school. He saw this as a good learning opportunity for his students. *“It not only was an opportunity to gain practical knowledge, but such events also boost confidence among student”* said Ram, stressing the value of co-curricular activities. However, they had a very tight timeline for preparation. After taking permission from the principal Ram selected eight students to work on projects after lunch each day for a week.

Three days had passed, one of the students informed him that one of the teachers would no longer allow the students to leave class to work on the project. Ram initially thought it was a misunderstanding. When he asked the teacher about it, he was surprised by the response. The teacher argued that students could not miss classes *“so close to secondary education examinations (SEE)”* and questioned the value of participation and the people who facilitated it. Ram was shocked by this, especially because he had administrative approval. He informed the teacher about the approval and he moved on.

He thought the issue was resolved after clarifying. However, in the next staff meeting the teacher raised it again in the presence of all the staff. The teacher questioned the idea of taking students out of class for *“non-curricular work”* and argued that it could harm the school’s SEE results. Ram described the moment with a look of shock even when recalling, *“I was shocked. I didn’t expect it to become such a big deal.”*

The disagreement that followed was not simply about time management. Ram was of the opinion that the conflict came from a deeper difference in mindset, he said *“(It’s) Mindset. Teachers have skills, all of them know their subject very well. But mindset is outdated. They think learning means sitting, writing, memorizing.”* He shared his opinion that learning could happen outside traditional lessons, through creativity, exploration, and exposure. But he felt many teachers remained fixed in an

older model of education. He said, *“We talk about innovation and AI, but teachers themselves think learning only means sitting and writing.”*

Recalling the nearly half an hour discussion in the meeting on the topic, Ram reflected that he experienced a mix of anger, confusion, and disappointment. He felt that his intention was being judged through a narrow lens. Only one teacher besides the principle openly supported him, although several approached him privately afterwards to say they agreed.

What really frustrated Ram was what he discovered later. He told how he came to know that the teacher who confronted him had an ongoing conflict with the principal. Ram thought that he had been pulled into the political tussle. *“He put the gun on my shoulder to fire at the principal,”* Ram said. Though he laughed, you could sense the frustration.

For Ram, interpersonal conflict at work was not something that appears daily rather it had come into focus during moments when his ideas clashed with others’ approaches or mindsets. His story of conflict revolved around a single but significant incident that revealed to him how disagreements, ego, and underlying politics shaped teacher relationships. The way this conflict played out in open setting among teachers also highlighted the micro politics within the school setting.

Though the incident lasted only a few days, it stayed with Ram. *“For some days, I was mentally drained. I kept thinking, why did I bother?”* For Ram the conflict took the shape of self-doubt within days.

Ram’s story showed that interpersonal conflict was not always caused by personality differences. It shows that when thinking and views diverge, when new ideas are met with resistance, and when sincere efforts to assist pupils are overshadowed by institutional or personal politics, interpersonal conflict may arise. Conflicts have more than just direct or personal causes; they were also influenced by covert alliances and goals. His story showed that conflict can become visible when a new idea is presented or tried and it questioned established ways of working. He concluded that teaching involved more than subject knowledge it required navigating people’s mindsets. He said:

Apparently, teaching is not just about knowing your subject. It is also about knowing people and how they think. You can then deal with them accordingly. You can also find support systems. Otherwise, you will be eaten with self-doubt like I was for the few days after the meetings.

Thus, for Ram conflict was a clash between traditional expectations and new ideas, between caution and experimentation, between a stable routine and a desire for change. For a young teacher like Ram, these moments defined or shaped what he attempted next, who he collaborated with, and how he navigated the school environment.

Surrender to Norms: Hidden Voice of Sita

Sita was relatively new teacher in the school. She remembered her first year in school. Every day, she came to the school, entered the staffroom quietly and limited her interactions with senior teachers to a polite *Namaste*. She remembered her early days at school:

For the first year of my job I don't think I spoke a word in all staff meetings. When I sat with them (her colleagues) in staff room I felt like a student not a teacher.

She recalled how senior teachers took the spotlight and did not refrain from interrupting others, usually reminiscing about old days. Talking about some of her experiences of interactions, she said:

In meetings, the senior teachers talked most of the time. Sometimes I did talk, but then they would start talking about things from years ago like, which principle was here in 2015. So, I listen and sit quietly. Sometimes, I wanted to share ideas or ask something but stopped myself. I thought, Maybe I don't know enough.

Nobody explicitly told Sita to remain silent or demanded submission to seniority, but she said, “*It was like an unspoken rule of who should speak and give opinion and who should remain silent.*” Sita showed a sense of accomplishment in saying that she had learned the unspoken rules. She said she had learned which teachers were approachable and which were not. Sita also talks about how this perceived hierarchy shaped the relationship and interactions that happen within the school. She said:

You have to see who's around, and their position. For example, some teachers are very open you can joke with them, share small things. But others, if you say even one casual line, might not like it. So, it's safer to just stick to 'Namaste', 'How was the class?' 'Are the results ready?' and that's it.

Sharing her experience of interaction inside staff room she further added:

You never know what someone might take the wrong way. Even in the staffroom, sometimes if I'm talking with one or two friends and laughing, someone might say, 'what is it that's so interesting?' So, you get nervous, and everything becomes awkward. It's not that they scold you or anything, but you become conscious. Feel like people are always prying around.

She shared her opinion that people were under constant watch and that belief determined who she talked with, the depths of relationships she built, and the nature and length of interactions. Sita said:

Managing appearances is a big part of the job. People are always watching you. Who came late, who sat with whom, who eats with whom. I think that's true in most schools, but here because everyone knows everyone, it becomes a little extra. If you sit with the same group often, people start saying, 'They are engaging in groupism.' So, sometimes I deliberately sit with different people just to avoid that talk.

In addition, Sita felt that there is a gender dynamic to this. She felt that she must be more careful because her interactions could be misinterpreted. Sita said:

I am also very conscious to talk with a male teacher, people notice and might say something wrong. So, we female have to be extra careful in navigating this and maintaining appearance. For example, if a male teacher and a female teacher are seen talking more than twice, someone will definitely make a joke. Not always bad, but still, you feel uncomfortable. So even when you just want to discuss a lesson plan, you think twice: 'Should I talk here or in staff room with everyone around later?' So, you must be conscious. I always say, sadly, as a woman, you must think not just what to say, but when, where, and to whom. You end up being super conscious even when you're just trying to do your work.

Sita's experience of conflict is also associated with the prevalent ignorance towards difference in physiology between men and female. She recounted a moment when during a menstruation cycle, she was strained physically and asked a male teacher to swap a class. Requiring long hours of standing, and moving, she explained that teaching is also physically demanding. One day few months ago she was in her menstrual cycle. After two back-to-back classes her body was tired, and it was getting difficult to manage. She knew she needed rest but did not want to take leave.

She thought of an alternative. If she could swap one class, then she would get almost 2 hours of rest including the lunch break. She planned for it and figured that she could swap class with one of the male teachers. She then approached the teacher asking she could take his class at the end of the day, and he covered one of hers before lunch as she was having a difficult day due to her menstrual cycle. She thought of it as a simple request and did not anticipate rejection. The mixed feeling of anger and disappointment was visible in her face when she recalled how He laughed and replied, “*We all have our problems, Miss. You’ll be fine,*” in front of others. Unwilling to challenge him publicly, she simply said “*okay*” and walked away. She said that since the incident she had stopped expecting support from male colleagues and lost all respect for that particular teacher. She said:

I don’t talk to him as much as possible. After that incident I also lost respect for him. What kind of person does such request lightly? For a woman to even bring it up is a big deal and he just laughed it off.

This showed how women’s physical discomfort is often dismissed or treated lightly, which became another form of conflict for Sita.

Looking back at Sita’s experience. As a new teacher her experience was not just about her confidence, but it reflected the environment where strong hierarchy is clear from the very onset. The institutional culture and personal beliefs on authority based on seniority was detrimental in Sita having to feel a regression in status from being equal among teachers to rather feeling that she is one of their students. While Sita believed she has carved her own space as a teacher, her experiences indicated a more pervasive and patterned institutional culture where a perceived sense of hierarchy remained determined by dimensions such as gender or age. In the second instance, conflicts arose through acts like dismissal of someone’s needs or ignorance towards basic facts. But even in that instance entrenched social norm was at play.

I could relate this experience to my observations of the school environment where certain teachers were seemingly in accordance with a higher degree of formality and gestures of respect even without holding formal position. This gave the impression that the staffroom is not just a physical room; it is a symbolic space where senior teachers occupy authority. That symbolic space is present the moment you enter the gate of the schools. Even as an outsider I could see that the conversations I had in a group were highly dominated by senior teachers. The seniority was either by

position or by age. The only way you could get a relatively new or younger teacher to contribute is if you direct a question to them.

There were also other more subtle and ongoing conflicts experienced through gender expectations, status and hierarchies, age, and social monitoring. She experienced these conflicts as social navigation, which she believed is a tradecraft for a teacher working in such setting. Interpersonal conflicts for Sita were not only an incident or event but a daily routine that had been put in place by an institutional system that abided by the pervasive social norms that fostered disparities based on age, position, and gender. As such, Sita's experience of interpersonal conflict was a condition that shaped her relations, interactions and her understanding of her place within the school.

Discussion

For the five participants, conflict was experienced as an ongoing condition that was part of the day-to-day activity and interaction within their workplace. It was more a part of the overall experience of working in community schools rather than an isolated incident. The narratives showed that most often disagreements and contestations remained latent. All five teachers were found to have adjusted their behavior rather than trying to change the causes that created conflict situation. Even in the case of Kamal, who seemed to be more confrontational than others, he opted to negotiate and adjust rather than to try to address the root cause he believed was the reason for the conflict.

Dahrendorf's authority-relation conflict helped us understand these experiences. Dahrendorf (1959) stated that individuals could experience conflict because there existed a non-formal structure of hierarchy in the form of social relations that could shape power and authority. Other scholars had expanded on this theory by stipulating that authority operated informally through seniority, control over resource access to leadership and social capital, and conflict was experienced as disagreement or contestation (latent or open) with these informal norms (Binns, 1977; Klimes, 2015).

This process was in line with Dahrendorf's argument (1965) that this informal authority created a relational condition whereby individuals were subordinate to them, as opposition could carry social risks of isolation or unacceptance, as well as personal risks that their own position within the structures was in jeopardy. Research has also shown that informal hierarchies wielded the power to suppress contestation and

disagreement, which fueled covert conflicts, emotional strain, and fostered a sense of subordination to the norm (Blase & Blase, 2002; Oyinlade, 2025).

While authority-relation theory explained how experience was shaped within an organizational structure, social identity theory explained the experience of conflict at the personal level. The stories showed that all participants, at some point or another, categorized themselves or their colleagues into groups such as senior teachers, junior teachers, male teachers, female teachers, traditional teachers, or innovative teachers. It was clear that the recollection of teachers' experiences was shaped by the notion of these groups' membership. Hence, experiences were narrated from the lens of expectations of behavior or actions of each group. Tajfel and Turner (1979, 2001) argued that individuals derived and perceived their position within a social structure from their association with a group, or as they called it, "*from group membership.*" In workplaces, these groups were formed around age, gender, perceived competence, and experience, among other things (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Terry, 2000). This group membership thus determined how individuals perceived their position within the informal hierarchical structure, and experiences were shaped by this notion of position. For example, in Sita's case, she saw her conflict as a natural occurrence that was part of the job and thought that as a new teacher she had little or no space to question these institutional norms. Thus, her experience of conflict was shaped by her social identity as a new teacher. Research has shown that such group categorization led to distorted dynamics characterized by behavioral patterns of favoritism or distancing and even led to interpersonal tension over time (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Thus, in teachers' experiences of interpersonal conflict, both authority relations and social identity operated together. Informal authorities were found to be aligned along identity groups formed around characteristics such as seniority and gender, while other groups were constrained from wielding or questioning authority. This created a social identity-based authority and subordinate relationship. This relationship explained why conflict was experienced both as a structural norm as well as a personal source of strain.

From the lens of narrative inquiry, the experience of interpersonal conflict was temporal. Past interactions clearly shaped present interpretations and expectations for the future, making conflict an ongoing phenomenon rather than an incident (Kim,

2016). Teachers' interactions, such as avoidance, resentment, or self-monitoring, were shaped by their experiences of being dismissed or invalidated.

CHAPTER V

INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT AND ITS IMPACT

This chapter includes a narrative story structured around the experience of cause and impact of interpersonal conflict on community teachers. The stories are structured around the immediate causes of conflict followed by understanding potentially more subtle causes of conflict.

Changes Become Conflict: Gopi's Experience

For Gopi conflict was a result of a sustained pattern of changes that are happening rather than a single incident. One such change was the rapid change in teaching tools and techniques, particularly in relation to technology. He described how he had seen an ever-growing gap between old and new teachers in regard to capacity and comfort with new tools. Gopi opined that while new teachers were accustomed to digital platforms and technology-driven methods, many old teachers like him struggled to keep pace. This he explained created subtle tensions. For Gopi personally, support offered by new colleagues despite being genuine infused a sense in him that he was outdated or less capable. Over time, this had contributed to him feeling embarrassed and loss of dignity, even when no disrespect was intended.

These feelings had effects on professional relationships in quiet but meaningful ways. Gopi admitted that he increasingly withdrew himself from collaborative spaces where he would otherwise seek to work closely with another teacher. He said, *"I feel that I am outdated and I might not be in par with other teachers, so I do things on my own and in my own pace."* Despite being widely respected and admired Gopi felt isolated and questioned his position as a senior teacher within the school. As a result, Gopi's time in schools was characterized by reduced participation and emotional distance.

For Gopi, conflict between teachers was something that grew slowly as the conditions within school settings changed and relationships were redefined. Thus, for him the contributing reasons for conflicts between teachers were this pattern of changes more than anything else.

Second reason contributing to conflict, according to Gopi, was the increasing influence of politics within schools. He recalled *"in earlier years when I joined, political affiliations existed but remained strictly separate from everyday school*

operations.” In contrast, he said that in the past decades school environments were marked by internal politics, and quests for position and power. He said that this practice has introduced mistrust as *“Teachers nowadays approach everything and take every action through political motives rather than teaching (professional intent).”*

For Gopi, this politicization had significantly affected his job satisfaction. He spoke with visible contempt for his colleagues who engaged in these politics who he said were *“...diverting attention away from teaching and community service.”* Gopi expressed his frustrations that decisions that should have been professional now easily became personal, and disagreements that could have been resolved *“... easily and professionally become prolonged because they are tied to loyalty and status.”* This environment has left him completely frustrated.

Emotionally, Gopi felt that the accumulation of these reasons had pushed him to seriously consider early retirement. Although he remained committed to teaching, he said his sense of satisfaction was diminishing, and he was no longer clear on institutional belonging. He drew his remaining motivation and satisfaction from personal integrity and the fulfillment of classroom responsibilities.

Gopi’s story illustrated that interpersonal conflict among teachers could often be a result of structural and cultural shifts within schools. It showed how structural shift diminished the informal authority he thought they had deriving from his identity as experience teacher. These shifts diminished job satisfaction and could create environment where self-belongingness is questioned.

Feeling Undermined: How Kamal Perceives Respect

The conflict Kamal described seemed to originate from the rejection of his leave request. However, Kamal stated that the rejection was merely an incident which was reflective of a longer running relationship between the vice principal and him. Upon receiving the leave request from Kamal, the vice principal cited overlapping leave of another teacher as an excuse to reject it. Kamal offered an alternative to directly talk to the teacher for rearrangement. The vice principal, however, rejected the idea stating that the leave had already been approved and entered into the system. Kamal expressed that this brushing off of a viable solution troubled him more than the initial rejection of the application. He said:

They have no respect for teachers like me. It was nice offering to negotiate with the other teacher when I did not have to. It was my right to get that leave.

I don't know how people who cannot recognize good gestures get such position.

The central reason that contributed to conflict in Kamal's experience was thus his perceived lack of respect from school leadership towards him, especially from the vice principle.

While the disagreement, at first glance, was caused by the rejection of his leave request, he viewed it as an example of personal bias and not an administrative issue as presented to him. In his view the overlapping leave with another teacher was not a strong justification for disallowing his request rather he saw it as a power move by the vice principle. He recalled how his proposed alternative was dismissed without even consideration which became the straw that broke the camel's back. This perceived dismissal and disrespect at individual level created a conflict situation for Kamal.

In careful examination of the story, one can find a deeper and probably the most consequential reason contributing to the conflict; it was the long-standing relational tension between Kamal and the vice principal. Kamal saw himself as a victim of continuous mistreatment, claiming that the vice principal had consistently acted against him. But Kamal could not provide any other concrete example of such mistreatment.

However, his own narration suggested that this relationship was shaped by Kamal's personality as he positioned himself as more knowledgeable and capable. His tendency to "guide" leadership and openly question the capacity of school leadership was likely to have equal if not more contribution to how colleagues and the leadership viewed him. Conflict, therefore, arose from an ongoing relational dynamic for Kamal.

Kamal's conflict highlighted that interaction between individual personality, institutional authority, and perceptions of fairness often shaped interpersonal tensions in schools. It was more about how he felt he was treated. Kamal was drawn into conflicts when he felt his rights, competence, or status were questioned. His narrative revealed that conflict among teachers was not always about workload, pedagogy or other teaching or school related causes. Interpersonal conflict in community schools could also be caused by perception of power and respect.

Kamal's personality and communication were a key reason that shaped these dynamics. He described himself as a straightforward, and confident individual who viewed his own competence to be among the highest if not the highest in the school.

The way he framed his past interactions with vice principal and other colleagues also suggested that he could be perceived as intrusive, dismissive, or egoistic. This became clearer when he said things like *“I am not sure the leadership actually has capacity”* or *“I try to guide my fellow teacher whenever required”* or *“I provide guidance to leadership as my contribution to school”*. The choice of word “Guide” and the emotions displayed when saying these indicated that he saw himself as more competent than others working with him. This might have brewed resentment towards him which spilled over as an open confrontation between him and the vice principal.

These aspects did affect Kamal’s professional relationships. Following the leave dispute, his relationship with the vice principal became more distant and strained. Communication was reduced to what was strictly necessary. He also displayed a mistrust toward the administration. The conflict made him feel disrespected. This sense of grievance lingers and is bound to shape how he interprets future decisions or interactions.

Kamal’s story showed that interpersonal conflict among teachers can arise from a combination of perceived disrespect, and history of personal relationships... In cases, feeling of being dismissed or undervalued can be more detrimental than logic or rules. This sense of personal disrespect strained professional relationships, reduced trust, and fostered skepticism shaping how teachers engaged with each other at their workplace.

Collision of Beliefs: Mina’s Pursuit

Mina experienced conflict with an incident involving punishment of a student she knew well personally and trusted. When that student was punished for missing homework during the student’s brother’s wedding, Mina, uncharacteristically of her, intervened. Her decision was not based on opposition to punishment, but on her belief in who should be punished. For Mina her flexibility was necessary for fairness. She said:

Teachers should judge students based on their performance and character. In cases students’ efforts should be made to understand the causes of the mistake and concessions should be made for such students.

The other teacher, on the other hand, viewed leniency as being unfair and setting wrong precedent. This disagreement, stemming from different views of fairness and discipline, became a source of interpersonal tension for Mina. In her case,

Conflict arose when this approach clashed with colleagues who applied the punishment uniformly, without the “background” of the student and their context.

Mina’s experience of conflict, especially the recent experience, suggested that difference in opinion about how students should be managed, particularly around discipline, was a source of conflict between teachers. Mina did not oppose punishment as a practice, but she believed that there needed to be a high level of judiciousness in punishment depending mostly on the student in question. She strongly believed that punishment should be applied selectively, based on student’s character, performance, and past mistakes.

Additionally, Mina shared her observation that “... *teachers often take suggestions personally and interpret them as criticism rather than professional discussion.*” This tendency of defensiveness among teachers was another underlying key contributor to conflict according to her. This awareness was what she attributed to her approach of being withdrawn, silent, avoiding confrontation or providing suggestions. The only reason she admitted to confronting a colleague in this instance was her personal connection with the student. She said:

I stay away from other teachers’ way. The only reason I brought it up this time is because Saru (name changed) is a very good student. I know her personally as well and also know the situation at home.

To support her argument, she added:

You think to yourself, which student comes to school when there is a whole marriage going on in the house. Saru only missed schools for three days. If she were not a good student, she could not have come for a week and still nobody would say anything to her. This shows her commitment.

Talking about the impact of such confrontation Mina explained that she had seen relationships often changing subtly, teachers stop talking, avoid shared spaces, or reduce communication. After the disagreement, Mina said she has had the same experience with the other teacher. These reactions were bound to discourage dialogue and allow tensions to remain unresolved.

Such experience had a clear impact on professional relationships. Mina described a staffroom where “*teachers laugh together, but resentments and disagreements linger beneath the surface.*” She further added, “*some colleagues stop speaking for weeks or months.*” Mina herself experienced this effect recalling how “*I*

did not talk with the teacher for months, and even now we do not engage much. Hi and hello, that's about it."

In terms of job satisfaction, Mina claimed that conflict did not affect her deeply, she said, *"I do not keep things in her heart."* However, her continued reference and display of anger and frustration in recalling the past incidents suggested otherwise. While she may have tried to display an overlay positive attitude this conflict did shape how she felt about expressing her opinions. Over time, this experience had reinforced her preference for silence over engagement. She said, *"Like I said I stay away from such matter. But this time I could not. However, I take this as a lesson. I will do what I can from my side, but I will not give advice to others."* In hindsight, these experiences gathered in the fourteen years might also have led to her constantly trying to show a positive attitude towards all things that happen to school or trying to minimize their seriousness.

Mina's teaching practices were influenced by these dynamics in subtle but important ways. She showed a feeling of protectiveness towards students she saw as having *"good characteristics"* or had personal connection with. Interestingly, this protectiveness resulting from her internal disagreement with other teachers on how punishment should be decided on, also was the reason she was drawn into conflict. Despite this understating she was still cautious about advocating openly for her approach. She continued to act on her beliefs and also was seemingly open to challenging colleagues on specific incidents, but she refrained from engaging in discussing and changing the mindset. This restraint resulted from her understanding that *"Suggestion are often viewed as criticism."*

Mina's story showed that interpersonal conflict between teachers was driven by differences in professional judgment, and personal relationships with students. This was further compounded by the defensive attitude among teachers viewing any alternative suggestions as personal criticism. The story also showed that these conflicts shaped how teachers related to one another, how freely they shared perspectives, and how they balanced their own beliefs with institutional norms. For Mina, conflict did not disrupt her commitment to teaching. Instead, it quietly narrowed the space in which she felt comfortable engaging with colleagues, reinforcing a culture of avoidance which in turn prevented constructive resolution of conflict.

To Innovate or Not to Innovate: Ram's Struggle

Ram's experience with interpersonal conflict surfaced in a staff meeting and centered around the participation of the school in a science fair. Ram had engaged about eight students to participate in the fair. For this the students had to take leave from some regular classes. However, one of the teachers stopped the students from taking part. With permission from the school administration, Ram brushed off the opposition, but he was surprised when the issue resurfaced in a staff meeting. In the meeting, the teacher argued that taking students out of the classes would affect their performance in the upcoming SEE. This was especially serious because the students selected were among the best in the class. To this, Ram argued that this would contribute to student learning.

Looking at Ram's experience, difference in the mindset seemed to be the primary reason causing interpersonal conflict among teachers. Talking about the reasons for disagreement Ram opined that conflict arose when the perception of what counts as "real learning" differed. In his view, some teachers continue to see textbook based classroom teaching as "real learning" which these teachers think "*are the only way student secure good grades in exams.*" This viewpoint is in direct contradiction of increasingly changing notion of learning advocated by teachers like Ram who see learning as "*...something that can also happen outside of classroom and is even more lasting through exposure, experimentation, and extracurricular engagement.*"

Ram openly admitted that teaching him is a transitional and strategic choice while preparing himself for public service exams. However, listening to his story indicated that he was very committed to what he was doing. He even went a step further to improve things with integration of new ideas, and activities promoting beyond textbook teaching. This mindset was also what shaped his experience of conflict.

This difference in perception of best pedagogical approach became visible during the science fair incident. Ram viewed the teacher disagreeing to students missing classes for preparation not as a product of "*traditional mindset that is common in our education system*". He opined that the teacher who objected to students participating in the science fair was unable to see learning beyond classroom and syllabus completion. This mismatch in pedagogical philosophy acted as the trigger for conflict, a conflict which Ram initially thought to be born out of basic

communication lapse. Bringing up the issue in the staff meeting intensified and, in a way, shifted the conflict from it being result of miscommunication to a clash of pedagogical philosophies.

Ram's experience also shaded light on how authority and legitimacy were interpreted within the school. Although Ram had secured permission from the principal the decision was still challenged publicly in a staff meeting. This showed that formal approval did not always translate into acceptance. It indicated that authority in schools did not always rest in position but was a form of negotiation and informal power relations. It is clear that authority in schools was more of a political act rather than administrative.

Reflecting on the matter, Ram also blamed school politics as a significant contributor to "unnecessary" magnification of issue. He recalled how later he learned that the colleague who opposed him had existing tensions with the principal. From Ram's perspective, this backdrop reframed the conflict. He felt that the interpersonal conflict experienced was more of a side-effect of a more sustained interpersonal conflict ongoing within the school staff. This realization had clearly deepened his frustration and reinforced his belief that conflicts in schools were often less about the issue at hand and always had other underlying causes. He said, *"It's (causes of conflict) like an onion. You peel a layer you just get to another layer. It takes several layers of peeling to get to the center."*

Ram experienced both emotional and professional impact due to the conflict. Thinking about the immediate emotions he described feeling angry and then mentally drained for several days. He even questioned his decision whether initiating such activities was worth the stress. However, the support from the leadership in the meeting and personal support shown by other colleagues helped him overcome this stress. At a personal level Ram felt that the conflict actually helped him feel more a part of the school. As other teachers approached him privately after the meeting to express support, even though they had remained silent during the discussion, he felt a sense of bonding and found support. With this experience Ram had developed a personalized strategy to pre-empt such conflicts in future based on collective effort and effective communication. This reflection on personalized strategy to approach implementation of new ideas showed how conflict, while discouraging, also served as learning.

Overall, Ram's story suggested that interpersonal conflict among teachers was driven by pedagogical differences, and macro politics at school. These conflicts could affect teachers' emotional well-being, shape how teaching approaches, and influence whether or not they pursued new ideas. Luckily for Ram, conflict did not lead to change in his belief in alternative approach to education, rather it did teach him that it requires navigating relationships as carefully as thinking through the ideas. However, this was only possible because Ram found a support system in school leadership and likeminded teachers.

Hierarchy and Bias: Sita's Nemesis

Sita shared her recent experience of approaching a male teacher with a request to switch classes. She was in her menstrual cycle and as teaching was demanding physically as well, she desperately needed rest. Not wanting to take a day off, Sita figured that switching classes would allow her the respite. However, when she approached the teacher, the response shook her to the core. Instead of empathizing, the teacher laughed at the request. She recalled how she had to muster significant courage even to bring up the issues to a male teacher and in the presence of another colleague. Rather than being sensitive the teacher refuted the request. What troubled Sita was not the refusal but in her own words, *"The way he laughed at it. It just stuck with me. He could have simply said no. But he chooses to trivialize the pain and the need of a women."* For her it is such prevalent norms and biases that led to her conflict.

Adding to the effect of the prevalent norm she also shared another incident. Sita's experience of interpersonal conflict in school setting started very early after her joining the school. Sita recalled how the staff room was dominated by senior teachers. Although she wanted to talk and contribute, she always refrained. She shared her experience of how she felt all her actions were watched and judged and that made herself regulate in her interaction. Her statement, *"Managing appearances is a big part of the job"* showed how the experience shaped her behavior at school. She recalled how she felt *"like a student"* in the staffroom. The senior teachers completely dominated conversation, and their actions made her feel excluded. She then adopted silence as a coping mechanism. Although no one explicitly asked her not to speak, the environment was such that she found refuge in silence. For her, the first experience of conflict in school was caused by the institutional norm that was biased based on seniority.

These events in Sita's professional life showed multi-dimensional reasons contributing to conflict. Her stories revealed that interpersonal conflicts stemmed from institutional norms that promoted hierarchical systems and social monitoring, and from gendered stereotypes and biases.

This dynamic directly affected how Sita went about her working relationship and interactions. She was very cautious about how she conversed; she distinguished her colleagues based on "*Some with whom you can be open and even joke. And other with whom you limit to a Namaste, how was the class? or What are the results?*" This selective approach to work relationship has severely limited the depth of her engagement in common forums like meetings and decision making. She admitted to focusing only on teaching and distanced herself from contributing to other management or beyond classroom work. She said, "*I don't think I can do anything to help the management, So I focus on teaching.*"

Sita's experience in the workplace was further complicated by gendered expectations. She described how she had to be constantly aware of interacting with other male teachers as it was more often misinterpreted and could attract joking remarks. This she felt was uncomfortable rather than harmful. This dissuaded her from building professional relationships and even pursue collaboration with male colleagues, which ultimately limited her beyond-classroom engagement at school.

At personal level, lack of sensitivity of male colleagues towards a female's bodily experience had been a source of conflict for her in the past. Sita explained how the physical demand of teaching was usually under looked:

There are days where you hardly sit for almost 4 hours, moving from one class to another. In the classroom you cannot maintain the environment if you just sit in your chair and read out loud. Moving around and engaging with students is a big part of teaching.

She further explained how this physical demand amplifies during menstruation. In one such instance, she requested a class swap. The request was taken so lightly and brushed off by a male teacher that the sense of disbelief and frustration was still visible when she recalled the incident. She was specially frustrated because this was done by a teacher, she said, "*As teachers we are supposed to teach students about these stuffs (Menstruation). But teachers themselves are insensitive.*" This incident, though brief, had left a lasting impact on her. She was

frustrated and angered by how easily women's needs were trivialized in school, no less by a teacher.

All these experiences influenced Sita's job Satisfaction. While Sita was highly committed to teaching and responsive to her students, she was increasingly distancing herself from her colleagues and engagements beyond teaching. Sita maintained that she kept her teaching practices intact from the stresses she had at the workplace, however, her narration indicated that such stresses meant limited or no collaborations with other teachers, pursuing her approach to teaching individually.

Sita's story showed that interpersonal conflicts are not always based on incidents but stemmed from regressive institutional practices, norms, and mindsets prevalent among teachers. It affected teacher collaboration as these experiences narrowed space and willingness for engagement to take collective actions for teaching or other activities.

Discussion

In these five narratives, interpersonal conflict was not caused by isolated misunderstandings or a single event. Instead, the stories showed that conflict was a result of structural and relational conditions which shaped teachers' interpretation of others' actions and intent, and responses were based on this interpretation and not just on the issue at hand. The causes of conflict were found to be embedded in informal authority, expectations based on informal social norms and identities, and shifting professional norms. The effects of this conflict on teachers and their job satisfaction were altered relationships, emotional strain, and constrained behaviors in professional settings.

For example, for Gopi the conflict was caused by his belief in the erosion of his informal authority gained through years of experience and symbolized by seniority. For Kamal, conflict arose because he felt that his position within the informal structure of authority was not acknowledged, and for Sita, conflict was a result of her subordinate position within the informal structure. Thus, the experiences aligned with assertion of Dahrendorf (1959) that conflict was generated not merely through formal hierarchies, but through informal authority relations that regulated legitimacy, decision-making, and respect. Such authority was often exercised through seniority, control over resources, reputational capital, and symbolic power rather than official position alone (Beheshtifar & Zare, 2013; Binns, 1977; Limerick, 1976), and these notions became the causes of interpersonal conflict. In all five cases, conflict

was produced not because teachers disagreed openly, but because authority was exercised or withheld in ways that clashed with individuals' expectations of respect and recognition.

Job satisfaction was also affected, but none of the participants described abandoning teaching due to conflict. Instead, a pattern emerged whereby satisfaction became distanced from the institution and was sought in classroom or students' success. The stories suggested that within the paradigm of interpersonal conflict, job satisfaction emerged as a relational or situational construct often associated with individuals or colleagues rather than a fixed attitude toward the profession itself. The participants also seemed to demonstrate adaptiveness in identifying sources of satisfaction, shifting the sources from an institutional norm or structure to something more personal; for example, Sita shifted the source to students, Ram shifted from the ability to try things to finding like-minded teachers, and Mina found it in the continuation of personal beliefs and approaches even when broader institutional norms contradicted her beliefs.

Likewise, the personal impact of these conflicts was not uniform, but there were clear patterns observed across all five narratives. The pattern was distancing or withdrawal at the personal level. In one form or another, all five participants reduced communication, avoided colleagues, limited collaboration, or retreated to classroom engagements rather than more holistic involvement in school after experiencing conflict. This aligned with organizational research showing that unresolved, identity-laden conflict often resulted in avoidance and emotional disengagement rather than collective problem-solving (Blase & Blase, 2002; Dahiru et al., 2018; Limerick, 1976).

The stories demonstrated that that interpersonal conflict among teachers was caused by the interaction of informal authority structures and that the effects were highly driven by social identity. The impact was most visible in relational withdrawal, emotional strain, and constrained professional engagement. Hence, with interpersonal conflict, teachers became more cautious and isolated. It constrained initiatives, made teachers question self-worth, and severely limited collaboration. It also shifted teachers' sense and source of job satisfaction from institutional experience to individual experiences.

CHAPTER VI

RESPONSE TO INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

This chapter delves into strategies the participants employed as a short term and long-term response to the experience of interpersonal conflict. Here, narration of the five participants is presented to showcase how teachers at community schools dealt with interpersonal conflict.

On the Verge of Giving Up: Gopi's Withdrawal

Gopi's approach to coping with interpersonal conflict was characterized by self-doubt, restraint, moral distance, and withdrawal. A more profound story that Gopi shared was how for past two to three months, he was constantly thinking if he should take an early retirement. Despite giving his life to teaching he shared that the scale of the changes that were happening, especially with the use of technology, filled him with self-doubt. He said, *"Sometimes I cannot sleep the whole night. I just keep thinking if I should retire. But again, I do not know what I will do after that. So, I push myself."* He further added, *"I cannot learn these stuffs (technology) at this age."*

Gopi also talked about how the changing dynamics within the school vis-à-vis the increasing impact of politics was also pushing him to quit. Talking about how he had been coping, Gopi said, *"I have learned through the years that disagreement that has ego and politics at center rarely leads to resolution. So, there is no point trying to overcome it. You just continue with it."* So, Gopi's conflicts were subtle, deliberate, and inward facing characterized by frustration, anger, and demotivation, pushing him almost to the edge of giving up.

While Gopi did feel his dignity challenged, particularly in moments when younger teachers stepped in to help him with technology, he did not voice discomfort. He did not express how these moments affected him but rather expressed gratitude for the teachers for trying to help. He admitted that he took in discomfort privately. He coped with the situation by avoiding tasks that required assistance and stayed silent in spaces where he might otherwise have felt inadequate. His response, in this sense, was distancing and self-regulation, his primary aim was to preserve a sense of self-respect.

In interactions, Gopi said he is very careful in his social navigation. He listened more than he spoke, particularly when conversations began to drift toward factional topics. Though he said he *"extremely despise"* gossip or internal politics,

and had the social standing to confront these, he rather than challenging colleagues who engage in it chooses to remove himself from those conversations. He did not see it as avoidance or retreat but believed refusal to participate in such practices was the best way to show contempt. He also believed that this approach was in line with professional ethos and morals.

Thus, for Gopi response rarely involved anything outside of himself. Instead, it occurred through boundary-setting, which was seemingly isolating him day by day. While this had reduced his social closeness with colleagues, it allowed him to retain a sense of moral consistency and self-respect. This was also an example of how he repositioned his expectations, especially due to changes he said started happening in the last decade. Rather than hoping for change in school culture, he adjusted his own responses. He accepted that politics would continue, that technological differences would widen. However, this choice had pushed him as far as to seriously consider early retirement. This was not resignation for him but a practical form of coping, *“Everything has an ending. I just thought mine (as a teacher) would be a bit later.”*

Gopi’s navigation of conflict was therefore grounded in self-regulation. He coped by limiting exposure, maintaining ethical distance, and hoping silence would protect his dignity. While these strategies might have reduced immediate tension of interpersonal conflict, they had clearly created emotional baggage and a sense of isolation that Gopi was increasingly finding harder to cope with.

His story showed that coping with interpersonal conflict did not always involve negotiation or compromise. For some teachers, like Gopi, coping meant enduring change with restraint. It meant holding on to personal values and to have a self-awareness of when to let go and move on.

The Confidence: Kamal’s Confrontational Approach

Kamal’s response to interpersonal conflict was also in line with what shaped his experience of conflict i.e. his personality. Kamal described himself as someone who took on things head-on and displayed an everlasting conviction of correctness of his own position in all circumstances. He believed that institutional norms were always skewed so it played no part in his approach to responding to conflict. He related with his own example, *“If rules and norms were not biased why was my leave request rejected. These are used by people to showcase authority. But if you stand your ground these (norms) become powerless.”* His navigation of conflict was therefore shaped by his personality and rarely by the institutional structures around

him. In describing his conflict with the vice principal Kamal saw the vice principal as incompetent and driven by interpersonal dynamics. However, he showed contempt for the institutional system because he believed this created space for “*Incompetent leaderships*”. He spoke highly of his handling of the matter which was by not giving up and escalating the issues until the principle had to jump in as the driving force for resolution. Thus, Kamal firmly believed in confronting issues, speaking up, and in his own words, “... *standing the ground until you get what you want*” as the only viable approach to tackle interpersonal conflict at his workplace.

For Kamal the first step to coping started with asserting his position on what he believed was right. He was firm in his convictions, and his first strategy was not negotiation but insistence. When he felt that he “*was within his rights*” to seek the six days leave. Kamal did not submit to the request to postpone his leave which he said, “*Most teachers would have agreed to without question.*” On the contrary, he offered a solution to ask the other teacher to change his dates for leave. When that too was rejected, he took it as a personal offense, driven by what he believed to be long pattern of the vice principal “*never treating me properly.*”

His navigation of conflict was reflective of how he saw himself in relation to others. He believed he was competent, decisive, and politically aware, and he expected the school leadership to acknowledge this and other colleagues to respect this. He said, “*Just because I do not hold a position it doesn't mean I do not know things. I am not as gullible as other teachers. They (authority) cannot get there way with me.*” In cases when he felt he was not receiving his due, his coping mechanism was more skewed towards confrontation or led to communication cut off. He explained, “*I stood my ground and attained by right. After that incident, I haven't talk to him (VP).*” The withdrawal was not merely a reaction or a natural distancing rather it was a deliberate strategy for Kamal to display that he sat on a higher moral ground. He said, “*I should not be engaging with incompetent and unethical people who has never treated me well.*” However, this very sentence especially when he said, “*who has never treated me well*” also indicated that he took things personally and that sense of personal affront was a significant driver for distancing. Kamal saw himself as the one offering direction and the vice principal as someone incapable of handling it.

Kamal's approach to coping with conflict was defined by the belief that the conflict occurred because the leadership lacked the professionalism or maturity he expected. Kamal also relied on a form of detachment, often expressed through

dismissiveness. He described the incident as a common irritation, *“just unnecessary hassle I have to handle regularly”*.

Kamal’s story showed how coping was not just about resolving disputes but also protecting sense of identity. His strategies were consistent with how he saw himself i.e. straightforward, confident, and unwilling to bend. It is through this self-perception that he continued to respond with conflict in school.

The Art of Discretion: Mina’s Learning

With fourteen years of experience, Mina thought that she had gained skills and awareness that made her judicious about timing and careful of social environment in coping with conflict. During the incident of when she confronted a colleague on his handing down of punishment to a student, she described her approach as *“I approached him one-on-one and presented my concerns “politely and briefly.”* She emphasized she was careful not to sound authoritative or demanding. She framed it as *“Providing suggestions rather than showing objections.”* She believed that this measured approach allowed her to express disagreement without challenging another teacher’s status or provoking them. In narrating her story, she gave a sense that when she faced resistance to these “suggestions”, she did not push further. She said *“I have worked long enough to know that if you push an issue too much you invite attention, harden positions of the other party, and unnecessary people will join in to contribute. None of these are helpful.”*

Adding further on things she believed to have learned about conflicts in school she said *“The end result of any disagreement is rarely about the issue itself. It is about how, when, and in front of whom something is said.”* Probably because of this when disagreement (when other teacher dismissed her concern of giving punishments regardless of the student) did arise Mina did not react immediately. When asked why she did not react even when it was clear she had some opinions to share she said, *“I did not want to create a scene there, he was with his friends (other teachers).”*

This showed that even at times of distress she was mindful of likely consequences. She was aware that even small disagreements could quickly become topics of discussion if *“not handled correctly”*. As a result, she avoided raising concerns in meetings or in the presence of other teachers. For Mina, this was not silence but a time-tested strategy that had worked for her all these years.

Interestingly, Mina also had support system to help her cope. She had a group of friends, a sub-group of schoolteachers. She felt very proud to share that she has a

circle of trusted colleagues who she could reach out to discuss or seek support in cases of conflict rather than engaging with the formal structure or with all the teacher as one single team. She feels that this relationship has provided her spaces where she *“can speak freely, share frustrations, and deal with stress”*. Through these sub-groups, she seemed to seek informal validation, which helps her maintain her standing among the peers.

A key strategy to coping with Mina thus becomes limiting the circle within which she engaged. She had found a system of a small number of colleagues she trusted and maintained only surface-level interactions beyond that circle. Beyond this group She seldom engaged in sharing. She said this was because *“I am aware that words can quickly become misinterpreted and circulated.”* By keeping her engagement contained, Mina expected to reduce chances of being a topic for gossip, mislabeling, and unnecessary conflict.

Avoiding open confrontation was of high importance to Mina. She felt *“if you are confrontational, you are seen as problematic, or argumentative you can have long-term consequences”*. Thus, rather than confronting conflict directly, she managed it through quiet negotiation, and engagement with sub-groups. When situations were heated, she stepped back even if she had a strong opinion on an issue because she said she knew *“when engagement will cost more than it gains.”*

Mina’s story showed that response to interpersonal conflict was about *“knowing where you are”*, understanding the risks of your actions, and choosing alternate (possibly more effective) ways of maintaining relationships and self-respect. Her response depended on being judicious and relying on trusted sub-groups.

Additionally, she shared that once she leaves school, she could very quickly shift her focus to family and household routines, allowing work-related frustrations to get overshadowed. This she said, *“It is the most important factors that has enabled me to manage my stress.”*

Choosing Your Battles: Ram’s Adaptation

Ram, a relatively young teacher, did not shy away from disagreement, but neither did he sought confrontation. At first when he was reassured by the permission received from administration to proceed with engaging eight students for science fair, Ram chose to directly engage with assertiveness when a teacher created obstruction with preparation. He approached the colleague who had stopped students from attending the preparation sessions and directly engaged with him. His initial

negotiation strategy was conversational and solution-oriented but also driven by assertiveness and confidence he drew from his belief in the value of the activity, and the permission he had secured from the principal. He expected the matter to end there. Ram clearly relied on logic and shared professional purpose, believing that once the facts were clear, there would not be any disagreement.

However, when the issue resurfaced publicly in the staff meeting, Ram's had to make adjustment to his approach. The sudden resurfacing made him feel vulnerable, he said, "*When my actions were questioned in front of colleagues, even though I knew it was right I got nervous and dumbfounded especially as it was presented as threat to exam preparation.*" Once he gathered himself Ram recalled how he chose not to escalate the conflict aggressively, even though he describes feeling intense anger. Instead, he allowed the principal to intervene and explain the administrative rationale behind the activity. This showed how his contextual awareness helped him navigate a conflict situation. Ram's context awareness enabled him to recognize the limits of what he could achieve alone.

Ram recalled coping with the impact of the incident through reflection and selective withdrawal. For several days, he described feeling mentally drained and questioning whether the effort was worth it. Unlike the argument, he had to process these feelings privately. On how he overcame this he said, "*I reminded myself of the righteousness of the activity and the positive response from students.*" His reflective mindset which allowed him to think beyond the staffroom argument and think about the students "*who had genuinely learned something meaningful*" became the support that helped him cope with the frustration.

Peer support also played a crucial role in Ram's coping process. Although few colleagues spoke up during the meeting, he recalled how "*several (teachers) approached me privately afterward and told me they agreed and supported what my initiative*". This peer support clearly had a significant impact on Ram's sense of support. He said:

It reassured me that I was not alone, and if needed I can count on likeminded colleagues. Even if they were unwilling to speak publicly at that moment, I am sure that if it mattered they would. In that meeting principal supporting me was enough.

This showed that he did not judge his colleagues for their silence, and he acknowledged that speaking openly in such situations was difficult. This silent

support had motivated him. He further added that it made him aware to take initiative in groups rather than alone and seek more involvement and communications with other colleagues.

Leadership support was another key element in how Ram coped with conflict. The principal's backing, especially during the meeting and later in a private conversation, helped Ram regain confidence. He recalled how at one point in the meeting when the teacher linked the activity to disturbing the exam, he had felt uncertain and exposed even though he had prior permission from the principal. He said, "*Principal sir's word reassured me.*" He further added that the principal's support did not erase the conflict at its root i.e. changing the mindset, but it validated Ram's actions and created an environment for other teachers to challenge these. From this, Ram said "*I learned that in school visible administrative backing is equally important not only good ideas.*" He thought this understanding would help him preempt or navigate conflict in future.

In the longer term, Ram said he has adopted his approach to doing things at school in response to the experience. He said that he had become more careful to maintain open and clear communication with other colleagues and ensure that plans were shared early and clearly with leadership. He also sought collaboration whenever possible. He explained, "*I learned that it's always better to have two or three people working together when introducing new initiatives.*" This shift reflected a pragmatic coping strategy. Rather than abandoning innovation, Ram had learned to spread responsibility to reduce individual exposure and limit possibility of conflict.

One change that Ram said helped him navigate interpersonal issue is internalizing that "*there will always be someone who disagrees, regardless of your intent.*" In saying this you could sense that he had normalized having opposition. This realization had allowed him to detach emotionally from conflict which limited the emotional drain he felt the first time. He continued to pursue creative activities with students and remains an advocate for alternate teaching approach at school. But the difference was that he did it with greater awareness and with strategic mindset to look for and manage disagreements.

Overall, Ram responded to interpersonal conflict by adaptive utilization of engagement and adjustment. His story showed that coping with conflict was not just about reacting to arguments, but about learning how to move forward within constraints and it is about identifying and reinforcing support systems to do that.

The Continuous Adjustment: Sita's Coping

"We adjust! That's the Mantra. In work that is the first thing one should learn" This statement of by Sita was not just a reflection but sums up her strategy to cope with conflict. She shared her experience from the first year, when she *"did not speak a word,"* not because she lacked ideas but because speaking in the presence of older staffs felt inappropriate. She admitted that she contributed selectively, measuring when and to whom she could speak without overstepping perceived boundaries. Even regarding personal matters when a colleague brushed off a genuine request due to physical difficulty and even made a joke about it her response she said was *"I just said OKAY and left"*, when she clearly understood the gravity of the matter as evident when she said:

Exactly. It is not something that should be joked about like that. Also, we are all teachers. We are supposed to teach our students about these things (Menstruation cycle and its effect). Now, if we ourselves are not sensitive towards these, how can we expect students to be?

When asked, with this level of clarity on the seriousness of the issue, how did she handle it she said, *"What's the point?"* and adds *"We (another female teacher) Laughed it off."* Her response was clear, rather than confronting the hierarchy, institutional norm, or any other source of conflict her coping was internal she adapted, observed, and usually deferred.

For Sita, conflict was not about confrontation or direct challenge. Rather, in her own words, it was an *"art of daily adjustment"*. An adjustment that she opined demanded to let go of personal need or want to perform an internal balancing act shaped by hierarchy, gender norms, and the constant awareness of being watched. Her awareness of being *"always watched"*, shaped how she perceived her workplace. She viewed it not as a neutral professional space, but as a performance stage where every action could be interpreted, commented on, or misread.

Sita's primary approach to respond to this was careful self-regulation in line with the institutional norm. She said she had learned to regulate her speech, her movements, and even her seating patterns. She shifted across groups to avoid assumptions of *"groupism."* She avoided one-one-one interactions with male teachers to make sure it's not misread. When she sensed tension, her instinct was to quietly withdraw rather than push against it. These careful navigation of relationships, interactions, and behaviors were her primary tactics for avoiding conflict. It was

clearly not a choice for Sita but a tried and tested mechanism which had helped her cope with interpersonal conflicts in a workplace where hierarchy, stereotypes, and scrutiny shape everyday interactions.

Sita's cautious approach was also amplified by Gender. Her coping mechanisms were shaped not only by institutional hierarchy but also by her gender i.e. female who is working in a male-majority and patriarchal environment. Her hesitation to speak with male colleagues, her conscious avoidance of engaging in conversations outside of staffroom, and her self-admitted "*careful management of appearance*" all indicated conflict-avoidance primarily driven by gender stereotypes and bias. She explained this actions of hers; "*as a woman, you always have to think not just what to say, but when, where, and to whom.*"

Even when she experienced direct dismissal, such as during her menstruation-related request to swap a class as mentioned above, her coping remained quiet and internal. She did not confront the teacher who laughed at her discomfort. Instead, she processed the disappointment privately, later sharing it only with a trusted female colleague rather than with the teacher or the administration. The response she gave "*What's the point?*" was not that of giving up but displayed a level of contextual awareness and understanding of the limited space available to challenge ingrained gendered bias and misconception.

Sita also mentioned that she had found a small group colleagues (all female) with whom she can "*share, tease each other, and feel lighter*" acting as a support system for each other. These micro-communities functioned as emotional support or private spaces where she could let go of tension accumulated from managing public appearances. Home, too, became a refuge for Sita: caring for her son, and shifting focus to family allowed her to detach from workplace stress said Sita.

In conclusion Sita's response strategy can be said to be a continuous negotiation with her workplace. She avoided open conflicts not because she lacked zeal, but because she believed the institutional and social environment did not create a pre-condition where confrontations from a teacher with her experience or gender cannot yield any positive outcome. Therefore, Sita preferred caution, and selective engagement.

Discussion

The narrative shows that teachers' response to conflict is not always aimed at resolution or transformation of the condition. The responses are centered around self-

adjustment (Gopi and Sita), assertion of position within informal structure (Kamal) or association with social groups (Ram and Mina). This phenomenon of why response to interpersonal conflict in schools do not usually take the form of open confrontation is also explained by the Dahrendorf. Dahrendorf's (1968) argues the creation of subordinate groups based on the informal authority structures is also largely to subvert any open challenges or contestation to this authority or towards individuals holding these authorities as it carries social and professional risk as well as personal risk of being kept outside the informal system which is expected to someday change one's positioning from subordinate to authority. The response to interpersonal conflicts like: teachers adjust, withdraw, or internalize conflict rather than challenge the structures they perceive as unchangeable, support this theoretical assertion. Other research within organization setting also shows that informal hierarchies suppress open disagreement (Blase & Blase, 2002; Klimes, 2015; Limerick, 1976)

The response strategies of the participants can further be understood by the social identity theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979,2001). The duo argued that interpretations and responses to actions within a social context, such as the workplace, by individuals are driven by their association to group membership. At workplace, these group usually are formed on the basis of seniority, gender, professional approaches, or perceived skill/competence (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Terry, 2000). The narratives show that response of the participants to interpersonal conflict were reflective of their perceived association with social groups within school.

For example, Kamal's response was highly driven by his perceived membership to group based on competency, which initially led him to reject the arguments of the vice principal and in the longer run he distanced himself from the vice principal labelling him "*not capable enough*" to be engaged with. Likewise for Mina her response mechanism was to share and engage with another sub-group of teachers that she is a member of. For Ram on the other hand, the longer-term strategy was to either increase proximity to or even form a group of teachers who were open to integrating novel approaches to teaching.

These identity-based responses, however, pose a risk of increased polarization between groups creating grounds for conflicts in future. Such identity-based group culture "*fosters in-group favoritism, out-group distancing, and cumulative interpersonal tension, even in the absence of explicit hostility*" (Hogg, 2016; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The response to interpersonal conflicts is

therefore not neutral or all positive in terms of their effect on addressing consequences. Though they allow teachers to continue functioning usually by some sort of distancing from conflict, they do not necessarily address the problem. They in turn also pose risk of normalization of conflict. Overtime, such response limits the incentive for establishing a system to identify or address conflict. At personal level, such responses also shape future expectations and anticipation of conflict which is the reason for the participants to think of restraint and acceptance of the norm as a pre-emptive action against conflict. It thus becomes a casual condition that needs to be navigated and a normal workplace characteristic.

CHAPTER VII

REFLECTION, IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

The study explored the interpersonal conflict between teachers in community schools of Kathmandu City. This section provides the conclusion and implication drawn from the study based on the literature, stories of participation, the researcher's reflection, and observation.

Reflection

When I first conceptualized this study, my understanding of workplace conflict was influenced by my own experiences and that of my family's: From my mother's quiet frustrations in her late-started career to my nephew's modern-day remote work clashes. These stories, spanning generations and professions, planted a seed of curiosity that eventually led me to the gates of Kathmandu's community schools to look how these workplace conflict operated inside those gates. As I reflect on the narratives shared by Gopi, Kamal, Mina, Ram, and Sita, my understanding of what conflict truly means in an educational setting has fundamentally deepened.

Immersing myself in the lived experience of these five educators revealed a much quieter, yet far more insidious, form of friction. I realized that the true struggle often lies in silence. The school staffroom, I discovered, is not just a physical room to rest between classes; it is a highly charged symbolic space. It is a space where seating arrangements dictate social standing, where seniority grants the loudest voice, and where informal authority silently regulates who is allowed to innovate and who is expected to merely comply.

Sitting with these teachers, theories of authority-relations social identity ceased to just be an academic notion. I could see them play out in the day to day lives of community teachers dictating their professional experience and emotional well-being. I felt the weight of Gopi's quiet embarrassment as he gracefully withdrew from a technologically advancing environment. I witnessed Mina's profound disappointment when her simple acts of care and suggestion were met with defensive isolation. Most profound to me personally, maybe because I am a father to a daughter, was the immense, unseen burden carried by Sita, who had to navigate not only the steep hierarchy of being a new teacher, but the exhausting, constant self-monitoring

required of a female educator in a space that did not hesitate to casually dismissed her views and opinions.

I would once again want to be reminded of the Hindu mythology of Samundra Manthan (the Churning of the Ocean), which I referenced early in the dissertation. Just as the churning produced both the nectar of immortality (Amrit) and lethal poison (Kalakuta), the diverse, complex environment of a school inevitably produces the 'poison' of interpersonal conflict. We cannot attain the 'nectar' of a high-quality education system without first acknowledging and managing this poison. I carry forward the profound insight that true educational reform does not begin with new textbooks or federal policies; it begins in the staffroom. If we can expect community schools to effectively nurture the minds of the next generation, we must first understand the institutional cultures of community schools and seek to actively manage informal hierarchies, acknowledge hidden power dynamics, and structurally support the teachers themselves.

For too long, our educational systems have limited teachers to mere instruments of instruction, focusing relentlessly on curriculum delivery and technical skill development. But this research has laid bare the reality that teachers are, first and foremost, complex social beings. We place a paradoxical and monumental burden on their shoulders: we expect them to step into the classroom and inspire the next generation to let go of harmful societal norms, yet we leave them completely unsupported in staffrooms that continuously enforce those very same discriminatory hierarchies and biases. I ask this question, how justified is it for us to expect them to guide students toward a more equitable future when they themselves are structurally trapped withing these norms in their own daily work?

The answer is that we cannot. True educational transformation, therefore, does not end with demanding more from our teachers; it begins by creating a profound institutional support system for them. I start by caring for our teachers. We must build systems that prioritize their well-being.

Implication

The significance of this study was largely based on its utility for two distinct stakeholders. The implications for them are presented in this section.

Policy Makers

This study provided a contextual understanding of interpersonal conflict as an ongoing and relational phenomena within the community schools. The study showed

that there is a clear lack of management or support available for teachers that can be of assistance to them to preempt or resolve interpersonal conflict. This is further complicated by a more structural issue whereby current management approaches or policy frameworks are inadequate in addressing these forms of informal aspects of work environment at school. These gaps are of concern because such conflicts had impact on teacher's motivation, and sense of belonging.

This study thus indicates that the current focus of policies around structure, technical capacity, or performance metrics are not sufficient to ensure good working environment for community schoolteachers. It is equally important for policies to focus on such personal experiences acknowledging that teachers are operating in a context with informal relationships and interactions that can create interpersonal conflict. Additionally, the study also indicated that leadership support and local support systems can improve teachers' experience. This narrative inquiry can therefore be used as empirical evidence to undertake policy review and to get grounded insight about interpersonal conflict at workplace in community schools.

At federal level, the policy framework around education can benefit from inclusion of interpersonal dynamics and teachers' safeguarding from conflict as a pillar for school effectiveness can provide foundation for operational steps to be taken to preempt and manage interpersonal conflict. Such policy framework can also be steppingstone to address the structural and institutional norms including informal authorities that cause interpersonal conflict or broadly affect teacher wellbeing. The experience of Sita shows that addressing informal authority derived from seniority or gendered norms as policy would have enabled a more cordial assimilation of Sita into the school where she would have felt confident to share opinion and views if she chooses to without any fair.

Similarly, provincial governments, with their mandates and resources, can operationalize addressing interpersonal conflicts by supporting capacity development of local leadership and administration to identify and preempt informal authority that affect the educational environment negatively.

Local Government

The study provides evidence around the informal authority structure that influences interpersonal conflict and reactions which are operating within the community schools. This information can be very useful for local government and school leaders to design their leadership approach and action. The study also provides

a nuanced picture of interpersonal conflict within the schools. It gives evidence of how conflict originates, manifests, and how it impacts teachers. The findings show that interpersonal conflict is not just a one-off event-based phenomenon, but rather it can be seen as the sign of underlying power relations, informal authority, and communication issues among others. Thus, addressing interpersonal conflicts among teachers will need the school leaders to engage simultaneously with diverse perspectives within the school in a sustained manner accounting for informal authority and social identities at play.

The study can serve local government by working as a conceptual frame to develop a diagnostic tool to preempt or address potential conflict. By using the study's insight into how teachers perceive authority, personal positions, support and fairness, the local government can work to improve their perceptions. Additionally, the insights on responses can also be useful to local government to develop a diagnostic tool to identify teachers who might be going through interpersonal conflict.

Therefore, the study can be useful to stakeholders to understand the relational dynamics within a school and the informal authority which will inevitably help them design more grounded leadership strategies. This can further be complemented as the study can also be used to develop a management tool to identify cases of interpersonal conflict. Both can be of particular interest to local government to devise intervention for prevention or ratification of conflict.

Future Researchers

This narrative inquiry brings to light the need to understand schools as complex organizations and dynamic workplaces. Future researchers should adopt an organizational management perspective to investigate the structural and administrative frameworks of community schools. There is a pressing need to explore the efficacy of different management practices, leadership models, and human resource strategies tailored specifically for the teaching workforce.

For instance, research could examine how decentralized decision-making, formalized conflict mediation protocols, and structured peer-collaboration systems impact the daily social dynamics of the staffroom. By applying organizational behavior theories, future inquiries can identify the structural determinants that either mitigate or exacerbate the latent conflicts observed in this study. Ultimately, by shifting the research focus toward organizational design and management, future

scholars can provide actionable, evidence-based framework for building school systems that support teachers and staff who serve them.

Conclusion

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore how teachers in Nepal's community schools experience, understand, and respond to interpersonal conflict in their daily professional lives. Through the lived experiences of the educators in this study, it becomes evident that workplace conflict in these schools is rarely a series of isolated phenomenon. Instead, it is a latent condition woven into the very fabric of institutional culture in community school. The narratives illustrate how deeply entrenched institutional norms, such as seniority-based informal authority, gendered expectations, and the friction between traditional mindsets and modern pedagogical approaches create a complex web of informal hierarchies that shapes the interpersonal conflicts among teachers.

Rather than confronting the root causes of interpersonal differences, teachers frequently resort to the "art of daily adjustment". Responses such as withdrawal, silence, passive compliance, and selective engagement highlight a critical systemic gap, i.e. community schools currently lack the institutional mechanisms to meaningfully address and mediate interpersonal friction. Consequently, the burden of managing conflict falls squarely on the individual teacher, often resulting in emotional exhaustion, demotivation, and fractured collaboration. This ultimately diminishes the quality of the educational environment, proving that the internal social dynamics of a staffroom directly impact a school's primary mission of student learning.

To meaningfully improve Nepal's community school system, policymakers, local governments, and school leaders must recognize schools not merely as learning hubs for curriculum delivery, but as complex human workplaces or organization. Transforming these institutions requires a shift towards recognizing school as a workplace where systems and mechanisms must be in place to identify internal power dynamics, value emotions, and actively prioritize the wellbeing of their staff. Transforming these institutions requires acknowledging the informal authorities and hidden conflicts that dictate teachers' daily lives. By actively addressing these relational challenges and fostering environments that prioritize open communication and mutual respect across normative lines like generation and gender, community schools can hope to become truly collaborative, resilient, and effective centers of education.

It should be understood that managing interpersonal conflict in community schools is not about eliminating differences, but about recognizing them and approaching them constructively. Only by addressing the informal authorities that often are formed around social identities that dictate teachers' daily lives can community schools hope to become truly collaborative, resilient, and effective centers of education.

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