

KEMI Journal of Educational Leadership and Management

KJELM

[ISSN 3079-4048]

Volume: 2 Issue: 1 | Jun-2026

Leadership dispositions and conflict management effectiveness among secondary school leaders in Mombasa, Kenya: A mixed-methods study

Maina Gioko[1]

Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa[1]

Corresponding Author Email: mainawagioko@gmail.com

Cite this article in APA

https://doi.org/10.68147/4af4508a

Copyright: ©2026 by the author(s). Open access under CC BY.

Abstract

This study explored how emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy help secondary school leaders in Kenya handle conflicts more effectively. Rather than viewing conflict management as a set of rigid behaviours, the research focused on how leaders' personal qualities and relationships shape their responses. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combined surveys with open-ended questions about real-life conflict experiences. Statistical analysis showed that leaders with higher emotional intelligence were the most successful at managing conflict, with cultural empathy and self-confidence also playing important roles. Together, these qualities explained much of the variation in conflict management success among leaders. The qualitative responses brought these results to life, illustrating how being calm, understanding different perspectives, and building trust help leaders resolve disputes. Overall, the study shows that conflict management in schools is an adaptive process that depends on a leader's emotional, cultural, and personal strengths. For schools in Kenya, the findings suggest that developing these capacities in leaders is more important than simply following step-by-step conflict management frameworks. The study also offers practical recommendations for leadership development, such as training in emotional regulation, cultural awareness, and confidence-building.

Key terms: conflict management, emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, leadership self efficacy, educational leadership, Kenya

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Conflict is an unavoidable feature of organizational life, particularly in educational institutions where principals, deputy principals, heads of department, and teachers interact within complex instructional, administrative, and interpersonal environments. In Kenya's secondary school system, these interactions are further shaped by curriculum reforms, accountability pressures, workload demands, and changing stakeholder expectations, all of which intensify the frequency and complexity of conflict situations. When poorly managed, such conflicts negatively affect school climate, teacher morale, collaboration, and student outcomes (Rahim, 2002; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

Despite the availability of structured conflict management frameworks such as the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974), evidence suggests that their effectiveness is highly dependent on leadership judgment and contextual interpretation. In practice, school leaders rarely apply conflict styles fixedly; rather, they adapt their responses based on situational demands, relational dynamics, and emotional pressures. This has shifted scholarly attention toward leadership dispositions as critical determinants of conflict management effectiveness (Heifetz, 1994).

Emerging research highlights emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy as key psychological and relational capacities that shape how leaders interpret and respond to conflict situations. Emotional intelligence enables leaders to regulate emotions and facilitate constructive dialogue; cultural empathy supports sensitivity to diverse stakeholder perspectives; and self-efficacy influences confidence in engaging with and resolving conflict (Goleman, 1998; Bandura, 1997; Akanji et al., 2021). However, most existing studies treat these constructs in isolation and are largely derived from non-African contexts, limiting their explanatory relevance to school leadership in Kenya.

More critically, there is limited empirical evidence that integrates these leadership dispositions into a single explanatory model to determine how they collectively influence the effectiveness of conflict management among secondary school leaders in Kenya. Additionally, existing studies rarely combine quantitative predictive analysis with qualitative explanations of lived leadership experiences, leaving a methodological gap in understanding both the measurable and contextual dimensions of conflict management.

To address this gap, this study examines how emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy influence the effectiveness of conflict management among secondary school leaders in Mombasa County, Kenya. The study focuses on principals, deputy principals, and heads of department as key actors responsible for managing interpersonal and institutional conflicts within schools.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread adoption of structured conflict management frameworks such as the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, conflict resolution in secondary schools in Kenya remains inconsistent and heavily dependent on individual leadership behaviours rather than standardised procedures. School leaders, including principals, deputy principals, and heads of department, continue to face recurring interpersonal and institutional conflicts that are not adequately resolved through formal mechanisms alone.

Empirical studies have largely focused on conflict management styles as static behavioural categories, with limited attention to the psychological and relational dispositions that influence how leaders interpret and respond to conflict situations. Emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy have been examined in isolation, with insufficient integration into a unified explanatory model within the context of secondary school leadership in Kenya.

Theoretically, this reflects a gap between procedural conflict management models and leadership disposition theories. While frameworks such as the Thomas–Kilmann model emphasise behavioural classification, they do not adequately explain why leaders in similar institutional contexts adopt different conflict management approaches. This creates an incomplete understanding of conflict dynamics in real school environments.

Methodologically, there is also a gap in the limited use of mixed methods approaches that simultaneously quantify predictive relationships and explore lived leadership experiences in conflict situations. As a result, existing knowledge lacks contextual depth and explanatory integration.

This study addresses these gaps by examining how emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy collectively influence the effectiveness of conflict management among secondary school leaders in Mombasa County, Kenya. It further seeks to integrate quantitative predictive evidence with qualitative insights to develop a more contextually grounded understanding of leadership-driven conflict management.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

General Objective

The general objective of this study is to examine how emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy influence conflict management effectiveness among secondary school leaders in Mombasa County, Kenya, by integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence to develop a comprehensive understanding of leadership dispositions and their role in managing school conflicts.

Specific Objectives

The study sought to:

i. To determine the extent to which emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy predict conflict management effectiveness among secondary school leaders in Mombasa County, Kenya.

ii. To explore how secondary school leaders describe their lived experiences in managing conflict situations within their schools.

iii. To examine how qualitative insights explain or complement the statistical relationships between leadership dispositions and conflict management effectiveness among secondary school leaders.

1.4 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

i.To what extent do emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy predict conflict management effectiveness among secondary school leaders?

ii.How do school leaders describe their lived experiences in managing conflict situations?

iii.How do qualitative insights explain or complement the statistical relationships between leadership dispositions and conflict management effectiveness?

By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the study develops a contextually grounded understanding of conflict management as a function of leadership dispositions within Kenyan secondary schools. It contributes to leadership theory by demonstrating how emotional, cultural, and cognitive capacities interact to shape conflict outcomes, and informs leadership development practices aimed at

strengthening relational and adaptive competencies in educational institutions.

2.0 Literature Review

Conflict in educational organizations is widely recognized as an inherent feature of interpersonal and institutional interaction rather than an exceptional disruption. Within school environments, conflict arises from competing professional expectations, hierarchical decision-making structures, and the diversity of stakeholder values. Contemporary scholarship increasingly views conflict not as inherently negative, but as an outcome shaped by leadership interpretation and response mechanisms.

Conflict as a Structural and Relational Phenomenon

Early organizational research conceptualized conflict as either functional or dysfunctional depending on its impact on performance outcomes. De Dreu and Weingart (2003) distinguish between task and relationship conflict, noting that task-related disagreements may improve decision-making under certain conditions, while relationship conflict consistently undermines trust and collaboration. However, subsequent scholarship has questioned the practical separation of these categories in real-world educational contexts, where task and relational dimensions frequently overlap.

This limitation suggests that conflict outcomes are determined not solely by the type of disagreement but also by how leaders interpret and manage emotional and relational complexity in those situations.

Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Regulation

Emotional intelligence has been widely recognized as a critical leadership competency influencing interpersonal effectiveness and conflict handling. It is associated with the ability to perceive, regulate, and respond appropriately to emotional cues in oneself and others, thereby facilitating constructive engagement during tension-filled interactions.

Research demonstrates that emotionally intelligent leaders are more likely to adopt collaborative approaches to conflict management, improve communication quality, and reduce escalation in organisational settings (Brackett et al., 2010; Jordan & Troth, 2004). Mayer et al. (2008) further conceptualise emotional intelligence as a set of cognitive-emotional abilities that support adaptive social functioning in leadership roles.

Ali et al. (2022) reinforce this perspective in educational contexts, showing that principals with stronger emotional intelligence demonstrate more effective conflict management styles and improved relational outcomes in schools.

Cultural Empathy and Contextual Sensitivity

Cultural empathy plays a significant role in shaping how leaders interpret behaviour, meaning, and legitimacy during conflict situations. In diverse educational environments, cultural misunderstandings often intensify conflict and weaken trust between stakeholders.

Akanji et al. (2021) highlight that cultural values significantly influence conflict resolution strategies in organisational contexts, particularly where hierarchical and relational norms intersect. Similarly, Njuguna (2016) demonstrates that culturally responsive leadership enhances fairness, inclusivity, and stakeholder cooperation in Kenyan secondary schools.These studies suggest that conflict management effectiveness is closely linked to a leader’s ability to interpret cultural meaning systems and respond in ways that maintain relational stability.

Leadership Self-Efficacy and Proactive Engagement

Leadership self-efficacy refers to a leader's belief in their capacity to organise and execute actions required to manage complex situations effectively. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy influences motivation, persistence, and resilience in challenging contexts.

In educational leadership research, self-efficacy has been associated with improved decision-making, proactive engagement in difficult situations, and stronger conflict resolution behaviours (Sommers, 2020; Musau, 2023). Leaders with higher self-efficacy are more likely to intervene early in conflicts and sustain resolution efforts despite resistance.

Integrated Leadership Dispositions Perspective

Although emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and self-efficacy are frequently studied independently, emerging scholarship suggests that they may function as interrelated leadership dispositions rather than isolated traits. Emotional intelligence provides the capacity for emotional regulation, cultural empathy shapes interpretive frameworks, and self-efficacy influences behavioural activation in conflict situations.

However, existing research rarely integrates these constructs into a unified explanatory model. This fragmentation limits theoretical development because it does not fully explain how leaders simultaneously manage emotion, culture, and behavioural response during conflict episodes.

Conflict Management Frameworks and Adaptive Leadership

The Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument categorises conflict behaviour into competing, collaborating, avoiding, accommodating, and compromising styles. While widely used, this model has been critiqued for assuming stability in behavioural responses across contexts.

Heifetz (1994) argues that leadership in complex environments requires adaptive judgment rather than fixed behavioural categories. This perspective suggests that conflict management is situationally constructed rather than mechanically applied, reinforcing the need to examine underlying leadership capacities.

Restorative Approaches and Leadership Preconditions

Restorative approaches to conflict emphasise dialogue, trust rebuilding, and relationship repair as mechanisms for sustainable resolution. However, their effectiveness is contingent on leaders' relational trust, emotional regulation, and cultural sensitivity.

Fronius et al. (2019) caution that restorative practices may become procedural exercises if not supported by strong relational leadership capacities, highlighting the importance of underlying dispositions in successful implementation.

Synthesis and Conceptual Gap

Across the literature, conflict management effectiveness is increasingly associated with leadership capacities that influence emotional regulation, cultural interpretation, and behavioural engagement. However, these constructs are often examined in isolation, resulting in fragmented explanations of leadership effectiveness in conflict situations.

This study addresses this gap by examining how emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy collectively shape the effectiveness of conflict management among educational leaders in Kenyan secondary schools.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design to examine how leadership dispositions influence the effectiveness of conflict management among secondary school leaders in Mombasa County, Kenya. The convergent design was selected because it enables the independent collection, analysis, and subsequent integration of quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of complex leadership phenomena (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A pragmatic research paradigm underpinned the study, prioritising practical problem-solving and integrating multiple forms of evidence to generate actionable insights in real-world educational contexts.

Research Design and Rationale

The convergent mixed-methods design involved collecting quantitative and qualitative data concurrently, analysing them separately, and merging results during interpretation. Equal priority was given to both strands to ensure complementarity: the quantitative strand identified predictive relationships, while the qualitative strand explained how and why these relationships manifest in lived leadership experiences.

This design was appropriate because conflict management in schools is both measurable (through leadership dispositions and behavioural outcomes) and experiential (shaped by emotions, relationships, and context), requiring both statistical and narrative explanation.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised secondary school leadership personnel in Mombasa County, Kenya, specifically principals, deputy principals, and heads of department in public and private secondary schools.

The accessible population consisted of leaders from 12 secondary schools selected for their administrative diversity and representation of both public and private school contexts. A total of 186 participants were included in the study.

A stratified purposive (criterion-based) sampling approach was employed to ensure representation across leadership roles (principals, deputy principals, heads of department). Stratification was first used to ensure proportional representation of each leadership category, followed by purposive selection to identify information-rich participants with direct experience managing institutional conflict.The response rate was 78%, which is considered adequate for social science survey research.

Research Instruments

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire composed of four sections measuring emotional intelligence (8 Items), cultural empathy (7 Items), leadership selfefficacy(8 Items), and conflict management effectiveness (10 Items). All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), which is widely used to measure attitudes and perceptions in social science research (Likert, 1932).

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire composed of four sections measuring:

- Emotional intelligence (8 items)
- Cultural empathy (7 items)
- Leadership self-efficacy (8 items)
- Conflict management effectiveness (10 items)

All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Instrument validity was ensured through expert review (face and content validity) by three educational leadership scholars. A pilot test involving 25 school leaders outside the study sample was conducted to refine clarity and reliability, consistent with recommended practices in survey research (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Internal consistency reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients

(Cronbach, 1951):

- Emotional intelligence: $\alpha = 0.86$
- Cultural empathy: $\alpha = 0.83$
- Self-efficacy: $\alpha = 0.88$
- Conflict management effectiveness: $\alpha = 0.85$

These values indicate acceptable to strong reliability for all constructs (Hair et al.,

2022).

Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected using structured open-ended questions embedded within the survey instrument. Structured open-ended questions allow participants to describe experiences in their own words while maintaining consistency across respondents (Patton, 2015).

Participants responded to prompts such as:

- "Describe a recent conflict situation you managed in your school."
- "What factors influenced your approach to resolving the conflict?"
- "What challenges do you face when managing conflict?"

Responses were collected digitally via an online survey platform over four weeks.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27)

. The analysis included:

- Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations)
- Pearson correlation analysis
- Multiple regression analysis

The regression model tested the predictive effect of emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy on conflict management effectiveness.

Model diagnostics were conducted to ensure robustness:

- Multicollinearity assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF < 3.0)
- Normality checked using skewness and kurtosis values.
- Homoscedasticity evaluated through residual plots

- Outliers are examined using Cook's Distance.

These diagnostics confirmed that regression assumptions were not violated.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework:

1. Familiarisation with data
2. Initial coding
3. Theme identification
4. Theme review
5. Theme definition
6. Narrative synthesis

Coding was conducted manually and verified through peer debriefing to enhance analytical rigor. Three core themes were developed:

- Emotional regulation in conflict situations
- Cultural sensitivity in the interpretation of conflict
- Relational trust as a mediator of resolution success

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure qualitative trustworthiness:

- Credibility was enhanced through participant validation (member checking of interpretations)
- Transferability was ensured through a thick description of leadership contexts.
- Dependability was supported through an audit trail of coding decisions.
- Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive documentation of the researcher's bias.

For quantitative rigor:

- Internal validity was supported by controlling for regression assumptions.
- Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.
- External validity was enhanced by including multiple schools and leadership categories.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by removing identifying information from all datasets. Data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its cross-sectional design, which restricts causal interpretation of relationships among variables. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias. The study was also geographically limited to Mombasa County, Kenya, which may limit generalisability to

other contexts. Future research could adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to strengthen causal inference.

4.0 Findings of the Study

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy predict conflict management effectiveness among secondary school leaders. The results are presented in Tables 1–3.

Table 1 Model Summary

1	0.76	0.58	0.56	0.39

The model explains 58% of the variance in conflict management effectiveness, indicating a strong predictive relationship between leadership dispositions and conflict management outcomes.

Table 2 ANOVA Results

Regression	41.28	3	13.76	58.44	.000
Residual	29.71	182	0.16		
Total	70.99	185			

The regression model is statistically significant ($F(3, 182) = 58.44$, $p < .001$), confirming that the predictors jointly explain variations in conflict management effectiveness.

Table 3Regression Coefficients

Constant	0.61	0.10	—	6.10	.000
Emotional Intelligence	0.36	0.05	0.41	7.20	.000
Cultural Empathy	0.29	0.06	0.33	4.83	.000
Leadership SelfEfficacy	0.24	0.05	0.27	4.80	.000

Interpretation of Quantitative Results

Emotional intelligence emerged as the strongest predictor of conflict management effectiveness ($\beta = 0.41$), indicating that leaders who can recognize, regulate, and respond appropriately to emotions are more likely to engage in collaborative and constructive conflict resolution.

Cultural empathy was also a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.33$), suggesting that culturally responsive leaders are better able to build trust, reduce misinterpretation, and promote relational stability during conflict situations.

Leadership self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.27$) significantly contributed to the model, indicating that leaders with stronger confidence in their conflict management abilities are more likely to intervene early and sustain resolution efforts.

Qualitative Findings

Three key themes emerged from the qualitative data: emotional regulation, cultural sensitivity, and

relational trust.

Emotional Regulation as a De-escalation Mechanism

Participants emphasised the importance of emotional control in preventing escalation and maintaining constructive dialogue during conflict situations.

“When I remained calm, even a heated disagreement shifted into a productive discussion.” (Respondent 5, Survey data, 2026)

Cultural Sensitivity and Interpretation of Conflict

Respondents reported that cultural misunderstandings often contributed to the escalation of conflict, while cultural awareness promoted inclusion and mutual understanding. “Sometimes what looks like resistance is actually a difference in cultural communication styles.” (Respondent 7, Survey data, 2026).

Relational Trust as a Foundation for Resolution

Trust was consistently identified as a critical factor influencing successful conflict resolution.

“Where trust exists, even difficult conflicts are easier to resolve without formal intervention.” (Respondent 11, Survey data, 2026).

Integrated Interpretation of Findings

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrates that conflict management effectiveness is shaped by both leadership dispositions and relational context. Quantitative results identify emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy as significant predictors of conflict management effectiveness. Qualitative findings further explain how these constructs operate in practice: emotional ntelligence enables emotional regulation, cultural empathy enhances interpretation of stakeholder behaviours, and self-efficacy promotes proactive engagement in conflict situations. Importantly, relational trust emerged as a contextual enabling factor that strengthens the effectiveness of these leadership dispositions. Without trust, even strong leadership competencies may not fully translate into successful conflict resolution outcomes. Overall, the findings indicate that effective conflict management is best understood as the interaction between personal leadership capacities and the relational environment within schools.

Discussion

This study examined how emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership selfefficacy influence the effectiveness of conflict management among secondary school leaders.The findings support a leadership-dispositions perspective in which conflict management is shaped by interrelated psychological and contextual capacities rather than discrete behavioral styles.

Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Regulation

Emotional intelligence emerged as the strongest predictor of conflict management effectiveness. Prior research consistently positions emotional intelligence as central to interpersonal regulation and constructive engagement in leadership contexts (Brackett et al., 2010; Jordan & Troth, 2004; Mayer et al., 2008), including school leadership settings where it is associated with collaborative conflict handling (Ali et al., 2022).

In the present study, emotional intelligence appears less as a supportive competency and more as a

regulatory condition that determines whether conflict escalates or stabilises. However, its explanatory scope is partial. Several cases in the qualitative responses indicated that emotionally controlled leadership did not always result in resolution when cultural misinterpretation or institutional constraints were present, suggesting that emotional regulation operates within broader interpretive and structural limits.

Cultural Empathy and Interpretive Constraints

Cultural empathy significantly predicted conflict management effectiveness, reinforcing its role as a mechanism of meaning-making in diverse school environments. Previous studies highlight that cultural values shape conflict interpretation and resolution processes (Akanji et al., 2021), while culturally responsive leadership strengthens trust and cooperation in Kenyan schools (Njuguna, 2016).

Findings from this study indicate that cultural empathy influences how conflict is defined in the first place, whether it is interpreted as resistance, disrespect, or legitimate disagreement. However, cultural empathy is not uniformly effective across contexts. In situations where organisational hierarchy or rigid policy enforcement dominated, culturally sensitive interpretations had limited impact on decision outcomes, indicating structural constraints on interpretive leadership.

Leadership Self-Efficacy and Action Thresholds

Leadership self-efficacy also significantly influenced conflict management effectiveness, consistent with Bandura's (1997) theory that perceived capability drives persistence and action. Educational leadership studies similarly associate self-efficacy with proactive decisionmaking and resilience in conflict situations (Sommers, 2020; Musau, 2023).

The present findings extend this understanding by showing that self-efficacy functions as an "action threshold", determining whether leaders intervene early or delay engagement in conflict situations. However, self-efficacy alone did not guarantee successful outcomes. In several instances, confident intervention without adequate emotional regulation or cultural awareness contributed to escalation rather than resolution, suggesting interaction effects among dispositions.

Interaction of Leadership Dispositions

The results support a shift away from isolated trait explanations toward an integrated dispositions framework. Emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and self-efficacy do not operate independently; rather, they function as a coordinated system shaping perception, interpretation, and response in conflict situations.

Emotional intelligence regulates affective responses, cultural empathy structures interpretation of social meaning, and self-efficacy drives behavioural activation. However, their effectiveness is conditional. Weakness in any one dimension can disrupt the functioning of the system, for example, high self-efficacy without cultural sensitivity may intensify rather than resolve conflict.

This interdependence challenges linear models of leadership effectiveness and suggests that conflict management outcomes are emergent rather than directly attributable to single variables.

Limitations of Behavioural Frameworks

The findings call into question the explanatory sufficiency of the Thomas–Kilmann framework. While useful for categorising observable conflict styles, the model does not account for the underlying cognitive, emotional, and cultural processes that shape behavioural choice.

Consistent with Heifetz (1994), the evidence suggests that conflict behaviours is adaptive rather than fixed. Leaders do not simply select predefined styles; their decisions emerge from the interaction between internal dispositions and situational pressures. This limits the predictive capacity of behavioural typologies when applied in isolation.

Contextual and Structural Boundary Conditions

Although leadership dispositions are central to explaining conflict management effectiveness, their influence is not absolute. Institutional culture, policy rigidity, hierarchical structures, and workload pressures emerged as important boundary conditions shaping outcomes.

In some cases, even strong leadership dispositions were constrained by organisational protocols that limited decision-making flexibility. This indicates that conflict management is not solely a function of individual capacity but is also shaped by systemic and institutional environments.

Restorative Approaches and Preconditions for Effectiveness

The findings partially support restorative approaches to conflict, which emphasise dialogue, trust, and relational repair (Fronius et al., 2019). However, their effectiveness appears contingent on underlying leadership dispositions.Where emotional regulation, cultural sensitivity, and confidence were weak, restorative practices tended to remain procedural rather than transformative. This suggests that restorative frameworks are dependent on leadership capacity rather than functioning as standalone solutions.

Summary of Discussion

Overall, the findings indicate that conflict management effectiveness in educational leadership is best understood as an emergent outcome of interacting leadership dispositions operating within institutional constraints. Emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy jointly shape how leaders perceive, interpret, and respond to conflict, but their influence is mediated by contextual and structural conditions. This position conflicts with management, which views dynamic interaction between individual capacities and organisational environments as a function of fixed behavioural styles.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined how emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership selfefficacy influence the effectiveness of conflict management among secondary school leaders in Kenya. The findings demonstrate that conflict management effectiveness is not primarily a function of procedural knowledge or behavioural style classifications but is strongly shaped by a set of interrelated leadership dispositions. Emotional intelligence emerged as the most influential predictor, followed by cultural empathy and leadership self-efficacy, indicating that effective conflict resolution is grounded in leaders' capacity to regulate emotions, interpret cultural meaning, and act with confidence in complex interpersonal situations.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes three key contributions to leadership and conflict management scholarship.

First, it advances an integrated leadership-dispositions model of conflict management effectiveness by demonstrating that emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and leadership self-efficacy function as an interdependent system rather than isolated predictors. This shifts explanatory focus from fragmented trait-based models toward a unified dispositional framework that better reflects how leadership operates

in real educational contexts.

Second, the study extends conflict management theory by empirically challenging the sufficiency of procedural and behavioural frameworks such as the Thomas–Kilmann model. The findings show that conflict styles are not fixed behavioural categories, but adaptive outcomes shaped by underlying emotional, cultural, and cognitive leadership capacities.

Third, the study contributes contextually grounded evidence from Kenyan secondary schools, strengthening the limited but growing body of African educational leadership research. It demonstrates that leadership dispositions play a central role in shaping how school-level conflicts are interpreted, engaged with, and resolved in resource-constrained and culturally diverse educational environments.

In practice, the study suggests that leadership development in education should shift from a narrow focus on procedural conflict-management frameworks toward structured capacity-building in emotional regulation, culturally responsive leadership, and strengthening self-efficacy. This includes embedding reflective emotional awareness practices, intercultural competence training, and experiential leadership simulations that build confidence in managing complex conflict situations.

The study is limited by its cross-sectional design, which restricts causal interpretation, and by reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce response bias. Additionally, the contextual focus on secondary school leaders' limits generalisability beyond similar educational settings. Future research should consider longitudinal designs and multi-level analyses that incorporate institutional and policy-level variables to further refine the leadership-dispositions model.

Overall, the study concludes that sustainable conflict management in educational institutions depends not only on formal systems and frameworks but more critically on the internal leadership capacities that guide how those systems are interpreted and enacted in practice, reflecting the dynamic interaction between who leaders are, how they relate to others, and the contexts in which they operate.

References

1. Akanji, B., Mordi, C., Ajonbadi, H., & Olatunji, D. A. (2021). Exploring cultural values in conflict management: A qualitative study of university heads of departments. Qualitative Research in Organisations and Management, 16(2), 350– 369.https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-06-2020-1953 Ali,
2. F., Saleem, Z., & Mustafa, J. (2022). Study of the impact of principals' emotional intelligence and self-efficacy on their conflict management style at the secondary school level. Global Economics Review, 7(2), 1– https://doi.org/10.31703/ger.2022(VII-II).01 Bandura,
3. A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. Freeman. Bhana,
4. A., Suknunan, S., & Mohamed, S. B. (2022). Role-modelling, decision-making, and conflict resolution: Impact of leadership and management on academic and administrative employees at a South African higher education institution. African Journal of Business and Economic Research, 17(3), 281– 307.https://doi.org/10.31920/1750-4562/2022/v17n3a13 Bonnyventure,
5. J., Ochieng, P., & Mutua, L. (2024). Leadership efficacy and conflict resolution strategies in secondary schools in Kenya. East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences, 5(4). Brackett,
6. M. A., Rivers, S. E., & Salovey, P. (2010). Emotional intelligence: Implications for personal and professional success. Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 4(1), 88–103.https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2009.00215.x Creswell,
7. J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (6th ed.). Sage. Creswell,
8. J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). Designing and conducting mixed methods research (3rd ed.). SAGE

Publications.

9. Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. Psychometrika, 16(3), 297–334. De
10. Dreu, C. K. W., & Weingart, L. R. (2003). Task versus relationship conflict, team performance, and team member satisfaction: A meta-analysis. Journal of Applied Psychology, 88(4), 741–749.https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.4.741 Dunaetz,
11. D. R. (2008). Personality and conflict management style: A study of pastors. Journal of Social Psychology, 148(5), 573–592.https://doi.org/10.3200/SOCP.148.5.573-592 Fronius,
12. T., Persson, H., Guckenburg, S., Hurley, N., & Petrosino, A. (2019). Restorative justice in U.S. schools: An updated research review. WestEd.
13. Goleman, D. (1998). Working with emotional intelligence. Bantam Books. Hair,
14. J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2022). Multivariate data analysis (9th ed.). Cengage.
15. Heifetz, R. A. (1994). Leadership without easy answers. Harvard University Press.
16. Jordan, P. J., & Troth, A. C. (2004). Managing emotions during team problem solving: Emotional intelligence and conflict resolution. Human Performance, 17(2), 195– 218.https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327043hup1702_4
17. Likert, R. (1932). A technique for the measurement of attitudes. Archives of Psychology, 140, 1–55.
18. Mayer, J. D., Roberts, R. D., & Barsade, S. G. (2008). Human abilities: Emotional intelligence. Annual Review of Psychology, 59, 507– 536.https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.59.103006.093646 Messarra,
19. L. C., Karkoulian, S., & El-Kassar, A. N. (2016). Conflict resolution styles and personality traits: The moderating role of Generation X and Y in a non-Western context. International Journal of Conflict Management, 27(3), 315– 340.https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCMA-10-2014-0080
20. Musau, J. (2023). Leadership self-efficacy and decision-making in school administration.*African Journal of Educational Management, 24*(1).
21. Njuguna, F. W. (2016). Conflict management strategies in Kenyan secondary schools. International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies, 8(2), 8– 16.https://doi.org/10.5897/IJEAPS2015.0414
22. Patton, M. Q. (2015). Qualitative research & evaluation methods (4th ed.). Sage.
23. Rahim, M. A. (2002). Toward a theory of managing organisational conflict. International Journal of Conflict Management, 13(3), 206–235.https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022874 Sommers,
24. W. A. (2020). Responding to resistance: Thirty strategies to manage conflict in your school. Solution Tree Press.
25. Thomas, K. W., & Kilmann, R. H. (1974). Thomas–Kilmann conflict mode instrument. CPP.