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AUTHORS: Mesut DEMIRBILEK, Soner FIDAN

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An Analysis on Conflicts in Educational Organizations and Informal Mediator Roles

Mesut DEMİRBİLEK¹, Soner FİDAN²

Abstract

In the current study, which aimed to examine the conflicts experienced in educational organizations and the informal mediator roles undertaken in these conflict processes, descriptive survey model which is one of the quantitative research methods, was used. Opinions of the participating teachers or administrators determined by using the criterion sampling method in the study were taken using an online form. The data obtained were analyzed within the framework of research questions using the descriptive analysis technique and the data were brought together under various categories and themes. In light of the findings of the study, it was determined that the conflicts in schools are caused by teachers, school administration or parents and the conflicts are mostly caused by factors such as communication problems, work distribution, differences, administrative disagreements, sharing, expectations, physical conditions, pressure and discrimination. When the characteristics of the people who undertake the role of informal mediator are examined, it is seen that traits such as strong communication skills, composure, impartiality, result and solution-orientedness, tolerance and being positive and optimistic come to the fore. When the methods used by the informal mediators were examined, it was determined that they use methods such as effective communication, active listening to the parties, managing the situation with a fair understanding, offering joint solutions, bringing the parties together, creating a suitable environment and using their expertise.

Key Words

Mediation
Conflict
Educational organizations
Role conflict
Mediator roles

About Article

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¹Dr. Ministry of National Education, Türkiye, demirbilekmesut@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7570-7807>

²Expert, Ministry of National Education, Türkiye, sonerfidan44@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3783-5031>

Introduction

Conflict is a state of intra-organizational disagreement that generally occurs between individuals or groups and where each person or group tries to impose their views and expectations on others (Thakore, 2013). The life of the individual in the organization causes these conflicts to occur and the internal conflicts in the organization can generally arise due to communication problems, resource scarcity, task distribution, differences, organizational roles and external factors (Madalina, 2016). Although conflicts are often seen as destructive, when evaluated and managed constructively, they contribute to understanding and solving problems and strengthening relationships (Tjosvold, 2006). In addition to this, beneficial outcomes can also be created through conflicts such as developing team skills, emerging new ideas and alternatives and improving critical thinking (Ronquillo et al., 2022). However, the roles assumed in the management of the conflict in the conflict process are important. There are many different types of conflict management including the “avoiding approach”, which requires getting away from and ignoring the conflict experienced during the conflict process, the “competing approach”, where one side wins and the other loses, resulting in resentment, the “compromising approach”, in which both sides make concessions and both sides sacrifice some of their own interests and the “collaborating approach”, where both parties come together and produce the best solution for both parties within the framework of effective listening and respectful communication (Sample, 2017).

Although conflict processes are tried to be resolved between the individuals and groups that make up the parties, individuals who play the role of mediator are often involved in the resolution of such conflicts. Mediators are people who play a role, sometimes formally and sometimes informally, as a third party to resolve conflicts (Şahin, 2021). These persons take the initiative as facilitators in the resolution of the conflict that may be experienced between the disputing parties (Haselgrove-Spurin, 2002). Mediators generally follow three stages in the conflict process (Rahman, 2012); (1) by being involved in the relations of the parties in conflict, they ensure that the parties understand and recognize the issue of conflict and help the interaction of individuals or groups on the subject by maintaining their impartiality, (2) by learning the needs and expectations of individuals or groups from the parties involved, they take action by creating an impartial negotiation environment and (3) within the framework of the negotiations, the terms of reconciliation are determined and they ensure that the parties agree on a common solution without blaming anyone or declaring anyone innocent. On the other hand, there are different approaches and styles adopted by people who assume the role of mediator (Initiative Mediation Support Deutschland, 2017); (1) some mediators exhibit facilitative mediation by uncovering the causes and interests underlying the requests and simply guiding communication in a non-directive and non-advisory manner, (2) some other mediators suggest different solutions in order to end the conflict process by structuring the process in such a way as to lead to a solution and (3) some mediators direct the conflict process and exhibit power-based mediation by using power elements based on punishment or reward to reach a solution.

Educational institutions, like other organizational structures, constitute an intense communication area where conflicts are experienced and felt (Bayar, 2015). In this context, while peer mediation for the resolution of conflicts between students is widely kept up-to-date (Malek, 2013; Trevaskis, 1994), informal mediation roles (Paçacı & Erdem, 2019), which also play a role in conflict processes among teachers, have also started to become widespread. As a matter of fact, individuals who assume informal roles take voluntary initiatives as individuals who act without being prescribed these roles and take responsibility in informal communication and contact processes (Dubin, 1958). Due to the intense communication in educational institutions, conflicts based on various problems may occur, especially between teachers, between teachers and school administration or between teachers and parents. For example, according to Polat and Demir (2021), conflicts can occur between teachers from different generations due to differences in attitudes and understanding of education and discipline and this can cause negativities in educational organizations. According to Ekici (2020), communication problems between teachers and administrators cause conflicts and negatively affect the educational goals of the school. While Bingöl (2013) states that there are conflicts experienced between teachers and school administrators due to reasons such as not being able to empathize, not being open to criticism, always seeing themselves as right and not accepting their mistakes, Başsayın

(2022) states that conflicts at school are generally related to communication problems, differences of opinion, unfair behaviours of administrators and the environment of competition. In this context, as Özdoğru (2022) also determined, teachers need a mediator in the conflicts they experience in schools.

Informal mediators, who assume a role and take action for the resolution of all these conflict processes between teachers and other stakeholders, try to eliminate the conflict by being involved in the process within the framework of their reputation, talent and motivation. These individuals are generally patient, reliable, objective, self-controlled, adaptable, able to take responsibility and sensitive to problems (Sam Imperati, 2017). At the same time, they try to understand the people around them, can empathize, are not prejudiced or judgmental and are willing to listen to others and their problems (NERIS Analytics, 2022). In conflicts in educational institutions, people who have these personality traits and assume the role of informal mediator are sometimes school principals, sometimes assistant principals and sometimes teachers and they take the initiative in the conflict process (Şentürk, 2006; Kurt, 2019; Özdoğru, 2022).

In this connection, in the current study, it was aimed to examine the conflicts experienced in educational organizations and the informal mediator roles of teachers or administrators in these conflict processes. In the context of this subject, the studies in the literature are insufficient and there is only one study conducted by Özdoğru (2022) in which the mediator role of school principals was evaluated. Most of the research on mediation in educational organizations has been conducted in the context of peer mediation for students (Benson & Benson, 1993; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Çetin & Türnüklü, 2015; Aytekin, 2019; Gökalp & İnel, 2019) and thus there is a lack of research on informal mediator roles related to teachers and administrators. In this regard, the current study sought answers to the following sub-questions;

1. What are the conflicts experienced by teachers and administrators working in state-owned educational institutions?
2. Who are the persons assuming the role of informal mediator between the parties in the conflicts, what are the characteristics and methods of these persons?
3. What are the main elements and methods that make the mediation role successful and contribute to the resolution of conflict?

Method

Research model

The survey model was used in this research. In survey models, the current situation related to a specific subject or phenomenon is tried to be described, and the subject, event or situation investigated is evaluated and defined within its own conditions (Singleton & Straits, 2009; Kuzu, 2013). In this framework, descriptive survey model, which is one of the survey models, was used and the opinions and perceptions of teachers and administrators were consulted to reveal the conflicts experienced in educational organisations and the informal mediation roles undertaken in these conflicts (Check & Schutt, 2012; Karakaya, 2012).

Sample

The criterion sampling method, which is one of the purposive sampling methods, was used in the study. In this sampling method, the criteria determined by the researcher are taken into consideration and the participants are selected accordingly (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006; Büyüköztürk et al., 2012; Patton, 2014). Thus, within the context of the study, participants who work in state-owned educational institutions and have experienced intra-organizational conflicts were included in the study. In this way, a total of 114 participants were accessed and the demographic information about the participants is given below.

Table 1. Demographic information about the participants

Groups		N	%
Gender	Female	67	58.8
	Male	47	41.2
Job	Teacher	95	83.3
	School Principal	8	7.0
	School Assistant Principal	11	9.6
School Type	Pre-school	2	1.8
	Primary School	32	28.1
	Secondary School	66	57.9
	İmam Hatip Secondary School	1	0.9
	Anatolian High School	8	7.0
	Vocational and Technical High School	4	3.5
	Imam Hatip High School	1	0.9
Length of Service	0-5 Years	21	18.4
	6-10 Years	21	18.4
	11-15 Years	16	14.0
	16-20 Years	19	16.7
	21 Years and More	37	32.5

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that 58.8% of the participants are female and 41.2% are male. In addition, 83.3% of the participants are teachers, 7% are school principals and 9.6% are school assistant principals. Of the participants, 1.8% work in pre-school institutions, 28.1% work in primary schools, 57.9% work in secondary schools, 0.9% work in İmam Hatip secondary schools, 7% work in Anatolian high schools, 3.5% work in vocational and technical high schools and 0.9% work in İmam Hatip high schools. When the distribution of the participants according to their length of service is examined, it is seen that 18.4% have been working as a teacher for 0-5 years, 18.4% for 6-10 years, 14% for 11-15 years, 16.7% for 16-20 years and 32.5% for 21 years and more.

Data collection tools and data collection

In the study, an online form consisting of structured and semi-structured questions was used as the data collection tool. In structured questions, participants are not allowed to go beyond the questions asked in the study and response options are limited and fixed, while in semi-structured questions, partial flexibility is allowed for the answers of the respondent (Çokluk et al., 2011). The online form prepared within this framework was sent to the participants in October 2022 and data analysis was carried out on the answers given by the participants. Some of the questions asked to the participants are as follows:

1. Who are the persons who assume the role of mediator between the parties in a conflict you have experienced or witnessed in the school environment?
2. Can you list the personality traits of the individuals who assumed the role of mediator between the parties in this conflict?
3. Can you explain the method that enables the persons who engage in mediation to be successful?

Data analysis

In the study, the descriptive analysis technique was used for the analysis of the data and the data obtained were brought together under categories and themes within the framework of the research questions. In the description, it is aimed for the researcher to reveal the phenomena related to a situation and the obtained data are organized and interpreted by the researcher (Altunışık et al., 2001; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). In this context, the data obtained in order to reveal the current state of the informal mediator roles undertaken by individuals within the framework of the conflicts in state schools are described and presented under categories and themes (Bryman & Burgess, 1994).

Findings

Situations subject to conflicts in the school environment

When the findings obtained in the study are examined, it is seen that the situations expressed by the participants as the subjects of conflicts are diverse. In this context, the situations that are the subjects of conflicts are discussed under three main themes: teacher-induced, school administration-induced and parent-induced.

Table 2. Teacher-induced situations that are subjects of conflicts in the school environment

Theme	Category	Subjects of conflict	<i>f</i>
Teacher-Induced	Parents	Communication problems with parents	9
		Disagreements with parents	7
		Teachers' making discrimination between parents	1
	Group of Branch Teachers	Work distribution within the group of branch teachers	2
		Differences of opinion between the members of the group of branch teachers on the curriculum	1
		Jealousy	1
		Selection of the classes to be taught	1
		Disagreements on who will teach morning and afternoon classes in double shift schools	1
	Differences	Political differences of opinion	1
		Differences of opinion in meetings	1
	Administrative Disagreements	Disputes on taking time off work with the school administration	2
		Teacher arriving late to school or arriving late to class	2
		Disputes with the administration about the way regulations are implemented	1
	Expectations	Teacher's class schedule and expectations	6
		Duty of overseeing the school and students and places of this duty	3
		Asking for a free day	1
	Communication	Personal problems between teachers	3
		Communication problems between teachers	2
		Prejudice or misunderstandings	1
	Reflection	Reflecting personal problems to work life	1

As can be seen in Table 2, teacher-induced situations that cause conflict are handled in seven sub-categories. In the category of “*Parents*”, the communication problems and disagreements of teachers with the parents of the students come to the fore. The stakeholders with whom teachers interact most are the parents of the students and the expectations of the parents about their children are reflected on teachers and this can sometimes cause conflicts. In the category of “*group of branch teachers*”, it is seen that the distribution of tasks within the group, differences of opinion on the curriculum, jealousy and not being able to share classes cause conflicts. In this context, the difference of teacher performance in schools, especially within the group of branch teachers and the fact that some teachers gain prestige by coming to the forefront in the group of branch teachers may cause jealousy. At the same time, conflicts may arise due to unfair sharing within the group of branch teachers and the dominant character of the head of the group or the informal leader. This conflict usually manifests itself during the sharing.

In the category of “*Differences*”, political views and differences of opinion cause conflicts. Teachers also have different views, unions or political ideas as in the whole society in general, which sometimes cause teachers to have different opinions about the operation of the school or various professional decisions and may pave the way for conflicts. In the category of “*Administrative Disagreements*”, there are conflicts about taking time off work with the school administration, some teachers' being late for school or class and the way regulations are implemented also cause conflicts. As in most organizational life, there may be teachers who disrupt or abuse their professional responsibilities in school functioning, this situation can sometimes put school administrations in a difficult situation and situations such as continuously taking off time and late arrival can cause

grievances. Moreover, some administrators' deficiencies in the implementation of regulations or their putting pressure on teachers by using regulations may also cause such conflicts.

In the category of "*Expectations*", situations that are not in compliance with the regulations such as teachers' expectations about the curriculum, making various requests about duty or places and requesting a free day cause conflict. Although the curriculum or the list of duties of overseeing the school and students are prepared by the school administration and the decisions regarding the functioning of the school are made by the school administration, the school administration generally has to deal with the requests coming from teachers that do not comply with the legal regulations. In this context, requests made by teachers such as wanting a free day, not wanting classes at certain times, wanting to teach a specific class, etc. are handled in line with the flexibility of the school administration, yet the fact that such requests are against the legislation is ignored by teachers.

In the category of "*Communication*", personal problems, communication problems and prejudices, misunderstandings between teachers cause conflicts. In the active and intensive communication processes of the school environment, the emergence of communicative problems among teachers can be seen as a natural process. Teachers constantly come together in meetings and environments in the regular functioning of the school and this can cause misperceptions and personal enmities. On the other hand, in the "*Reflection*" category, it is seen that teachers' reflecting their personal or private life problems to the school causes conflicts. Problems related to teachers' own private lives can sometimes be a cause of conflict that goes beyond individual boundaries and reflects on school stakeholders or professional life.

Table 3. School administration-induced situations that are subjects of conflicts in the school environment

Theme	Category	Subjects of Conflict	<i>f</i>
School Administration-Induced	Administrative Discretion	Administrative applications	1
		Problems between parents and teachers due to administrative vacuum	1
		Continuously finding parents right	1
		School principal avoiding responsibility	1
	Classes-Course Schedule	Parent-administration conflict due to elective courses	1
	Physical Conditions	Shortcomings in physical conditions	2
		Materials used in classrooms	2
		School cleaning	1
		Crowded classrooms	1
	Pressure	Administrative pressure and mobbing	3
		Imposing a workload on the teacher	2
		Insulting the teacher	1
		Provocative attitudes	1
	Discrimination	Administrative favouritism and discrimination	4
		Unfair practices in the assignment of classes to teachers	2
	Communication	Communication problems and disagreements with teachers	6

As can be seen in Table 3, the situations caused by the school administration that cause conflicts are discussed in six categories. In the category of "*Administrative Discretion*", it is seen that the administrative practices of the school administration, the administrative vacuum created in the school, the administrative approach that does not defend the teacher and administrators' ignoring their responsibilities cause conflicts. The leadership displayed by the administrators in the school can sometimes harm the school climate. In this context, it should be taken into account that administrative practices that victimize teachers and stakeholders, or cause conflict can increase disputes and disagreements. In the category of "*Classes-Course Schedule*", there may be disagreements with the parents of the students, especially regarding the selection of elective courses. In fact, due to the intensity of the class hours and curriculum and physical conditions in schools, sometimes school administration can impose elective courses without allowing flexibility on students and parents and this can be the subject of conflicts.

In the category of "*Physical Conditions*", the physical deficiencies of schools, lack of various materials, school cleaning and crowded classrooms cause conflicts. The parents of the students see the

school administration as responsible for the deficiencies or negativities experienced in the school and in this context, they return as the problems reflected to the school administration, which can cause arguments and disagreements with the parents of the students. In the category of “*Pressure*”, it is seen that the pressures of school administrators, their mobbing, imposing workload, insulting and provocative attitudes cause conflicts. In this context, the imposition of psychological or verbal pressure on the teacher by school administrators becomes a negative stimulus that directly disrupts the peace environment in the school, which can sometimes lead to consequences that are brought to the judiciary.

In the category of “*Discrimination*”, favouritism of school administrators and unjust behaviours in various sharing cause conflicts. It is easier for teachers who feel the environment and climate of discrimination to see and evaluate this as a factor that will cause conflict. In the category of “*Communication*”, the communication problems of school administrators with teachers cause conflicts. Misunderstandings or prejudices can increase in schools where there is no transparent and active communication environment and sometimes the communication problems of school administrators can prepare the ground for these conflicts.

Table 4. Parent-induced situations that are subjects of conflicts in the school environment

Theme	Category	Subjects of Conflict	<i>f</i>
Parent-Induced	Demand/Request	Pressure of expectations	2
		Not liking the teacher	1
		Comparing teachers	1
		Demands for changing classes	1
	Not accepting	Not accepting negative student behaviours	4
	Accusing	Accusing the administration of the problems experienced by students	1
		Seeing the teacher responsible for student disputes	1
	Putting Pressure	Parental violence	3
		Seeing the teacher as a caregiver	1
		Threatening the teacher with political power	1
		Making allegations against teachers	1
	Intervening	Intervention of parents in disagreements between students	1
		Intervention in the professional field of the teacher	1
		Intervention in the teacher's private life	1
	Communication	Creating tension	1
	Administrative Functioning	Insisting on student enrolment	1
		Student disciplinary proceedings	1

As can be seen in Table 4, parent-induced situations that cause conflict are discussed in seven categories. In the category of “*Request/Demand*”, situations such as the pressure created by parents with their expectations on teachers and the school administration, their selecting teachers, making comparisons between teachers and their demands for class change cause conflicts. Most parents have the desire to reach the “best” in general, these expectations generally put pressure on teachers and school administration and may negatively affect their professional activities. In the category of “*Not accepting*”, parents’ ignoring their children’s negative behaviours causes conflicts. The problems experienced by students in the communication processes in the school environment and the behaviours they exhibit can sometimes cause disputes between the school administration and teachers and parents not wanting to accept that their children misbehaved.

In the category of “*Accusing*”, parents’ blaming the school and teachers for the problems experienced with their children and seeing the teacher and school administration as the responsible part cause conflicts. It is thought that the above-mentioned perception of denial and the understanding of seeking someone to blame are effective in experiencing this situation. In the category of “*Putting pressure*”, verbal or physical violence created by the parents of the students against the teacher and the school administration, the perception of seeing teachers as caregivers and putting teachers in a difficult situation by making various allegations about them or threatening them with political power cause conflicts. Parents of students may seek various justifications or engage in practices of violence, especially in cases of expectations that they cannot resolve with school stakeholders or that do not

comply with the legislation. This situation shows that the existence of violence and oppression is felt not only in certain sectors such as health but also in education.

In the category of “*Intervening*”, parents’ intervention in the problems experienced among students, parents’ various interventions with teachers’ professional skills, abilities, and methods and with teachers’ private lives (such as wanting to contact the teacher at late hours) cause conflicts. This situation can be explained by the change in parents’ perception of “teacher” as a result of new tools of communication. In the category of “*Communication*”, parents’ occasional disputes with teachers leading to tension can cause conflicts, while in the category of “*Administrative Functioning*”, insisting on enrolling in certain classes or choosing certain teachers and disciplinary inspections on students can cause conflicts. In short, it has become easier for parents to reach the “school” and the “teacher” compared to the past, and this creates pressure on the teacher or the school administration and creates conflicts because of dissatisfied expectations and wishes.

Informal mediator roles in the conflicts experienced

According to the data obtained in the study, the person or people who assume the role of informal mediator in the conflicts in the school climate, the characteristics of these people and the main findings on the methods that make the mediation activity successful are presented below.

Table 5. People assuming the role of informal mediator in the conflicts experienced in school

Position	<i>f</i>	%
School Principal	21	18.5
School Assistant Principal	18	16.0
Administration	19	16.7
School Counsellor	9	7.9
Representatives of the Union	1	0.8
Head of the Group of Branch Teachers	1	0.8
Senior Teachers	1	0.8
Female Teachers	1	0.8
Other Teachers	36	31.5
No Mediation	7	6.0

As can be seen in Table 5, the person or people who assume the role of informal mediator in conflicts are mostly in administrative positions. The ratio of informal mediator roles assumed by the school principal, assistant principal and administration is around 51%, followed by the informal mediation carried out by colleagues working in the same school (31.5%), the school counsellor (7.9%) and then representatives from the union, the head of the group of branch teachers, senior teachers and female teachers. In general, it is seen that school administrators or leaders feel responsible for the conflicts in schools, as the conflicts that occur harm the school climate and disrupt the school functioning. For this reason, it can be considered as a natural process for school administrators to assume this role.

Table 6. Characteristics of the people assuming the role of informal mediator in conflicts in school

Informal Mediator	Categories	Characteristics	f
	Knowledge	Establishing Strong Communication	2
		Having Knowledge and Experience	7
		High Capacity to Persuade	2
		Knowing about Human Psychology	1
		Experienced in Crisis Management	1
	Behaviour/Attitude	Sensible and Calm	3
		Having Leadership Qualities	8
		Patient	8
		Compatible	6
		Listening	6
		Loving-Sincere	5
		Constructive	4
		Active-Sociable	3
		Problem Solver	3
		Acting in Compliance with Ethical Values	2
		Self-confident	2
		Frank	2
		Determined	2
		Respectful	2
Altruistic		1	
Friendly		1	
Self-sacrificing		1	
Disciplined		1	
Outspoken		1	
Genial		1	
Sensitive		1	
Consistent		1	
Courageous		1	
Way of Thinking/Approaching	Neutral (Objective)-Fair	1	
	Result-Solution Oriented	6	
	Tolerant	0	
	Understanding	9	
	Naive-Well-Intentioned	6	
	Agreeable	5	
	Multi-directional	4	
	Reasonable	3	
	Responsible	3	
	Mature	3	
	Democrat	2	
	Peaceful	2	
	Fostering Different Perspectives	1	
	Honest	1	
	Practical	1	
Emotion	Positive (Optimistic-Modest)	2	
	Empathetic	9	
	Prudent	3	
	Devoted	1	

As can be seen in Table 6, the characteristics of individuals who assume the role of informal mediator in conflicts in school are discussed under four categories. In the category of “*Knowledge*”, the participating teachers stated that the people who assume the role of informal mediator in conflict

processes are experienced and knowledgeable, know people and human psychology, have experience in crisis management, have strong communication skills and have high persuasion skills. Individuals who assume the role of mediator in conflict processes gain experience in this process. At the same time, the fact that they are individuals who analyze people and their psychology well fosters their success in the persuasion process. However, as seen in the findings, the most distinguishing characteristic of these individuals in the role of informal mediator is that they have strong and effective communication skills. This characteristic brings these people to the forefront in conflict processes and makes them effective in the mediation process.

In the category of “*Behaviour/Attitude*”, the participating teachers stated that those who assume the role of informal mediator in conflict processes are sensible and calm, have leadership qualities, are patient and compatible, listen to the parties effectively, are loving and sincere, constructive and active individuals. In addition, according to the participating teachers, informal mediators are problem-solvers, ethical, self-confident and frank, determined and respectful, self-sacrificing and altruistic, friendly and genial, sensitive and consistent. When the findings presented in this framework are considered, it is seen that informal mediators generally have positive personality characteristics. Actually, it is not possible for individuals who do not have a positive attitude and behaviour to establish trust and be successful in conflict processes. In this context, these individuals, who make an impact on people with their positive behaviours and attitudes and command trust, become problem solvers and sought-after individuals in organizational life. In the findings, especially the sensible and calm attitudes of these individuals, their leadership qualities and patient attitudes attract attention.

In the category of “*The Way of Thinking/Approaching*”, the participating teachers stated that individuals who assume the role of informal mediator in conflict processes are impartial and fair, well-intentioned and understanding, tolerant and honest, peaceful and with different perspectives. However, according to the participating teachers, informal mediators are versatile people who focus on resolution, think logically and practically, are responsible, mature, believe in democratic values and are peaceful. In this context, it is seen that the people who assume the role of mediator should be fair and objective, be result or solution-oriented and act with a tolerant mindset. Acting impartially in mediation processes is an element that the conflicting parties pay attention to and that affects the conflict process and its outcome. At the same time, it is considered as an expected approach in conflict processes to achieve a result that will satisfy people and their interests by acting in a solution-oriented manner. In this context, the mediator’s understanding based on tolerance is important for the effectiveness of the process.

In the category of “*Emotion*”, the participating teachers stated that individuals who assume the role of informal mediator in conflict processes are positive and optimistic, empathetic, prudent, and dedicated. In this context, it is seen that individuals who are modest, optimistic, and empathetic are better in the mediator role. As a matter of fact, empathizing and approaching the events positively in conflict processes serve as a driving force for the solution.

Table 7. Methods used by people who assume the role of informal mediator in conflicts in school

Theme	Categories	Methods Used	<i>f</i>
Methods Used	Communication	Establishing good and effective communication	17
		Trying to understand by listening to the parties	6
		Trying to persuade for a solution	4
		Helping parties to understand each other through empathy	4
		Using a positive language	3
		Establishing a healthy dialogue between the parties	3
		Activating the elements of persuasion	2
		Showing that you are listening to and understanding the parties	2
		Analyzing the situation by listening to the parties	2
		Trying to persuade by setting the rules	1
	Impartiality	Managing the situation from a fair and unbiased perspective	5
	Result-Orientedness	Presenting joint solution suggestions and being solution-oriented	10
		Generating solutions to eliminate conflict-inducing problems	1
		Suggesting alternative solutions	1
		Commanding trust for finding a solution	1
		Creating willingness to find a solution	1
		Generating solutions that both parties can be satisfied with	1
	Authority/Power	Acting in accordance with the legislation-reminder of official grounds	2
		Using bureaucratic power	2
		Using local and cultural elements of power and recognition	1
		Reminding the parties of their rights and responsibilities	1
	Expertise	Making them feel that you are in control of the situation and the event	2
		Correctly diagnosing the problem and its source	2
		Implementing crisis management processes	1
	Attitude/Flexibility	Exhibiting a determined attitude	3
		Focusing on the positive aspects of the conflict	1
		Taking the personality traits of the parties into consideration	1
		Making the good-intentioned effort felt	1
		Making them feel that you are open to suggestions	1
		Allowing the parties to self-criticize	1
		Enabling the parties to understand and realize the issue of conflict and the problem experienced	1
		Assuming a humble attitude towards the reactions of individuals	1
		Taking into account the interests of the parties	1
		Exhibiting democratic and tolerant attitudes	1
	Bringing People Together	Bringing the parties together	2
		Enabling the parties to listen to each other and express themselves	2
		Highlighting common points	2
	Creating a Suitable Environment	Creating a peaceful dialogue environment	4
		Removing disturbing elements from the environment	1
		Getting them to accept the elements that create the conflict	1
		Calmly approaching the event or situation	1
		Creating an environment of mutual understanding	1

As can be seen in Table 7, the methods used by individuals who assume the role of informal mediator in conflicts experienced in school are discussed under eight categories. In the category of “*Communication*”, the participating teachers stated that the most popular methods used by informal mediators in conflicts are to establish good and effective communication and try to understand the parties by listening to them. Communication used in the management of conflict processes and its quality constitute one of the most effective elements determining how the role of mediator is fulfilled. Moreover, listening to the parties effectively and trying to understand the situation are of vital

importance, especially in terms of starting a process towards a solution. In addition, according to participating teachers, other methods used by mediators include using the power of persuasion, making the parties understand each other through empathy, using a positive language, establishing healthy dialogue, showing that you are listening to and understanding the parties, and analyzing the situation by listening to the parties. When we look at the frequencies of the methods, it is seen that the communication elements and communicative methods are more frequently used in the mediator role. In this context, the main driving force of persuasion in conflict processes is generally directly related to the communication elements used, but the right communication styles accelerate the persuasion process.

In the category of “*Impartiality*”, the participating teachers stated that those who assume the role of mediator in conflicts generally manage the situation and the process with a fair and unbiased perspective. So, this seems to be the most popular method. The lack of impartiality and justice in complex and crisis environments such as conflict processes may negatively affect the success of the mediator role.

In the category of “*Result-Orientedness*”, the participating teachers stated that methods such as presenting joint solution suggestions, focusing on the solution, eliminating the source that caused the conflict, suggesting alternative solutions, commanding trust for finding a solution, creating willingness to find a solution, and generating solutions that both parties can be satisfied with are used. Basically, in conflict processes, the parties usually seek solutions in line with their own interests, in this context, the mediator’s acting with a result and solution-oriented perspective and approaching the process with common solution suggestions shorten the time to reach the result and command trust. In this connection, sometimes there are solutions that will satisfy all parties, but sometimes there are alternative and result-oriented mediator approaches that partially satisfy the parties but provide a solution. At this point, the critical element can be thought of as the mediator’s commanding trust necessary to persuade the parties for a solution and creating willingness.

In the category of “*Authority/Power*”, the participating teachers stated that the people who assume the role of mediator in conflicts use methods such as reminding the parties of the legislation and applying the rules of the legislation, using the bureaucratic power, activating the elements of local recognition and cultural power, and reminding the parties of their rights and responsibilities. Although bureaucratic, cultural or legislative power provides a short-term solution in conflicts, it does not completely eliminate conflicts due to its official nature, and in this context, it can cause weakness in the role of informal mediator. However, the elements of authority and power, which are reminded informally in conflict situations leading to a deadlock, can be beneficial in terms of ensuring organizational sustainability.

In the category of “*Expertise*”, the participating teachers stated that methods based on expertise such as making the parties feel that you are in control of the situation and the event, correctly diagnosing the problem and its source and implementing crisis management processes are used. Having expert knowledge and competence about the conflict process can create an advantage for mediators. This expertise provides people with knowledge and experience in terms of approaching style and method and contributes to the correct management of the process.

In the category of “*Attitude/Flexibility*”, the participating teachers stated that the people who play the role of mediator in conflicts use methods such as exhibiting a determined attitude, focusing on positive aspects, taking into account the personality characteristics of the parties, making the good-intentioned effort felt and being open to suggestions, allowing self-criticism, making the parties aware of the problem, assuming a humble attitude towards the reactions of individuals, taking into account the interests of the parties and exhibiting democratic and tolerant attitudes. The attitudes and behaviours of the mediator in the conflict process are vital for the success of this role. A mediation approach that is well-intentioned, positive, considers differences and acts within the framework of a tolerant attitude and flexibility contributes to the success of the process and satisfaction of the parties.

In the category of “*Bringing People Together*”, the participating teachers stated that people who play the role of mediator in conflicts use methods such as bringing the parties together in reasonable situations, enabling the parties to listen to each other and express themselves and

highlighting the common points. In this context, creating environments in which parties or common ideas are brought closer to each other and they are made to understand each other play a driving role in achieving results.

In the category of “*Creating a Suitable Environment*”, the participating teachers stated that the people who play the role of mediator in conflicts use methods such as creating a peaceful dialogue environment, removing the disturbing elements from the environment, getting them to accept the elements that create the conflict, calmly approaching the event and situation and creating an environment of mutual understanding. It is important to establish calmness in conflict processes first, and in this context, eliminating the stimuli that negatively affect the environment and then increasing the dialogue and ensuring that the problem is accepted by the parties contribute to the accomplishment of efficient mediation.

Discussion

When the findings obtained in the study are examined, it is seen that conflicts in schools are caused by teachers, school administration or parents. In this context, it is seen that the communication problems of teachers with the parents of the students, the disagreements, the distribution and sharing of tasks within the group, the differences of opinion among teachers, the disagreements they have with the school administration regarding their duties and rights, the expectations about the curriculum and duty of overseeing the school and students and personal problems between teachers cause conflicts. In addition, it is seen that the administrative practices of the school administration, deficiencies in physical conditions or materials, oppressive attitudes and behaviours, favouritism and discrimination, and communication problems with teachers are the subjects of conflict. At the same time, the various demands, expectations and wishes of students’ parents, their not accepting their children’s negative behaviours, their accusing teachers and school administration about the problems experienced, their threatening teachers and imposing violence and pressure on teachers, their interventions with the professional and personal lives of teachers and the administrative procedures such as student registration and discipline cause conflicts between parents and teachers and school administration. In this regard, as Madalina (2016) states, organizational roles and life in the organization can bring along communication problems or differences can cause conflicts among individuals. Thus, it is seen that the effect of organizational roles on conflict processes is important in that individuals’ personality characteristics, goals, relationship styles and perceived roles can cause conflicts in the school environment (Çağlayan, 2006). Mohamed (2016) points out that situations such as role ambiguity and distributions within the group, problematic relationships between individuals, inability to share resources and competition for interests can trigger disagreements. Seen from this perspective, individuals’ personality, values, goals, position, communicative elements such as interpersonal relations, misunderstandings, power struggles and rivalries, unfair practices, sharing relations and previous interactions are also effective in school organizational life and affect school stakeholders (Wall & Callister, 1995). As can be understood from the findings of the current study, the intensity of conflicts among teachers, between teachers and school administration or between teachers and administrators and parents of students in school organizational life is more frequent than other organizations (Bingöl, 2013; Ekici, 2020; Polat & Demir, 2021; Başsayın, 2022) and it is obvious that this situation creates an expectation that a mediator is needed for teachers and school administrations (Özdoğan, 2022).

When we look at the informal mediation roles undertaken in the conflicts, it is seen that the school administration and administrators generally mediate in these conflicts, while colleagues and school counsellor also play a role in this process. As conflicts in the school disrupt the school climate and functioning, the fact that school administration and administrators take a role, take action voluntarily and take initiative by considering the organizational benefit has a possible effect on the emergence of this result (Dubin, 1958; Açıkalın, 1994; Özdemir, 2018). On the other hand, voluntary peer mediation, which aims to transform the relations between the conflicting parties (Kelman, 1992) and focuses on the solution, is also common in educational institutions. In addition, because of the duties the school counsellor needs to fulfil within the framework of remedial, preventive and protective psychological help and counselling activities in schools (Pamuk & Yıldırım, 2016), school counsellors feel obliged to assume the role of mediator in conflicts.

When we look at the personality and characteristics of teachers or administrators who take on the role of informal mediators, these people generally have knowledge and experience, can communicate strongly, are sensible and calm, have leadership qualities, are patient and harmonious, act impartially, are result-solution oriented, tolerant and understanding, well-intentioned and agreeable, positive and empathetic. In general, it is seen that informal mediator teachers have positive personality characteristics and are responsible, empathetic, sensitive individuals who are trusted in their environment, act fairly and take initiative in a self-controlled manner (Howden, 2015; Fraser & Bryan, 2017; Sam Imperati, 2017; NERIS Analytics, 2022). Teachers with these qualities come to the forefront in conflict processes and act voluntarily and show sensitivity without external stimuli. Seen from this perspective, it can be said that personality characteristics and the impressions left by the individual on other people are important factors for the success of informal mediators (Bercovitch & Houston, 1993)

When the methods used by teachers or administrators who assume the role of informal mediator in the mediation process are examined, it is seen that communicating well and effectively, trying to understand by listening to the parties, displaying a fair and impartial attitude, acting in a solution-oriented manner by offering common or alternative solutions, displaying a determined attitude, using their knowledge and experience, creating dialogue environments to bring the parties closer, revealing common points and removing disturbing elements from the environment are among the methods used by them. From these results, it is seen that people who undertake informal mediation mostly use methods based on integration and reconciliation. In this respect, in the study conducted by Özdemir (2018), it was determined that teachers mostly use these methods in conflicts. In this context, it is seen that finding common points, facilitating (Shonk, 2022), bringing the parties together and transforming relations (Zumeta, 2018) and establishing effective communication (Işık, 2016) create solution-oriented effects on the parties as can be understood from the results of the current study.

Conclusion and Suggestions

As a result, the intense communication and interaction structure of educational institutions brings along conflicts. It is seen that these conflicts generally arise from communication problems, work distribution, different mindsets, administrative procedures, teacher expectations, personal problems, injustices such as favouritism and discrimination, pressures and disagreements originating from parents. It can be thought that the main factor that creates these conflicts is related to roles and expectations about roles, as different social groups take on various roles in different environments and people carry the burden and responsibilities of the duties and communication required by these roles (Gökçe & Şahin 2003; Dozier, 2005). In this process, the emergence of mismatched interests after the interaction between different roles accelerates the conflict processes in the organizational environment. In this context, the teaching profession also requires interacting with different roles and social groups, and the deficiencies, demands and expectations and uncertainties encountered while fulfilling the responsibilities of a position can put the school environment under pressure with conflicts.

The existence of informal mediators, who act in an internally controlled manner and carry out voluntary activities in schools, as in organizational life, contributes to the resolution of conflicts. It is seen that the people who undertake this role are mostly school administration and administrators, and that teachers also play a role in the process. This shows that the mediator role is not only formal in nature, but also has social and informal aspects. Teachers or administrators, who have personality characteristics revealed in the current study, can undertake this role within the framework of the social environment of the organization. This situation reveals that the informal aspects of mediation are more effective and should be taken into account in research. Therefore, conducting more research on informal or social mediation will be beneficial in terms of deepening the subject area. However, considering that the conflicts experienced in educational organisations are intense and diverse, it is important to train voluntary informal or social mediator individuals by taking into account the personality traits revealed in the research in order to prevent these conflicts from reaching a dimension (complaints, investigations and investigations) that will negatively affect the organisation and individuals. Since this research is limited to the context of educational organisations, it would be

useful to conduct research on the functioning of informal mediation in other sectors and organisations in order to understand the depth of the subject.

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