

## Fostering Peace and Harmony in Education: Challenges, Strategies, and Innovations in Conflict Resolution

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### Abstract

Conflicts form a part of life today in different situations such as society, education and the workplace. In an educational setup, the educator's prime objective is to ensure a peaceful learning environment for the learners. However, the rising conflicts in educational settings in the past few decades have made this objective increasingly challenging. This study, therefore, delves into the importance of conflict resolution in the educational environment, including the key objectives in terms of conflict resolution in educational settings, its challenges, best practices, strategies, and innovations. As addressed throughout this study, conflicts can be seen in different environments, such as classroom-level, digital, systemic, inclusivity-related, and higher-education challenges. The findings of the study revealed that Conflict Resolution Education (CRE) and Life skills become essential for educators, administrators, researchers, and policymakers to take one step towards understanding and finding solutions to these different concerns for more peaceful and balanced living.

**Keywords:** *Conflicts, conflicts resolution, classroom-level conflicts, digital conflicts, systemic conflicts, inclusivity-related conflicts*

## Introduction

*“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”*

-Stephen R. Covey

Man is a born rational being with infinite potential given to him in his mental and reflective abilities. The ability to think positively and peacefully is within the nature of every human being. The world can be peaceful and harmonious by activating that innate potential for developing harmony. We may, therefore, make this world a more enjoyable and peaceful place to live by fostering the same inner peace. Conflicts may be defined in several ways from different perspectives. However, the definitions may differ in context, process, intervention and study areas (Jares, 2002). The term “Conflict” emerged in the late 20th century and was influenced by the work of Morton Deutsch and Roger Fisher. Conflict is a social process that occurs when individuals or groups hold opposing objectives or principles (Jares, 2002). Conflicts must address four key elements: the underlying causes, the conflict protagonists, the process of conflict resolution, and the context (Valente et al., 2020).

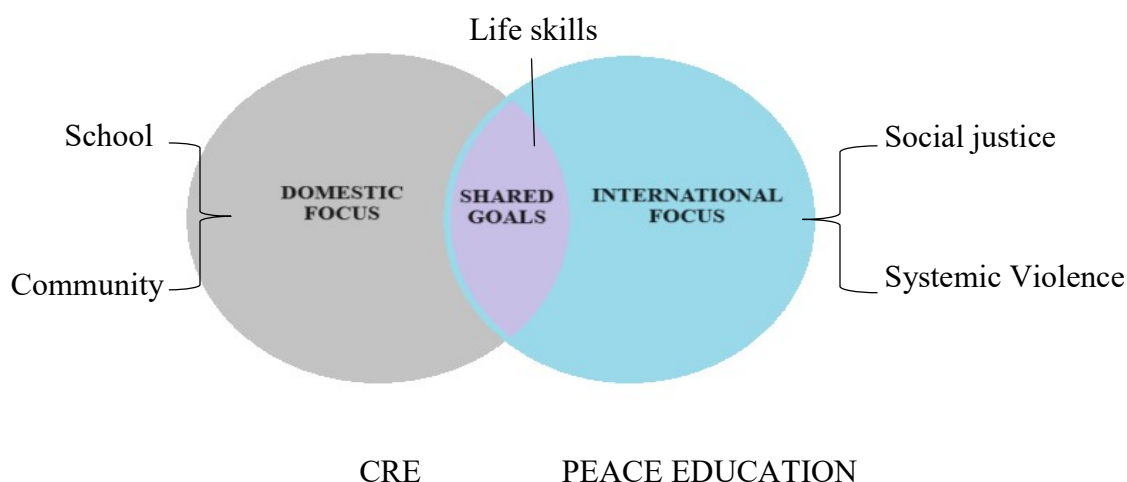
Integrating peace into the educational curriculum is a pedagogical strategy and a potential catalyst for national healing and revitalization (National National Council of Educational Research and Training)(NCERT, 2005). In an educational setup, the educator’s prime objective is to ensure a proper learning environment for the learners. However, the rising conflicts between teachers and learners and among peers in the past few decades have made this objective increasingly challenging. This paper, therefore, delves into the importance of conflict resolution in the educational environment, as it is crucial for making the teaching-learning process more effective and contributing to national healing and revitalization. The key objective of this paper includes-

- To study conflict resolution in educational environments, such as classroom-level, digital, systemic, and inclusivity-related conflicts.
- To explore the challenges encountered in different educational environments.
- To explore best practices for conflict resolution in different educational environments.
- To identify strategies and innovations to overcome conflicts in different educational environments.

## Conflict Resolution in the Educational Environment

For education to be meaningful, it must empower individuals to adopt peace as a lifestyle and enable them to become administrators rather than passive observers of conflict (NCERT, 2005). Conflict resolution is an essential aspect of the curriculum, and thus, policies, strategies, and innovations are implemented to resolve conflict and elevate the value of peace. This is mainly known in different studies as “Conflict Resolution Education (CRE).” During the last twenty years, conflict resolution education (CRE) programs have taught learners about effective methods for handling conflict in their schools and communities (Jones, 2004). Critical life skills, as specified in National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, are one of the primary objectives in the holistic development of a learner (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). CRE is essential for developing critical skills to create empathetic communities and foster positive connections (Jones & Compton, 2002).

CRE plays an important role in overlapping different fields, such as peace education (Jones, 2004). According to Sommers (2003), peace education promotes the development of communication skills such as active listening and strong speech, problem-solving skills such as brainstorming or establishing consensus, and cultural knowledge and empathy as critical life skills mentioned in NEP 2020. CRE and peace education have comparable motives, goals, essential skills, and material. However, CRE is used domestically, whereas peace education is done internationally, and peace education places a greater emphasis on social justice perspectives and more significant systemic concerns of violence than conflict education programs (Jones, 2004).



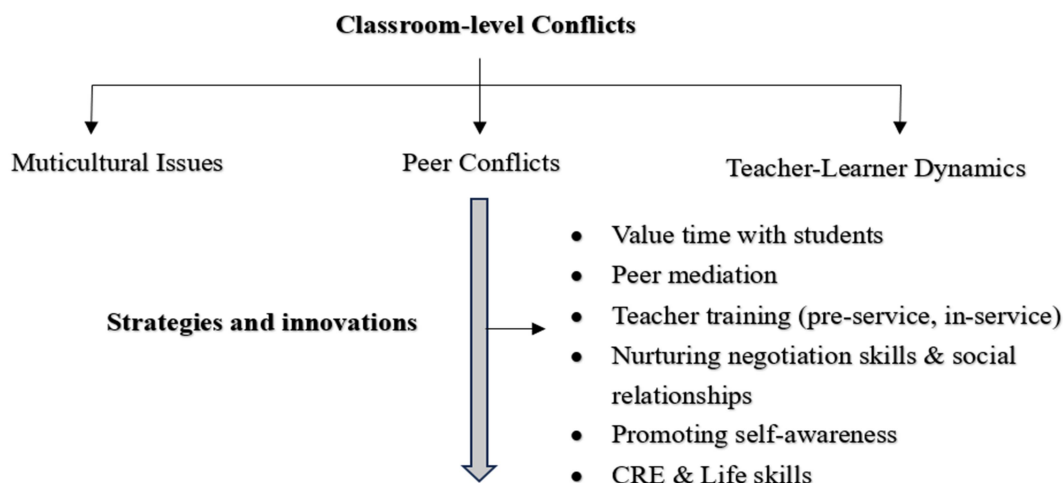
**Figure 1. Perspectives of CRE and Peace Education**  
**Classroom-level conflicts**

A contributing element to conflicts between teachers and students is the decline in learners' motivation to acquire knowledge (Frolova, 2009). Students' need for the quality of the educational process and innovative forms of classes is another level of conflict between the teacher-learner (Frolova, 2009). Hence, teachers must be sensitized to pre-service and in-service issues to overcome such conflicts. Conversely, research has discovered that dedicating time (value time) with learners, such as promoting self-awareness, nurturing negotiation skills, strengthening social relationships, and mentoring to prevent addiction, leads to resolving conflicts at the classroom level and avoidance behaviour and negative repercussions like favouritism done by teachers may be factors that lead to the loss of respect of teachers towards learners (Behal, 2022).

The world is known for its diverse culture. As a result, in school, learners come from multicultural backgrounds with ethics, diverse needs, ethnicities, languages, and traditions. The study showed that if teachers do not deal with diversity sensitively, learners are more likely to experience frustration, miscommunication, and intercultural conflict (Roux, 2001). Therefore, a teacher must be effectively "multicultural" to overcome multicultural conflicts. Education begins in early childhood, and it is essential to implement pedagogical practices and structural aspects in Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) to avoid conflicts in the later stages of learning. Research has shown that increased instructional time, teacher-student supportive interactions, peer interactions and friendship, child engagement, teacher training in emotionally supportive environments, teacher-family trust-based relationships, and the sharing and caring activities result in multicultural conflict resolution in a heterogenous classroom (Khalifaoui, 2021).

In the 21st century, life skills like communication, empathy, and problem-solving have become imperative among learners. It is necessary to build among them to make them social beings. Conflict resolution is not only facilitated by the teacher, but the teacher can also involve peer activities of critical thinking and problem solving, which helps them resolve their problems by creating positive peer relationships. This is termed explicitly as "peer mediation". A conflict resolution training program is designed to assist students in resolving conflicts involving two or more individuals (Parker, 2024). Studies have shown that after giving intervention programs for conflict resolution, females have shown a much more significant effect than males, who have shown a very moderate effect. In addition, CRE must be proactively implemented every academic year for its long-term effect (Srividya, 2016). Moreover, there is a significant relationship between

the aptitude for leading negotiations and the ability to resolve conflicts, particularly regarding academic success (Ye & Don, 2024).



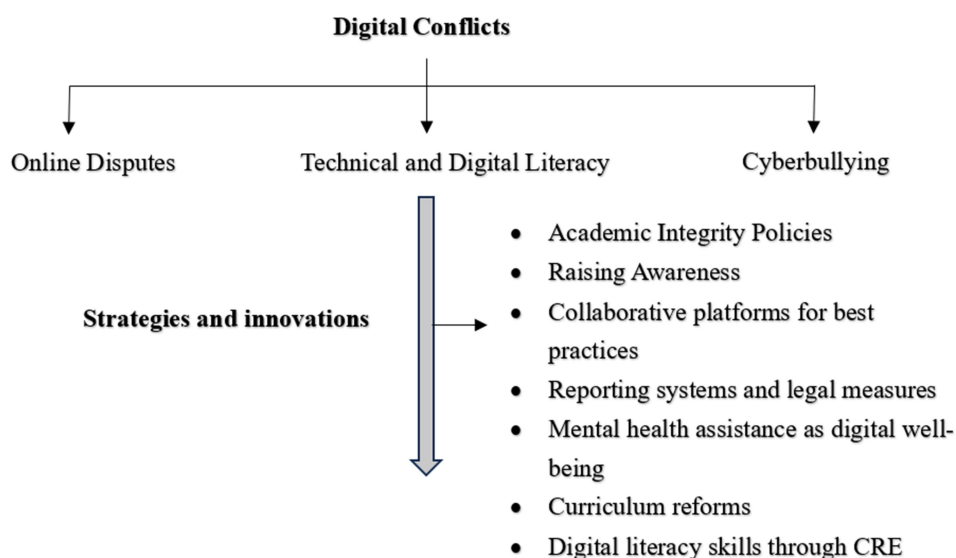
**Figure 2. Classroom-level Conflicts, Strategies and Innovations**

## Digital conflicts

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the world shifted from traditional to digitally equipped classrooms. Online classes were a significant challenge for continuing education, particularly in rural areas. The crisis (pandemic or disruption) brought out the practicality of online teaching instead of prioritizing the creation of new pedagogical concepts or reflection (Ewing & Cooper, 2021). Conflicts have always been a part of online interaction, whether cyberbullying, online disputes such as teacher-student conflicts in digital classrooms regarding communication, differing opinions on online discussion, academic integrity, disparity in digital literacy, and technical glitches. Problematic social media use and conflict (PSMUC) significantly affect higher levels of cyber-victimization via higher levels of social stress, i.e., feelings of isolation and social exclusion (Kim et al., 2024). As students become accustomed to digital technology, their experiences may differ from how teachers believe it should be used in teaching methods or what they consider necessary teaching (Aagaard, 2015).

Digital literacy is considered to be the most critical component of 21st-century skills, which create life skills for both the learner and the facilitator, such as information literacy, critical awareness, creativity, and time management (particularly in teachers). However, reducing the overuse of digital media is also helpful, as the study revealed that

students do not feel like a person as a whole without a phone (Lofving, 2023). Moreover, students also found copying and pasting assignments and projects, which leads to decreased creativity among learners and heavy reliance on internet sources (Lofving, 2023). To resolve such plagiarism conflicts, the stakeholders' strategies should be considered, such as academic integrity policies, encouraging research skills programmes, curriculum reforms, particularly application-based assessment, which represents learners' self-reflection, collaborative platforms to share best practices, etc. Students who experience cyberbullying have reported considerably higher levels of perceived stress and poorer mental well-being compared to students who do not experience cyberbullying. This effect is especially pronounced among females, students with lower academic achievement, and those who often use the Internet (Ramadan et al., 2024). Addressing cyberbullying requires a comprehensive strategy that encompasses several aspects, such as educating, raising awareness, implementing reporting systems, enforcing legal measures, and providing mental health assistance (Malik & Dadure, 2024).



**Figure 3. Digital Conflicts, Strategies and Innovations**

### Systemic conflicts

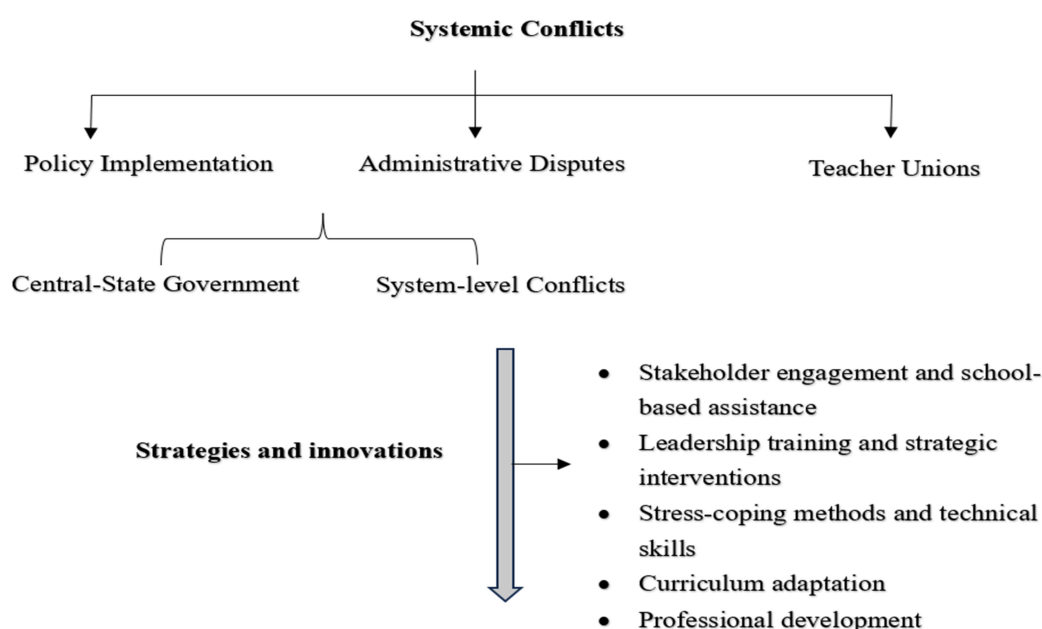
For any organization to run effectively and achieve its vision, the organizational climate within the system must be kept healthy. Good management is an essential supplement to resolving system conflicts. For this, one must have the leadership skills for effective management to run an organization and keep a positive environment around its employees. The interaction between the teacher and the administration is at risk of conflict due to several organizational and managerial dysfunctions. These dysfunctions

include redundant control, an authoritarian leadership style, conflicting directions, and ambiguity or unfairness in the distribution of additional extracurricular activities (Frolova et al., 2019).

The Central and State Governments must work together to implement education policies successfully. The central government has released many educational policies and curricula, such as NEP 2020, but successful implementation is still a challenge that hinders the execution of any policy. Central-state miscommunication, resource allocation, resistance from state and private schools, bureaucratic resistance, teacher shortages, appropriate training programmes, and frequent monitoring can lead to “systemic conflicts.” The education ministry withholds SSA funds from Tamil Nadu (India) for not accepting NEP provisions (Raman, 2024). There has been a growing number of conflicts between the central government and state authorities, which have been consistently evident. Headteachers did not receive in-service training on managing school finances (Lucume & Matete, 2024). Effective financial management and seminars thus become necessary for in-service teachers.

In the modern period, teachers are considered facilitators who employ multidimensional techniques. Various programs are currently being implemented to strengthen teachers’ pedagogical and life skills, both in their pre-service and in-service teacher education, to improve the quality of education (GoI, 2020). The National Education Association (NEA) has highlighted various challenges in both classroom and administrative settings. These include overcrowded classes, limited resources, insufficient parent support, job insecurity, and low salaries, especially in private and government schools. Teachers face excessive administrative work and pressure to meet performance metrics under a multidimensional approach (NeaToday, 2024). Despite facing numerous problems, individuals inside the business must also navigate various conflicts for personal gain as well as professional gain, resulting in feelings of anxiety, tension, and an imbalance between work and personal life. Teachers’ self-efficacy, locus of control, and stress-coping methods (planning class activities, comparing oneself to coworkers, confiding in family and friends, and finding alternate means of relaxation) were protective against anxiety, stress, and aggression. Furthermore, the study also found that teachers’ technical skills and school-based assistance were excellent coping methods for managing anxiety and stress (Truzoli, 2021). Moreover, it has been determined that resilience significantly contributes to the detrimental impact of role conflict (Archarya, 2024; Padmanabhanunni, 2023; Liu et al., 2021). Hence, it is necessary to possess unwavering resolve to shield from the adverse consequences of conflicts.

Good administration abilities are essential for the success of any organization. Leadership should possess such formidable influence that it inspires its staff to operate efficiently, fostering a conducive organizational atmosphere. Effective educational leadership promotes effective teaching practices, professional development, and student results (Groenewald et al., 2024). Research revealed that school leadership practices improve learners' outcomes and learning attitudes/processes (Tan et al., 2024). Administration leadership also results in high-performance organization in school (Kalmolnate&Intarak, 2024). The causes of conflicts in school administration include adherence to quality work principles, the need for speed in job accomplishments, good academic performance, differences in values and personality, nuisances, the nature of relationships between staff members, and inadequate resources in schools (Kimathi, 2017; Mathieu, 2008; Plunkett & Attner, 1989; Okoth & Yambo, 2016; Ghaffar, 2009; Campbell et al., 1983). Strategic interventions are necessary to resolve conflicts of this nature. Effective conflict resolution can be achieved through the active engagement of stakeholders in establishing school objectives, adapting leadership training programs to suit specific contexts, and fostering a supportive culture that promotes mutual trust among governments, local communities, and school principals (Tamadoni et al., 2024). Additionally, the head of the department should consider implementing peer mediation, regular counselling, training programs, equitable distribution of workloads, and fostering sympathetic and emotional intelligence as part of their resolution process.



**Figure4. Systemic Conflicts, Strategies and Innovations**



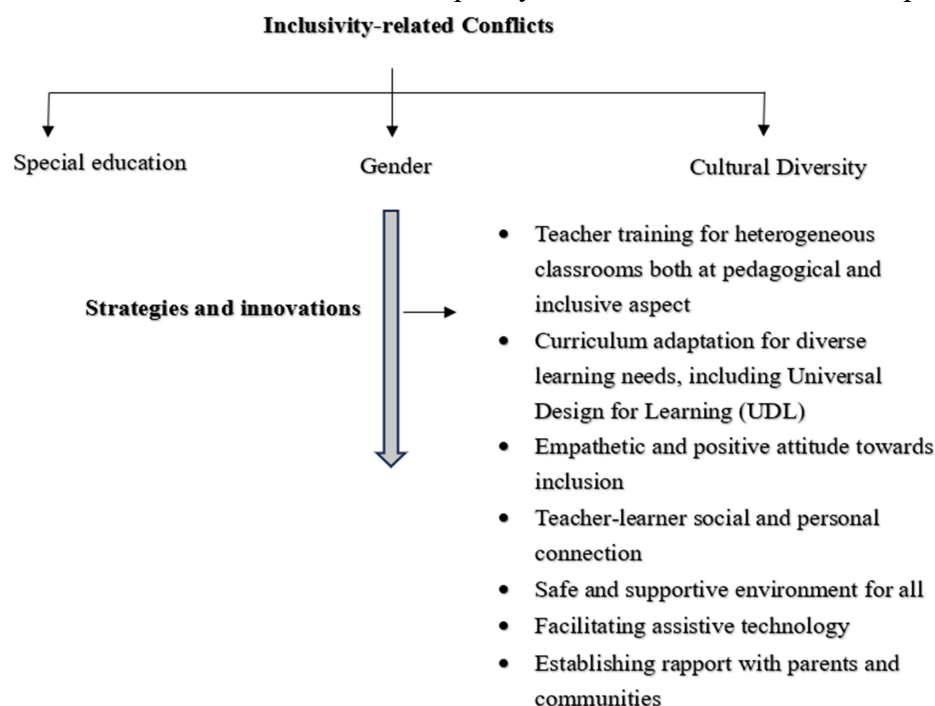
## Inclusivity-related conflicts

The primary objectives of nearly all educational policies worldwide are to provide a quality education that is equitable and inclusive, ensure the right to education, promote gender equality (including LGBTQIA+), universalize education, and ensure access to education to all, including socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs). One of the most challenging conflicts in the classroom occurs when learners feel excluded and marginalized as a result of the facilitator's failure to provide a conducive and safe atmosphere for learners with disabilities, often known as "inclusion-related conflicts." The concept of inclusive education varies among school systems, leading to diverse teaching techniques and variable results (Schuelka et al., 2019). Faculty members' attitudes towards learners with disabilities significantly hinder their professional progression (Collins, 2000; Hong & Himmel, 2009; Coriale et al., 2012). The findings also indicated that implicit attitudes were substantially more unfavourable than explicit attitudes (Rohmer et al., 2022). The study found that language obstacles, lack of confidence, insufficient training, and poor school physical conditions limit successful inclusive education (Balik & Ozgun, 2024). Teachers have obstacles while assessing young children with special needs, designing tailored education plans, modifying teaching, managing classrooms, and dealing with challenging behaviours (Ozokcu et al., 2017).

Typically, students who do not have disabilities attend ordinary schools, whereas those with disabilities participate in special schools. One of the primary challenges is a lack of resources. Many educational institutions lack the essential infrastructure and instruments to support students with various needs (Ji, 2024). We have schemes like SSA (Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan) through which initiatives like Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBVs), Ekalavya Residential Model School (EMRS), Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNVs) have been established. Similarly, special schools are there for children with special needs (CWSN). On the other hand, we are talking about inclusivity, particularly learning with the differently-abled. The reasons for this issue may include insufficient resources, inadequate training of instructors in meeting the needs of students with disabilities, institutional gaps, lack of awareness and outreach, curriculum adaptation challenges, and geographical constraints.

Inclusivity will remain the primary conflict in education if strategies are not addressed. Research suggests that social and personal connections with disabled peers are crucial for addressing unfavourable perceptions (Wainstein et al., 2024). According to

research, teachers should internalize positive thoughts about inclusion to protect themselves from emotional exhaustion (Rohmer et al., 2024). Furthermore, Schools may provide inclusive settings where every learner flourishes by allocating resources to teacher training programs, facilitating access to assistive technologies, and cultivating partnerships with parents and communities (Pradhan & Naik, 2024). By embracing cultural variety and supporting tolerance, educational institutions may create an environment where all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to thrive (Eden et al., 2024). However, numerous policies and documents outline various pedagogical approaches for different types of learners. However, empathic behaviour and curriculum adaptation by a facilitator are the most critical factors in implementing a conducive and safe environment for all learners to achieve quality education and minimum dropouts.



**Figure5. Inclusivity-related Conflicts, Strategies and Innovations**

## Conclusion

In conclusion, conflicts are part of our internal cognitive process, whether they transpire internally or externally. Conflicts in the educational environment occur when two or more people oppose each other's perceptions. They can be classroom conflicts between teacher and learner, peers, multicultural backgrounds in the classroom, digital conflicts such as cyberbullying and online disputes, systemic conflicts in terms of policy

implementation, teacher unions, administrative disputes, inclusivity-rea, and ted conflicts in marginalized groups and SEDGs. However, classroom conflicts can be resolved by good pedagogical strategies that can be sensitized during pre-service and in-service teacher education, peer mediation, and empathy towards learners. Furthermore, academic integrity policies, research skills programs, curriculum reforms, particularly application-based assessment, which represents learners' self-reflection, collaborative platforms to share best practices, raising awareness, implementing reporting systems, enforcing legal measures, and providing mental health assistance can be used as a strategy to address cyberbullying issues. In addition, effective communication and collaboration among the central State, peers, and administration is the most critical strategy for addressing systemic conflicts in the educational environment.

Similarly, in addition to these conflicts, teachers' willingness to be empathic toward diverse learners and strategize pedagogical ways can help settle inclusivity disputes and other educational conflicts. Maslow's hierarchical theory posits that self-actualization represents the stage at which peace is achieved. To better achieve the latter level, it becomes imperative to cultivate harmony within the theory's initial stages. Moreover, as educators, providing Conflict Resolution Education (CRE) to all learners from a young age is critical in fostering healthy relationships. As said, *the cause must be addressed prior to the impact*.

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