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Student Number(s):	51699460	# here	# here	# here	# here

Student Name(s):
(In the same order as student numbers above)

HAOLAN ZHENG

Lecturer's Name(s): David Smyth

Module Name: Dissertation

Assignment Title: Mediation Services for Conflict Resolution in Secondary Schools in China –

Due Date: 21/05/2021

Date of Submission: 17/05/2021

Requested Word Length: 15000

Actual Word Length (excluding list of references): 5200

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**Mediation Services for Conflict Resolution in
Secondary Schools in China – What is the role of
mediation for Chinese Teachers?**

**HAOLAN ZHENG
51699460
MA in Dispute Resolution
Independent College**

Abstract

This research is conducted in the secondary schools in China in order to explore more information about the mediation service used to settle the workplace conflicts, in particular the role of mediation that plays in the Secondary school conflicts and what relevant factors (especially individual's efficiency, voice and equity) can impact the mediations' outcomes. According to the research context, this research will be conducted in the secondary schools (in different cities) in China. The purpose of this research is to have a good understanding of the causes of the school workplace conflicts and mediation's role in facilitating these disputes. It includes some good recommendations about the proper settlements. More importantly, by measuring the outcome with the three metrics (efficiency, equity, voice), they will improve their individual awareness of the interrelationship between the metrics and their satisfaction of the mediation outcomes in the secondary schools.

Based on some existing empirical researches, they are more focusing on the disputes among the teachers, parents and students instead of just the teachers' issues. There is little research in the workplace disputes among the teachers in the secondary school in China, that is why this study is worthy of deep exploration. All of the empirical results can be taken by the leaders and teachers in the schools for their future school policies and regulations advices.

Acknowledgements

To all of my interviewees from different Secondary schools, thanks for your passionate participation for this research and your enthusiastic response gives me a lot of confidence to carry on this study. Without your help in this research, it is hard to collect so much useful data. To my lecturers in Independent colleges in particular, thanks for your teaching and patience all the time, your support is my motivation to keep pursuing my further education in Independent College and I gain more and more confidence in academic study. Doing research is a long and tough issue for any learners, we did our best to collect the useful data and read relevant academic articles, ensuring I have a comprehensive understanding of the topics that are involved in this study. By working hard for a few months, the research was completed and that is a good experience for the life. I really appreciate my family, and all the classmate and friends who once helped me in my life. For any progress in my life, it is due to their assistance and constant support.

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Introduction

This research is to explore the role of mediation that used in the Secondary Schools in different cities of China. Secondary schools are given huge attention by the Chinese governments and parents so that they know the teachers' teaching capabilities and working environments, more or less, will influence their working performance and their attitudes. Thus, keeping a clean and friendly working environment for the Secondary teachers is critical and necessary. As teachers' disputes are inevitable in the workplace, thus, having a good understanding about their disputes causes and implementing the practical resolutions are of great importance in improving the working environment and their managerial systems.

Obviously, through this research the leaders and managers in the schools can also get a good idea about the relationship between the employees' job satisfaction and their working issues such as their relationship with other co-workers and their right or voice to be treated fairly. Although some other similar researches doing this exploration has been tried and conducted in other previous studies in the world, there is little finding in the context of Chinese schools, which illustrated that why this research is worthy of being done. Analysing the causes of the working disputes in the secondary schools and the role of mediation's function, and the relevant factors that might influence the mediation outcome is the key point of this research. In order to get reliable data for analysing, this research will be conducted by interviewing and the participants are of different ages and from different schools in China.

As mentioned before, as the Chinese government and parents are paying more and more attention to the students' education, the teachers' professionalism and their working conditions and individuals' satisfaction in the workplace also catch the parents and governments' eyes. Consequently, the teachers in different schools are facing various working disputes in the schools and these conflicts are also in relation to their positions and individual attitudes and personalities. Exploring the causes and finding the useful solutions are of great independence to provide useful information for the teachers and schools leaders, which might be helpful to improve or complete the schools' policies in the future on the basis of the data collected in this research.

There are more details and data shown in the following chapters to support this study. For example, in terms of the literature part, it gives us a brief introduction about the normal causes of the workplace conflicts, the relevant resolutions like ADR (alternative disputes resolution), and the employees' satisfaction about the mediation outcomes. Specifically speaking, there is no absolute answer for each of the questions as different factors that might influence the whole picture. With regard to the methodology part, it outlines the differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches, and also furthered illustrated the reasons why qualitative approach (interview) is the most appropriate choice in this research to collect data and other useful information.

According to this research, the results also clearly indicate the teachers' satisfaction about the mediations' outcomes and what factors that play important roles inside (like their working positions, voice, or personal personalities, or if their treatment is fair or not in the workplace). Obviously, this is a complicate survey and many other factors also have to put inside to take into consideration as well. Thus, based on the findings which also have been verified by the literature, it is important to know the teachers' thoughts about the mediations' function and outcomes in coping with their disputes. Based on all the information in the literature, findings, recommendations, the teachers or leaders in the Secondary school have basic and useful data and information to adjust

their relevant school regulations and policies which can be beneficial in managing the school's disputes with higher efficiency.

This research will firstly explore the relationship between workplace conflicts and mediation. Then, it is followed by a range of discussion of the mediation process and other alternative options for resolving the interpersonal conflicts. Finally, a case study will be conducted to see the interrelation with the three metrics and mediation outcomes. Besides, recommendations for future research is included in this report as well. This paper provides a comprehensive analytical framework in which the researcher focuses on the relationship between the mediation outcome and the related three metrics: efficiency, equity and voice. Besides, the policymakers and leaders in the schools or other organizations can also design and implement optimal dispute resolution systems that also cover the efficiency, equity and voice as well.

The human resource managers are responsible for designing the effective dispute resolutions systems, the policymakers just know when and where to use or promote these systems. When it comes to the disputes in the workplace, different alternative disputes resolutions can be adopted to help the participants to fix their conflicts. Mediation, as one of the most effective approaches, is widely used in different organizations and companies, schools. The role of mediation in the Secondary schools and teachers' satisfaction about the mediation outcome still need more researches to obtain more information and data. Besides, Budd's (2004) research and analyses of the objectives of the employment relationship and the metrics (efficiency, equity, and voice) he proposed for evaluating the dispute resolution are widely accepted and these factors can be used to measure the mediation effectiveness.

Chapter one -Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

It is clear that the workplace conflicts can generate many negative impacts on the employees, for instance, the conflicts in the workplace can decrease the employees' working productivity and reduce their job satisfaction. Some experts also pointed out that conflicts are common in the organizations and workplace. Obviously, the conflict in the workplace is dysfunctional and negative. Therefore, the design and operation of the workplace dispute resolution systems are a long-term issue in any human resources departments. However, no one can clearly illustrate what metrics are served as the most evaluating workplace dispute resolution systems.

What is worse, their relationships can also be damaged which also makes them feel uncomfortable and stressful (Kidder, 2007). Then, loads of stress-related claims will be made by the staff and this is likely to be costly for the company (costs related to the loss of productivity and absenteeism) and individuals (personal mental health and working performance). Cotton (2008) once indicated that the stress-related claims are increasing in the workplace and the associated costs are also generated. Obviously, stress-related claims frequently result in some workplace conflicts among the employees.

Some scholars emphasized that there are many factors that make contribution to the conflicts such as poor communication, employees' competition, security, equity or participation in decision making process (Ghaffar, 2019). Besides, the difference in personal perceptions or goals, social values, or nature of work are also the main reasons that cause some disputes in the workplace.

These situations also happened in the Secondary schools as more workplace disputes emerge in the secondary schools, mediation and ADR are adopted by the school leaders to cope with these issues.

In different cases, different outcomes were generated and the teachers had various levels of satisfaction about the mediation outcomes. In addition, Cheng (2011) once highlighted that teachers' attitudes and motivation is closely connected to their efficiency of teaching and their working cooperation with other colleagues. The teachers' attitudes are regarded as the essential factor to cope with the disputes in the school contexts. Given this context, we assume that the three metrics (efficiency, equity and voice) are crucial to measure the mediation outcomes.

1.2 ADR

Some scholars pointed out that owing to the change of the nature of workplace conflicts recently, some effective conflict management approaches are taken into consideration carefully (Scheuer,2006). No matter which approaches are taken to solve the workplace conflicts, their goals are to improve their job performance, ensure the high productivity and also build harmonious labour relationships in the organizations.

Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) is perceived as the effective approaches and practices that are allowed to be used in legal disputes outside the courts. Generally speaking, mediation and arbitration are the most common ones, which are supported by a neutral party to facilitate the resolution of some related legal issues. Some researchers noted that using ADR schemes can create a confidential and safe environment for the involved parties to maintain their good relationship (Law Reform).

Therefore, ADR is a good choice to resolve their disputes and also maintain their relationship. Using ADR can also help the parties to build trust for each other in the organisation (Clarke, 2015). ADR is also less expensive and less time-consuming compared with other court actions when it comes to its unique advantages. Therefore, a growing number of organisations become aware of the importance of the ADR and also start adopting ADR to solve their disputes in the organisations, among them, mediation and arbitration are the most popular options (International Mediation Institute). Unlike adjudication and negotiation, mediation and arbitration are unlikely to be used to resolve legal disputes. However, some people lack of knowledge about the usage of ADR in some circumstances (Christopher, 2019) and more information is below.

Arbitration – A impartial party (the arbitrator) will be appointed to handle the process and resolve the issues. The arbitrator chosen by the involved participants can come from any private institutions instead of any public officials. The final agreement is totally binding and it is a voluntary process. 'Arbitration may have both lower transaction and higher quality results than conventional adjudication'. Arbitration is quicker due to its procedural informality. In addition, the participants are able to take arbitration as one approach to resolve their disputes if the mediation does not work and they don't get any satisfactory resolution (John,2005).

Adjudication – This is an open and public process that has to go through the court. It is involuntary and a neutral third party will be appointed by the state, which totally has the power to proceed and resolve the related conflicts among the participants. During the structured procedure, they must follow the formal rules regarding pre-trial and trial stages. Finally, the adjudicator makes a reasonable decision on the basis of legal rules (Ansary, et.al,2017)

Mediation – The mediator has to be the third-party and neutral/impartial in the mediation process.

The role of the mediator is to help the involved participants to reach agreement based on their own understanding and decisions. It is totally a voluntary, confidential and private process (Brown and Ayres, 1994). John (2005) also stated that the rationale for the mediation approach, to some extent, is to help the participants avoid arbitration or other related impacts like costs, legal issues or delays.

Negotiation – It is a direct process as it does not need any neutral third-party involvement for the final decision. In other words, the participants can make their own decision to resolve the disputes. Negotiation is informal and voluntary, but the whole process is not open to the public. As the participants get involved in their negotiation directly and they always seek to the resolution that fits their own interests and needs (Gourlay, 1987).

When dealing with the conflicts in the workplace, some emotions of the conflicts might emerge such as the disrespect, distrust, injustice and mistreatment between the participants (Xi and Zhao, 2014). Among them, Arbitration, mediation and some other procedures that to some extent, are regarded as the samples that the third party get involved to resolve the disputes in the workplace or other circumstances. Besides, some scholars once stressed that theoretically and empirically speaking, the role of ADR played in different cases (disputes) is of great importance, and its effectiveness on the frequency, process and final settlement is obvious (Robert, 1998). Regarding to the further empirical and theoretical study of the effectiveness and efficiency of ADR in the dispute resolution systems, or how ADR overcome the barriers in order to achieve the expecting outcomes in some disputes, it needs more researches to be done and explored.

1.3 Mediation

Handling the workplace disputes is essential for many companies/schools as the disputes are inevitable. If their disputes can't be settled well, the employees have to work in a less productive and more negative environment. Without any doubt, the employees feel more satisfied if their working environment is fairer or company policies are lawful (Balc, 2002). More and more companies and organizations are seeking alternative methods in order to address the workplace conflicts properly, such as mediation and arbitration.

Mediation is a popular approach used by the employees to cope with their disputes in the working places. In terms of the conflicts in the work place, some experts once pointed out that mediation can be regarded as one effective approach, conducted by an independent third party, to help the participants to resolve their issues and create a new and friendly working atmosphere for each other (Bingham, 2004). Some experts highlighted that mediation has already been regarded as one essential part of organizational integrated conflict management systems, especially in the fields of coping with any involving harassment and discrimination conflicts (McKenzie, 2012).

Bingham also stressed in his research that the mediation was proved to be very appropriate and functional in resolving interpersonal conflicts in the workplace especially when it was supported by organizational commitment to Alternative Dispute Resolution strategies. Personal emotion and feelings when having conflicts with other colleagues play a critical role in further relationship. Negative feelings like shame and anger, more or less, will damage their communication and mutual understanding with each other.

Plus, it is indispensable that the employees' concerns and voice can be heard and taken seriously in the workplace, the perceptions of fairness are related with the organizational outcomes (Bingham & Novac, 2001). In this situation, the mediation is highly suggested and recommended to be an good option for handling the workplace conflicts (Retzinger & Scheff, 2000).

Harkavy (1999) once stressed that “*Mediation provides a comfortable forum for all parties and thus is more likely to facilitate a workable resolution to a dispute than a more adversarial process involving rights adjudicated in a formal setting under a fixed set of rules.*” “Mediation is a voluntary and confidential process which is controlled and facilitated by the third party (mediator). That is why, based on some experts’ belief, the mediation is used to facilitate negotiation in the disputes in order to bring about a good outcome (Donna, 2012). Bingham (2004) also pointed out that the mediation can produce a better outcome due to there is no intervention or involving judgement, it is also not expensive for the participants.

Facilitative mediation is different as it focuses on the problem-solving techniques and the aim of this mediation is to move the participants towards their agreement by organizing their mediation procedure. Compared with the general mediation, the mediator in the facilitative mediation aims at helping the participants protect their own interests and reach a long-term agreement. By asking questions and validating the participants’ perspectives, the mediator can have a good understanding of the participants’ individual interests so that the mediator can help them find some resolutions (Zena,2021)

Transformative mediation is less direct than other methods. The involved participants can get chances to illustrate their own interests, choices and they aim to make both sides have a better understanding of the opposite side to see if they can handle their issues peacefully (Dike, Samuel, 2020). In comparison with other mediation forms, transformative Mediation focuses more on the participants’ mutual communication and interaction in the procedure. During the mediation, the mediator achieves this goal by asking “open ended questions” and “reflecting, Checking in, or summarising” to ensure the participants can know more about each other’s thoughts and perspectives (Zena,2021)

Evaluative mediation- Facilitative mediation and Transformative mediation are the most common mediation forms at present. In terms of valuation mediation, the mediator usually provides the participants some professional advice and opinions about the legal and essential merits of any claims based on the weaknesses and strengths of their cases (Weigel and Sascha,2018). In other words, the Evaluative mediator are knowledgeable with expertise in some fields like construction engineer. Additionally, it is often used in financial issues (Zena,2021).

There are some other factors that might also make contribute to the outcome of mediation. Mediation focuses on solution-making process and take both parties’ interests into consideration as well. Therefore, the deeper and more comprehensive understanding of both sides’ needs and perspectives, feelings and interests, the disputes might be handled more smoothly with the effective mediation. Secondly, in order to maximize the possibility of the mediation success, the mediators and all involved parties are supposed to know their own and each other’s emotions and feelings. This awareness of their emotions is very crucial for their mediation developments. More importantly, their emotions also may influence/impact their decision making and further negotiation for the problem solving (Allport and Lesley,2021).

Some scholars once emphasized that “*Mediation is not just about the law and the facts, it is about people.*” (Harold Coleman). Emotion, the participants and the mediators involved should pay attention to their emotions change and be more flexible and creative in order to get a satisfying mediation outcome. When dealing with the disputes or reconcile a conflict, it is important for the parties to know what is essential for themselves. After being aware of their priorities and interests, they will have a good idea to know how to reach a reciprocally satisfactory outcome. Besides, it is also easy to predict what might be the outcome after considering all the pertinent information and it

is also helpful for the parties to make decisions for reconciliation and resolution. At this stage the mediator also needs to help them with informal information timely (Allport and Lesley, 2021). Mediators are playing an important role in the mediation and they are charged with managing the whole mediation procedure. Therefore, the mediators' roles, expertise, responsibilities of the participants are crucial factors that might lead the mediation towards a positive direction (James, 1998). The mediator aims at helping the parties sort out their disputes and work collectively to reach agreements with each other. The parties can get access to some professional legal information before they make any final decision (Balc, 2002). The mediator is impartial and neutral, he/she does not stand on any side of the participants and no personal suggestions or proposals are given to any of the participants. In terms of the mediation, the company/school can hold it in the workplace or through an external party. Besides, it is easier for the participants to apologize to the other side in the mediation instead of litigation, in other words, the mediation can be regarded as the admission that goes against interest or liability in the workplace.

1.4 Mediation and satisfaction

James (1998) once pointed out that the participants would compare their experience with their prior expectations of the mediation to see if their satisfaction is strong or not. Obviously, the parties would feel more satisfied if their expectations are met or exceeded based on the mediation process and outcome. As talked above, the mediator, unlike any judge or arbitrator, is not authorized to make any decision for any participants in the case. The parties have their power to develop their agreements or settlement, which further illustrated that why the participants are more likely to have higher satisfaction if they reach the agreement with each other in the mediation (Zaharie, et.al, 2020).

James also stated that there are some other factors that might play roles in the participants' satisfaction in the mediation. For instance, the procedural justice in the mediation, '*the process control is valued primarily because it gives parties a chance to have a voice and to participate meaningfully in the process.*' (James, 1998). This point gives the participants impression that their voice can be heard and have a chance to participate and the outcome is impartial. Thus, their satisfaction will be highly enhanced with mediation. Furthermore, some scholars also come up with that thought the fairness embedded in the mediation process promotes compliance with mediation agreements and increases the participants' satisfaction for the upcoming outcome (Zaharie, et.al, 2020). The participants feel satisfied if they reach the agreement with each other since the agreement through mediation generally meet their needs and underlying interests. Additionally, they also feel more satisfied cos the mediation is less expensive compared with other disputes resolution approaches. (James, 1998). When considering the factors above that might influence the participants' satisfaction in the mediation process or outcome, it largely increases the likelihood of their eventual satisfaction when they reach the agreement.

1.5 The three metrics

The focus of the proposed study is about the teachers' disputes resolution approaches and mediation is an essential method and its role is of great importance to deal with the conflicts. The hypothesis is that, in the school context, the teachers' disputes are caused by different reasons. No matter it is about the mediation efficiency or the employees' working efficiency (after the mediation) in their work performance, or their personal relationship with other co-workers, more or less, are influenced by their mediation outcomes. There is scant literature on the mediation role in the teachers' disputes in the secondary schools in Chinese context although some articles already discussed the three metrics (efficiency, equity, voice) in the conflicts resolution systems.

According to the article written by Budd. J and Colvin. A (2007), they came up with a good research about the relationship between the dispute resolution system and the three metrics. In other words, the three metrics, to some extent, also influence the mediation outcome of the working place disputes in the secondary school in china. Based on Budd and Colvin's (2007) research, they focus on the dispute resolution systems' efficiency, equity and voice. However, in this research, the main point is to measure how the teachers' equity, voice, working efficiency are corelated to the mediation process and outcome.

Efficiency refers to the effectiveness and some concerns with productivity or competitiveness. It is a standard of business performance in the workplace.

Equity is regarded as the fairness and justice that is related to the administration of employment policies, specifically speaking, equity is a standard of treatment for the employees (such as non-discriminatory hiring and just cause discharge) or unbiased decision-making. Individuals in the same workplace are supposed to receive the similar treatment in the same circumstances. Hence, the importance of an equitable system is necessary to be established in the workplace and ensure that the participants are treated with the same respect and privacy.

When the participants feel that the mediation process is fair enough, they are more likely to feel happy and satisfied with the outcome. Restorative justice in the workplace, to some extent, is also in line with the mediation principles and they aim at healing their relationships instead of balancing hur with hurt (Kidder,2007).

John (2005) once pointed out that outcomes that are from equitable systems or procedures are harmonious with the judgment of any reasonable persons. In the equitable systems, the parties involved are getting enough respect and privacy. Emotionally speaking, the involved participants are more likely to feel happy and satisfied with the mediation outcomes. Besides, it is also clear that the equity is also linked to objectivity the participants might face and the evidence that are included in their dispute solutions. To some extent, it also provides the participants the confidence and ability to appeal decisions. These implicit conflicts are hidden in the emotional conflicts. Those conflicts are usually caused by the leaders or employers' disrespect for some employees. In other words, if the employees are not receiving proper respect or dignity for their colleagues or leaders, their relationship will not be harmonious enough. It is easy to understand that workplaces are also the scenes of discrimination, snubs and prejudices, racism against the staff in the organizations. Manning (2006) also emphasized that owing to the emotional nature of workplace conflicts, the alleged models above are not sufficient in many cases. Therefore, the interaction and interventions of the proper mediator and some unexpected issues that occurred in the mediation process, to some extent, can creates more chances for the participants.

Some factors (such as distributive justice, procedural justice and disputant-disputant interpersonal justice) can be used to assess the programs' effectiveness.

1. Distributive justice focuses on the fairness in the allocation or distribution of the outcomes.
2. Disputant-disputant interpersonal justice indicates the mutual interaction between the disputants, it is also regarded as one measure to see how the employers and employees fix their relationship
3. Procedural justice refers to the fairness that embedded in the whole mediation process and also include the participants' perceptions of the fairness in the process.

Voice refers to the employees' ability and power to speak for themselves, especially for their workplace decision both individually or as one member of the team, it focuses on the employees' participation in the workplace. John (2005) once stated that in terms of the system '*The voice dimension of dispute resolution systems captures the extent to which individuals are able to participate in the design and operation of a dispute resolution system.*' Individually, if the participants have the power to make their voice heard in the workplace plays an important role in their satisfaction about the mediation. At least, they don't need to compromise due to their positions are not in the same level (participants). Obviously, the bias or discrimination might exist if the participants' positions or power are at various levels.

Generally speaking, equity and voice might be regarded as the factors that both are relation with fairness or justice. However, they are actually different and need analyses for each of them. In particular, the equality is more about outcomes and voice highlights participation in the mediation. Some disputes resolution systems may be equitable but lacking voice, or there is enough voice inside and appear inequitable.

Chapter Two – Methodology

2.1 Background of the schools

Chinese Government paid a lot of attention and did a huge investment in the education system every year, which results in many training schools or secondary schools are set/established across the country and the schools teaching qualities are higher and higher. As more and more graduates or young people choose to become teachers in the school in the recent years. The management in the schools is not well organized or structured, to some extent. Along with more sever disputes emerging in the secondary schools, it is necessary to conduct the research to see what is going on inside the secondary schools and sort out the issues by providing some effective approaches. With regard to the schools, they are famous and their education systems have a high reputation and a long history in China, which can represent most of the secondary schools in China.

The teachers/participants have different teaching length in the schools and their personal backgrounds are also various so that there is no ethic bias existing when it comes to the interviewees' relevant backgrounds. As the teachers are from different secondary schools in different cities in China, their feedback and response are objective and representative enough.

2.2 Proposed Methodology

Quantitative and Qualitative approaches are the most common methods used by the researchers to further explore or gain deeper understanding of the related parts in their researches. Meanwhile, it is easy for them to enhance the reliability of the participants' proper feedback and thoughts. In terms of this study, qualitative research method is more suitable to be utilised with a small sample size of 6 Secondary teachers from different cities after considering some factors that might influence the research outcome. In order to have a better understanding of the role of mediation used to resolve the teachers' disputes in Secondary schools, interviewing (qualitative) is an useful way to collect relevant data and information, it is also a practical approach to measure the interviewees' emotions, feeling and their own perspectives (Choy, 2014). Moreover, by adopting qualitative research, it is more likely to get more details through the questions which definitely will benefit our research content. The purpose of this research is to know more about the mediation's function in Secondary schools to resolve their workplace disputes, the proposed questions are harmonious with the advantages of interviewing. It is undeniable that some disadvantages or limitations lie in qualitative approach as well, it is still a good choice compared with quantitative method. More reasons and

explanations of adopting this method are illustrated below.

2.3 Research Philosophy

It is clear that the right choice of research philosophy is of great importance to conduct and carry on the research and collect the data with high efficiency. Mkansi and Acheampong (2012) once stated that Research philosophy refers to “*The positivist's position was grounded in the theoretical belief that there is an objective reality that can be known to the researcher if one uses the correct methods and applies those methods in a correct manner*”.

Some other scholars also highlighted that research philosophy are helpful in finding reliable information and minimize some unnecessary data, it can also help the people to get a deeper understanding about the research they do (Lewis and Thornhill,2012). Due to its important role in conducting the relevant research, philosophy is worthy to be illustrated with more details which acts as an essential factor to run the research process successfully. Hence, more details and knowledge about the methodological adoption and theories are fully explained in the next sections.

Some experts pointed out that positivism and interpretivism are the most popular and critical research philosophies used in the academic field (Mkansi and Acheampong,2012). Furthermore, Horn (2009) also highlighted that philosophies theories are singular and objective and they are not impacted by other factors. That is why he thought positivism is closely link to the universe rules and natural science.

In contrast, Collis and Hussey (2009) hold the view that interpretivism is more subjective and the author in the research can guide or use it. According to Saunders (et.al,2012), there are some important philosophical assumptions (Epistemology, Ontology and Axiology) that are worthy of checking on the basis of interpretivism and positivism mentioned before.

Ontology

According to Ritche and Lewis (2003), they pointed out that ontology refers to “realism; materialism, critical realism, idealism and relativism.” Al-Saadi (2014) also highlights that ontology is the nature of existence and structure of reality in the world and it is related to our beliefs about the nature of reality (the assumptions about the nature of reality). In terms of interpretivism, it is subjective and multiple, peoples are individuals and they usually hold various views about the realities while positivism (Ontology) stands on the opposite side. Positivism means the reality is totally singular and objective and there is one truth or reality. However, as mentioned before, the people who believe interpretivism always hold various views and points as they hold the view that reality varies.

Epistemology

Regarding epistemology, it is a way for the humans to perceive and understand the world (Crotty,1998). Cohen (et.al, 2007) also stated that epistemology is how the nature and it is form are realised and acquired to the human beings, it is the assumption about the nature of knowledge and knowing. Besides, the positivists believe that the researchers’ perspectives or attitudes don’t have any impact on the data or information collected in the research or study. Contrarily, for the interpretivists, they hold different views that, more or less, the data or information they collected can be changed due to the researchers’ personal outlook, values and observation.

Axiology

In terms of axiology, the interpretivists hold the view that biases might exist in the research when

the researchers are doing and collecting the data because the researchers' perspectives are subjective and the research results, to some extent, might be influenced with the researchers' participation in the process. However, positivists don't admit the possibility of any biases in the researches.

2.4 Rational for Qualitative approach

Quantitative and Qualitative methods own their specific advantages and disadvantages (Zawawi,2007). As mentioned before, they are used in various situations to help the researchers to handle their investigation. When it comes to qualitative approach, the big feature of this method is that it focuses on collecting the data or information that is related to the individuals' feelings and reactions though observing or relevant interviewing in the research. However, compared with quantitative method, qualitative approach takes a longer time to complete the research process (time-consuming). Contrary, quantitative method is faster and mainly used to collect statistics or data, it is hard to get a good understanding about the respondents' feedback or emotions of their choices. Quantitative research can produce data that can be statistically analysed and the results can be expressed numerically (Humberman and Miles,2002). Besides, quantitative methods is also regarded as a temporary investigation and can't predict any long term trends.

This research is to explore the importance of mediation and its factors that might influence its mediation outcomes. Having a good understanding about the teachers' feeling and thoughts are necessary, the final report can also act as a good basis for the researchers to carry on in this field and obtain more useful information.

2.5 Research Design

As mentioned before, qualitative and quantitative methods are the most common used at present in academic field. Due to their different characteristics and features, they are adopted in various cases and researches. For instance, for the researches which went through the interviews, observations, interpretations or all kinds of discussions, qualitative research is more suitable as it focuses on the humans' perspectives and feelings, their own reflections. If the interviewees give proper response for some topics, more information and details can be explored. However, Zawawi (2007) stated that quantitative method is more about statistical analysis and used in more fields through relevant questionnaires and surveys to do the investigations. Some scholars once stated that the adoption of right research method plays an important role in conducting the researches (Saunders et al., 2012).

Since the purpose of this research is to discovering the mediation's role in settling the disputes in the workplace of the secondary schools. More details are expecting to be explored and a descriptive research design is suitable that the concrete responses from the interviewees can facilitate the research.

2.6 Sample size

A sample size refers to the number of the respondents that will be interviewed in this study. Generally speaking, 6 teachers in secondary school (from different cities, different schools) are arranged to attend this research. They have different teaching backgrounds (not the same subjects or same schools, their teaching years and working positions are also different) and they can represent most teachers' thoughts and choices when dealing with their conflicts in the workplace.

Due to this factor, the interview will work well as DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, p. 317, citing Kuzel) stated '*Selecting in-depth interview participants is based on an iterative process referred to as purposeful sampling that seeks to maximize the depth and richness of the data to*

address the research question”. In other words, the teachers’ (sample) feedback and thoughts are comprehensive enough and can be taken as reference in this situation. The parents invest more energy and money on children’s study, it is necessary to do more researches in education in the future to make more teachers in the school gain their rights and know how to resolve their disputes effectively.

2.7 Aims and objectives

2.7.1 Introduction

This research is conducted in the secondary schools in China and to examine the mediation services for conflict resolution, especially the role of mediation and what factors might influence its outcomes. The research will be set in the secondary schools in China and investigate their disputes in the workplace.

Based on some existing empirical researches, they are more focusing on the disputes among the teachers, parents and students instead of the teachers’ issues. There is little research in the workplace disputes among the teachers in the secondary school in China, that is why this study is worthy of deep exploration. Additionally, doing this research can make up this part to see how the teachers’ disputes can be handled by the mediation or other ADR. Besides, what other factors do influence the teachers’ choices/agreements after attending the mediation.

Purpose of the research

Generally speaking, by doing this research, the teachers or staff in the secondary schools can have a good understanding of their main disputes roots and mediation role in facilitating their conflicts, how to handle them with higher efficiency. They can also know more about ADR role in the whole process. What is more importantly, by measuring the outcome with the three metrics (efficiency, equity, voice), they will improve their individual awareness of the interrelationship between the metrics and their satisfaction of the mediation outcomes.

The value of the research

To improve the teachers’ awareness of the function of mediation and ADR

To identify the role of the mediation used in the secondary schools in China

To identify the relationship between the mediation outcome and the three metrics (efficiency, equity and voice).

To provide a broad knowledge about workplace disputes in the secondary schools and mediations’ role.

To make the leaders and teachers be aware the relationship between the three metrics and mediation outcome

The main aims and objectives

To improve the teachers’ awareness of the role of mediation

A good understanding how the three metrics relate to their satisfaction of the mediation conducted in the secondary schools

1. Identify the importance of mediation used in the workplace in the schools
2. Identify the main causes of the disputes in the Secondary schools (for the teachers).
3. Assess the relationship between the three metrics and mediation outcome

2.7.2 Research Questions

As mentioned before, the qualitative method will be used in the research and some teachers from different Secondary schools will participate the interview to help the researcher to collect data and

useful information. As these teachers have different teaching backgrounds (various age, gender, teaching years, subjects, different cities), and the researcher intend to collect the relevant information to explore the role of mediation in the secondary schools and the participants' satisfaction about the mediation process and outcome. The whole process generally will follow the order based on these questions below to obtain more details and information.

- A. What are the dispute categories / main causes of the school disputes among the teachers?
- B. What is the role of mediation in the dispute resolution for the teachers in the workplace? ADR?
- C. What factors that might influence the participants' satisfaction about the mediation?
- D. What is the underlying relationship between the three metrics (measure the satisfaction of resolution dispute) and the outcome of the mediation in the schools?

Questions **A and B** are mainly designed to explore the causes of the workplace disputes and role of mediation used in these conflicts in the schools. The results of these two questions can make the leaders in the Secondary school have a good understanding about their working environments and know more about their employees. To some extent, they can do more investment or mobilize more resources to avoid the alleged disputes in the workplace, at least, the leaders can help the participants to minimize the acceleration of their disputes in some ways.

Question **C** is focusing on the parties' responses, their satisfaction about mediation from a big picture. There must be different situations in different cases, which means many factors that might influence the parties' feelings or judgement. When the leaders know what makes the parties feel dissatisfied after mediation, they can figure out the way to avoid some pitfalls indirectly and they even don't need to go through other alternative dispute resolutions.

Question **D** is designed to explore relationship between mediation outcome and the three factors: efficiency, equality and voice. These three factors, more or less, influence the participants' feelings and satisfaction for the outcome of the mediation. The leaders can adjust their company resource or policies based on the research results here and the organizations can benefit from these information and data.

2.8 Sample population

Obviously, the teachers' population for the interview is made of 6 teachers and they are from the secondary schools in different cities in China. Their teaching years are also different in the schools, which means some of them are just new teachers with a few years' teaching experience. However, some of them have been teachers for over 10 years. Some of them are leaders in the schools. Most of them are female and some of them are male, this is natural because most teachers in the schools are female based on the statistics. They are teaching different subjects in the schools, owing to their difference, the information and data collected can be largely impartial and objective enough. Additionally, this also added the researchers more confidence to obtain appropriate options according to the teachers' own situations and positions in the schools.

2.9 Pilot Study

Pilot study is of great importance in the academic study. Calitz (2009, p. 256) pointed out that "*A pilot study is a mini-version of a full-scale study or a trial run done in preparation of the complete*

study". Therefore, the pilot study can be viewed as "both a feasibility study as well as a pre-testing of instruments, questionnaires and interviews".

In this case, the research form and related interview questions have been designed in order to obtain more information about the respondents' psychological feedback and their perspectives. It is not deniable that quantitative method can be used to collect the statistics and data by doing the surveys and other forms of investigation. However, by adopting interviews in this research, it can help the researchers to deepen their understanding in some aspects. In other words, the pilot study in this case is to use interviews as the proper way to collect the data. Some experts also highlighted conducting the pilot study can maximise the reliability and validity of the research (Vasudevan, 2014). Additionally, Calitz (2009) also stated that pilot study can also be used to test if the proposed approach is suitable for the research. When something goes wrong in the process, pilot study can also provide the techniques to amend the format of the relevant interviews or questionnaires and other kinds of investigations.

2.10 Validity

Admittedly, reliability in the research is of great importance when using the qualitative method. Validity, specifically speaking, means the extent of the accuracy of the information and data collected by the researchers. Uniformity and validity are the common forms of reliability (Yilmaz, 2013) and reliability is linked to the respondents' feelings and perspectives, or other data collected in the research instead of any research instruments. When it comes to validity, if the data or information gained from the respondents are accurate, reliable or positive, the research will be taken as a valid result. Simultaneously, some experts also pointed out that there are a few various types of validity like internal and external validity, construct validity, conclusion validity. All of the respondents in this research are anonymous and their feedback can be of great credit based on their teaching backgrounds. All of the participants already have a good understanding about the topics in the research and they are also interested in it. Besides, they all agree to participate the interviews and sign the consent forms to guarantee that the whole research is progressed in a legal way.

2.11 Ethical Considerations

When it comes to Ethical considerations, Marshall (1988) once highlighted that the relevant ethical regulations and behaviours codes are strictly used in the researches' various steps to avoid some wrongdoings. When collecting and analysing the information and data from the respondents, it is important to realise they are anonymous and they totally consent for the whole research process. Besides, the data collected from them cannot be shared with a third party, unless specific and explicit consent is secured. The data and information gained from the respondents' are critical for the research and the ethical regulations can facilitate the progress and completion of the research smoothly (DiCicco- Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). In order to ensure that research data and information can be made available for future reuse, it is important to get the participants' consent for future reuse of the data as well. Meanwhile, the involved respondents will be informed how research data will be preserved and stored, or reused in the future and there is also necessary which also proves that their rights are protected.

In other words, the research is designed and conducted properly, it does not violate any moral and society laws such as copyright, confidentiality and the information about data sharing. Some questions are tricky for some participants and the researchers are supposed to design a thoughtful interview. All of the interview processes are based on the participants' will and they are totally

voluntary (Collis and Hussey,2008). For the researchers, they should show great respect to the respondents and accept the objectivity of the data and information they obtained through the interviews without any exaggeration or change. This research definitely obey all the rules mentioned above and ensure the high quality and validity.

2.12 Limitations of the Research

Although qualitative method is a good option to collect the respondents' feedback and personal opinions. However, it also owns some disadvantages and limitations. For instance, it is a time-consuming process and less structured. To some extent, the sample size is small so that it is hard to guarantee the research result can be typical or representative enough. That is why some experts also pointed out that, the data and information obtained from qualitative method might be not clear enough compared with quantitative data, because the information is according to the humans' interpretation (Saunders, et.al.2012).

They are individuals and have different backgrounds in their life and working in the schools. These teachers are from different cities, the education level in different cities are totally different, some schools are normal public schools while some are international secondary schools which means the policies inside might be more open and fair enough in terms of the teachers' treatments in Salary or personal relationship with other colleagues. Besides, some teachers who are interviewed are also leaders in the schools while some of them are just new teachers with less teaching experience. Their personalities are also different, it is hard to deny that sometimes, individuals' personalities are making contribution to their disputes with other co-workers as well. Due to these various factors in their teaching backgrounds or personal traits, the research results can't be representative enough.

2.13 Data collection

As mentioned above, based on the different functions and advantages of quantitative and qualitative methods, doing the interviews in this research is more appropriate as the interview process is an effective way to explore the respondents' feelings and individual perspectives (Cooper and Schindler,2014). In particular, the purpose of this research is to explore the mediation's role and the teachers' response of mediation outcome in the Secondary schools. The teachers who are interviewed are teaching the different subjects in different schools, they are also in different cities. Owing to their different teaching backgrounds, which provides the information and data that are more comprehensive in the whole country. As the economy or other living factors are various in different cities, it is easy to predict that the usage of mediation in different cities are accepted at various levels. In order to conduct the interviews successfully, some technology devices can be choose based on the needs such as cameras, or video or audio recorders (Collis and Hussey,2009). In this research, the interview content will recorded by the most common chat app in China, which is named Wechat (like Whatsapp), and the contents of interviews are translated into English later.

Chapter Three- Interview Data

3.1 Introduction

Although quantitative and qualitative methods are the most common ones that are used in the researches, they have their own advantages and disadvantages. In terms of qualitative research, Collis and Hussey (2008) once highlighted that it could help the researchers to have a deeper and better understanding of some underlying thoughts. To some extent, it is a hard analysis procedure as

it is hard to ensure that the data can be collected in a structured way, however, the qualitative method can be managed by the researchers to improve the interview quality (Horn, 2009). In this case, qualitative method is a better option to get more exploration. All the interviews processes are recorded, transcribed, analysed, also summarised well.

3.2 Background of the Interviewees

The sample teachers are randomly selected from the different Secondary schools in different cities in China. They are teaching the various subjects in the schools with different years' teaching experience. Their backgrounds are various so that the data collected from them are more objective and fairer. It is beneficial to explore more information based on their same backgrounds (as all of them are teachers in the Secondary schools).

The appointed interviewees are as follows:

Interviewees	Personal age	Years of Teaching	Cities of the schools	Subjects (Secondary schools)
A	40	15	Beijing	English
B	30	6	Wuhan	Math
C	32	8	Tianjin	Physic
D	34	10	Shenyang	English
E	26	3	Chengdu	Chemistry
F	29	5	Shenzhen	Math

Table 1.0: Interviewee and school profile

3.3 Interviewee Profile

A - Beijing- 40 years old -15 years in teaching English

A is an English teacher who is responsible for teaching students in one Secondary school in Beijing city, China. As an experienced English teacher, she does a good job in her teaching. Besides, she already worked as an English teacher in the secondary school for almost 15 years now and witnessed many workplace disputes that happened in the school. She mentioned that, there are many factors that make contribution to the conflicts in the schools, such as bully and harassment, poor work environment, unfair treatment, poor management, inadequate training, inequality (promotion chances or benefits). Mostly, when some conflicts occurred in the workplace, HR department will arrange mediation for the involved participants. Mediation is widely used in resolving the workplace conflicts and is more popular than other options. Some teachers also once thought of some other alternative disputes' resolutions like negotiation and arbitration. However, the participants adopted mediation to facilitate their issues in most cases. In terms of the participants' satisfaction about the mediation outcome, it depends on the individuals, some teachers felt the mediation worked well and they were satisfied especially they are more likely to feel happy

when the mediators are fair and neutral. However, some of them still felt unhappy although they reached agreement in the mediation. She said that half of the teachers feel good for the mediation outcomes, which also serves as a good basis for their long-term relationship in the workplace. Nevertheless, the inequality in their positions or some other aspects is a main factor that influence the participants' satisfaction. Some teachers had lower positions and they did not have voice to express their inner feeling even they don't feel content about the mediation issues. She held the view that the teachers may repeat their workplace disputes again and again if they are not in the equal positions.

B—30 years old – female- 6 years' teaching experience – Wuhan city – Math

She is still regarded as a new teacher by her other colleagues in the workplace as she just has 6 years' teaching experience in Math. She emphasized that bully and harassment, poor management, individual personalities are the main causes for the workplace conflicts in the schools. Besides, the teachers in different positions (higher and lower) generally would have some unhappiness with each other, the invisible inequality to some extent make the teachers feel unfair on some issues, which also led to some conflicts in some circumstances. Mediation is the most common approach they would like to take to handle their issues. However, not everyone is satisfied with the mediation outcome as they perceived different information in the mediation process or after the mediation. Some teachers feel good and they don't have any disputes again after the mediation. They understand each other and they try to avoid some conflicts. A few teachers still felt unhappy about the outcomes for different reasons such as the mediator is not neutral enough, some participants attitudes are not very friendly. In particular, inequality and voice are two important factors that influence their satisfaction after the mediation. When they are in lower positions, they even have lower voice to speak for themselves. Although they can attend the mediation with the other participant, it does not mean the mediation outcome is fair enough. Sometimes, the participant has to reach agreement as they are in lower position, but they also know they are not able to get any apology from the other side.

C- 32years old – male – 8 years' teaching experience – Tianjin - Physics

He is a physic teacher in Tianjin city and he already worked at least 8 years now. He pointed out that he once went through the workplace conflicts on his own. That was because he found his salary was lower than other teachers who had the similar teaching years' experience as him. He could not figure out the reason and he tried to communicate with his manager. However, his manager's attitude was rude in his eye and also did not explain to him why his treatment in payment was not as good as others. He argued with his manger and finally he was suspended by the school. He also attended the mediation with his manager to see if they could resolve their disputes. He did not feel happy after the mediation as he realised that when the participants are in different position (higher position and lower one), they could not get the same treatment even in the alleged mediation. He admitted that mediation is a common approach for the teachers in the Secondary schools to resolve their disputes with other colleagues or supervisors. However, it does not work all the time as some other factors that might influence the effectiveness such as inequality and unfair treatment, poor management in the company or schools. They are also the factors that causes their workplace disputes. In his eyes, the new teachers generally have no voice in any importance decisions or teaching programs. When the teachers are working in the poor environment, their working efficiency/ performance is also negatively influenced. He also mentioned that female teachers are also in a weak position due to gender inequality in some occasions. However, He also stressed that some of his colleagues feel good for the mediation, their disputes are coped well by the impartial mediator. He thought the mediation outcomes should be great if both of the participants are sincere

enough.

D- 34years old – female- 10 years’ teaching – Shenyang city - English

She is an English teacher for 8 years in one Secondary school in Shenyang and she is also one leader in the teaching department. She mentioned that, in her eyes, there are different causes that might make contribute to the workplace conflicts such as poor management, individual personalities (teachers), different payment and benefits, bullying and harassment. She once helped some teachers to deal with their conflicts, they got involved in some disputes as their personalities are totally opposite. They are sitting in the same office and they had arguments with each other very often. D was invited to be the mediator for the participants to help them cope with their issues. She was chosen to be the third party that is because she is a leader and other teachers thought she must be fair enough to others. She is neutral and impartial as a mediator. She also pointed out that some disputes occurred accidentally while some disputes were caused by some teachers on purpose. D also mentioned that sometimes, negotiation is also one option for the involved parties to resolve their issues if both of are managers or in higher positions. It is obvious that mediation is more common than other alternative options and it does not mean mediation always works well. It depends on the various situations. Some teachers just tried mediation and negotiation to resolve their issues. If they failed in the negotiation or mediation, they would like to quit their job instead of using other options like arbitration. The teachers’ inequality in gender or treatment are the main issues. Besides, some teachers also reflected that although they reach the agreement after the mediation, but it does not mean they feel satisfied with the outcome. They don’t want to bother to go through other alternative disputes resolution again that is because they are new teachers or the teacher who had disputes with them are leaders or worked in the secondary school for many years, they have to compromise in some situations. However, she also indicated that some issues are very simple and the participants’ interests are not violated by each other. In these cases, the mediation can work well and help the participants resolved the issues with high efficiency. In contrast, if any participants’ interests are influenced, they will break up in the mediation.

E- 26 years old – female – 3 years’ teaching – Chengdu city - Chemistry

She is a chemistry teacher in one secondary school for just 3 years. She stressed that unfair treatment, poor management, poor working environment, inequalities are the main factors that causes the workplace conflicts. Even now, she is still a new teacher in most other employees’ eyes, she suffered some unfair treatment, especially the teachers with more experience always bully her verbally. She did not seek any assistance as she thought she was new and the leaders in the secondary would not help her. Therefore, she just endured it silently for years. Finally, the teacher who bullied her quitted her job and went to another school, she felt better. Although she found other colleagues would like to attend the mediation for help to solve their issues. Some teachers feel satisfied after the mediation, someone does not. She concluded that in different occasions, the teachers had different feelings in the mediation. For instance, when the new teacher had conflicts with the older teachers, the mediator (HR in the school) would slightly help the teachers with more teaching experience in the mediation. Besides, the HR also talked with the new teachers and advised them to tolerated when it comes to some office disputes. The teachers in lower positions, weaker voice. They once hear about some other alternative dispute’s resolutions like negotiation and arbitration, but in her school, as far as she knows, she noticed that mediation kind of it is the only approach for the teachers to solve their conflicts. She does not want to try other approaches to solve her disputes with others. Some teachers felt unhappy although they already reached agreement with the other participants after the mediation, their working efficiency was influenced in a bad way. Obviously, they feel not satisfied about the mediation outcome, they had no voice for

themselves.

F – 29 years old -female- 5 years' teaching – Shenzhen city - Math

In her eyes, workplace conflicts are everywhere and she emphasized that she had some disputes with some other colleagues before. She summarized that some factors such as relationship among the colleagues, unfair treatment (include job training, payment, bonus, performance appraisal), bullying and all kinds of harassments that took place in the secondary schools always led to some disputes indirectly and directly. Simply speaking, HR (as the third party) to offer mediation for the involved parties are the most common options to handle the issue. However, some participants are not satisfied with the mediation outcome as they don't get any sincere apology from the other side in (or after) the mediation. Besides, negotiation and arbitration also were taken by some teachers in the schools although these two methods are not so popular as mediation. Some participants felt unhappy about the mediation, that is because they feel the mediator, more or less, is standing on the other side (whose position is higher in the school, which refers to the inequalities and voice). She once experienced the disputes as she had conflicts with her male manager that he abused her verbally. She also mentioned that the participants are in different situations, sometimes, their disputes are also relation to the school policies and principles. She thought mediation is the best option for the parties although mediation does not work well in all of the cases. When asked if the efficiency is related to the mediation outcome, she pointed out that, when the teachers can't use mediation to resolve their disputes in the workplace, the mediation outcome influence their mood and working efficiency. In contrast, if they feel happy about the outcome, their performance remains high and positive. Besides, the new teachers and female teachers are more vulnerable and they are hard to get the same treatment in the mediation and they have little voice to express their thoughts, so they have to compromise in some occasions. Finally, she also mentioned that some teachers feel satisfied about the mediation, it mostly depends on the nature of their disputes, if their disputes are small issues, they can be handled fast and both of the participants feel happy.

Chapter Four – Findings

Based on the interviewees' responses above, it is already clear that the causes below that are making huge contribution to the workplace disputes in the secondary schools.

Bully and harassment -Almost all of the teachers interviewed mentioned that bully and all kinds of harassments are very common in any organizations include the secondary schools. According to the teachers' responses, it is clear that bully and harassment is one main factor that causes the conflict in the secondary schools. Bully can be perceived very easily like spreading any malicious rumours, undervalue any employees' work performance, or use various ways to humiliate others , undermine the staff's integrity and so on. Besides, harassment is similar to the meaning of bullying to some extent, harassment refers to some forms of discrimination of the grounds of sex, gender, race, nationality or physical disability, religion or faith, sexual orientation.

Inequality (unfair treatment)- Most of the teachers also pointed out that some factors associated with bullying like they feel the imbalance of power in different positions. Reward systems focus on the teachers with more teaching experience. Workplace inequality also refers to some unfair treatment of the people based on their payment, promotion opportunities, genders , benefits in the workplace and so on. When the teachers (employees) feel that they are treated without fairness, they feel disappointed about their work and also have disputes with their colleagues or leaders because, honestly, some of their unfair treatment are given by their colleagues or leaders in some situations.

Voice (high-low positions)-Some teachers also highlighted that the employees' voice in the workplace is of great importance. For instance, if the employees have strong voice, their productivity and work performance can be improved hugely. Their voice is closely related to their job satisfaction and opportunities of future development in their career.

Poor management and working environment - According to the interviewees' statements, it shows that when the employees are working in the environment with poor management, it is easy for them to feel frustrated and disappointed, especially they don't feel motivated or supported in their work. Slowly, they started having some small disagreements or disputes. However, these conflicts or disputes are hard to be handled properly as they lack effective management skills. Finally, the employees' working productivity might drop or lose gradually as they don't engage in their work with enough effort. Their morality will diminish because they feel they are undervalued.

Relationship with other colleagues- It is inevitable to avoid the conflicts with other colleagues in the workplace. Basically, some reasons that cause this trouble for the employees. 1, they lack proper communication. 2, Their personalities are not compatible or they don't know how to tolerate with each other when some disputes happen. For instances, the employees with an outspoken personality may be too direct and offend others without realising it. 3, when they having disagreement in their work, their values at work are different and they always oppose each other. In contrast, a harmonious relationship with colleagues is one important factor that motivate the employees to remain in a workplace/ organization. The employees can not only feel comfortable, a good working environment can also improve their working performance/efficiency.

The role of Mediation / Negotiation / Arbitration -All of the teachers recognised that the most common alternative disputes resolutions are arbitration, mediation, conciliation and arbitration. They are used and examined to test the efficiency of the related disputes or conflicts in all kinds of fields like working environment. Generally, ADR is regarded as a group of informal processes to help the participants to resolve their disputes outside the courts and also help them to reduce the cost of conventional litigation or some related legal disputes. ADR plays an essential role in helping resolving the parties' disputes and many organizations or companies take ADR as their main method to settle their disputes inside and to create a peaceful and harmonious working environment for all the employees.

Satisfaction of Mediation - Obviously, Mediation is the most common approach for the teachers to use to resolve their disputes in the Secondary schools. Some teachers are satisfied with the mediation outcome and return to work soon with high efficiency. However, there are still some factors that influence the teachers' satisfaction in the mediation, for instance, the mediators' partiality towards the teachers with higher position or more teaching experience than the other side. The participant with lower position still feels a little afraid that they will be bullied indirectly after the alleged mediation as they reach agreement after the mediation. It does not mean they will have a good relationship since then. Moreover, the participants with higher positions, to some extent, make the other participants stressful in the workplace. Hence, the participant with lower position might has less job satisfaction after the mediation.

Efficiency / equality /voice - There are many factors that might influence the participants' satisfaction about the mediation. No matter it is about the mediation ,this dispute resolution system's efficiency, or in the mediation the participants' role (if they receive the same equal treatment in the mediation , generally, the participants with lower power or lower position in one organization is hard to feel satisfied with mediation outcome as they know although they reach agreement in the mediation, it is likely that it is hard for them to remain the relationship with the

other side who has more power than them. In this kind of working environment, they have lower voice to speak for them, more or less, they will feel some unfair treatment or isolated by other colleagues who don't want to make the participants with higher power unhappy. Inequality and voice is connected with each other and are regarded as two main factors that cause the satisfaction for the parties. It is obvious that if the parties hold the power and ability to make the decision /final outcomes, this system in the dispute resolution is more likely to promote party satisfaction although there are some other factors that are also essential in the mediation.

Chapter Five– Discussion

According to the interview data we collected above, it is important to obtain some lessons and key points from this research. As some interviewees pointed out that workplace disputes are inevitable in the schools or other business companies, or some national/international organizations. Wherever there is any human, there is conflict.

Bullying can result in psychological and physical health problems such as anxiety, depression, stomach or sleeping problems. Finally, the employees who are suffering all kinds forms of bullying or harassment in the workplace could not have a good work performance in a long term. Frequently, bullying and harassment always take place when the employees are in different positions, for instance, in the terms of the disputes between the manager and one normal employee, no matter if they go through mediation or not, it is hard for them to reach any agreement as the manager does not allow the employee to win in the mediation or in their daily work.

The employee without any power in the workplace will also feel stressful and this might influence the employee's working performance/efficiency. In a word, their rights and power in the workplace are not equal to each other. Although mediation can help them to resolve their disputes, however, based on the research, the employees with lower power or in lower positions are still afraid of their future relationship with the other participants or other co-workers as they have no voice to speak loudly for themselves. In terms of their voice in the workplace, it means the employees' participation and involvement. If they feel secure to express their thoughts and opinions, they can do a lot of things to make their voice louder to help them win more chances. However, there are various causes that lead to the workplace conflicts based on the respondents' claims. Almost all of the interviewees mentioned that bullying and mistreat (or unfair treatment) are the main factor that causes the teachers' conflicts directly, this ranks first. It is understandable that if the teachers are bullied or suffered some mistreatments in the workplace, they fight for their own rights and benefits, even justice.

One teacher also highlighted that she was a new teacher in the school and just did the teaching for 3 years. She found that she did not receive enough respect from some other teachers who did the teaching for many years, besides, the teachers are in higher positions always gave her extra work to finish and she had to work late sometimes. She admitted that unfair treatment is everywhere especially if you are a new staff in the working environment. More or less, the staff with less working experience have to suffer some forms of discrimination like verbal abuse or have to take more tasks than other teachers. Obviously, When the staffs are treated in this unfair way for a long time, it is easy for them to have conflicts with other co-workers as they don't feel comfortable at this kind of atmosphere.

As for this point, effective management and good working environment are playing important role in enhancing the teachers (staffs') job satisfaction and decrease their conflicts indirectly. Many factors can be used in the workplace to measure the working environment such as work atmosphere

and their relationship with their co-workers (Nitisemito,2012). For instance, if the staff enjoy their working environment or if they are led by some managers they trust and respect, the managers have the capability to handle the teachers' unhappiness or dissatisfaction in the workplace on time, they can reduce their disputes and they don't need to go through any other alternative disputes resolutions. Besides, a few interviewees also stressed that their relationship with other co-workers is also one factor that causes their disputes. In particular, as managers, they should be equipped with quality manager task skills and expertise. When they are dealing with their work, human's nature has to be taken into consideration as well. If they know how to diffuse some conflicts in a good and quick way, the employees will feel more satisfied about their job and they don't need to go through the mediation or other ADR procedures.

Generally speaking, the alleged disputes in the workplace can be regarded as the human-to-human conflicts, the colleagues have competition at their work, or their personalities and values are very different. In these cases, their disputes in the workplace will be more and more common if they could not figure out their problems. When disputes arose in different situations, the schools or organizations choose handle them by adopting mediation as their first option to help the participants to resolve their conflicts although some respondents also stated that some other alternative disputes resolutions are also being taken like negotiation and arbitration. However, mediation is their first choice and the mediator usually are the members from the HR department in the secondary schools. Mediation is beneficial for both sides, not only because the mediator is of great importance in the mediation and the mediator acts as the neutral party to facilitate the involved parties' merits and values of their claims. The mediators tried their best to help the parties to reach agreement that reflect their needs and interests. Besides, the mediation is a voluntary process and the involved participants can control the whole process and they can make their own decisions without any stress.

However, not all of the respondents thought the mediation can resolve the conflicts well as there are lots of factors that might influence their mediation effectiveness and outcome. For instance, some teachers who are interviewed pointed out that mediation sounds like a fair method for the teachers to solve their disputes in the workplace. Their satisfaction of the mediation sometimes depend on the participants' positions (or power) in the workplace. Taking the disputes between one team leader and one new teacher as an example, even they have to go through the mediation to help them to figure out their problems, the mediator from HR department more or less stands on the leader's side to ask questions. Based on this point, it is because the failure of the alternative disputes resolution systems' failure in efficiency if the mediators are not impartial in the mediation. The new teacher maybe has to compromise although the mediator will not speak it so directly. Consequently, they reach their agreement after the mediation, however, the new teacher still have no satisfaction as she/ he still face future problems that might happen again. When it comes to this issue, the inequality in the workplace exists everywhere and the new teachers are aware of that they don't have voice at work. What is worse, their mediation fails, they lose their job satisfaction. Job satisfaction, generally speaking, are more connect to some aspects such as their relationship with other co-workers, their work placements, their career future opportunities (Dost, 2012). As a result, their working efficiency/performance will also be impacted negatively. Additionally, if the participants feel satisfied about the mediation also depends on the nature of the issues, if the involved issues don't violate their core interests, they are more likely to reach agreements in the mediation. Mostly, the participants are seeking for the similar goals and interests in their mediation, if they can find any ways to benefits each other. The mediation can be used as a powerful tool to resolve their disputes and gain the reconciliation quickly

Plus, the participants' emotions generated in their disputes can't be ignored, especially the

participants are likely to have mismanaged negative emotions when they have disputes in their workplaces, which definitely influence their working performance as well. Thus, it is not a good choice to ignore the effect that emotional issues might have on the effectiveness of the mediation process. Besides, the mediators also should be professional enough and have strong expertise in this field. If they have a good understanding of the participants' emotions or feeling at various stages, they are more likely to drive the mediation go smoothly and satisfy both sides finally. Meanwhile, they have to know how emotions probably drive poor mediation strategies.

The parties usually are just seeking for an objectively reasonable resolution to make them feel satisfied in their life or workplace. The mediation settlement can only be reached if the involved participants consent the mutual acceptable outcome. In terms of the settlement, if the participants are satisfied with the outcome and resolve their issues successfully, that is a win-win result. Besides, the parties also have the authority to select a mediator to help them resolve their disputes.

Chapter Six: Recommendation

Workplace conflicts are inevitable in the companies, organizations and other institutions so that it is essential for the employees to deal with them when the disputes arise. No employees want to be embroiled in the workplace conflicts and the employees would have some negative experience or feeling like stress or frustration if their disputes can't be resolved effectively. There are some tips for the employees to adopt to handle their disputes. For instance, being positive in the workplace. The employees with more positivity are more likely to deal with anxiety or some challenges. They can reduce their possibility to be put into any severe disputes. Besides, it is clear that individuals' personalities might also contribute to the workplace disputes, in these cases, the disputes are very difficult to be handled as the participants are hard to compromise with each other. Don't align yourself with anyone else to against other groups and stick to the company policies and regulations. When some conflicts take place, proper communication is necessary at the beginning stage. In other words, proper communication might be helpful to resolve the disputes effectively. Especially, then disputes occur, the participants might be upset or in some negative emotions, at this moment, they are supposed to be calm, which might help them to avoid some unnecessary arguments or disputes in the working environment. Admittedly, the workplace disputes are caused by various reasons like the individuals' personalities, poor communications, various values in the workplace, or even the poor management in the working environment. Being aware of these causes that might cause the workplace disputes is a good approach for the employees to avoid some potential disputes when working.

For the different kinds of disputes that take place in the secondary schools, it is necessary to come up with various solutions. For instance, poor management is one factor that makes the employees feel frustrated in the workplace. As managers, should have a good understanding of how to treat their employees well like show them enough dignity and respect, erase the invisible bully or mistreat in the workplace, provide more training programs or opportunities for the employees to make them realize their value in the workplace and would like to remain in the company.

They are supposed to encourage control and choice for their employees and also explore different levels of competition in the company. They have to seek incentives to drive them to get higher performance and also ensure the employee feel secure and confident. There are a lot of concrete steps the managers can take, they can provide diversity training for the employees, and publicise the bullying and harassment policies, also encourage a collaborative management style in the workplace. The organization has to complete their bullying and harassment policy and conduct it effectively to help the employees to create a clean working environment. Meanwhile, the

participants can be brave enough to express their opinions and make their voice to be heard by the forms of proper communication, representation, participation, related surveys or offer effective suggestions for the team or organizations. Although it is inevitable to have disputes with co-workers, resolving these disputes in effective ways are necessary. As mentioned above, there are many factors that might influence the mediation outcome, having proper communication is also one good option for them to start coping with their conflicts.

When the workplace disputes can't be avoided, some other effective methods can be taken into consideration to resolve their problems. For instance, they can go through mediation or other ADR, no approach can be guaranteed successfully when adopted. When dealing with their disputes by mediation, some elements can be taken into consideration to avoid failure in the mediation. Staying impartial (the mediation system and the mediator) is of great importance for the participants to get assistance in the mediation process. If the leaders in the schools go through these situations in their workplace and they would have a good idea what decision is good for the schools (firms). They have to think about the productivity of the firm, teachers' morale and team collaboration in the workplace. In other words, the leaders should be fair enough to use the mediation to satisfy the participants and eliminate the chances for any possibility of favouritism (regardless the teachers' positions in the schools). Through this way, the participants would feel they get enough respect and dignity and would be more satisfied with the mediation outcomes. During the mediation process, the mediator also plays an important role, they have to be neutral and impartial enough, besides, they are responsible for creating a culture that the involved participants would like to listen to each other without any aggressive behaviour. They should learn to respect each other even if they don't agree with each other in the mediation. Additionally, the mediator has to emphasize that the conversation is solution-focused, any other factors that might influence the participants' feelings or agreements should be spoken out in the conversation. Being candid with each other and showing enough respect can make contribute to their success of the mediation and create a win-win solution. As mentioned before, some participants don't feel satisfied about the mediation outcomes for various reasons. If they are in the low position or have less-year teaching experience compared with the other side, they might be bullied again although both of them reach their agreement in the mediation, as the leaders or other co-workers might value the teachers in higher positions more. Thus, the teachers in lower positions might feel stressful and they know they don't resolve their disputes from the roots, their disputes would be repeated in the workplace again and again. In this case, the leaders have to be aware of these facts and create a fair and just working environment for all of the teachers regardless their age, teaching years or working positions. When the new teachers or the teachers in lower positions are treated with high respect and they feel secure in the working environment, they will be more confident to go against the bias, discrimination or unfair treatment and be more satisfied with mediation or other approaches used by the schools.

Based on the findings of this research, some proper implementation plans are supposed to be put in place in order to further resolve the teachers' potential disputes in the future. Besides, some programs should be used to improve the schools' productivities and provide a better working environment for the teachers, those programs can be implemented at different circumstances or period. The programs are also targeting different groups of the staff in the schools, some of them are good for the leaders while some are suitable for all the other involved teachers in the Secondary schools. Those programs are totally flexible and the involved teachers can pick up the time that fit them most.

Programs	Involved Area	Time Scale	Cost
The brief introduction of workplace disputes	Disputes causes	On-going	100 Euro/per teacher
Mediation introduction	Mediation	1 month	200 Euro/per teacher
Other ADR	Disputes resolution	1 month	250 Euro/per teacher
Fairness and treatment (leadership)	Leaderships' power in the mediation	On going	300 Euro/ per participant

Table 2.0 Implementation Plans

Conclusion

Some experts are already done some empirical and conceptual researches of how the workplace conflicts affect individual outcomes and performance (Bouwen and Salipante, 1990). Mediation is the most effective approach at present and to dig this question, determining the role of mediation in the workplace is of great importance.

This study makes huge contributions to the current perception on the relationship between the factors that influence the employees' participation of the mediation. This provides a solid foundation for the participants involved in the mediations to evaluate and identify the different types of conflicts and the proper way to address them. Obviously, the mediator plays an crucial role in the mediation process and the mediators have to be qualified and skilled in negotiating the emotional situations in the workplace relationship conflicts. They also need to know and judge which mediation form is suitable for the different cases. In light of the present study, limited research was found so that most findings are related largely to the Secondary school in China. There is a lack of related literature on workplace conflicts mediation in its rehabilitation and back to work context. Therefore, more and further researches are being recommended to undertake, in the schools, to see and confirm its effectiveness in Chinese secondary schools.

Personal Learning Statement

Apparently, the mediation's role in the Secondary schools is an attractive topic for me as I had ever been a teacher in one Secondary school in Beijing for almost 4 years and I already noticed some facts when it comes to disputes resolutions in the schools. By conducting this research to discover what causes the disputes in the workplaces in the schools and also did the study to get a deeper understanding of the teachers' thoughts and responses about the mediation approach. In particular, the result verified that some factors like the teachers' voice, positions make a huge contribution to their dissatisfaction of mediation outcomes. I started prepare the relevant investigation and interview process in March, 2021 and had a high expectation for the investigation of the outcomes.

Generally speaking, I managed to gain a good understanding about these issues I would like to explore, and the result also indicate that mediation is of great importance, and some factors need to be taken care of, in that case, the mediation can get a more effective and positive influence in helping the teachers to resolve their conflicts. I really enjoyed doing this research and interviewed so many good teachers in different cities, by doing this research, I also learnt a lot through this topic. Besides, the leaders and teachers in the schools have a good understanding about the relevant issues and they also are aware of the factors (employees' voice, treatment, positions) might influence their satisfaction about the mediation and other alternative disputes resolutions. Hence, the leaders in the schools will be more careful in designing their school policies and regulations, to ensure most teachers' voice and perspectives can be considered and make the regulations more complete and encouraging. Thus, the complete policies can further create a friendlier and more harmonious working environment for the teachers. Additionally, doing the research also improves my analytic ability and it served as a good chance for me to practice my investigation skills and enhance my confidence in my future research or study.

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Appendix 1 - Interview questions

1. What do you think that cause the workplace disputes in the secondary school?
2. What approaches would you like to take to resolve your disputes in the workplace?
3. What is the role of Mediation that used in the workplace /secondary schools?

4. In terms of the mediation process and outcome, what factors do you think that influence the participants' satisfaction?
5. In what situation, they will feel satisfied with the mediation?
6. Apart from mediation, what other alternative dispute resolution could become one option? Why?
7. What factors that might influence the mediation outcome in a negative direction?
8. According to the three metrics of evaluating the dispute resolution system, efficiency, equity, and voice, which ones are related with the mediation outcomes?

Appendix 2 and 3 , Please see additional documents.