



CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES OF STUDENTS WITH TEACHERS IN UNIVERSITIES, A STUDY OF UNIVERSITIES OF LAHORE PAKISTAN*

Saba JAVED 

Dr. Nasreen AKHTAR 

ABSTRACT

The present research investigated student conflict management styles with teachers in both public and private sector universities. The purpose of study was to investigate preferences of students for different conflict management styles with teachers in universities of Lahore. It also aimed to find out the effects of gender, age, educational level and university sector on conflict management styles. Survey method was employed to collect data from graduate and postgraduate students (350) of public and private sector universities by using an indigenous scale "Organizational Conflict Management Inventory" (Haque 2004). Results indicated that students in both types of universities use integrating as first preferred style of managing conflicts followed by obliging and avoiding. The main effect of educational level was significant on integrating, dominating and avoiding styles. However, the effect of gender on conflicts management styles remained insignificant.

Keywords: Conflict Management Styles, Integrating, Obliging, Avoiding, Dominating.

JEL Classification : O11, E10, E30

1. INTRODUCTION

With interaction of different people having so many varied views, different characteristics, needs, beliefs, expectations, perceptions, opinions and ideas, disagreements (conflicts) happen in any setting. Conflict is also attached when there is variance over attitudes, goals, distribution of sources and competitive activities (Karimi, Yektayar, Nazari and Mohammadi, 2003). Due to all these differences conflict is inevitable in organizations.

According to Khan, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) because of conflict producing nature of organizations, universities have no exception to this generalization; their open structure system makes them to influx of various values and goals from both the public and internal role groups. Since unavoidable nature of conflicts, it continues to be part of academic settings. This daily occurrence of

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* Government College University, Katchery Rd, Anarkali, Lahore, Punjab 54000, Pakistan. saba.javed@ucp.edu.pk

* Government College University, Katchery Rd, Anarkali, Lahore, Punjab 54000, Pakistan. nasreenakhtar51@gmail.com

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conflict mainly happens because of differences in opinions between the teachers and students, communication barriers, ambiguity regarding role, expectations and rules, unresolved past conflicts, poor teaching, inadequate support, disagreement on task and content issues, all these factors lead to conflicting situations which bring about discord in academia (Calitz, Fuglested and Lillejord, 2002). So conflict excessively occurs at universities. In other organizations people work toward common goal while in academic settings teachers and students play the role of adversaries because of this very reason academic settings appear to be the zone of frustration and tension which ultimately contribute in problems of society (Fleetwood 1987).

As the conditions and contexts of universities are getting more challenging the conflicts and forums available for its management are much more profound and wide ranging than in the past. With change in society the university has changed too. This point is supported by the research of Volpe and Chandler (1999) who sated “the total number, kind and complexity of conflicts are growing in universities”.

Several studies have been carried out on conflict management in organizational settings in Pakistan. However, not many of these studies have paid particular attention to conflict management in educational sector. So the current research aims to explore the conflict management styles used by university students and extend the literature in Pakistan. The findings of the study would provide insight about conflict management styles of students of both private and public sector universities. It seeks to provide vital information about how conflicts should be managed in universities. This in turn, would help the university students to determine suitable style in dealing conflicts in educational sector.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In classrooms the conflict is considered an unsociable behavior. Morrisette (2001) defined it as “the deliberate behavior of students to make mess and interfere with the teaching and learning process of others.” In universities conflict happens among various parties as student versus teacher, student versus student, in few situations class versus teacher and in countless other ways. In previous literature various styles of conflict management of students have been explored. The researches have also been done on different cultures of students. In study of (Ogretir 2008) was found that the high context culture (collectivistic) students preferred the integrating style more than any other styles and compromising as the second most preferred style. On the other hand low context culture (individualistic) students used compromising with obliging. Hodis (2005) conducted study to explore how US college and Taiwanese college students responded to conflicts in different situations. He found out that there was statistical significant difference in the way of handling conflicts among students of these two countries. US students were more direct than Taiwanese students. Taiwanese students preferred avoiding strategy than US college students. In recent research, Su’udy (2009) explored conflict management styles among Indonesian and Americans. The results showed that Americans preferred the integrating, compromising and dominating than Indonesians. Indonesians preferred the avoiding style more than Americans.

Another study was done by Knutson, Smith, Han and Hwang (2002) to explore conflict management of Taiwanese Chinese students in comparison to Americans. The results of this study showed that Taiwanese Chinese students showed preference for avoiding and obliging style styles for conflict management whereas the U.S. students were more likely to use competitive style. Ohbuchi and Takahashi (1994), investigated the conflict management strategies of Japanese and American students. The results showed that Japanese subjects used avoiding style for conflict management whereas Americans use this strategy very less often.

There is influence of gender on using conflict management styles. Regarding this Tezer (1996) explored that male undergraduate students in regard to conflict behaviors reported more competing behavior toward same sex peers and avoiding behavior toward opposite-sex peers. Females, compared to males, reported more accommodating behavior toward both same- sex and opposite sex peers. These findings suggest that preferences about conflict management behaviors are different for males and females students toward same-sex and opposite -sex peers.

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Hypotheses

In accordance with the above mentioned objectives the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Public and private sector university students would differ significantly in their preferences for using conflict management styles with teachers.
2. Main effect of sector would have significant difference on conflict management styles of both kinds of university students with teachers.
3. Main effect of gender would have significant difference on conflict management styles of both kinds of university students with teachers.
4. Main effect of educational level would have significant difference on conflict management styles of students with teachers of both public and private sector universities.

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

The sample of the study was BSc (Hons) and M.phil students of public and private sector universities. The sample of 200 students of BSc (100 from private and 100 from public sector) and 150 students of M.phil (75 from public and 75 from private) was selected by using convenient sampling technique. They volunteered to participate in the study. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants.

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of the Sample

Variables	Categories	f (%)	M	SD
Age Range in years (20-30)			22.44	3.568
Gender				
	Male	175 (50)		
	Female	175 (50)		
Educational level				
	BS/BBA(Honrs)	201 (57.4)		
	M.phil/MS	149 (42.6)		
Sector				
	Public	175 (50)		
	Private	175 (50)		

3.2. Instrument

3.2.1. Organizational Conflict Management Inventory

To students' conflict management style with teachers the organizational conflict management inventory was used (Haque 2004). It consists of 37 items. The response choices ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. The reliability of scores for OCMI and its 5 subscales for a sample of 203 corporate managers is as: integrating .87, obliging .80, dominating .71, avoiding .73 and compromising is as .57. The results of factor analysis supported the validity of the scale. Overall reliability of full scale on current sample is very good. i.e. .84 for 37 items. Two subscales namely integrating (.84) and obliging (.78) have very good reliability and one (avoiding, .70) has satisfactory reliability. Two subscales (dominating, .66 and compromising, .47) have relatively low reliability. The results of factor analysis supported the validity of the scale.

4. PROCEDURE

Initially permission was taken from concerned authorities of Conflict Management Scale. Prior to the data collection permission from concerned authorities of two universities was taken to make sure their willingness. Later participants were approached in their classrooms and required to fill the consent form. Purposive convenient sampling was used to draw the data from two universities. They were informed about the purpose of the study, issues related to confidentiality and participation right to withdraw from the study at any time. Demographic information was taken from students on demographic form and it was followed by administration of organizational conflict management inventory (Haque, 2004). The meanings of difficult items were explained to the respondents. After data collection the scoring was done. Gender, Age, father's education, father's profession, father's income, mother's education, mother's profession, birth order, educational level were included in demographic form.

5. RESULTS

Study was conducted to verify the research hypotheses quantitatively to find out the most preferred conflict management styles of students, effect of educational level, sector and gender on these conflict management styles. Descriptive analysis for the demographical variables was carried out.

Table 2. Reliability of Organizational Conflict Inventory Scale

Variable	N	M	SD	α
Conflict Management Styles	37	120.96	17.576	.84
Integrating	12	44.51	8.371	.84
Obliging	7	22.88	5.566	.78
Dominating	7	14.59	4.853	.66
Avoiding	7	24.72	5.503	.70
Compromising	4	12.26	3.040	.47

Note. CI= Confidence Interval. $**p < .00$

Internal consistency was estimated by using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient. Alpha internal consistency reliability estimate was considerably high i.e, .84. The reliability of subscales is as follow, integrating .84, obliging .78, dominating .66, avoiding .70 and compromising .47.

Table 3. Inter Correlation among Subscales

Variables	Integrating	Obliging	Dominating	Avoiding	Compromising
Integrating	1	.59*	-.11*	-.40*	-.47*
Obliging	.59*	1	-.19*	.57*	.26*
Dominating	-.11*	-.19*	1	-.13	.16
Avoiding	-.40*	.57*	-.13	1	.21
Compromising	-.47*	.26*	.16	.16	1

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 3 indicates that integrating style has significant positive and moderate correlation with obliging ($r = .59, p < .05$) and inverse correlation with dominating ($r = -.11, p < .05$), avoiding ($r = -.40, p < .05$) and compromising ($r = -.47, p < .05$). Furthermore obliging style has inverse relation with dominating ($r = -.19, p < .05$) \ and positive correlation with avoiding ($r = .57, p < .05$) and compromising ($r = .26, p < .05$). Moreover, dominating has inverse correlation with avoiding ($r = -.13, p < .05$) and positive correlation with compromising ($r = .16, p < .05$). Whereas, avoiding has positive relation with compromising ($r = .21, p < .05$).

Table 4. Students Preference for Different Conflict Management Styles

Most preferred styles	F	χ^2	df
First Preference			
Integrating	348 (98%)		
Dominating	1(1%)	688.05*	2
Avoiding	1(1%)		
Second Preference			
Obliging	189(54%)		
Avoiding	146(41%)	306.66 *	3
Dominating	13(11%)		
Third Preference			
Avoiding	170(48.5%)		
Obliging	139(39.7%)	220.04*	3
Dominating	39 (33.4%)		

** $p < .00$

Chi square goodness of fit indicates that first preference style is integrating followed by dominating and avoiding $\chi^2 (2, N = 350) = 688.05, p < .00$ in both sector university students. Second preferred style was obliging followed by avoiding and dominating $\chi^2 (3, N= 350) = 306.66, p < .00$. Third preferred style was avoiding followed by obliging and dominating $\chi^2 (3, N= 350) = 306.66, p < .00$.

Table 5. Effect of Educational level, Sector and Gender on Conflict Management Styles

Source of variance	DV	SS	df	MS	F	Partial η^2	Observed Power
Educational level							
BS (Hons)							
MS/M.phil							
	Integrating	306.22	1	306.22	4.37*	.01	.55
	Dominating	103.83	1	103.83	4.90*	.01	.59
	Avoiding	156.18	1	156.18	5.18*	.01	.62
Sector							
Public							
Private							
	Dominating	270.38	1	270.38	12.06*	.03	.93
Error							
	Integrating	23949	342	70.02			
	Obliging	10597.17	342	30.98			
	Dominating	7662.49	342	22.40			
	Avoiding	10312.37	342	30.15			
	Compromising	3123.26	342	9.13			
Total							
	Integrating	717889.00	350				
	Obliging	227468.00	350				
	Dominating	82739.00	350				
	Avoiding	224395.00	350				
	Compromising	55808.00	350				

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Note: only significant findings were reported.

Results of MANOVA indicate the effect of educational level was significant on integrating, dominating and avoiding styles, $F (1, 350) = 4.37, p < .05$, $F (1, 350) = 3.43, p < .05$, and $F (1, 350)$

=5.18, $p < .05$. Results indicated that M.phil/ MS students ($M = 45.67$, $SD = 7.51$) had high scores on integrating style more than BS/BBA (Hons) students ($M = 43.65$, $SD = 8.87$). Moreover, BS/BBA (Hons) students ($M = 15.09$, $SD = 4.93$) had high scores on dominating style more than M.phil/MS students ($M = 13.91$, $SD = 4.67$). Avoiding style is used by students of M.phil/MS students ($M = 25.53$, $SD = 4.97$) more than BS/BBA (Honrs) students ($M = 24.11$, $SD = 5.80$). In addition to educational level the main effect of university sector was significant on dominating style, $F(1,350) = .075$, $p < .001$. Private sector students use dominating style ($M = 15.57$, $SD = 5.39$) more than public sector students ($M = 13.62$, $SD = 4.03$). However, there was no significant effect of gender on conflict management styles. The interaction effect of educational level and sector had significant effect on compromising style, $F(1, 350) = 4.89$, $p < .05$. Eta squared suggested small effect size for the significant findings.

6. DISCUSSION

Conflict is inevitable part of any organization likewise universities have no exception to this rule. In university setting conflict is considered an inherent component of academic life. Conflict management plays a pivotal role in developing healthy and good working environment to enable an institution to develop and flourish. University students encounter multitude conflicts on daily basis with teachers. Conflicting ideas regarding task, or issue are the main source of generating these conflicts.

There are very few publications which addressed how conflict is managed at university level ((Findlen, 2000; Gmelch, 1995; Gmelch and Carroll, 1991). The benefits of conflict management should not be de-emphasized. Clear understanding of conflict management flourishes and progress the organizations. Organizations develop only and only when there is a clear understanding of conflict management functions and this clear understanding works as a catalyst and stimulant for organizational growth and innovation. The present study focused on conflict management styles of public and private sector university students and the effect of educational sector, educational level and gender on conflict management styles

The present study was aimed to explore the difference in conflict management styles used by university students in both public and private sector universities. The conflict management styles were divided into five styles as, integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and comprising. The study was also aimed to find out the most preferred styles used by university students of both sectors. Moreover, another purpose was to determine the effect of educational level and sector on managing conflicts in students of both public and private sector universities. Gender difference in terms of using conflict management styles in both kinds of university students were also explored.

The reliability of the measure was determined. Cronbach alpha for Conflict management scale was found to be significant. While reliability of Alpha was considerably high. The first hypothesis of the study was that public and private sector university students would differ significantly in their preferences for using conflict management styles with teachers. The findings didn't support the hypothesis. The results indicate that that first preference of university students in managing conflicts

with teachers is integrating followed by obliging and avoiding by students of public and private sector universities. Similarly, the second and third most preferred styles were as obliging and avoiding in both sector universities. The results are consistent with the findings of (Ogretir, 2008) who found that the high context culture (collectivistic) students preferred the integrating style more than any other styles. As avoiding was third most preferred style used by students, this finding is consistent with the findings of Hodis (2005) he found out that there was statistical significant difference in the way of handling conflicts between US College and Taiwanese college students. Taiwanese students preferred avoiding strategy more than US college students. Ohbuchi and Takahashi (1994), investigated the conflict management strategies of Japanese and American students. The results showed that Japanese subjects used avoiding style for conflict management, whereas Americans used this strategy very less often. The results also support the findings of Su'udy (2009) who explored conflict management styles among Indonesian and Americans. The results showed that Americans preferred the integrating, compromising and dominating than Indonesians. Indonesians preferred the avoiding style more than Americans. Ohbuchi et al. (1994), investigated the conflict management strategies of Japanese and American students. The results showed that Japanese subjects used avoiding style for conflict management, whereas Americans used this strategy very less often.

The second hypothesis was that the main effect of educational sector would have significant difference on conflict management styles of both kinds of university students with teachers. MANOVA results showed that the main effect of university sector had significant effect on dominating style. To find out which sector of students had difference on dominating style; the t test of independence was used. Private sector students were found using dominating style more than public sector students. One possible explanation for this difference can be that in private sector universities, students have more freedom and university gives them authority to be assertive. Therefore, students use their right of freedom and try to dominate in situation.

The third hypothesis of the study was that main effect of educational level would have significant difference on conflict management styles of students with teachers of both public and private sector universities. The results of multivariate analysis indicated that the main effect of educational level was significant on integrating, dominating and avoiding styles. The findings supported the second hypothesis. The results indicated that M.phil/ MS students use integrating style more than BS/BBA (Hons) students. Moreover, BS/BBA (Hons) students use dominating style more than M.phil/MS students. Avoiding style was used by students of M.phil/MS students more than BS/BBA (Hons) students. While the effect of educational level was non significant on obliging and compromising styles.

Reason of M.Phil./MS students using integrating style more than BS students could be as students get matured by this stage. Students of higher level start avoiding issues and conflicts with teachers than BS students. On the contrary, BS students confront the issue and want to be dominating over the issue. As person using integrating style takes into account the concern for self and others so M.Phil students

are more concerned about the both parties. On the other hand sometimes students of M.Phil./MS avoid the conflict altogether as it brings peace for them by avoiding indulging in any issue. Similar findings were reported by Ciulla (1995) and Greenberg (1990) that the application of avoidance in educational sector. This style refers to no concern for self and others so it seems students.

Fourth hypothesis of the study was that main effect of gender would have significant difference on conflict management styles of both kinds of university students with teachers. The findings didn't support the hypothesis. The results showed that there are no gender differences in terms of using conflict management styles by students of both public and private sector universities. This finding contradicts the research findings of Tezer (1996) who found that male undergraduate students reported more competing behavior toward same sex peers and avoiding behavior toward opposite-sex peers. Females, compared to males, reported more accommodating behavior toward both same- sex and opposite sex peers.

7. CONCLUSION

The findings of present study showed that there was no significant difference in the conflict management styles of students graduate and postgraduate with teachers of both public and private sector universities. Main effect of educational level had significant effect on integrating, dominating and avoiding styles. However, the main effect of university sector was significant on dominating style. Conclusively it was found that dominating style is used more by private sector students than public sector students.

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