



Reaching out Merits of Information Technology: Conflict Management in Schools

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine the attitudes of headmasters in conflict management process within the school culture. The study has qualitative nature through the interviews with 76 teachers on the leadership and conflict management strategies of the headmasters. Within the framework of action learning and learning organization of a school culture, professional identity, the motivation and leadership are crucial for the research process. The analysis of multiple themes, as regards to the research focus, the findings proved the merits of information technology in conflict management in schools. Being involved in a collaborative dialogue provides valuable opportunities for a bridge on communication, negotiation for personal and professional development as regards to the motivation and productivity in school context.

Keywords: conflict management, information technology, leadership, tolerance education

INTRODUCTION

In today's global world, the increase in communication among people due to the development in technology transfer and communication, provides the spread of concepts such as, freedom, democracy, economic prosperity and justice in the distribution of income among people (Johnson & Johnson, 2010); thus, cultural interaction between people is increasing. While on one hand positive interaction occurs, on the other hand the changing of socio-cultural conditions in the global world and crushing people under a competitive economy makes people more nervous and as a result makes them get used to experiencing conflicts. In this perspective, the abilities of people to manage conflicts, to respect each other's differences and to learn to live according to social justice are among the acquisitions of tolerance education (Harris & Morris, 2003).

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State of the literature

- School cultures face the merits of information technology in conflict management
- Prevention of violence through the merits of information technology and awareness of conflict management strategies is possible
- Dominating is a form of conflict management that is often implemented by managers, especially when there is a superior-subordinate relationship

Contribution of this paper to the literature

- Engaging in dialogues and active learning environments encourages headmasters and teachers to facilitate collaboration and communication
- Internalizing critical friendship for conflict resolution increases the value of reflection, understanding of the development acting for the school improvement.
- Self-evaluative awareness of communication and conflict resolution help better solutions on professional identity, motivation and productivity.

Therefore, conducting transformation in education, related to the merits of information technology in overcoming conflicts in schools and enhancing the importance of tolerance education in teaching requires the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to resolve conflicts positively (Ciolan, Petrescu, Radulescu, & Bucur, (2014; Johnson & Johnson, 2010). Management process is not just to prevent conflicts; it also includes being respectful to differences (Harris and Morris, 2003). As tolerance education and the use of information technology must be given at schools from early childhood, primary schools have an important place, due to the fact that mandatory and the first stage of education, in providing the learners with the necessary knowledge and skills to achieve the tolerance and the ability to become digital citizens in the community. Schools are contexts to develop communication, empathy, anger management, cooperation; critical thinking, cooperative interview and mediation skills and the headmasters and teachers are the basic role models to mediate tolerance and conflict management skills (Danesh, 2006).

While the world is integrating and shrinking with globalization, conflicts still continue. Border conflicts continue among countries, the world is divided by political accounts and civilization conflicts, with limited labor force, but without a limit for capital which causes migration and conflict in border policies (Pieterse, 2003). Educators have the biggest task to prevent violence through the merits of information technology and awareness of conflict management strategies. The study by Akcıl, Aksal, Mukhametzyanova, & Gazi, (2016) examines the open and technology leadership in managerial practices of education systems. In this respect, schools are social systems to make a balance of interactions and exchange of knowledge. The study by Altınay, Dagli, & Altınay (2016) underlines the role of tolerance education by information technology, through considering multi-dimensional nature of citizenship, managing conflicts in schools, play a great role in acquiring mutuality and working together with others. The study by Wintersteiner (2013) points out the

importance of digital citizenship and Aksal (2015) underlines the importance of information technology and digital leadership for headmasters in schools.

The practice of conflict management can be done through different phases. Integration is one of the strategy that is used when the parties attach high importance to the needs of both their own and counterparts. The integration strategy is also called problem solving. The parties come together and negotiate the real problem and the action that could be taken within confidentiality and openness. Both parties analyses the differences between them in order to achieve an acceptable solution. The main rule of this strategy is to take up a position. In this way, both parties would be able to overcome their limited view of what can be done (Karip, 2013, p.64). The most common statements regarding the management of the integration strategy appear as the importance given to communication, mutual sincerity and independent problem solving independent from ego and whims. Although integration seems to be the most ideal conflict management strategy, it may also have weaknesses. For instance, this style may be considered inadequate in cases where there is not enough time in order to implement the problem-solving techniques in quite simple cases of problems, where the education and experiences of the counterpart are not adequate in terms of problem solving or where one of the parties do not care about the consequences of the negative events (Rahim, 2001, p.81).

In addition to this, the strategy of obliging can be implemented if one of the parties takes a step back in a case that is not important for oneself in order to protect the relationship between the two parties. In order for the obliging style to be accurate, it should be ensured that the party that will make concessions should consider the case as a matter of importance or should believe that the counterpart is right. If the relevant party makes concessions to a case as a matter of importance or if the counterpart is not believed to be right, it is not possible to implement the obliging strategy accurately (Rahim, 2001, p.83). Another style is dominating style, which is appropriate to implement this strategy in the implementation of the routine issues and in the case of decisions to be taken rapidly by the senior staff. It is a conflict management strategy that an administrator can apply on inexperienced or undisciplined subordinates, especially in situations where concrete technical skills are required (Rahim, 2001, p.83). The dominating strategy is used when one of the parties attaches importance to satisfy one's own interests and needs at the expense of the other's interests and needs. Either party may use every means possible. In case of a conflict between the senior and the subordinate, the senior may enforce the subordinate to obey his/her own demands and even orders (Karip, 2013, p.66).

The strategy of avoiding conflicts or ignoring conflicts is used when the parties have a weak consideration about the interests and needs of both their own and counterparts. This strategy usually emerges with attitudes such as withdrawing to the edge, not being interested or the reluctance to hear anything negative. The avoiding strategy can also be used for purposes such as postponing dealing with the conflict to a more appropriate time or gaining time for someone to improve their position. If the conflict has a detrimental effect on

both sides, the parties may refrain from starting the conflict. In this case, the existence of a conflict situation is generally not explicitly accepted. (Karip, 2013, p. 67) Avoiding the problem by assuming that the problem will eventually abort will cause the problems to remain unsolved over time. Moreover, avoiding behavior may also have a provocative effect by creating the impression that the other side is not taken serious or that the party is not considered important (Karip, 2013, p. 68)

When both sides agree to a compromised mutual agreement strategy, they will give up some things to agree and to reach a solution, compromising is that the parties mutually have some acceptance or they have to find a common point in a short time. When a compromised mutual agreement strategy is used, the compromising party compromises less than in the strategy of compliance. Here, the "win-win" approach is followed for both sides to win and satisfy the interests and needs of both parties. In order to implement this strategy, the parties need to attach importance to the satisfaction of their interests and needs as well as valuing and considering the interests and demands of the other party (Karip, 2013, p.68.).

Recent studies reveal the role of management and technology in the development of school cultures that they stay partial in facing the merits of information technology in conflict management (Altınay, Dagi, & Dagi, 2016; Aksal, A, 2016, Altınay, 2016). The study of Garcia-Valcarcel, Basilotta & Lopez (2014) encapsulates the role of collaborative learning in schools through the role of information technologies. As information technology gains the nature and spirit of facilitating school development, this study aims to evaluate perceptions of headmasters and teachers in conflict management strategy and the use of information technology in school development. Further to this, this research study gives insights on the role of technology and management in conflict management education.

The following research questions are considered to reveal the research focus;

1. What are the key factors in conflict management in the school practices?
2. How do rural schools implement conflict management and tolerance education?
3. What is the role of technology in conflict management in education?

Methodology

This research study relies on qualitative nature that focuses on evaluating perceptions of headmasters and teachers related to conflict management and the role of information technology in schools. As the research relies on details and experiences of teachers and headmasters, an action research based case study in gaining valuable strategies to overcome conflicts is used to examine the current situation of schools in the development of tolerance and effective practices (Karasar, 2008).

Research Group

The participant teachers and headmasters were chosen through snowball sampling method (Tavşancıl & Aslan, 2001; & Hanushek, & Jackson, 2013).

Table 1: Research Participants

Participants	Number
Teachers	76
Headmasters	6
Total	82

Data Collection Procedure

The data was collected between September 2016 and February 2016 at convenient times for the teachers and headmasters in their schools. In the research, a 45- minute face to face meetings were held with the headmasters and teachers in six different cities and schools.

Data Collection Tool

In this research, three experts were referred for their views about the questions in order to gain the internal validity and reliability of the question forms. The questions were piloted in three schools with headmasters and teachers. The taped sounds were translated and the themes were set in the light of the experts' views. A 92% agreement was reached among the experts (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Coding the Data

Miles's and Huberman's 1994 formula was referred for the stability of the research and the credibility was calculated as 87%. The credibility of a research over 70% is considered valid and Miles's and Huberman's codes were taken as key focuses in obtaining the data.

Analysis of the Findings

All the findings were analyzed and the qualitative data related to the focus of this research was collected.

Research Findings and Discussion

Scope 1: When a conflict arises between a teacher and a Principal in the school where you work (You or others), what kind of attitude does your school principal take on this issue? The answers given in the question are as follows;

Table 2: Integration

Responses	Theme
1. He tries to solve the problem and speaks calmly.	Integration
2. He tries to understand. It is always settled by negotiation	Integration
3. He does not grudge at all	Integration
4. We can raise our voice about our ideas during the discussion.	Integration
5. Even in the case of a debate, he never grudges at us. He	Integration

welcomes our views.

6. We can discuss without interrupting	Integration
7. There is little debate at first, but then he invites us to the chamber and it ends with agreement.	Integration
8. Our manager takes our opinion in case of disagreement.	Integration
9. He strives not to make faults on the hill and not to disturb the opponent's morale.	Integration
	Integration

Integration, as noted in the data above, is a conflict method strategy, particularly in cases where communication and the mutual will to solve problems are at stake (**Table 2**). The involved do not nurse a grudge towards each other and their motivation in problem solving is at its top level. In order to achieve success in interaction strategy, which does not seem possible by the effort of only one part, particularly school directors who have the authority should be closely involved in this issue as an important factor in solving conflictions and motivating teachers.

Integration is a conflict management strategy, particularly in which the communication and mutual problem solving skills are on the foreground, as seen in the above data. The parties do not hold a grudge against a person and their motivation for problem solving is at a high level. Although the success of the integration strategy can not be achieved by a single party, having the school administrator who holds the power close to the strategy is undoubtedly an important factor in conflict resolution and teacher motivation.

Dominating is a form of conflict management that is often implemented by managers, especially when there is a superior-subordinate relationship (**Table 3**). The implementation of the dominating strategy as a general rule except certain special cases may cause a decrease or break of communication between the parties in the medium term. Even if the dominant party establishing authority does not care about the experiences in the beginning, the polarizations within the organization that will be experienced in the long term may harm all parties.

Table 3. Domination

Responses	Theme
1. He tries to act according to rules and regulations.	Domination
2. Generally, managers are a little nervous and they do not exhibit a friendly approach in such a situation.	Domination
3. If the teacher does not step back, the issue is reported to the Ministry of Education.	Domination
4. He has not been very constructive in the last few cases.	Domination
5. In general, we avoid quarrelling with the director.	Domination
6. The Director has the last say.	Domination
7. The director does not ask our opinion before any practice.	Domination
8. He prefers defending his own rights.	Domination

Table 4. Avoidance

Responses	Theme
1. I have not witnessed such a conflict in any way. He usually avoids being involved or a part of a conflict.	Avoidance
2. It was a school situation. Opinions clashed. The issue was put to a vote.	Avoidance
3. It was a tense atmosphere. Soon the tension was over and the issue was voted and decisions were made.	Avoidance
4. Usually both the director and teachers raise voices and the problem remains unsolved and the discussion does not come to an end	Avoidance
5. The principal listens. He has his own say and avoids argument.	Avoidance
6. He usually tries to be calm and tries not to flare the teachers up because he is sure to be opposed with severe reactions.	Avoidance
7. Usually we are a family here, so everything is connected to good will.	Avoidance

Avoiding is also one of the often-frequent conflict management styles in schools. There may be cases where it is appropriate to be implemented as well as cases where it may cause serious damages (**Table 4**). If the tension is high, giving the immediate angry parties a hard time can further exacerbate the possible conflicts. In some cases, it may be logical to postpone the conflict by implementing the avoiding strategy. However, the implementation of the continuous avoiding strategy may lead to the growth of the problems within time, the implementation of inappropriate alternative solutions and polarizations.

Table 5. Compromise

Responses	Theme
We benefit from his experiences.	Compromise
It does not matter whoever is right or wrong. He steps on, we step on.	Compromise
There is always a solution	
The general attitude of our principal is to try to find a sound solution, without resorting to self-deprecation and oppression.	Compromise
He usually listens to the teachers and respects them.	Compromise
First of all he detects his own fault.	Compromise
	Compromise

It can be passed on as a strategy in which the parties of reconciliation will take steps in order to achieve common purpose through mutual compromise. In order for the parties to achieve the "win-win" outcome, one party must compromise the other party on certain issues (Table 5). It is a conflict management strategy that is not utilized often particularly by the senior managers and that will result in favour of the organization through the implementation in the appropriate case.

Table 6. Compensate

Responses	Theme
Our manager often changes teachers tune.	Compensate
The director trusts himself in persuading the teachers.	Compensate
He usually approves the majority's ideas.	Compensate
He tries to keep the teacher happy and in peace	Compensate

Compromising is often seen to be the least preferred conflict management strategy in relation to superior-subordinate relationships but it is sometimes observed. The party takes back its own priorities and agrees to adhere to the other party's considerations. This does not create a problem if the concerned party has compromised on a topic that is not highly significant, but if an important issue is compromised, then it may lead to various problems.

Having analyzed the Table 7, teachers answered the question "What kind of attitude does your headmaster exhibit when a conflict arises between a teacher (You or others) and the headmaster at school that you work in? and (56) of a total of 145 items were answered as dominating, (42) of them were answered as integrating, (30) of them were answered as avoiding, and the remaining (17) of them were answered as compromising (13) and reconciliation (4) respectively. It can be clearly observed that the strategy of conflict management by the headmasters in case of the conflicts between headmasters-teachers is the dominating strategy (56). This demonstrates that the headmasters highly protect their authorities and powers and they deal with the problems within a mechanism of chain of commands. The second strategy applied is the strategy of integration (42), a conflict

management strategy in which communication and problem-solving techniques are more prominent. The fact that implementation of integration is at the second place demonstrates that the headmasters intend to solve their problems through communication and empathy. The avoiding strategy (30) at the third place takes place at the situations in which the conflicts are not taken into account deeply and ignored by headmasters and in which they do not want to conflict with teachers. The Compromising as a conflict management strategy in which parties negotiate in a win-win manner by making compromises in return was found in (13) items. The least frequently implemented conflict management strategy by the headmasters was found to be Reconciliation (4).

Table 7. The frequencies of answers given to the question “When a conflict arises between a teacher and a Principal in the school where you work (You or others), what attitude does the school principal have?”

Theme	Frequency
Domination	56
Integration	42
Avoidance	30
Compromise	13
Compensation	4

As noted in the above table (**Table 7**), the response of teachers related to their director’s attitude in case of a conflict, was ordered as 56 “domination”, 42 “integration”, 30 “avoidance” out of 145 items and the other 17 items were ordered as 13 “compromise”, and 4 “compensation”.

Scope 1 was determined according to five themes. The questions were directed to 76 samples whose answers were mainly on integration and domination themes. When Scope 2 is examined, it can be noted that four themes were revealed. 76 samples were asked about their views. The answers concentrated on two themes, “increasing motivation” in the first place and “decreasing motivation” in the second place (**Table 8**).

Table 8. Motivation

Responses	Theme
He works well because we come to school peacefully	Increase
Determination to work increases our enthusiasm because if you are an amateur in your work environment, it will make you uncomfortable.	Increase
It enhances our motivation.	Increase
It is a positive influence that the executive does not take a decision based solely on his own strength, valuing the other's ideas.	Increase
I want to come to school every morning. This is my second home As the other person listens to you, values your ideas and evaluates your views without conflict, the teacher expresses your thoughts in a relaxed and democratic environment and the teacher feels safe and motivated.	Increase
Nobody's ashamed as it is in the family. It affects me very positively.	Increase
It works well. I do not want to be in a tense environment. A comfortable environment motivates me, of course.	Increase

The impact of conflict management strategies implemented by school administrators (headmasters) on the motivation of teachers is markedly different. It has been found out in the statements in which teachers mentioned to have their motivation strengthened that headmasters are usually in contact with them, they adopt a conflict-focused approach and prefer a working environment away from tension.

Table 9. Conflict based responses

Responses	Theme
Of course, but I try not to reflect it in class.	Decrease
Of course, motivation falls. I know that people talk behind others back under their false smile in school. .	Decrease
It does not matter as long as it makes sense. But if it does not make sense to me, of course I am negatively affected.	Decrease
I don't want to work in that environment	Decrease
Conflict is adverse.	Decrease
On the day of discussion motivation falls completely.	Decrease
At first it's devastating. If the decisions taken are my disadvantage, then I am adversely affected.	Decrease

In the data referring to a lack of motivation, teachers stated that tension in the working environment, lack of communication and insensitivity towards the school problems in the medium term. Certain teachers mentioned that they are motivated in case the conflicts end in their favour but they have a tendency towards the lack of motivation when the conflicts do not end in their favour.

Table 10. Teacher reactions

Responses	Theme
It will not affect me.	No Effect
I am a very optimistic person. It does not impress me very much, but they are affected.	No Effect
It does not affect me very much	No Effect
No effect. I trust my knowledge after 30 years teaching experience.	No Effect

This table (**Table 11**) demonstrated that certain teachers become insensitive towards the conflict management strategies of headmasters without taking into consideration whatever strategies they are. This finding shows that teachers have somehow been negatively affected by conflict management strategies implemented in the past and have lost the organizational belonging and motivation over time.

Table 11. Motivation Status

Themes	Frequency
Motivation Increase	42
Motivation Decrease	32
No Effect	7

In consideration of the analyzed data, it has been found out that the teachers were asked "How does the behavior the headmaster exerts in case of a conflict between a teacher (You or others) and the headmaster takes place in the school you work affect your motivation?" and (42) out of 81 items were answered as a strengthened motivation, (32) were answered as a weakness in motivation and (7) were answered as no effect on motivation. As can be concluded, the conflict management strategies that school administrators (headmasters) implement result in a strengthening in the motivation of teachers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper revealed the findings of a collaborative dialogue and empathy yielding positive results on awareness and reflection in conflict management in schools (Akcil, et al., 2016). Engaging in dialogues and active learning environments encourages headmasters and teachers to facilitate collaboration and communication. Internalizing critical friendship for

conflict resolution increases the value of reflection, understanding of the development acting for the school improvement. Increasing work productivity relies on motivation and consensus among school management and the staff. In this respect, the tolerance culture is one of the fundamental elements needed to be internalized for overcoming conflict and effective leadership. In tolerance culture and conflict management, leadership of the headmasters and tendencies on continuous learning and professional attempts are crucial (Harris, et al., 2003).

In terms of quality management in schools, effectiveness of organizations, cultural elements within the organizations, tolerance to conflicts, management style and leadership are the roots that show how schools can set strategies to reach out quality. Engaging school management staff in collaborative learning environment, based on the frame of learning organizations, raises awareness, reflection and growth in professional development. As Karip (2013) encapsulates the merits of strategies to manage conflicts, this study showed that leadership, collaboration and conflict management support critical friendship for reflecting and reconstructing effective communication bridge to demonstrate competencies on problem solving, and reflective thought. Significantly, self-evaluative awareness of communication and conflict resolution help better solutions on professional identity, motivation and productivity.

In fact, social learning, collaborative discourse through technology supported environment foster negotiation, cooperation and success in work productivity (Lee, Tsai, Chai, & Koh, 2014). The merits of the information technology in social learning and discourse also support the process of collaboration and negotiation (Aksal, A., 2015, Valtonen, Kukkonen, Kontkanen, Sormunen, Dillon, & Sointu, 2015). Rather than individual attempts, partnership and use of technology plays a critical role. Although the study has positive results as regards to conflict management strategies and school culture, longitudinal studies need to be conducted to see the impact of trainings. The model for conflict management framework needs to be developed in further studies.

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