

CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

Abdul Ghaffar*
Amir Zaman**

Abstract

Conflicts at all stages of life have been an acknowledged and a well recognized fact. Children at elementary level are prone to all sorts of conflicts i.e. their individual behavioral problems (termed as intra-personal conflict), strained relations with their peers (inter-personal conflict) and conflicts with students group (inter-group conflicts). Whatever the nature and type of a conflict might be, it always poses a challenging and sometimes threatening situation for the teacher to cope with these conflict situations. This research article has studied the conflict resolution strategies of elementary schools teachers and their impact on children behavior. The researchers took a sample of 200 elementary schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Data were collected with questionnaire and for the analysis of data Mean, Standard Deviation and ANOVA were applied after feeding data in SPSS software. Findings of this study show that teachers need to be trained and made aware of different conflict resolution programs; it further showed that conflict resolution strategies have a significant relationship with students' behavior.

Key words

Elementary school, conflict resolution, students' behavior

Introduction

Conflicts most of the time is caused by to an attempt for meeting or satisfying one of the basic needs, it lurks even when the disputants have reached on a mutual agreement on the state of affairs. Conflict management as “*a philosophy and a set of skills that assist individuals and groups in better understanding and dealing with conflict as it arises in all aspects of their lives.*”¹

* Assistant Professor Department of Education Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan.

** Assistant Professor Department of Education Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan.

Problem-Solving Processes

Conflicts offer competitive as well as cooperative context in the organization but it varies according to the situation. Problems exist in managing conflicts when the context is competitive/individualistic or when the context and the conflict resolution procedures are incongruent. Negotiation, mediation and consensus decision making are some of the structured problem-solving processes of conflict resolution. All conflict resolution approaches are based on the integrated negotiation theory. "Negotiation" and "Mediation" has been used interchangeably in conflict resolution literature. These terms have been defined by different experts as;

Negotiation

It is defined as an approach in which two or more persons have some common and opposed interests and who want to come to a settlement after a workout plan.² It is always a voluntary approach for solution of the problem in which bargaining is directly carried out between the two parties who after some deliberation reach a settlement.

Mediation

In mediation a third party (mediator) intervenes in order to bring the disputants to the table and give a solution to their problem.³

Conflict Management

Conflict management is a process in which people or group of people tackle grievances which is held about other party's behaviors. It consists of finding the root cause of the conflicts which may be interpersonal (between individuals), intrapersonal (within the individual), intra group (within group) and intergroup (between groups). Once it is done then suitable negotiation approaches and/or other interventions strategies are designed to avoid conflicts and mitigate or resolve conflicts.⁴

Principal's Role in Conflict Management

School principals have a number of assignments ranging from supervisory duties to that of administrative work⁵. He has to perform his duties as team leader, servant leader, organizational and social architect, administrator, manager, educator, moral agent, a mediator, negotiator, a social worker, a child advocate and an active community member. He has to fulfill these assignments very actively and these should be centered round the child's moral, mental and physical development.⁶

Conflicts have been viewed as more intense and frequent in the organizations; that's why terms such as fighting, violence, and gangs has been connected and viewed due to indiscipline which has occurred in local public schools.⁷

It has been argued that principals occupy a central and responsible position as whatever happens in the schools is tied with the administrative ability or inability of the principals.⁸

Two main elements are contained in an authentic conflict resolution program which are: 1) the *principles* of conflict resolution; and 2) a *problem-solving process*.⁹ These two components are common factors in the following four approaches to conflict resolution currently used in the schools:

1. *Process Curriculum*—it is a particular assigned time for teaching a separate course having distinct curriculum (possessing of daily lesson plan) and is given to teach to the students different conflict resolution approaches.

2. *Mediation Program*—here adults as well as students who have been given proper training in the resolution of conflicts and have been taught these principles of problem solving and mediation act as neutral third-party who facilitate disputants to reach a mutual solution.

3. *Peaceable Classroom*—this is a new phenomenon in public schools in which conflict resolution is integrated into the curriculum and classroom management. These form the basis for the peaceable schools.

4. *Peaceable School*—here it has been made obligatory on all the school staff (i.e. teachers, other staff, students, administrators, and parents) are trained in conflict resolution.¹⁰ Students are taught in the schools that examining school violence as well as in the society helps us understand that the important thing is teaching to the students that they should resolve their conflicts by using constructive ways.

Impact of conflict management on Students' Behaviour

Acute influence of the peer relationships and influence which has been observed on children is being synchronized with the significance of teaching to the children negotiation skills to the children which work as coping strategy is considered as an important feature of the school programme.¹¹

It has been worked out of very comprehensively on the review literature on coping which specifically is related to the acute behavioral

features of children personalities¹². Selman has elaborated 26 independent studies which have shown children as having chronic aggressive behavioral problems and have been rejected by their peers. Consequently the effects show that these children cannot locate exactly the feelings of others as being hostile or ambivalent.

Implementation of peer mediation programme has been observed very difficult because the school staff has got it very eccentric to change and modify their behaviors so as to have control and power on the students.¹³

Furthermore it has been observed that the genuine influences of the peer mediation programmes which cannot be generalized in the schools for children pro-social behaviors. Long et.al have suggested the cause of the limited positive effects of the mediation training that it was due to the possibility of the creative problem solving requirements of mediation on the part of cognitive aspects of young children. It becomes obligatory on the researchers that they should continue to practically explore the effects of peer mediation programs so as to have a thorough understanding of both social and educational implication.¹⁴

Steps in the Problem-Solving Process

Two main elements are required for a valid conflict resolution programme: the principles of conflict resolution which include; a. separating people from the problem; b. focusing on the interests and not positions; c. inventing alternatives for mutual gained. Using objective criteria as the basis for decision making and finally a problem-solving process (negotiation, mediation, or consensus decision making). Some steps are necessary to be identified and found by the opposing parties which should be characterized locating each other's interests and working cooperatively for solution of their problems. Here mutual support and direction in a cooperative effort, assistance from both the parties for staying focused on the problem rather than on each other and on finding a mutual agreed acceptable resolution. Similarly, a valid programme for resolution of conflicts includes comprehensive training and practice using the principles and problem-solving processes of conflict resolution. These steps which are important in each problem-solving process are given as under:

- a. Set the stage
- b. Gather perspectives
- c. Identify interests
- d. Create options
- e. Evaluate options
- f. Generate agreement

Strategies of Conflict Resolution Education

Four basic approaches have been followed by for conflict resolution education:

- i. Process Curriculum:
- ii. Mediation Program:
- iii. Peaceable Classroom:
- iv. Peaceable School:

There is difficulty in drawing specific lines which are dividing line among different approaches in actual practice, but on the other hand these categories can be useful in describing the focus of each approach. Its potential is in the application of each approach for resolution of conflict and problem-solving processes. Another good point in the programme is that the schools have initiated such approaches where the principles and problem-solving processes of conflict resolution have allowed for further expanding the programme from one approach to another.¹⁵

Statement of the Problem

This study has taken into consideration elementary school teachers conflict resolution strategies and its impact on children behavior.

Objectives of the study

This study has the following major objectives;

1. To ascertain teachers' views about conflicts in their schools
2. To investigate about conflict resolution strategies used by elementary school teachers
3. To find out the impact of these strategies on children behavior

Hypotheses of the study

1. Teachers are unaware of conflicts in their schools
2. Teachers do not use any conflict resolution strategies
3. These strategies have no significant effect on students behavior

Population of the study

The researcher took the elementary schools of District Charsadda of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It included;

- i. All elementary schools of District Charsadda
- ii. All urban and rural schools of District Charsadda
- iii. All Male and female teachers of these schools

Sample of the study

Convenient and simple random techniques were used for selection of sample. The sample comprised of;

- i. One hundred (100) male and female elementary schools (50 urban & 50 rural) were selected
- ii. Two hundred (200) male and female from both urban and rural schools were taken as sample of the study.

Data Analysis

After collection of data, it was fed in SPSS version 20 for analysis. T-test and ANOVA were applied for analysis of data.

Teacher awareness regarding conflicts in school

Gender/location	Mean scores	Std	t-value	Df	Sig.
Male	16.84	6.051	1.25	198	.213
Female	15.75	6.278			
Urban	16.56	6.137	.606	198	.545
Rural	16.03	6.231			

The means scores of male and female is not much different and the t-value of the results is very weak and is insignificant at 0.05 which showed that there is no significant difference in the awareness of both male and female regarding the conflicts that take place at school.

Location wise result of the above table is also not significant and is very near to that of gender wise results of the respondents. The results also revealed that teachers are not clear about the causes of school conflicts and that there is no regular workshop or training nor for teachers neither of students regarding the school conflicts and quarrels among the students and teachers.

Use of conflict resolution strategies

Gender/location	Mean scores	Std	t-value	Df	Sig.
Male	15.07	6.45	1.205	198	.230
Female	13.95	6.68			
Urban	14.73	6.780	.472	198	.637
Rural	14.19	6.396			

The mean scores (Male, 15.07 and female, 13.95) illustrated that the respondents were quite similar in approach to use conflicts resolution strategies. The overall responses of the respondents were not near to the mean score which explains their deviation from the mean

score. The t-value 1.205 is less and don't show any significant difference between the male and female respondents. Majority of the respondents were not agreed that students' conflicts are timely managed and these conflicts remain for long time. Location wise result of the above table is also not significant and is very near to that of gender wise results of the respondents.

Effects of Conflicts resolution strategies

Gender/location	Mean scores	Std	t-value	Df	Sig.
Male	16.72	6.707			
Female	15.58	7.000	1.176	198	.241
Urban	16.59	6.812			
Rural	15.71	6.918	.609	198	.366

Both male and female teachers used same strategies for conflict resolution. The mean scores of the both the respondents are near to one another. The difference between the two mean scores (t-value, 1.176) is insignificant as .241 is higher than 0.005. The individual mean score 3.21 illustrates the unawareness of the teachers that whether teachers are responsible for students disruptive behavior? The mean score of 2.84 explains the mistrust of students on their teachers that they are not discussing their personal matters for the sake of guidance and help. The overall table confirms the weak effect of the strategies adopted by the teachers in resolving students conflicts. Location wise result of the above table is also not significant and is very near to that of gender wise results of the respondents.

Relationship and statistical significance of the variables

	Awareness	Used strategies	Effects of strategies
Chi-Square	146.290 ^a	61.450 ^a	100.300 ^a
Df	20	20	20
Sig.	.000	.000	.000

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 9.5.

The above table illustrated that the chi square value 146.290, 61.450 and 100.300 for awareness, used strategies and effects of the used

strategies for conflict resolution of the respondents with .000 p-values is statistically significant relationship between the variables.

Findings of the study

Following are the major findings of the study;

1. The means scores of male and female is not much different and the t-value of the results is very weak at 0.05 (insignificant) which showed that both male and female are unaware of the conflicts that take place in their schools.
2. Location wise result of the above table is also not significant and is very near to that of gender wise results of the respondents. The results also revealed that teachers are not clear about the causes of school conflicts.
3. The mean scores (Male, 15.07 and female, 13.95) illustrated that the respondents were quite similar in approach to use conflicts resolution strategies. The t-value 1.205 is less and don't show any significant difference between the male and female respondents. Majority of the respondents were not agreed that students' conflicts are timely managed and these conflicts remain for long time. Location wise result regarding conflict resolution strategies is also the same as that of gender wise results of the respondents.
4. Both male and female teachers used same strategies for conflict resolution as the mean scores of the both the respondents illustrated it. The difference between the two mean scores (t-value, 1.176) is insignificant as .241 is higher than 0.005.
5. The individual mean score 3.21 illustrates the unawareness of the teachers regarding students' disruptive behavior. The mean score of 2.84 explains the mistrust of students on their teachers that they are not discussing their personal matters for the sake of guidance and help. It is also confirmed that there is weak effect of the strategies adopted by the teachers in resolving students' conflicts. Location wise result is also same as that of gender-wise.
6. It is well illustrated that the chi square value 146.290, 61.450 and 100.300 for awareness, used strategies and effects of the used strategies for conflict resolution of the respondents with .000 p-values is statistically significant relationship between the variables.

Recommendations

1. Government may initiate such programmes through which school staff including male and female may be kept aware of the conflicts which take place in their respective schools. Similarly staff of both rural as well as urban schools may be trained in identifying conflicts in their respective schools.
2. It's a good notion that both male and female staff use the same conflict resolution approaches. But it may be conveyed to them that proper strategies may be used for resolution of conflicts. Both male and female staff of urban and rural schools may be trained end students' conflicts in a timely manner.
3. Both male and female staff may be trained in the use of different conflict resolution strategies as different conflicts require different approaches for management of conflicts.
4. It has been observed that teachers are unaware of the disruptive behavior of their students. This is because of the lack of confidence on their teachers that they are not discussing their problems with their teachers. Government should seriously consider this issue and different training workshops and seminars may be arranged to bring students and teachers close together so that they may develop rapport between them. Similarly the strategies which the teachers adopt for conflict management have zero effect on students' conflict resolution. It is therefore recommended that teachers should adopt such approaches which are pertinent for resolution of students' conflicts.
5. The relationship among awareness of teachers, their conflict resolution strategies and their effects on students is significant which show that all the three synchronize in a troika. It is recommended that steps may be initiated to further boost up the strategies so as to strengthen them for a smooth working relationship.

References

- ¹ Tschannen-Moran, Megan, "The effects of a state-wide conflict management initiative in Schools." *American Secondary Education*, 29, (2001)
- ² Johnson, David W., and Frank P. Johnson, *Joining together: Group theory and group skills* (6th Ed) (NJ: Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1997)
- ³ Johnson, David W, Roger Johnson, Bruce Dudley, Marty Ward, and Douglas Magnuson, "Impact of peer mediation training on the management of school and home conflicts", *American Educational Research Journal*, 32, Pp 829-844, (1995)
- ⁴ Hellriegel, Don, Slocum, W. John & Richard W Woodman, *Organizational Behavior*, 8th Ed, (USA: South- Western College Publishing, 1998). 363
- ⁵ M. C. Blackman, & Leslie. T. Fenwick, "The principal ship: Looking for leaders in a time of change", *Education Week*, 19(29), P.46, (2000)
- ⁶ Ibid (2000), P. 47
- ⁷ M. Elam, Stanley L. Rose & A. Gallup, "The 26th Annual Gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools" *Phi Delta Kappan*, (1994), 76, Pp. 41-56
- ⁸ Abdul Ghaffar, "Evaluation of Conflict Management Skills: Developing A Model For Secondary School Principals", (Unpublished Ph. D Thesis, Qurtuba University of Science & Information Technology, Peshawar Pakistan, 2012)
- ⁹ D. Crawford & R. Bodine, *Conflict Resolution Education: A guide to implementing programs in schools, youth-serving organizations, and community and juvenile justice settings*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 1997)
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Cathy Bullock, "Teaching students with behavioral disorders to use a negotiation procedure: Impact on classroom behavior and conflict resolution strategy", (Unpublished PhD Thesis graduate faculty Iowa State University Ames, Iowa, 2012)
- ¹² K. A. Dodge, "Social-cognitive mechanisms in the development of conduct disorders and depression", *Annual Review of Psychology*, 44, 559-584, (1993)
- ¹³ E. Sellman, "Peer mediation services for conflict resolution in schools: What transformations in activity characterize successful implementation?", *British Educational Research Journal*, 37, 45-60. doi: 10.1080/01411920903419992, (2011)
- ¹⁴ Jennie J. Long, William V. Fabricius, Michael Musheno, and Dennis Palumbo, "Exploring the cognitive and affective capacities of child mediators in a "successful" inner-city peer mediation program", *Mediation quarterly*, 15, (1998) 289-302,
- ¹⁵ Richard J. Bodine, D. Crawford, and F. Schrupf, *Creating the Peaceable School: A Comprehensive Program for Teaching Conflict Resolution* (Champaign, IL: Research Press, Inc. 1994), Pp. 52-53,