

## The Conflict Management Styles in Malaysia Teachers Training Institute: A Preliminary Study

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**Abstract:** Conflicts are unavoidable in any organisations. Hence, conflicts need to be handled effectively by all members in the organisation. This study intends to investigate the conflict management styles and the levels of conflicts (intrapersonal, intragroup and intergroup) among teacher educators in one Teachers Training Institute in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. This study also seeks the differences in the conflict management styles based on gender and position held among teacher educators. A set of instrument is modified and developed based on the instrument “Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory I (ROCI I) and “Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory II (ROCI II). Findings showed that teacher educators used integrating style as compared to other conflict management styles.

**Keywords:** Conflict management, intrapersonal, intragroup, intergroup, teacher educators

### INTRODUCTION

Conflict has been a major phenomenon in any organisations. It is part of natural outcome when two or more social entities interact with each other in attaining their goals (Rahim, 2011). This is to suggest that conflict is an unavoidable situation in any organisations and it is the treatment towards conflict that determines the outcomes. Hence, leaders and staffs must be able to work collectively together in order to attain the organisational goals even during the conflicting period.

The management of conflict is demonstrated through five various styles which involves integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising (Rahim and Bonoma, 1979). The conceptualizations of these styles are based on two fundamental dimensions of concern for self and concern for others. In addition, research findings indicated that a moderate amount of conflicts is needed for three levels of conflict in organisation which are divided into intrapersonal, intragroup and intergroup (Rahim, 1986).

Intrapersonal conflict involves opposing interests within individual while intragroup and intergroup conflicts involve opposing interests of more individuals, subgroups or larger groups within an organisation. Weider-Hatfield and Hatfield (1995) postulate that the awareness of the conflict management styles and its relationships between the amounts of conflicts in these three levels bring advantage of comprehensive understanding of the organisational effectiveness to all members in the organisation.

Most conflict studies in Malaysia are focused on schools (Mohd, Yusof, 1996, Abu Bakar, 1997) and other sectors of government organisations (Suppiah, 2007). In the context of academic settings in Malaysia, the study of conflict in teachers training institutes is underdeveloped. These teachers training institute are independent governance of Malaysia Ministry of Education. This top-down structure reflects the strong interdependency among groups in the organisations. Teacher educators are individuals who are responsible to educate and train the students to become future teachers and they are the largest group who influence the effectiveness of teachers training institutes. Hence, it is the intent of this study to investigate the relationships between the conflict management styles and the levels of conflict among teacher educators in one Teachers Training Institute in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This is further supported by Rahim (1986) who posits that a

complete assessment of conflict in organisation must include an analysis of the amount of conflict in various levels and the ability of all members in the organisation to use the conflict styles in different context.

On 13 July 2005, The Cabinet Ministers have given authority to 27 teachers training colleges in Malaysia to be upgraded to teachers training institute. The direct implication from this upgrading is that the teachers training colleges has turned to higher education with university status. According to Gmelch and Caroll (1991), the relational features of academic settings in term of structures and functions guarantee conflict. The new rebranding of teachers training institute requires restructuring and wider functions as compared to the former teachers training college. It also requires new approaches to the “work culture, competency and administration” (Senin et al, p.3, 2011) to meet the challenging demands and expectations.

As such, teacher educators are seen as a central unit who carries the responsibilities of realising the mission and vision of the new teachers training institute. In addition, the Malaysian Ministry of Education produces a new set of competencies to guide the teacher educators. The Personal Quality dimension of the competency outlines four elements which include “influence, thinking, personal effectiveness and teacher educator as a role model” (Senin et al, p. 13, 2011). This further suggests that all teacher educators must be armed with effective skills as academic leaders and therefore they should enhance their capacity to face conflict in the new rebranding teachers training institute. Further, research findings showed that there are differences of conflict management styles in term of gender and position in organisation (De Turk, 2010). Hence, this study will also examine the differences of conflict management styles among teacher educators in term of the mentioned demographic characteristics.

In this paper, there are three research questions that we seek to answer:

What conflict management styles that teacher educators demonstrate in one Teachers Training Institute in Kuala Lumpur?

What are the levels of intrapersonal, intragroup and intergroup conflicts among teacher educators in one Teachers Training Institute in Kuala Lumpur?

What differences are there in the conflict management styles based on the demographic characteristics of gender and position held among teacher educators in one Teachers Training Institute in Kuala Lumpur?

This knowledge is crucial in preparing the next effective educational leaders who are able to play his or her leadership roles according to the conflict situations. The current leaders should be able to differentiate the levels of conflict in term of intrapersonal, intragroup or intergroup. Once it is identified, the leader could choose the five styles of conflict management; giving priority of functional outcomes to the organization. Simultaneously, a leader could also demonstrate his or her leadership styles based on the conflicting situation. This is to further suggest to all nursing educational leaders to creatively gain insights from this marriage of leadership and conflict to strive from the painful perspective of leadership in their organization.

In addition, the taxonomy of five conflict management styles developed by Rahim (1986) may serves as useful guidance for any organizational members to learn how to manage the organizational conflict from recurring or getting more severe. Further, the understanding of conflicts and how people react to it will enable members to treat conflict as functional.

## **METHOD**

This research is a quantitative study in which the quantitative approach involves data collection through questionnaires. The questionnaires are used to answer research questions pertaining to the conflict management styles, levels of conflict and the differences of the conflict management styles based on the demographic characteristics of gender and position held among teacher educators in one teachers training institute in Kuala Lumpur. A total of 188 teacher educators were involved in this study. This research uses two separate questionnaires which consists of two different variables; conflict management styles and levels of conflict. The instrument is modified and developed based on the instrument “Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory I (ROCI I) and “Rahim Organisational Conflict Inventory II (ROCI II) which was developed by Rahim Azlafur (1983). ROCI consists of 24 items and ROCI II consists of 28 items. Every item in this instrument uses Likert Scale of five-point (1-strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

What conflict management styles do teacher educators demonstrate in one Teachers Training Institute in Kuala Lumpur?

Table 1 showed that of these five different conflict management styles, integrating style was the most style demonstrated among teacher educators with a mean score of 4.30. It was followed by the compromising style with a mean score of 4.14. Next was the obliging style with a mean score of 3.76 and avoiding style with a mean score of 3.67. The least common conflict style was dominating with a mean score of 3.08.

Table 1: Conflict management styles among teacher educators

Conflict Management Styles	N	M	SD
<b>Integrating</b>	183	4.3005	.48584
<b>Avoiding</b>	183	3.6667	.66299
<b>Obliging</b>	183	3.7605	.56735
<b>Compromising</b>	183	4.1393	.50313
<b>Dominating</b>	183	3.0842	.82176

From Table 2, the amount of conflict among teacher educators was highest in intergroup conflict with a mean score of 2.45. It was followed by the intragroup conflict with a mean score of 2.35. Teacher educators experienced least intrapersonal conflict with a mean score of 2.30. Overall, the teacher educators experienced low level of intrapersonal and intragroup conflict. However, the teacher educators experienced moderate level of conflict in this institute.

Table 2: Levels of conflict

Levels of Conflict	N	M	SD
<b>Intrapersonal</b>	183	2.2992	.50459
<b>Intragroup</b>	183	2.3530	.60143
<b>Intergroup</b>	183	2.4482	.63074

From the Table 3, there was a significant difference between integrating style (.009) and gender ( $p < .05$ ). There was also a significant difference between obliging style (.011) and gender ( $p < .05$ ). This data further indicated that there was a significant difference between compromising style (.015) and gender ( $p < .05$ ). Hence the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3: T-test of female and male teacher educators with regard to conflict management styles

Conflict Management Styles	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>Integrating</b>	Male	73	4.4149	.47270	2.635	<b>.009*</b>
	Female	110	4.2247	.48163		
<b>Obliging</b>	Male	73	3.8904	.55848	2.562	<b>.011*</b>
	Female	110	3.6742	.55914		
<b>Avoiding</b>	Male	73	3.7420	.73862	1.254	<b>.211</b>
	Female	110	3.6167	.60601		
<b>Compromising</b>	Male	73	4.2500	.50690	2.457	<b>.015*</b>
	Female	110	4.0659	.48919		
<b>Dominating</b>	Male	73	3.2137	.92155	1.747	<b>.082</b>
	Female	110	2.9982	.74019		

Table 4 indicated that there was significant difference between integrating style (.005) and position held ( $p > .05$ ) among teacher educators. There was also significant difference between compromising style (.004) and position held among teacher educators ( $p > .05$ ).

Table 4: T-test of position held with regard to conflict management styles

Conflict Management Styles	Position	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. 2-tailed)
<b>Integrating</b>	Admin.	33	4.5152	.40867	2.857	<b>.005*</b>
	Staff	150	4.2533	.48991		
<b>Obliging</b>	Admin.	33	3.9242	.50362	1.844	<b>.067</b>
	Staff	150	3.7244	.57573		
<b>Avoiding</b>	Admin.	33	3.6212	.78204	-.434	<b>.665</b>
	Staff	150	3.6767	.63640		
<b>Compromising</b>	Admin.	33	4.3636	.46390	2.885	<b>.004*</b>
	Staff	150	4.0900	.49940		
<b>Dominating</b>	Admin.	33	3.0606	1.04581	-1.181	<b>.856</b>
	Staff	150	3.0893	.76800		

Overall, it was found that the teacher educators in Ilmu Khas Teachers Training Institute demonstrated integrating and compromising styles. The results of the findings were similar to Shih and Susanto (2010) and Ting-Toomey (1991). According to Macintosh and Stevens (2008), integrating style is the most effective conflict style that members in the organization could employ during conflict situation. This style may reduce

the levels of conflict and stress (Friedman et al, 2008). However, integrating style requires organizational members to put more efforts in seeking the alternatives for everyone to gain because it is a win-win situation (Rahim (2011)). Out of the five conflict styles, the respondents used dominating style the least. It is not surprising because dominating style is associated with low concern for people and high concern for self. Hence, it has high possibility not to be well-liked by many.

Further, the survey indicated that all teacher educators experienced low levels of conflict in teachers training institute. However, the findings may or may not be completely accurate as these results were self-perceptions of the teacher educators. Rahim (2011) postulate that a moderate amount of conflict is needed for an organization to sustain its productivity and performance, Hence, it takes effective leaders to play their roles to empower their staffs to actively contribute towards organizational goals. In this context, leaders are anticipated to maximize the use of integrating style (Blake and Moulton, 1984) because staff teacher educators were reported to experience the intergroup conflict the most. The findings were similar to study by Stanley and Algert (2007) that faculties in higher education experienced intergroup conflict frequently as compared to other types of conflict.

Within the t test for gender and position held, significant differences were identified with regards to conflict management styles. Male teacher educators were fond of competing conflict style (Thomas, Thomas and Schaubhut, 2008) because of their concern nature in individual outcomes. Meanwhile, female teacher educators gave priorities to relationship which resulting in less competing and dominating conflict styles. However, this seemed to suggest that female teacher educators may have to suppress most of their feelings over the conflict and this contributes to higher levels of intrapersonal conflict in them. Female teacher educators may argue on conflict within themselves rather than outburst the feelings. This implies their high concern for others rather than for themselves (Rahim, 1985).

In term of position held in the organization, administrators were more integrating than the staffs. This is backed-up by Brewer et al (2002) that found individuals from upper status are highly integrating. Meanwhile, administrators were also found to employ compromising as compared to staffs. This is contradicts to findings by Chusmir and Mills (1989) that individuals with higher status position were less likely to employ passive conflict styles like avoiding and accommodating. In this context, all administrators are urged to be cautious because the overuse dominating styles may yield dysfunctional outcomes (Rahim, 1985).

## CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it was found that teacher educators used integrating style the most and dominating style the least. This study also analyses the levels of conflict in this institute. It was found that teacher educators experienced low level of intergroup conflict as compared to intrapersonal and intragroup conflict. The analysis also showed significant differences in the demographic characteristics of gender and position held in term of conflict management styles.

The combined effects of conflict management styles on gender and position held in the organization cover new ground in the body of literature. The results imply that there should be a new theory to help explaining the variables on the outcomes of the organizations in the future.

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