

## Conflict Management Styles in Public and Punjab Education Foundation Secondary Schools

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Received on: 09-04-2024

Accepted on: 12-05-2024

### Abstract

Conflict management is critical for educational institutions, impacting the overall school climate, staff morale, and student outcomes. This study aims to investigate and compare the conflict management styles employed in public and Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) funded secondary schools in District Vehari, Punjab, Pakistan. The study paved the way for educational administrators to make informed decisions about choosing the most effective conflict management style for their schools. The study was purely quantitative. The research design for this study was a cross-sectional survey that was comparative. According to School Information System Punjab and CEO (DEA) Vehari (2023), in District Vehari, there were a total of 262 Secondary schools, including 214 public secondary schools and 48 Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) High schools. The sample size was 178. A survey questionnaire was administered for data collection. This research generated valuable knowledge that contributed to understanding the dynamics of conflict management in educational institutions and informed the development of effective strategies for promoting a positive school environment.

**Keywords:** Conflict management, educational institutions, Public schools, Punjab Education Foundation (PEF), Secondary schools, Positive school environment.

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### **Introduction**

Conflict is a disagreement or struggle between parties with opposing interests, needs, values, or goals in various settings like personal relationships, workplaces, and international affairs (Isenhardt & Spangle, 2000). Individual differences often lead to conflicts, which should be viewed not as inherently good or bad but as opportunities for learning and improving relationships (Cai & Fink, 2002). Whether a conflict is productive or destructive depends on how it is managed. Constructive conflicts can lead to positive outcomes like improved communication and innovation, while destructive conflicts can harm relationships and reduce productivity (Henkin et al., 2000). Conflict management involves strategies to handle conflicts effectively, aiming to minimize negative consequences and achieve positive results (Himes, 2008).

In educational settings, conflict management is vital for maintaining the quality of the learning environment and the well-being of students and staff. Headteachers play a crucial role in managing conflicts within schools, particularly in public schools and those affiliated with the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) in Pakistan. These institutions face unique challenges that influence the conflict management styles of their leaders (Maeda, 2021; Göksoy & Argon, 2016). The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument identifies different conflict management styles: avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise, and collaboration. Understanding these styles in educational contexts is essential for enhancing leadership and school management (Vestal & Torres, 2016).

The research emphasizes the impact of effective conflict management on educational quality and student well-being (Ciuladiene & Kairiene, 2017). Studies have shown that different school types, like public and PEF-affiliated schools, have distinct organizational cultures that affect conflict management styles (İlğan, 2020; Joy et al., 2021). This research seeks to explore these differences to improve educational outcomes and the overall school experience for students. Leadership plays a key role in promoting positive conflict management, and a mixed-methods approach is recommended for understanding the complexities of conflict resolution in schools (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Wang & Wu, 2020).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The study aimed to compare the Conflict Management Styles of Public and Punjab Education Foundation Secondary Schools headteachers. There are very few studies on this topic, but it is the most burning issue nowadays, and in every school, there are many conflicts among teachers. The head of the institute tries to overcome and solve these conflicts but, due to a lack of specific knowledge, faces many problems. It was necessary to conduct such a study and find solutions. The results of the study will be beneficial for heads of institutes and teachers. The results will also be beneficial for stakeholders and policymakers.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The following were the objectives of the study

- i. To analyze the headteachers' perceptions of conflict management styles at the secondary school level.

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- ii.To compare the headteachers' conflict management style in light of their demographic information (Gender, institution sector Public and Preacademic Qualification, Professional Qualification and Administrative Experience).
- iii.To identify the most and least used conflict management style at the secondary school level.

### **Research Questions**

Some important research questions are

1. What are the headteacher's perceptions regarding factor (1) collaborative conflict management style at the secondary level?
2. What are the headteacher's perceptions regarding factor (2) competitive conflict Management style at the secondary level?
3. What are the headteacher's perceptions regarding factor (3) compromising conflict Management style at the secondary level?
4. What are the headteacher's perceptions regarding factor (4) accommodating conflict management Style at the secondary level?
5. What are the headteacher's perceptions regarding factor (5) avoiding conflict Management style at the secondary level?
6. What are the headteacher's perceptions regarding factor (6) integrative conflict Management style at the secondary level?
7. What are the headteacher's perceptions regarding factor (7) distributive conflict management Style at the secondary level?
8. What are the headteacher's perceptions regarding factor (8) assertive conflict management Style at the secondary level?
9. What are the headteacher's perceptions regarding factor (9) collaborative problem-solving Conflict management Style at the secondary level?
10. What are the headteacher's perceptions regarding factor (10) Directive Conflict Management Style at the secondary level?
11. Is there any sector-wise comparison of all (10) Conflict management styles?
12. Is there any comparison of all (10) styles gender-wise?
13. Is there any comparison of all (10) styles academic qualification-wise?
14. Do all (10) professional qualification styles compare?
15. Is there any comparison of all (10) styles of experience wise?
16. What are the most and least used conflict management styles?

### **Research Methodology**

The following research methodology was used for the study

### **Research Design**

The research design for the study was a comparative cross-sectional survey. This design allows for the simultaneous investigation of conflict management styles among head teachers in public and Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) secondary schools. It aimed to capture a snapshot of the current state of conflict management within the selected schools at a specific time.

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**Population of the Study**

According to School Information System Punjab and CEO (DEA) Vehari (2023), in District Vehari, there were a total of 214 public secondary schools with their head teachers and 48 Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) secondary schools with their head teachers. Therefore, the total population considered for the study was 262 head teachers from both Public and Punjab Education Foundation secondary schools.

**Table 1 Population of the study**

Tehsils	Public Schools			Headteachers			PEF Schools			Headteachers			Total Population
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	
<b>Burewala</b>	35	47	82	35	47	82	8	8	16	8	8	16	262
<b>Vehari</b>	37	37	74	37	37	74	10	7	17	10	7	17	
<b>Mailsi</b>	34	24	58	34	24	58	9	6	15	9	6	15	
<b>Total</b>	106	108	214	106	108	214	29	21	48	29	21	48	

Source 1-<https://sis.punjab.gov.pk>

Source 2-CEO (DEA) District Vehari

**Sample of the Study**

For selecting the minimum sample, Krejcie & Morgan's (1970) social survey research sample table was consulted. Using a proportionate sampling technique, a total of 178 head teachers of both school sectors were chosen randomly as a study sample.

**Table 2 Sample of the study**

Tehsil	Public School Headteachers			PEF School Headteachers			Sample Size
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	
<b>Burewala</b>	22	23	45	8	8	16	178
<b>Vehari</b>	24	24	48	8	7	15	
<b>Mailsi</b>	21	20	41	7	6	13	
<b>Total</b>	67	67	134	23	21	44	

Table 3.2 describes the sample distribution; from public high schools, 134 head teachers were selected randomly with an equal proportionate of (67) males and (67) females. Accordingly, 44 head teachers were selected randomly from Punjab Education Foundation schools, (23) male and (21) female.

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### **Research Instrument**

A research instrument adapted from Rahim's (1983) Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI) was used for data collection. The five-point Likert scale tool consisted of a total of 40 items. These items were categorized into ten factors, each containing four items to assess headteachers' perceptions regarding conflict management styles at the secondary level.

### **Validity of Instrument**

Scale validation was observed to confirm the validity of the instrument. The face validity of the scale and content validity of the scale were presented before the expert panel. The validation panel observed the scale and then asked to modify four statements (5, 8, 13, 21) due to language complications. Some statements (23, 28, 31, 34) were omitted and then constructed new easily relevant statements according to the PEF school context.

### **Reliability and Validity of Instruments**

Before pilot testing the value of alpha was .78 and which was good, for more reliable data some treatments were taken, items with low reliability were updated according to expert opinions and instrument was redeveloped and then pilot tested. All data were put in to SPSS and then find the reliability of the tool. The Cronbach alpha was .89 and it was acceptable.

### **Data Collection**

For data collection, researcher personally visited the sample schools and collected the data from headteachers. Researcher handed over the questionnaire first time and then collect the questionnaire second time before the school closing time. If some head was on leave the researcher again went to school and handed over the questionnaire and ensure 100% data collection. In this way researcher collected hundred percent data from sample heads of institutes. Then put data into SPSS for interpretation.

### **Analysis of Data**

After collecting data, researcher sorted out data carefully, then numbered the questionnaires for putting into SPSS, Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) were used for conflict management styles in public and PEF schools and to summarize the central tendencies and variabilities within each group. Inferential statistics (independent sample t-test, one sample t-test, chi-square and One way ANOVA Post Hoc Tukey test) were used to compare mean scores and relation of conflict management styles between public and PEF schools.

### **Results of the data**

**Table 3 Comparison of all (10) styles sector-wise**

Sr. No.	Factors	School Sector	$\bar{x}$	$\sigma$	t-test	Sig
1	Collaborative Conflict Management Style	Public	4.2519	.60348	2.494	.014
		PEF	3.9773	.71897		
2	Competitive Conflict Management	Public	1.5560	.50341	-.627	.532

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	Style	PEF	1.6136	.60390		
3	Compromising Conflict Management Style	Public	3.8414	.50425	1.541	.125
		PEF	3.7045	.53176		
4	Accommodating Conflict Management Style	Public	2.6194	.79573	-	.013
		PEF	2.9489	.62780		
5	Avoiding Conflict Management Style	Public	2.1549	.72986	-	.063
		PEF	2.3977	.80029		
6	Integrative Conflict Management Style	Public	2.3974	.67041	-	.126
		PEF	2.5739	.63241		
7	Distributive Conflict Management Style	Public	2.6119	.59015	-	.128
		PEF	2.7670	.56135		
8	Assertive Conflict Management Style	Public	2.4683	.46637	-	.000
		PEF	3.2273	.48769		
9	Collaborative Problem-Solving Conflict Management Style	Public	2.6437	.68577	-	.008
		PEF	2.9716	.73772		
10	Directive Conflict Management Style	Public	3.7351	.86045	1.956	.052
		PEF	3.4432	.85396		

The comparison of conflict management styles between public schools and PEF schools reveals significant differences in certain areas. Public school leaders scored higher in Collaborative Conflict Management Style ( $t = 2.494$ ,  $p = .014$ ) but lower in Assertive Conflict Management Style ( $t = -9.261$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and Collaborative Problem-Solving Conflict Management Style ( $t = -2.701$ ,  $p = .008$ ). Conversely, PEF school leaders scored higher in Accommodating Conflict Management Style ( $t = -2.501$ ,  $p = .013$ ). No significant differences were found in Competitive, Compromising, Avoiding, Integrative, Distributive, or Directive Conflict Management Styles

**Table 4 Comparison of all (10) styles Gender-wise**

Sr. No.	Factors	Gender	$\bar{x}$	$\sigma$	t-test	Sig
1	Collaborative Conflict Management Style	Male	4.1694	.62803	-.304	.761
		Female	4.1989	.66107		
2	Competitive Conflict Management	Male	1.5472	.56327	-.586	.559

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	Style	Female	1.5938	.49322		
3	Compromising Conflict Management Style	Male	3.7944	.49800	-.345	.731
		Female	3.8210	.53060		
4	Accommodating Conflict Management Style	Male	2.3417	.70855	-	.000
		Female	3.0682	.64853		
5	Avoiding Conflict Management Style	Male	2.2222	.76478	.131	.896
		Female	2.2074	.74493		
6	Integrative Conflict Management Style	Male	2.4139	.68507	-.550	.583
		Female	2.4688	.64417		
7	Distributive Conflict Management Style	Male	2.6917	.59143	.954	.342
		Female	2.6080	.57958		
8	Assertive Conflict Management Style	Male	2.6833	.54798	.644	.520
		Female	2.6278	.60052		
9	Collaborative Problem-Solving Conflict Management Style	Male	2.7056	.71949	-.363	.717
		Female	2.7443	.70607		
10	Directive Conflict Management Style	Male	3.6667	.85130	.058	.954
		Female	3.6591	.88505		

The analysis of conflict management styles between male and female leaders shows a significant difference only in the Accommodating Conflict Management Style, where females scored higher ( $t = -7.132$ ,  $p = .000$ ). No significant differences were observed between genders in the other conflict management styles, including Collaborative, Competitive, Compromising, Avoiding, Integrative, Distributive, Assertive, Collaborative Problem-Solving, and Directive styles.

**Table 5 Comparison of all (10) styles Academic Qualification wise**

Sr. No.	Factors	Academic Qualification	$f$	$\bar{x}$	$\sigma$	F	Sig.
1	Collaborative Conflict Management Style	Graduate	5	3.8000	.41079	2.277	.081
		Master	99	4.1136	.64313		
		M.Phil.	69	4.2826	.64869		
		Ph.D.	5	4.6000	.37914		
		Total	178	4.1840	.64292		
2	Competitive Conflict Management	Graduate	5	1.4000	.57554	.871	.458



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Style	Master	99	1.5783	.54004		
	M.Phil.	69	1.5471	.51677		
	Ph.D.	5	1.9000	.41833		
	Total	178	1.5702	.52881		
3 Compromising Conflict Management Style	Graduate	5	3.8000	.54199	1.060	.367
	Master	99	3.7702	.52571		
	M.Phil.	69	3.8804	.48811		
	Ph.D.	5	3.5500	.57009		
4 Accommodating Conflict Management Style	Total	178	3.8076	.51309	2.518	.060
	Graduate	5	3.1500	.41833		
	Master	99	2.8030	.71274		
	M.Phil.	69	2.5181	.80932		
5 Avoiding Conflict Management Style	Ph.D.	5	2.7500	1.15920	.713	.545
	Total	178	2.7008	.76932		
	Graduate	5	2.5000	.86603		
	Master	99	2.2626	.78439		
6 Integrative Conflict Management Style	M.Phil.	69	2.1232	.68280	1.067	.365
	Ph.D.	5	2.2500	1.01550		
	Total	178	2.2149	.75293		
	Graduate	5	2.7000	.64711		
7 Distributive Conflict Management Style	Master	99	2.4975	.63537	1.375	.252
	M.Phil.	69	2.3587	.71804		
	Ph.D.	5	2.2000	.27386		
	Total	178	2.4410	.66386		
8 Assertive Conflict Management Style	Graduate	5	3.0000	.50000	.790	.501
	Master	99	2.6111	.60422		
	M.Phil.	69	2.7029	.55617		
	Ph.D.	5	2.3500	.60208		
9 Collaborative Problem-Solving Conflict Management Style	Total	178	2.6503	.58545	.387	.763
	Graduate	5	2.9500	.41079		
	Master	99	2.6338	.63116		
	M.Phil.	69	2.6486	.50059		
10 Directive Conflict Management Style	Ph.D.	5	2.9000	.41833	1.246	.295
	Total	178	2.6559	.57360		
	Graduate	5	2.9000	1.29422		
	Master	99	2.7626	.63424		
	M.Phil.	69	2.6594	.77052		
	Ph.D.	5	2.7000	.77862		
	Total	178	2.7247	.71114		
	Graduate	5	3.3000	.94207		
	Master	99	3.5909	.86857		



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M.Phil.	69	3.7609	.86755
Ph.D.	5	4.1000	.54772
Total	178	3.6629	.86570

The analysis of conflict management styles across different academic qualifications shows no statistically significant differences among the groups for any of the styles, as all p-values are above the .05 threshold. However, the Collaborative Conflict Management Style approaches significance ( $F = 2.277$ ,  $p = .081$ ), indicating a trend where PhD holders scored highest ( $\bar{x} = 4.6000$ ). The Accommodating Conflict Management Style also nears significance ( $F = 2.518$ ,  $p = .060$ ), with graduates scoring higher ( $\bar{x} = 3.1500$ ). The data suggest a general consistency in conflict management styles across academic qualifications.

**Table 6 Comparison of all (10) styles Professional Qualification wise**

Sr. No.	Factors	Professional Qualification	$f$	$\bar{x}$	$\sigma$	F	Sig.
1	Collaborative Conflict Management Style	Nil	5	3.8000	.41079	3.562	.015
		B.Ed.	85	4.1029	.64005		
		M.Ed./MA (Edu)	26	4.0481	.75173		
		M.Phil. (Edu)	62	4.3831	.56850		
		Total	178	4.1840	.64292		
2	Competitive Conflict Management Style	Nil	5	1.4000	.57554	.418	.740
		B.Ed.	85	1.6059	.55551		
		M.Ed./MA (Edu)	26	1.5096	.57654		
		M.Phil. (Edu)	62	1.5605	.47193		
		Total	178	1.5702	.52881		
3	Compromising Conflict Management Style	Nil	5	3.8000	.54199	.537	.657
		B.Ed.	85	3.7618	.55354		
		M.Ed./MA (Edu)	26	3.8077	.40192		
		M.Phil. (Edu)	62	3.8710	.49947		
		Total	178	3.8076	.51309		
4	Accommodating Conflict Management Style	Nil	5	3.1500	.41833	.682	.564
		B.Ed.	85	2.7206	.72827		
		M.Ed./MA (Edu)	26	2.6538	.76836		
		M.Phil. (Edu)	62	2.6573	.84474		
		Total	178	2.7008	.76932		
5	Avoiding Conflict Management Style	Nil	5	2.5000	.86603	.601	.615
		B.Ed.	85	2.2412	.76905		
		M.Ed./MA (Edu)	26	2.2788	.75607		
		M.Phil. (Edu)	62	2.1290	.72815		
		Total	178	2.2149	.75293		
6	Integrative Conflict Management Style	Nil	5	2.7000	.64711	.550	.649
		B.Ed.	85	2.4735	.65012		
		M.Ed./MA (Edu)	26	2.4519	.77788		
		M.Phil. (Edu)	62	2.3710	.63977		

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7	Distributive Conflict Management Style	Total	178	2.4410	.66386	.805	.493
		Nil	5	3.0000	.50000		
		B.Ed.	85	2.6176	.61913		
		M.Ed./MA (Edu)	26	2.6058	.54394		
		M.Phil. (Edu)	62	2.6855	.56164		
		Total	178	2.6503	.58545		
8	Assertive Conflict Management Style	Nil	5	2.9500	.41079	1.108	.348
		B.Ed.	85	2.6088	.65175		
		M.Ed./MA (Edu)	26	2.7885	.51329		
		M.Phil. (Edu)	62	2.6411	.48252		
		Total	178	2.6559	.57360		
		9	Collaborative Problem-Solving Conflict Management Style	Nil	5		
B.Ed.	85			2.7500	.62797		
M.Ed./MA (Edu)	26			2.7500	.78422		
M.Phil. (Edu)	62			2.6653	.74513		
Total	178			2.7247	.71114		
10	Directive Conflict Management Style			Nil	5	3.3000	.94207
		B.Ed.	85	3.6147	.84915		
		M.Ed./MA (Edu)	26	3.5481	.92741		
		M.Phil. (Edu)	62	3.8065	.85462		
		Total	178	3.6629	.86570		

The analysis of conflict management styles based on professional qualifications revealed a statistically significant difference between the Collaborative Conflict Management Style ( $F = 3.562$ ,  $p = .015$ ) and the M.Phil. (Edu) holders scoring the highest ( $\bar{x} = 4.3831$ ). No significant differences were observed for the other conflict management styles, indicating consistency across professional qualifications. These results suggest that professional qualification influences collaborative approaches to conflict management, particularly among those with higher educational qualifications.

**Table 7 Most and Least Used Styles**

	<i>f</i>	$\bar{x}$	$\sigma$	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Collaborative Conflict Management Style	178	4.1840	.64292	86.825	.000
Competitive Conflict Management Style	178	1.5702	.52881	39.616	.000
Compromising Conflict Management Style	178	3.8076	.51309	99.007	.000
Accommodating Conflict Management Style	178	2.7008	.76932	46.839	.000
Avoiding Conflict Management Style	178	2.2149	.75293	39.247	.000
Integrative Conflict Management Style	178	2.4410	.66386	49.057	.000
Distributive Conflict Management Style	178	2.6503	.58545	60.396	.000
Assertive Conflict Management Style	178	2.6559	.57360	61.775	.000
Collaborative Problem-Solving Conflict Management Style	178	2.7247	.71114	51.119	.000
Directive Conflict Management Style	178	3.6629	.86570	56.451	.000

The t-test analysis for various conflict management styles shows highly significant results

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across all factors, with p-values of .000, indicating that the mean scores for these styles significantly differ from the expected mean in the population. Collaborative Conflict Management Style had the highest t-value ( $t = 86.825$ ), while Competitive Conflict Management Style had the lowest ( $t = 39.616$ ). These findings suggest strong, statistically significant preferences for specific conflict management styles among the participants.

#### **Conclusions**

Based on the data analysis, the following conclusions were drawn;

It was concluded that the collaborative conflict management style was higher than all other styles in public and PEF schools. It was found to be very effective in both types of schools. The compromising conflict management style ranked second in both types of schools; the directive conflict management style ranked third in both schools. The competitive Conflict Management Style was found to be least in use and ineffective. It was concluded that the Collaborative Conflict Management Style was higher than all other styles in male and female schools. It was found to be very effective in both genders' schools. The compromising conflict management style ranked second in both genders' schools; the directive conflict management style ranked third in both genders' schools. The competitive Conflict Management Style was found to be least in use and ineffective. It was concluded that the Collaborative Conflict Management Style was higher than all other school styles. According to the academic qualifications of heads, it was observed that highly qualified heads were more optimistic than those with low academic qualifications. The compromising conflict management style ranked second among all academically qualified heads, and the directive conflict management style ranked third among all academically qualified heads.

It was concluded that the Collaborative Conflict Management Style was high as compared to all other styles in schools according to the professional qualification of heads; it was observed that highly qualified heads were more optimistic as compared to the low professional qualification of heads. The compromising conflict management style ranked second among all professionally qualified heads; the directive conflict management style ranked third among all professionally qualified heads. It was concluded that the Collaborative Conflict Management Style was high compared to all other styles in schools according to managerial experience of heads; it was observed that highly managerial experienced heads were more optimistic compared to low managerial experience of heads. The compromising conflict management style ranked second among all experienced managerial heads, and the directive conflict management style ranked third among all experienced managerial heads.

#### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are presented

1. It is recommended that head teachers adopt the collaborative conflict management style to handle conflicts, as it was found to be very effective in both public and PEF schools.
2. It is suggested that head teachers utilize the compromising conflict management style, which ranked second in effectiveness in both types of schools in the study.
3. It is recommended that head teachers apply the directive conflict management style when necessary, as it ranked third in both types of schools.
4. It is suggested that both male and female head teachers adopt the collaborative

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conflict management style, as it proved to be very effective in schools regardless of gender.

5. It is recommended that head teachers be aware of all conflict management styles and apply them flexibly, integrating various styles according to the situation.

6. It is suggested that proper training programs be implemented to enhance head teachers' skills in different conflict management styles and ensure they can effectively handle conflicts in various situations.

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