

# COMPARATIVE STUDY ON CONFLICT AND ITS MANAGEMENT AMONG TEACHERS AND TEACHER EDUCATORS IN INDIA AND RUSSIA

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## Abstract

Teachers and teacher educators have always been concerned with the ideas of creating successful communication *in the classroom* with a view to teaching students life skills such as empathy and conflict resolution, for conflict is part and parcel of human life, and every individual should be trained to manage disputed situations. Teachers and teacher educators have always been interested in productive communication *out of the classroom* with a view to collaborating fruitfully with their colleagues that can be guaranteed if all the participants of communication are able to handle appropriate collaboration and/ or conflict management strategies in a particular conflict situation. "Because conflict is a normal part of everyone's life, conflict resolution, or the ability to resolve conflicts effectively, is a crucial skill for everyone to have" [1]. No doubt, all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the probability of its further escalation [2].

In this paper, a few causes and consequences of conflicts have been viewed and answered the research questions - (i) Do teachers teaching at various levels encounter conflict in their professional lives? (ii) What are the specific reasons of conflict among teachers? (iii) What conflict management style is adopted by teachers to overcome conflict?

For this study data were collected in two phases. In the first phase, quantitative data were gathered by applying the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Questionnaire. 190 teachers (95 from Russia and 95 from India) were contacted to obtain data. In the second phase in order to seek further answers to research questions and to explore the causes of conflict among teachers, a qualitative approach was employed and data were collected through semi-structured interviews of total 40 teachers and teacher educators from India as well as Russia. The analysis of the obtained data constituted the third phase of the research. The collected data were processed in numbers and percentages. It was found out that although the ground causes of conflict among teachers in India and Russia are different, teachers prefer adopting a collaborative style to resolve conflicts in case they come to light. The findings reported in the research are of certain theoretical and practical value and can be used when compiling such university courses as Classroom Management, Conflict Management, Teaching Methodology and may assist university administrators to make educational institutions policy.

**Keywords:** comparative study, conflict, conflict-handling mode, conflict management, conflict management style.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions are of considerable importance for human resource development and shaping the future of any country. Knowledge, values and principles acquired during teacher training program reflect the personal and professional life of an individual. To equip the learners with adequate employability skills, interpersonal skills, harmonious development of personality and development of global outlook are the core organisational objectives. But, while working for a unison goal, human relations and organisational environment may at times get disturbed due to intervening factors including financial resources, interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships that hamper overall performance and smooth functioning. The disturbance or differences among manpower is termed as *conflict*. As per Collins dictionary, "A conflict is a serious difference between two or more beliefs, ideas, or interests". It is a sensitive issue that ought to be resolved amicably and quickly not to affect growth of the institute, teachers, students and society as a whole.

Conflict is an outcome of behaviours. It is an integral part of human life. Whenever there is interaction, there is conflict. Conflict means the expression of hostility, negative attitudes, antagonism, aggression, rivalry, and misunderstanding. It is also associated with situations that involve contradictory interest between two opposing groups. It can be defined as a disagreement between two or more individuals

or groups with each individual or group trying to gain acceptance of its view over others. Conflict means to be in opposition to one another. It refers to disagreement between people or members of organisations. Such disagreement is inherent in relationships between all human beings. Larfela [3] concurs with this view when he defines conflict as: "Part of the competition process that is basic to the survival and successful evolution of the species, homo sapiens and to his search for new and better ways to cope with limited resources and stress from environmental change." According to this definition it is obvious that conflict always exists between people, groups of people, members of an organisation and between organisations which are related in one way or another. Organizational conflict is defined as the behaviour intended to obstruct the achievement of some other person's goals. Conflict is therefore a product of incompatibility of goals and it emerge from opposing behaviours. According to Lewis, French and Steane [4], conflict within an organisation is inevitable. This is a consequence of boundaries arising within any organisational structure, creating separate groups that need to compete for scarce resources. Rivers [5] published research that suggested that a mere fact of categorisation (between us and them) is enough to cause conflict. They term this the social identity theory. This categorisation is exactly what happens when groups are formed; representing different functions within an organisation and it supports the notion that is inevitable [4]. Conflict is defined as a clash between individuals emanating out of a difference in thought process, attitudes, understanding, interests, requirements and even sometimes perceptions. It is the personal divergence of interests between groups or individuals. It may take place within the individual, between individuals, between the individual and the group or between groups. Conflicts are the primary reality of organizational societies and the basic political systems in organizations through which conflict is signified, it is observed in many organizations [6]. According to Roloff [7], "Organizational conflict crop up when members engage in activities that are incompatible with those of colleagues within their network, members of other collectivises, or unaffiliated individuals who utilize the services or products of the organization".

Litterer [8] defines conflict as "a type of behaviour which occurs when two or more parties are in opposition or in battle as a result of a perceived relative deprivation from the activities of or interacting with another person or group".

When conflict happens there is a tendency for morale to be lowered hence it connotes a stressful, unhappy, depressing, annoying and frustrating state of affairs that may adversely affect teaching, learning, and schooling effectiveness [9]. Within the school institutions conflict makes the educational process more complicated.

Conflict management is the process by which disputes are resolved, where negative results are minimized and positive results are prioritized. This key management skill involves using different tactics depending on the situation, negotiation, and creative thinking. With properly managed conflict, an institution is able to minimize interpersonal issues, enhance congenial ambience and produce better outcomes. There are various styles of behaviour by which interpersonal conflict can be handled. In order to manage conflict effectively, one style may be more suitable than the other depending upon the situation. Follett [10] conceptualized five methods of handling conflict in organizations i.e., domination, compromise, integration, avoidance and suppression.

For the purpose of this study, the Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) is chosen so as to analyse styles of handling interpersonal conflict on two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. It is among the most popular styles of handling conflict used in research. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) has been used successfully for more than 30 years to help individuals in a variety of settings understand how different conflict styles affect personal and group dynamics. The TKI measures five conflict-handling modes or ways of dealing with conflict: Collaborating, Competing, Avoiding, Accommodating and Compromising.

**Collaborating:** This style produces the best long-term results; at the same time, it is often the most difficult and time-consuming to reach. Each party's needs and wants are considered, and a win-win solution is found so that everyone leaves satisfied. This often involves all parties sitting down together, talking through the conflict and negotiating a solution together. This is used when it is vital to preserve the relationship between all parties or when the solution itself will have a significant impact.

**Competing:** This style rejects compromise and involves not giving in to others viewpoints or wants. One party stands firm in what they think is the correct handling of a situation, and does not back down until they get their way. This can be in situations where morals dictate that a specific course of action is taken, when there is no time to try and find a different solution or when there is an unpopular decision to be made. It can resolve disputes quickly, but there is a high chance of morale and productivity being lessened.

**Avoiding:** This style aims to reduce conflict by ignoring it, removing the conflicted parties, or evading it in some manner. Team members in conflict can be removed from the situation they are in conflict

over, deadlines are pushed, or people are even reassigned to other departments. This can be an effective conflict resolution style if there is a chance that a cool-down period would be helpful or if one needs more time to consider stance on the conflict itself. Avoidance should not be a substitute for proper resolution, however; pushing back conflict indefinitely can and will lead to more (and bigger) conflicts down the line.

**Accommodating:** This style is about simply putting the other parties' needs before one's own. One allows other person to 'win' and get their way. Accommodation is for situations where one does not care as strongly about the issue as the other person, if prolonging the conflict is not worth the time, or if one thinks one might be wrong. This option is about keeping the peace, not putting in more effort than the issue is worth, and knowing when to pick battles. While it might seem somewhat weak, accommodation can be the absolute best choice to resolve a small conflict and move on with more important issues. This style is highly cooperative on the part of the resolver but can lead to resentment.

**Compromising:** This style seeks to find the middle ground by asking both parties to concede some aspects of their desires so that a solution can be agreed upon. This style is sometimes known as lose-lose, in that both parties will have to give up a few things in order to agree on the larger issue. This is used when there is a time crunch, or when a solution simply needs to happen, rather than be perfect. Compromise can lead to resentment, especially if overused as a conflict resolution tactic, so use sparingly.

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Instances for conflicts are natural within every organizational setup, and it is a part of every professional skill to be able to effectively manage all such instances. A study carried out by Mapolisa and Tshabalala [11] revealed that almost every week school heads has to deal with one or two cases of conflict. Another study by Makaye and Ndofirepi [12] on Conflict Resolution between heads and teachers also indicated that barely a month passes without either the head conflicting with the teachers or the teachers amongst themselves. According to Doğan [13] and Dick and Thodlana [14], conflict is a fact of life and is inevitable at all levels of human life and is a common phenomenon in organizations and workplaces and that if managed effectively, conflict can be constructive or functional and if not, it can be a destructive or dysfunctional force in people and organizations. While functional conflict can present opportunities for improvement, dysfunctional conflict is unhealthy, destructive and can create unwanted divergence in their learning environment and shift the focus of teachers and students in a school situation from the work to be done to the conflict itself and the parties involved.

In the school environment conflict can have adverse effects on the academic environment, including affecting the morale of educators, their pace to work and efficiency. It may also increase absenteeism and negative impacts on academic performance of students which will lead to low educational development or deteriorated performance [9]. Doğan [13] argues that if conflict is properly managed it presents ideal opportunities for learning or improved efficiency, develops the skills of communication, opens up important issues or highlights problems, develops trust, and relieves anxiety as well as suspicion.

Researchers have underlined the fact that the most constructive way to handle any conflict situation at work largely depends on the prevailing circumstances of the conflict itself [15], [16], [17]. This idea is suggestive of the view that the people responsible for managing a conflict situation must have sound understanding of human psychology in order to determine the best style of conflict management needed for the particular situation. The term contingency itself makes the idea very vivid indeed; it requires one to realize fully that many conflict situations occur without warning, and thus in such circumstances a proactive approach may not be possible but rather a reactive approach is inevitable. Alternatively, scholars such as Blake and Mouton [18], [19], Fisher and Ury [20], Pneuman and Breuhl [21] are of the opinion that waiting for a conflict situation to arise in order to determine the best conflict management style may not be the best approach. They believe that a problem-solving approach trumps the contingency perspective, in the sense that it creates a bigger sense of unity and camaraderie among the conflicting parties. These scholars offer the 'one-best-way perspective' towards managing any conflict situation. The purpose of this particular approach is that, it encourages team work, creativity and a general feeling of tolerance, upon having collectively managed a conflict situation. In essence, the 'one-best-way perspective' marks the distinct outlines for teams to make unanimous efforts towards 'fizzling-down' a conflict situation. By means of sharing ideas and 'talking-it-out', team members can think more rationally and in the long run feel more at ease upon knowing that they contributed in a positive way.

Some scholars have a more deliberate approach to suggesting the most appropriate means to conflict management. Thomas [22] has applied both the above perspectives into two-time horizons. He offers

the 'time perspective' and states that the 'one-best-way perspective' is largely a long-term organization solution to conflict management and has benefits which are meant to last a longer period of time. Conversely, he also implies that the 'contingency perspective' is best fit for solving short term conflict situations and helps answer the problems of that particular moment in time in which conflict has turned out.

It must also be clearly understood that as the level of conflict in a group intensifies, the style of conflict management needed will also have to be altered accordingly. This being due to the cause that high conflict intensity may in principle identify with high levels of interpersonal relationships and eventually trust. Therefore, managing conflict without determining the level of conflict intensity in a situation may result in failure to manage the conflict at all. Andrews and Tjosvold [23] suggested that when conflicting parties collectively and openly discuss their disagreements in order to coalesce with their designs and interests, the resulting effect is stronger relationships and better decisions. By suggesting this, the researchers are in fact referring to a 'cooperative problem-solving approach'. The more open the idea sharing, the easier it is for everyone to understand and appreciate each other in the long run. On the other hand, other researchers have come to the conclusion that not every person has the capacity or know-how for such a problem-solving mechanism to work [24], [25].

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Viewing the consequences of conflict, a need is felt to undertake the project focused on the following research points.

1. Do teachers teaching at various levels encounter conflict in their professional lives?
2. What are the specific reasons of conflict among teachers?
3. What Conflict Management Style is adopted by teachers to overcome conflict?

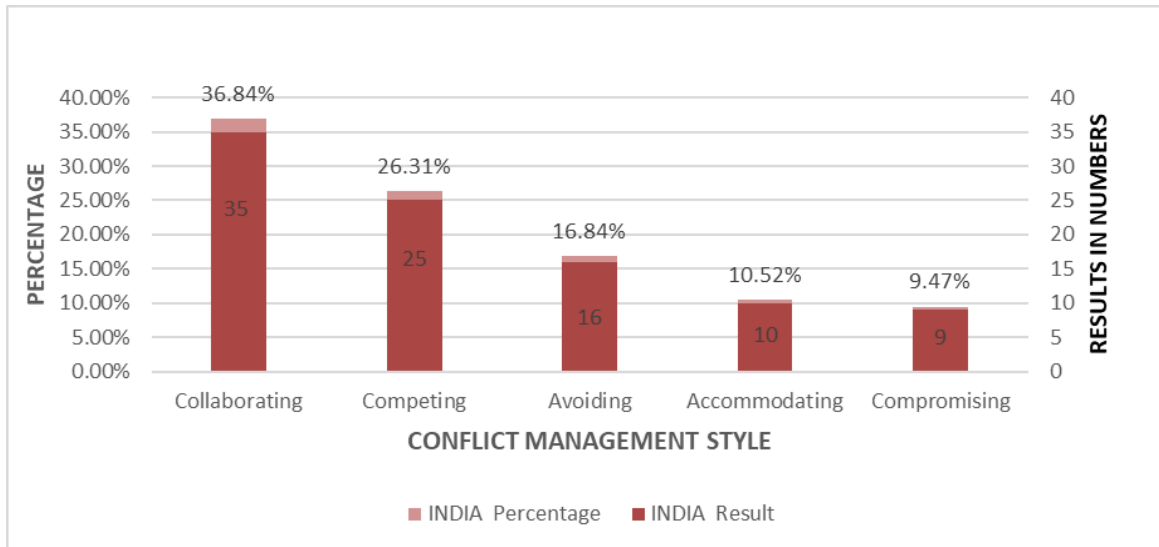
### 4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

Data was collected in two phases. In phase one, quantitative data was gathered by applying the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Questionnaire (TKI). The Thomas Kilmann's Conflict Mode Instrument TKI assesses an individual's behaviour in conflict situation on the basis of five parameters i.e., Avoiding, Accommodating, Competing, Compromising and Collaborating. Highest scores received from results indicate the primary conflict management style. In all, 190 teachers were contacted to collect data (95 from Russia and 95 from India).

In India majority of the teachers make efforts to express their thoughts freely and prefer to discuss openly the wishes of self and their colleagues. Results in Table 1 and Figure 1 indicate that 36.84% teachers adopt a collaborative style of conflict. They believe that prolonging the conflict is to waste more time, whereas only 9.47% and 10.52% of the teachers compromise and accommodate to resolve conflict respectively. The results also exhibit that competing is the second preferred mode to get over conflicts among Indian teachers. Avoidance is a strategy to ignore or withdraw from the conflict which is followed by 16.84% teachers.

*Table 1 Conflict Management Mode in India*

| INDIA         |        |            |
|---------------|--------|------------|
| Mode          | Number | Percentage |
| Collaborating | 35     | 36.84%     |
| Competing     | 25     | 26.31%     |
| Avoiding      | 16     | 16.84%     |
| Accommodating | 10     | 10.52%     |
| Compromising  | 9      | 9.47%      |

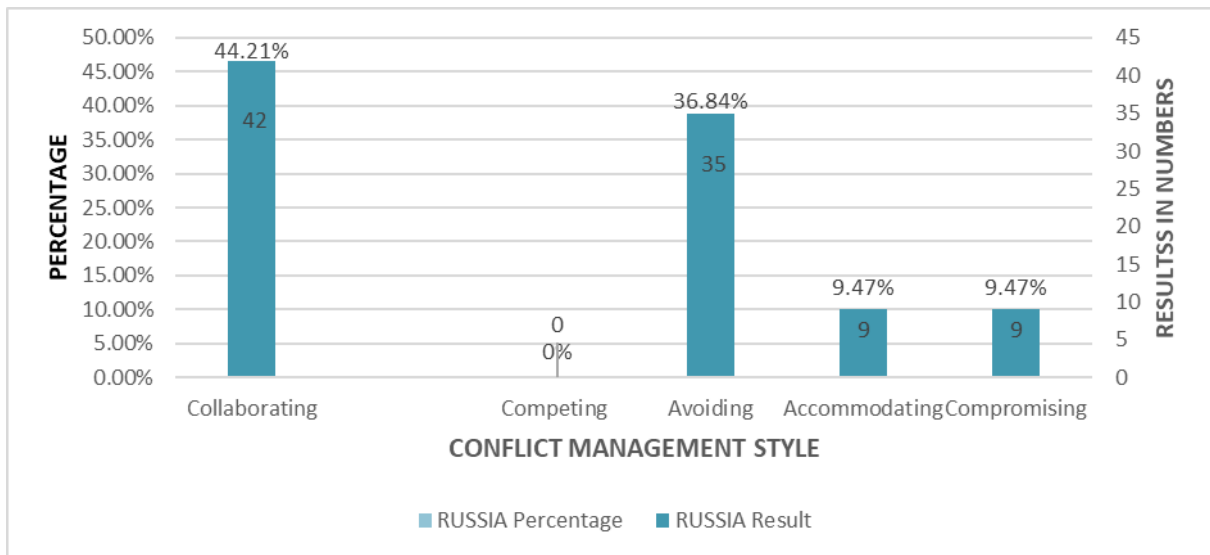


*Fig. 1 Conflict Management Mode in India*

Similar to the results of Indian teachers, in Russia too maximum number of teachers prefers to adopt a collaborating mode to resolve conflict. To be collaborative means to be assertive along with being cooperative. It is explicit from Table 2 and Figure 2 that 44.21% teachers are inclined to discuss their issues openly, identify solutions that satisfy everyone's concerns and improve relationships. The second most preferred style by Russian teachers is avoiding. 36.84% teachers simply avoid conflicts and conflicting situations. On the other hand, no teacher in Russia choose to compete with their fellow colleagues and a very few teachers likely to adopt accommodating and compromising strategies. Only 9.47% teachers tend to accommodate conflicts and the same number of teachers (9.47%) makes compromises to deal with conflicts.

*Table 2 Conflict Management Mode in Russia*

| RUSSIA        |        |            |
|---------------|--------|------------|
| Mode          | Number | Percentage |
| Collaborating | 42     | 44.21%     |
| Competing     | 0      | 0%         |
| Avoiding      | 35     | 36.84%     |
| Accommodating | 9      | 9.47%      |
| Compromising  | 9      | 9.47%      |



*Fig. 2 Conflict Management Mode in Russia*

The status of parameters used by teachers (Russian & Indian) to manage conflicts is presented on the comparative base in Table 3 and Figure 3.

*Table 3 Status of parameters used by teachers (Russian & Indian) to manage conflicts*

| MODE          | RUSSIA |            | INDIA  |            |
|---------------|--------|------------|--------|------------|
|               | NUMBER | PERCENTAGE | NUMBER | PERCENTAGE |
| COLLABORATING | 42     | 44.21%     | 35     | 36.84%     |
| COMPETING     | 0      | 0%         | 25     | 26.31%     |
| AVOIDING      | 35     | 36.84%     | 16     | 16.84%     |
| ACCOMODATING  | 9      | 9.47%      | 10     | 10.52%     |
| COMPROMISING  | 9      | 9.47%      | 9      | 9.47%      |

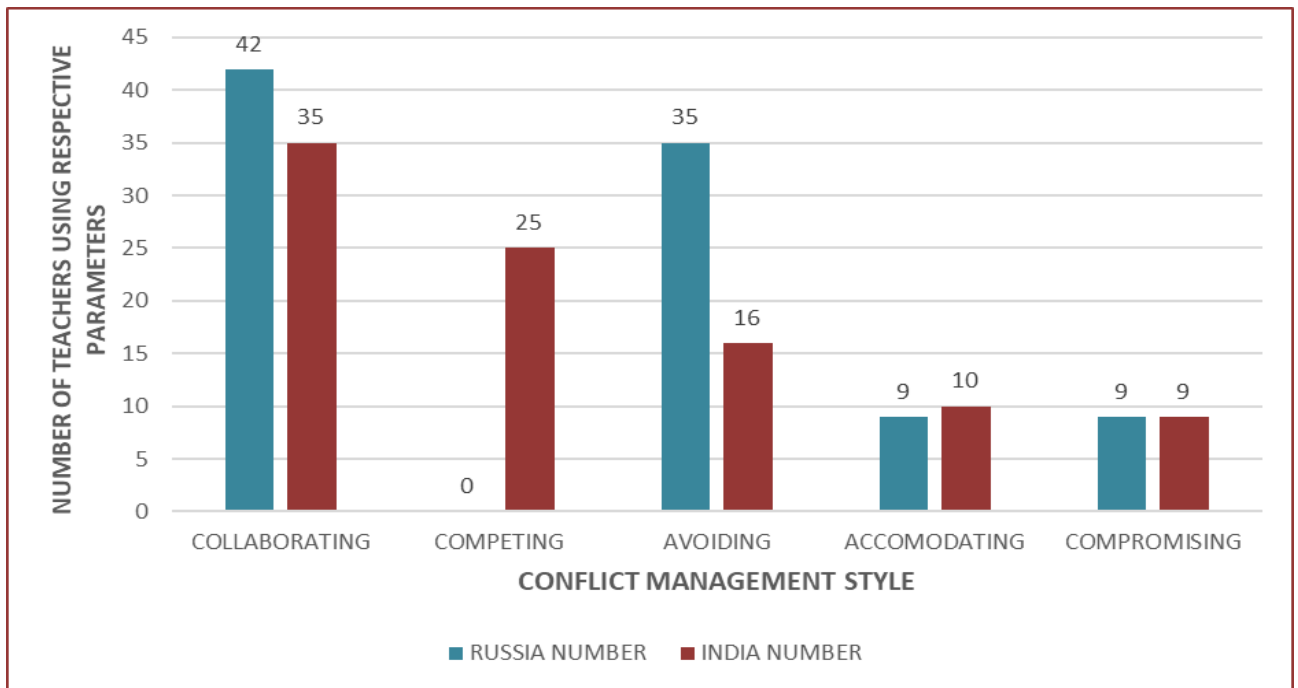


Fig. 3 Status of parameters used by teachers (Russian & Indian) to manage conflicts

#### *Collaborating*

As per TKI results, approximately 45% Russian and 35% Indian teachers follow the collaborating style to manage conflicts, which shows that teachers believe to find an integrative solution.

#### *Competing*

It is noteworthy that no teacher from Russia prefers to compete with their counterparts whereas in India nearly 25% teachers hold the competitive spirit to get over conflicts and in India it is the second most followed way to resolve conflicts.

#### *Avoiding*

Avoiding conflict can be an appropriate choice, depending on the circumstances. 35 teachers in Russia avoid conflicts whereas the number of teachers in India is almost half to Russian teachers. In India 16% teachers adopts an avoiding style to deal with conflicting situations.

#### *Compromising*

A compromising mode of conflict management is followed to do temporary settlements and arrive at expedient solutions in complex issues. The result of the compromising style is found same in both the countries. Nearly 10% teachers in Russia as well as in India resolve issues by compromising.

#### *Accommodating*

An accommodating style is to renounce own needs in exchange of others. The results of TKI indicates that in India, approximately 11% teachers put the concerns of their colleagues before their own whereas the percentage of Russian teachers following the accommodating mode is found merely 1% less than that of Indian teachers. This difference is almost negligible.

### **Causes of Conflicts**

Due to certain limitations of the TKI, the objectives of the study could not be fulfilled. Thus, to attain required information, in the second phase a qualitative approach has been employed and data is collected through semi-structured interviews of total 40 teachers and teacher educators from India as well as Russia. Due to the restrictions in place during COVID19 pandemic interviews were conducted and transcribed virtually/telephonically. All the interviews were fixed with the consent of subjects and conducted virtually/ telephonically with the selected subjects, which lasted for about 10-15 minutes each. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended to know the root causes of conflict among teachers. It was focused to garner the strategies teachers usually follow to resolve conflict and conflict arising situations. Semi structured interviews are flexible and adaptive research technique that can be

modified to suit the needs of different groups of participants [26]. The conversations were recorded for further analysis. All the conversations were classified according to the respective groups and the recorded narrations were analysed descriptively to get the answers of research questions. Yildirim and Simsek [27] have suggested that direct citations must be included in the descriptive analysis so that it can conspicuously reflect the interviews. The audio recordings are preserved for further comparative investigation in future.

The first research question - "Do teachers teaching at various levels encounter conflict in their professional lives?" After the analysis of the conversations, it was inferred that conflict is a frequent reality that transpire due to human interventions and differences of opinions which is the commonest cause of conflicts among teaching faculty. About 67.5% teachers expressed that they encounter conflict in their professional life.

For sustainable development of the teaching/ learning process and to curb the ill effects of conflicts, it is important to know possible reasons of conflict. Hence, the second research question was focused on to know the reasons of conflict among teaching community.

Subject B, a teacher educator from India having 10 years of teaching experience, asserted that, "One of the major reasons of conflict and dissonance in relationships is difference of opinion. We all want our opinions to be heard and valued. It is quite obvious that we are drawn towards people who hold the same opinions as ours."

It was inferred that personality clashes and the attitude of some colleagues are the reasons due to which conflicts are aroused. Subject A, a school teacher having 12 years of teaching experience in government school, stated that,

"Senior teachers who have more experience generally do not cooperate with their junior colleagues and make them feel inferior. In their turn, junior teachers also avoid talking to them which ultimately creates communication gap and conflict takes place."

Subject E, teacher from Russia, who has been teaching over 15 years, explained that, "The most common reason of conflict among teaching faculty is poor relationship between the teachers, and the management style is the second cause of conflict."

Subject D, one of the senior teachers from Russia, having teaching experience of over 40 years asserted that,

"I feel juxtaposition of socio-role positions, goals, interests, lack of communicative culture and psychological incompatibility are the reasons due to which difference of opinions emerge and cause conflict."

All the respondents from India as well as Russia noted that conflict was a natural part of their jobs.

Some most commonly found reasons from the replies of the teachers from India were:

- Lobbyism
- Lack of communication and coordination
- Difference in employment status
- Different levels of qualification, skills and abilities (inferior and superior complexes)
- Unequal distribution of work in organisation
- Differences in behavioural temperament
- Lack of work ethics
- Favouritism (among teachers and between teachers and students)
- Biased appraisals and undue rewards

Whereas common responses to reasons of conflict given by the teachers from Russia were:

- Clash in ideas and treating other as inferiors
- Misuse of power
- Juxtaposition of social role positions, goals, interests
- Lack of communicative culture and psychological incompatibility
- Some teachers work more than others. Some teachers do not develop any materials and use whatever the hard-working teachers develop. In general, inequality in the work load could cause conflict
- Inattention, misunderstanding and low intelligence of some colleagues
- Different approaches to teaching and teaching methodology

Conflict is a quite frequent reality in every institution irrespective the difference of countries and continents. But it may adversely affect the quality of the learning environment as well as the performance of teachers. It is very important to resolve conflict and conflict arising situations for the betterment of all teachers and learners. Thus, it was felt necessary to also enquire the third research question-"What conflict management style is adopted by teachers to overcome conflict?"



The results have revealed that the majority of teachers prefer to resolve the conflict through discussion and they try to find mid-way which suits all. Subject D, a teacher educator for 11 years, expressed that,

“We know that it (conflict) can be avoided, but it still happened. So, we discuss with each other and try to find a solution, we discuss until we found the right solution and everyone is happy with that.”

Subject C, a school teacher having 5 years of teaching experience, stated that,

“I prefer open talk and collaborate. As it is important to find amicable solutions to resolve the issues and maintain healthy relationship with our fellow colleagues.”

The results of the qualitative data collected through interviews depict that teachers follow the collaborative mode to resolve the conflict. As per TKI results, approximately 46% Russian and 37% Indian teachers follow the collaborating style to manage conflicts, and nearly 77% teachers asserted that they prefer to talk and work collaboratively. It exhibits that the results of both data sources are in tune.

## **DISCUSSION**

Conflict is inevitable, when many people work together. It is human nature to complain and to be at variance in different situations. Conflict is frequent reality and it should not be ignored or avoided. Conflict at educational institutions, adversely affects and deteriorates the teacher's performance, quality of the learning environment, institutional life, students' performance, standards of academics, professional growth of teachers and can also cause great damage to society. Some common reasons for conflicts among teachers are- lobbyism, lack of communication and coordination, teachers' different levels of qualification, skills and abilities (inferior and superior complexes), lack of work ethics, disagreements and differences in ideas and different approaches to teaching and teaching methodology. These can be resolved with the right kind of an attitudinal approach and an open mindedness. A good democratic leadership and mentorship also helps in managing conflict among teachers. Whereas dearth of necessary skills among administrators and teachers who fail to get over conflict and conflicting situations can cause serious issues and can waste the time that should be spent on educating students and providing instructions. In this context, it is crucial to take necessary precautions to prevent conflicts to occur and successfully resolve conflicts to avoid its unpropitious impacts.

Teachers are not ordinary people. They belong to the intellectual class of society, so they ought to know ways and means to cope with conflicts successfully and more importantly they should directly focus on their sacred task of teaching.

The results drawn from the study will assist the administrators, mentors and policy makers of both the institutes to paint a comparative scenario depicting conflict among teachers working in two different cultures. Considering the reasons mentioned by teachers, school managers and administrators should be conscious about conflict among teachers and should design set ups for congenial environment and enhance efficiency for root out conflict and conflict arising situations. Difference of opinions should be taken as a constructive criticism and round table discussions should be held to develop healthy social relationship and communication. The democratic attitude of teachers should be developed and supported not only this, their demands and work conditions should also be taken on priority.

## **CONCLUSION**

The data analysis revealed that teachers have to confront various conflicts and conflict arising situations being on professional grounds but they follow a collaborative style to resolve conflicts which is a combination of being assertive and cooperative. There is no denying the fact that teachers are witty, astute and wise people who do not dwell on grudges of any sort, they minimize negative feelings by discussing with their colleagues. They collaborate to work with others to identify a solution that fully satisfies everyone's concerns. They prefer to indulge in productive activities rather than create vacuum by avoiding conflict situations. This study also provided good knowledge of causes of conflict arising issues at every level of teaching, however there appeared to be no major long term negative effects of such conflict on the organizational performance in the long run. Conclusively, conflict management is both an art and a science; it has been exhibited that in a highly collaborative environment the outcomes in each event of conflict and conflict management are positive, and the existence of any degree of conflict may not affect functional outcomes of the institutions.

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