Conflict Management Styles Among School Heads and the Institutional Climate of Large Elementary Schools in General Santos City Division

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Abstract
Aim: This study aimed to examine the conflict management styles employed by school heads and their relationship with the institutional climate in large elementary schools within the General Santos City Division. The research sought to determine how different conflict resolution strategies adopted by school leaders influence the overall atmosphere and functioning of educational institutions.
Methodology: A survey questionnaire was utilized as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire was distributed to a representative sample of school heads from large elementary schools in the General Santos City Division. The survey assessed various aspects of conflict management styles, including collaborative, competitive, accommodating, and avoiding styles. Additionally, the institutional climate was evaluated based on factors such as teacher morale, student behavior, and the overall work environment. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlational analysis to identify any significant relationships.
Results: The study revealed that the majority of school heads employed a collaborative conflict management style, which was found to positively correlate with a more conducive institutional climate. Schools with heads who favored a cooperative approach reported higher levels of teacher satisfaction, improved student engagement, and a more supportive work environment. Conversely, schools led by heads that leaned toward avoiding or competitive styles tended to exhibit challenges such as lower teacher morale and higher levels of stress.
Conclusion: The findings suggest that the conflict management style of school heads plays a significant role in shaping the institutional climate of elementary schools. Adopting a collaborative and inclusive approach to conflict resolution can foster a positive work environment, contributing to improved educational outcomes.
Keywords: *Conflict management, school heads, institutional climate, elementary schools, General Santos City, survey, educational leadership*

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inherent aspect of human interaction, particularly in organizational settings, and educational institutions are no exception. Within the context of schools, conflict may arise between staff, students, parents, and even within administrative teams (Sanchez, et al., 2024). Effective conflict management is crucial in ensuring a harmonious and productive environment, one that is conducive to learning and personal development. Over the years, scholars have recognized that the way school leaders handle conflicts can significantly impact not only the internal dynamics of the school but also the overall quality of education provided (Carvajal, et al., 2025). In schools, conflict management is not just about resolving disputes but also about fostering a climate that nurtures collaboration, trust, and shared purpose (Birhanu & Thuo, 2017).

Globally, educational leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping how conflicts are addressed within schools. Conflict management styles—ranging from avoidance to collaboration—are seen as key factors in determining the institutional climate, a broad term that encompasses the environment, culture, and overall atmosphere of the school

(Vinokur, et al., 2024). Researchers have found that school heads or principals, who possess effective conflict management skills, are better equipped to create environments where teachers and students feel supported, motivated, and engaged (Amihan, et al. 2023; Plaku & Leka, 2025). Conversely, poorly managed conflicts can result in disengagement, lower morale, and diminished educational outcomes. These findings underscore the importance of understanding how different conflict management strategies are applied in schools worldwide and their implications on school climate (Mejia & Arpon, 2021).

In the Philippine context, where education is seen as the cornerstone of societal development (Abenojar, et al., 2025; Muńoz & Sanchez, 2023; Pangilinan, 2025), the role of school heads is crucial in maintaining a positive institutional climate. School heads in the Philippines are expected not only to manage academic matters but also to oversee the interpersonal relationships that define the culture of the school (Gamala & Marpa, 2022). The Philippine educational system, though constantly evolving, still faces challenges related to the proper training of school administrators in leadership and conflict management. While some school leaders possess strong conflict resolution skills, others may lack the training or experience necessary to handle interpersonal issues effectively (Castañeros, et al., 2023). As a result, the impact of conflict within schools can be profound, often affecting student outcomes and teacher job satisfaction. In large elementary schools, the complexity of managing a school environment is amplified due to the number of stakeholders involved. These schools often face unique challenges related to diversity in the student body, varying expectations from parents, and the large number of staff members to manage (Göksoy & Argon, 2016). The institutional climate in such schools can be fragile, with teachers and students relying heavily on school heads for guidance and leadership in times of conflict. When conflicts are not managed effectively, the consequences can lead to a tense atmosphere, which may have a ripple effect on the quality of education and the overall morale of the school community (Amihan & Sanchez, 2023; Hoque & Raya, 2023).

The relationship between conflict management styles and institutional climate in large elementary schools in the General Santos City Division has yet to be explored in-depth. General Santos City, located in the southern part of the Philippines, is home to a diverse population, and its educational institutions reflect this diversity. The dynamics of conflict in schools in this region are influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors that are unique to the area. School heads in General Santos City are expected to be not only administrators but also community leaders who mediate conflicts and ensure a positive learning environment. However, the approaches these leaders take in managing conflicts have not been thoroughly examined, leaving a gap in understanding how their leadership styles affect the schools they manage.

This study aims to address this gap by exploring the conflict management styles of school heads and how these styles influence the institutional climate of large elementary schools in General Santos City. Through this research, the study sought to contribute to the understanding of how different conflict management strategies whether collaborative, competitive, accommodating, or avoiding can shape the overall environment within schools. The institutional climate, which encompasses factors such as teacher morale, student engagement, and the general atmosphere of the school, will be examined in relation to the conflict management styles adopted by school heads. By examining the relationship between conflict management and institutional climate in the specific context of General Santos City, the study intends to provide valuable insights that can inform policy and practice in the region. This research will also serve as a guide for future leadership development programs aimed at enhancing the skills of school heads in conflict resolution and fostering positive school climates. Given the increasing recognition of the importance of school climate in educational success, this study sought to underscore the significant role of school leadership in shaping a school's environment.

Objectives
The main objective of this study is to explore how the conflict management styles of school heads influence the institutional climate of large elementary schools in the General Santos City Division.
Specifically, the study aims to:
1. identify the conflict management styles employed by school heads in large elementary schools in the General Santos City Division;
2. examine the relationship between the conflict management styles of school heads and the institutional climate in large elementary schools;

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3. determine the impact of conflict management styles on teacher and student engagement within the school environment; and
4. recommend effective conflict management strategies for enhancing the institutional climate in large elementary schools.

Hypothesis

Given the stated research problems, the following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H_0: There is no significant relationship between the conflict management styles of school heads and the institutional climate in large elementary schools in the General Santos City Division.

H_a: There is a significant relationship between the conflict management styles of school heads and the institutional climate in large elementary schools in the General Santos City Division.

METHODS

Research Design

The study used a descriptive-correlational research design to explore the relationship between conflict management styles and the institutional climate in large elementary schools. The design was appropriate for determining the extent to which the variables were related without manipulating any of them.

Population and Sampling

Ten school heads constituted the population of large elementary schools within the General Santos City Division. The participants of the study were selected through a purposive sampling method because they fulfilled specific criteria aligned with the goals and objectives of the study. Participants were required to be appointed school heads (principals or officers-in-charge) in large elementary schools within the division. They must have served in their current leadership role for at least one year, been involved in managing personnel, handling conflicts, and implementing school policies, and expressed their willingness to participate by providing informed consent. This sampling technique ensured that the respondents were well-qualified in matters of conflict management and institutional leadership, which made them suitable sources of information for the research.

Instrument

A structured survey questionnaire was used to collect data on the conflict management styles of school heads and the institutional climate of large elementary schools. The instrument was designed with closed-ended questions to ensure consistency and ease of analysis. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts: the first part focused on identifying the conflict management styles employed by school heads, while the second part assessed the institutional climate as perceived within the school environment.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, it was subjected to content validation by a panel of experts composed of educators, school administrators, and research professionals. Their feedback was used to revise and refine the items to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire that was distributed to the selected school heads of large elementary schools in the General Santos City Division. The questionnaires were administered either in person or through an online platform, depending on the availability and preference of the participants. A follow-up was conducted to ensure a high response rate and the completeness of the data. Participants were given adequate time to respond to the questions, and all responses were gathered within a set timeframe to maintain consistency in the data collection process.

Treatment of Data

The collected data were processed and analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency distributions and means, were used to summarize the conflict management styles and institutional climate scores. To determine the relationship between conflict management styles and institutional climate, correlational analysis specifically Pearson's correlation was conducted. This analysis helped identify whether and how specific conflict management strategies employed by school heads influenced the overall atmosphere and effectiveness of the school environment.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. The study emphasized ethical data handling and reporting, with all information gathered treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The results indicated that school heads predominantly employed a collaborative conflict management style, which was positively correlated with a more favorable institutional climate, characterized by higher teacher morale and improved student engagement. Furthermore, a significant relationship was found between effective conflict resolution strategies and the overall school atmosphere, suggesting that leadership style directly impacts the educational environment.

Profile of the Respondents on Conflict Management Styles

The table below presents the conflict management styles employed by school heads in large elementary schools in the General Santos City Division. It provides an overview of how school heads approach conflicts within their schools, with a focus on collaboration, authority-based resolution, and avoidance strategies.

Table 1. Conflict Management Styles Employed by School Heads

Statement Indicators	Mean	Description	Interpretation
I prefer to collaborate with others to solve conflicts.	3.5	Agree	Collaborative conflict resolution.
I tend to avoid conflict when it arises.	2.1	Disagree	Tends to avoid conflict.
I often assert my viewpoint in conflict situations.	3.8	Agree	Assertive in conflicts.
I am open to compromising in order to resolve conflicts.	3.2	Agree	Open to compromise.
I prefer to seek a win-win solution for all parties involved.	4.0	Highly Agree	Strong preference for win-win solutions.
I tend to yield to others in conflict situations to maintain peace.	2.3	Disagree	Prefers not to yield in conflicts.
I encourage open communication during conflicts.	3.7	Agree	Promotes open communication.
I handle conflicts by imposing my authority to resolve them.	3.0	Agree	Uses authority in conflicts.

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I prefer to discuss conflicts with all involved parties.	3.9	Highly Agree	Strong preference for discussion.
I avoid conflicts by delegating them to others when possible.	2.0	Highly Disagree	Avoids delegation of conflicts.
Grand Mean	3.3		Tends to prefer collaborative and open approaches to conflict management.

	Interval	Interpretation
1	1.00 - 1.75	Highly Disagree
2	1.76 - 2.50	Disagree
3	2.51 - 3.25	Agree
4	3.26 - 4.00	Highly Agree

The table indicates that a majority of school heads prefer a collaborative approach to conflict management, as reflected in the higher mean scores of statements like "I prefer to seek a win-win solution" (4.0) and "I prefer to discuss conflicts with all involved parties" (3.9). These statements fall under the "Highly Agree" category, showing a tendency toward resolving conflicts in a constructive and inclusive manner. However, the lower mean scores for statements like "I tend to avoid conflict when it arises" (2.1) and "I avoid conflicts by delegating them to others when possible" (2.0) suggest that school heads are less likely to resort to avoidance strategies. These responses indicate a preference for handling conflicts directly rather than evading or delegating them, aligning with the "Disagree" and "Highly Disagree" categories.

Overall, the data shows that school heads lean towards open communication, collaboration, and compromise in managing conflicts. The grand mean of 3.3 supports this, indicating that while some assertiveness and authority-based strategies are present, the predominant approach is to engage others in resolving issues constructively, fostering a positive and communicative school environment.

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Profile of the Respondents on the Impact of Conflict Management Styles on Teacher and Student Engagement

The table below presents the perceived impact of conflict management styles employed by school heads on teacher and student engagement within large elementary schools in the General Santos City Division. It provides an overview of how different conflict resolution strategies may influence the level of teacher satisfaction, student behavior, and overall engagement in the school environment.

Table 2. Impact of Conflict Management Styles on Teacher and Student Engagement

Statement Indicators	Mean	Description	Interpretation
My approach to conflict resolution enhances teacher satisfaction.	3.6	Agree	Enhances teacher satisfaction.
Teachers in my school feel more engaged when conflicts are resolved collaboratively.	3.8	Agree	Collaborative resolution boosts engagement.
My conflict management style helps create a positive atmosphere for students.	3.7	Agree	Creates a positive student environment.
Teachers are more motivated to work when conflicts are managed effectively.	3.5	Agree	Motivation increases with effective conflict management.
Student engagement improves when I address conflicts openly and fairly.	4.0	Highly Agree	Open conflict resolution enhances student engagement.
Conflict management in my school leads to stronger teacher-student relationships.	3.9	Highly Agree	Strengthens teacher-student relationships.
Teachers feel supported and valued when conflicts are resolved constructively.	3.8	Agree	Teachers feel supported.
Student participation in class activities increases when conflicts are resolved constructively.	3.6	Agree	Constructive conflict resolution increases participation.
Teachers demonstrate higher commitment to their roles when conflicts are managed collaboratively.	3.7	Agree	Higher teacher commitment with collaborative management.
My conflict management style leads to a more engaged and positive school community.	3.9	Highly Agree	Leads to a more engaged school community.

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Grand Mean	3.7		Conflict management positively impacts both teacher and student engagement.

The results clearly show that school heads who utilize collaborative and open conflict management styles create a positive environment that encourages both teachers and students to engage more actively. As the grand mean of 3.7 suggests, these conflict resolution approaches foster teacher satisfaction and student participation, which are crucial for maintaining a productive school climate. School heads who address conflicts openly help build trust and support among staff and students, which enhances the overall atmosphere of the school.

Moreover, the study highlights the direct influence that conflict management has on teacher-student relationships. By handling conflicts constructively, school heads facilitate stronger bonds between teachers and students, leading to increased engagement in classroom activities. This positive shift in the school environment contributes to a more motivated and committed school community, where both teachers and students feel valued and empowered to contribute to the learning process.

Relationship between Conflict Management Styles and Institutional Climate

This section examines the correlation between school heads' conflict management styles and the institutional climate in large elementary schools in the General Santos City Division. The analysis focuses on how different conflict resolution strategies employed by school heads influence key aspects of the institutional climate, including teacher morale, student engagement, and the overall school atmosphere.

Table 3. Correlation between Conflict Management Styles and Institutional Climate

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Interpretation
Conflict Management Styles	Institutional Climate	0.85	0.01	Strong positive correlation, indicating that collaborative conflict management styles improve the institutional climate.

The table presents the Pearson correlation between conflict management styles employed by school heads and the institutional climate in large elementary schools. A strong positive correlation is observed between collaborative conflict management styles and the institutional climate, particularly in teacher morale, student engagement, and the overall school atmosphere. This suggests that school heads who use a collaborative approach to resolve conflicts contribute to a more positive and supportive school environment, enhancing teacher satisfaction and student participation.

On the other hand, avoidant conflict management styles show a negative correlation with the institutional climate, indicating that when school heads avoid addressing conflicts, it leads to a less favorable atmosphere within the school. Assertive and authoritative styles also demonstrate moderate positive correlations, while compromising styles show a moderate positive impact on the institutional climate. Overall, the table emphasizes the importance of conflict management in shaping the school environment, with collaborative strategies being the most effective in promoting a positive institutional climate.

Conclusions
The study concludes that conflict management styles employed by school heads significantly influence the institutional climate in large elementary schools. Collaborative conflict resolution strategies were found to have the

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most positive impact, fostering a supportive atmosphere, improving teacher morale, and increasing student engagement. In contrast, avoidant styles negatively affected the school environment. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of effective conflict management in creating conducive learning environment and suggest that school heads should prioritize collaborative and constructive approaches to conflict resolution.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that school heads prioritize adopting collaborative conflict management strategies to foster a more positive institutional climate. Training and professional development programs should be provided to school leaders, focusing on enhancing their skills in conflict resolution and communication. Additionally, school heads should encourage open dialogue and transparency in resolving conflicts, ensuring that all parties are involved in the process. Schools should also create a supportive environment where conflicts are seen as opportunities for growth rather than challenges, ultimately contributing to a healthier, more engaging school atmosphere.

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