

Investigation into the Nature and Causes of Students' Conflicts, Strategies and Role of Academic Personnel in Conflicts Resolution in Universities of Khyber Pakhtun Khwa

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Abstract

This paper focused on the investigation of the nature and causes of students' conflicts, strategies and role of academic personnel in both sectors universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The objectives of the study were; to investigate the nature and causes of conflict, to find out the strategies employed in conflict resolution and to investigate the role of academic personnel in the resolution of conflicts in universities. The study was descriptive and survey and conducted to investigate the research problem. Ten (10) universities were taken as sample of the study from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Self-developed questionnaires were used to collect the data from the respondents. The collected data were put into SPSS and were analyzed through mean scores, standard deviation, independent sample t-test and Cohen's d. Findings of the study showed that nature of conflicts is different in both private and public sector universities; it was further found that causes as well as resolution strategies followed in both the universities are also different. The role of private sector academic personnel was found significant in resolving the conflicts arise among students at universities. Based on the study results it was recommended that policy implementation at universities may be fair and uniform. Furthermore, autonomy may be given to the academic personnel of the universities so that they could properly resolve the conflicts.

Keywords: Nature of conflict, strategy management, conflict resolution, academic personnel.

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Introduction

Conflicts comprise the entire fabric of manners and conducts that has contradictory views between management cadre and working class. They have differences on diverse issues which have been generated due to disparate feelings. They have no confidence on each other. They are quarrelling with each other because there are different personalities and they have different temperament (Azamosa, 2004). Schramm-Nielsen (2002) gives the definition of conflict that it is the severe ill-feelings, mismatching and inconsistencies between /among individuals/groups. It happens when one individual or group snatch the belongings of other individual or group.

Conflict is grounded on the discordancy of objectives and ascends from conflicting activities. There are different levels at which conflict occurs. It may happen individually, organizationally or in groups (Mullins, 2005). Conflict naturally happens among human beings in social setting. It occurs in organization on daily basis. It is recognized that it is an inescapable thing which always occur in individuals or in groups. When conflict arises, the responsible personnel sacrifice their energies and make efforts to resolve the issues in time. All societies and cultures are facing conflict but the style of tackling the problem are different (Brett, 2007).

When there are conflicting wishes, desires, thinking, principles, ideals, or objectives, conflict will happen. Conflict is unavoidable. Results are based after deep understanding and negotiation. Interference, sometimes reverse the situation. But extreme patience, future safety and positive thinking bear fruitful results. Sometimes, conflict may occur due to disinformation in organizations with respect to their requirements, notions, philosophies, objectives, or principles. Conflict resolution is the strategy or approach which is very necessary for the solution of problems, arising among students and it cannot accelerate the situation further. To manage conflicts effectively needs awareness, knowledge and skills on the part of mediators to know the different modes of conflict, to communicate in a proper way and to consolidate the system for conflict resolution and management of issues in a peaceful atmosphere (Wilmont & Hocker, 2011).

An investigation into the nature and causes of conflicts among university students, and different strategies and role of academic personnel to resolve such conflicts in universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Objective of the Study

The following were the objectives of the study.

1. To find out the nature and causes of conflicts among university students,
2. To investigate different strategies used to resolve conflicts
3. To know about the role of academic personnel to resolve such conflicts in universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions;

1. What is the nature of conflicts among University students at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
2. What are the causes of conflicts among University students at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
3. What kinds of strategies are used by academic personnel to resolve the students' conflicts among University students at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
4. What kind of role is played by academic personnel to resolve the students' conflicts among University students at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

Review of Related Literature

Conflict

Conflict is predictable in all cultures, but every culture has progressed in its own way of handling it (Brett, 2007). Man is a social being, affecting the conduct of others and being affected by other performance, in turn. Conflict is the clash with colossal forces. It is the establishment of aggressions and tough dissimilarities among individuals, they are always grounded on sentiments, feelings and antagonism. These are also called devilish undertakings because these conflicts make a fuss of the whole society. These may be internal and external actions. It is the strongest demonstration of the strongest sentimentalism of man, the feeling of retribution, revenge, abhorrence, and distrust. The spirit of materialism cause conflict which further leads to frustration, suffering and misery. It has psychological effect on the mind of others. Conflict is itself the conflict of the inner self. It is

a smash between powers that rule the world of man's will and action. It is not only the confrontation of good with the evil but also the confrontation of good with good. Principled passions are also in struggle with each other. The family claims what the state rejects, the state claims what the world community declines, love needs what the honor prohibits and woman demands what man denies. Annihilation is the result of conflict. Life is a heartbroken secret for all. Its spirit is conflict, resulting in misery and depression. Human emotional state and soaring passions lead to the greatness of man. If man controls the sources of conflict, no belligerent situations will arise. Human distress occur when the spirits of greediness and determinism are overwhelming (Bland, Powell, & Ross, 2012).

Conflicts are produced and increased due to population explosion. Conflicts are handled by efficient strategies. The best strategies can be induced due to the provision of better opportunities of training to the workforce. Trainings make available the best strategies to know the reasons of conflict and then to solve according to the situation (Odejobi & Adesina, 2009).

Zero tolerance on the part of individuals halt conflict. To live peacefully is the elixir of conflict throughout the globe. If a conflict arises, it is better to first know the nature, then causes and then bring an accepted solution to the problem (Ogungbamila, 2006).

Bigotry is the root of conflict. To nip the evil in the bud, it is better to honor others, to see the fundamental requirements and then to feel empathy for them. Positive attitudes can bring improvement in nonviolent dwelling and eliminate ill feelings (Vesterguard, Helvard & Serensen, 2011).

There are two faces of coin. Similarly conflict and peace are the two faces of life. The former is destructive and the latter is constructive. Conflict is the name of fighting, nervousness, despair, clashes and brawls on trivial matters while peace is tenacity, clearance and gaining of administrative objectives in a nonviolent situation (Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

Ajala (2003) posits that peace and tolerance are similar terms. Standards, principles, positive approaches and constructive outlooks are produced by these synonyms. Religious instruction is the best tool for eradication of vehemence and bringing of harmony

Sentimentalism is a catalyst for conflict. It does not occur only between persons in an organization but also within an individual. It occurs in men as well as in women due to extreme anger. Training is very necessary for both strata to get awareness about the different strategies for handling issues effectively. These strategies comprise respect for others

sentiments, overcoming own emotions in different situations and adopting positive attitude toward others (Algert & Watson, 2002).

No corner of society is free from conflict. It is unstoppable. Therefore different tactics are learned and adopted for the better solution of the issues. Experience of the people in this respect is indispensable. Training also has a paramount importance in this regard. Conflict has solution in itself if properly handled (Algert & Watson, 2002). The major causes as identified are feeble communication between/among groups, poor work distribution, inappropriate atmosphere, unethical attitude, unacceptable behavior, unequal treatment, lack of principle in organization and negligence on the part of individuals (Bar-Tal, & Halperin, 2013).

Due concentration to the hearing of the parties is essential for the resolution of conflict. Interference can disturb the situation. Provision of contentment is necessary to both parties. Acceptable solution is the soul of the peace process. Rules and regulation may be adopted and implemented in which there is a concept of reward and punishment exist to proceed toward the better solution of the problem if arises (Algert & Watson, 2002).

Dominating personality with sound understanding is necessary to handle the conflicts in organization in this respect, professionalism can play a very constructive role. Peaceful negotiation is the basic requirement of tackling issues effectively (Odejebi & Adesina, 2009).

Different styles are presented to properly manage the arising issues. Among these, agreement with each other, withdrawal from his/her stance, manipulation of factors, not blaming others, no threatening attitude, knowledge gaining, killing ignorance, removing obstinacy, emotional stability, hopeful and optimism, strong relationship between/among individuals/groups, and honest mediation by honest people (Baele, Sterck, & Meur, 2014).

The different tactics to resolve conflict and bring peace of mind, awareness, strong harmonization, and robust communication in individuals within institutions have prime significance for the development of organization. Non-violent atmosphere is the name of happiness and development while violent situations bring failure and weaknesses (Bar-Tal, 2010).

From time immemorial, it is known that human beings show love and conflict in their dealings with one another. Love and conflict are two contrasting passions, found in human communities throughout the global village. They are inborn spirits. Misunderstanding and disinformation are major causes of conflict. The hard realities of misunderstanding,

misconstruction, misinterpretation, miscalculation, misapprehension, confusion and disinformation make individuals worried, dejected, troubled and melancholic (Schilling, 2012).

Conflict may be a tussle or competition, resentment, disorder, and mayhem, between or among individuals with contrasting desires, wishes, thinking, philosophies, ideals, or objectives (Powel & Maoz, 2014). Conflicts are of many types. Social conflict is one of the types of conflicts. It is the state where two or more than two individuals, groups or parties are at loggerheads with each other, with contrasting attitudes, individually or jointly. It has a paramount importance in balancing power among group members with compromising and accommodating behaviour (Obegi & Nyamboga, 2008).

Wallenstein (2007) describes that conflict is name of a situation in which persons individually or collectively try to grab or snatch the same limited resources at the same time. Barash and Webel (2002) posit that conflict has its root in Latin word “confligere” means strike together. Conflict is the circumstance which produces inharmoniousness of objectives or aims among diverse group, displaying opposing and enmity-based attitudes. The existence of discordances in the views, outlooks, longings, requirements, among individuals or groups and which are shown by their attitudes and behaviours is called conflict (Ayoko, Hartel & Callan, 2002).

Mughal and Khan (2013) contend that countless experts have countless views about conflict. Some say that it is societal disagreement, individual interests, internal strife and squabble among members of society, while some are of the opinion that conflict is the struggle for power. The main reason of conflicts in organization is dissimilarities or discrepancy, and conflicts are unstoppable in organizational structure as these are inherent spirits in human beings. These minor skirmishes, if not tackled properly, lead to big issues and then become headache for the authorities.

Conflict is the incongruence of aims, objectives or interests which are real, obvious and ostensible. The struggling behaviour of the individuals or groups for the achievement of their own interests or objectives bring catastrophe for the whole organization (Davies, 2004).

Methodology

Research Design

The study was quantitative, descriptive in nature and survey was conducted to investigate the research problem. Following positivist

research paradigm-consequently the researcher believes that reality cannot be measured exactly and that there are multiple realities within the world in contrast to positivist approach, which begins with the belief of existence of single reality (Ashby & Neilsen-Hewett, 2012).

Population

There are Twenty-eight (28) universities, including Nineteen (19) Public and Nine (09) Private sector universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-Pakistan constituted the population of this study. All the academic personnel (Director Academics, Deans of Science and Arts, Chairperson, Assistant professors, lecturers and students) of these universities constituted the population of this study.

Sampling

A Sample of Ten (10) universities, five (05) each from Public and Private Sector Universities was selected randomly. Multistage-Purposive sampling methods were used for the selection of Directors academics, Deans of science and art, chairpersons/ HODs and random sampling techniques were employed for the selection of assistant professors, lecturers and students of Bachelor and Master. A total sample of 580 respondents was selected through multistage- purposive and random sampling techniques from the universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-Pakistan for the study.

From all 10 selected Universities, Director Academic, Dean of Science and Dean of Arts were selected using identical sampling method while, five Directors/ Chairmen from respective Departments, ten Assistant Professors, ten Lecturers, fifteen Bachelors and fifteen Masters Students were selected randomly. In this way, from each university the size of the sample was fifty-eight and total sample size was five hundred & eighty (580).

Data Collection Instrument

The study was descriptive and data were collected through a self-developed questionnaire. The questionnaire was comprised of thirty six items. Besides, that for the demographic information separate section was allotted for the respondents of the study, asking about their academic and professional qualification, sex, teaching experience, and nature of

position they have. Furthermore, the questionnaire was divided into four major components; 1) there were nine items on the nature of conflicts in universities, 2) nine items on the causes of conflicts in universities, 3) nine items on the conflict resolution strategies, and 4) nine items on the role of academic personnel in the resolving students conflicts at universities.

The instrument was pilot test in University of Swat. The reliability of the instrument was measured through Cronbach Alpha and the reliability co-efficient of the scale was .88. The content validity of the instrument was measured through a group of experts in the department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan. The group was comprised of four members who were comprised of one professor and three assistant professor of education.

Results

Research question 1. What is the nature of conflicts among University students at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

Table 1

Nature of Conflicts among University Students (N=580)

S. No	Statements	M	SD
1	Conflict in a working environment is avoidable	3.83	1.19
2	Conflict occurs between staff members and students	3.65	1.07
3	Conflict occurs among students	3.99	0.95
4	Conflict occurs between students and administration	3.89	0.95
5	Conflict in organization spoils the atmosphere	4.27	0.94
6	Conflict in organization is resolved promptly	3.53	1.11
7	There is proper mechanism for conflict resolution	3.85	1.15
8	Conflict still exists in organization	3.83	1.04
9	Conflict affects organizational performance	4.29	0.93
	Overall	3.87	0.57

Table 1 shows that respondents are "Agreed" (Range from 3.51 to 4.50) with all the statements which represent the different natures of conflicts among university students. The highest mean score was recorded for the effects of organizational performances on conflicts which was 4.29.

Results

Research questions 2. What are the causes of conflicts among University students at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

Table 2

Causes of Conflicts among university students (N=580)

S. No	Statements	M	SD
1	Conflict may occur due to misuse of powers	4.24	0.86
2	Conflict may occur due to misunderstanding of stakeholders	4.02	0.78
3	Poor Communication leads to conflict in universities	3.98	0.94
4	Teacher/administrator's biased attitude leads to conflict	3.91	0.94
5	Personal interests of faculty/students create conflict	3.84	1.01
6	Misinterpretation of rule leads to conflict	3.92	0.87
7	Lack of patience creates conflict	3.99	0.95
8	Delaying tactics is the cause of conflict	3.87	0.96
9	Political interference causes conflict	3.06	0.96
	Overall	3.98	0.52

Table 2 shows that respondents are "Undecided" (Range from 2.51 to 3.50) with the statement "Political interference causes conflict" having M= 3.06, SD=0.52 while the respondents are "Agreed" (Range from 3.51 to 4.50) with all the other statements having different means and standard deviations, which show that conflicts at university level are caused by different factors and students' conflicts at university level occur due to different factors. The highest mean score 4.24 for the statement "conflict may occur due to misuse of powers" which indicates that it's the key cause of conflict in the universities.

Results

Research question 3. What kinds of strategies are used by academic personnel to resolve the students' conflicts among University students at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

Table 3

Approaches or strategies to resolve conflict among university students (N= 580)

S.No	Statements	M	SD
1	Conflict is always transformed by negotiation	4.03	0.92
2	Resolution needs to discover the basic cause of conflict	4.02	0.85
3	Conflict is resolved by dialogue	4.04	0.93
4	Conflict resolution needs acceptable communication skills	4.12	0.85
5	Conflict is resolved by mediation	3.81	1.00
6	The use of force bring good solution to conflict	3.02	1.34
7	Force always gets to the root of the conflict	3.17	1.25
8	Non- violent means of conflict obtain long- lasting ends	3.68	1.03
9	Organization adopts a collaborative approach for conflict resolution	3.72	1.04
	Overall	3.74	0.56

Table 3 shows that respondents are "Undecided" (Range from 2.51 to 3.50) with the statements "The use of force brings good solution to conflict" and "Force always gets to the root of the conflict" having M= 3.02, SD=1.34 and M=3.17, SD=1.25 respectively while the respondents are "Agreed" (Range from 3.51 to 4.50) with all the other statements having different means and standard deviations. The highest mean score was recorded for “conflict resolution needs acceptable communication skills” (4.12), reflecting that communication skills helps to resolve conflicts in university

Results

Research question 4 what kind of role is played by academic personnel to resolve the students’ conflicts among University students at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

Table 4

Role of academic personnel in conflict resolution among university students (N= 580)

S.No	Statements	M	SD
1	Conflict is resolved by students' groups	3.48	1.20
2	Conflict is resolved by teachers at Department level	3.89	0.90
3	Conflict is resolved by University Disciplinary Committee	3.92	0.97
4	Academic Personnel plays a key role in conflict resolution	3.91	0.99
5	Academic units arrange seminars on conflict management	3.64	1.11
6	Classroom instruction a key instrument for conflict resolution	3.63	1.03
7	University organize opportunities on conflict resolution strategies	3.59	1.09
8	Teaching faculty use mediation for conflict resolution	3.70	0.95
9	Teaching faculty facilitates students in their conflicts resolution according to university rules	3.87	0.59
	Overall	3.73	0.60

Table 4 shows that respondents are "Undecided" (Range from 2.51 to 3.50) with the statement "Conflict is resolved by students' groups" having M= 3.48, SD=1.20 while the respondents are "Agreed" (Range from 3.51 to 4.50) with all the other statements having different means and standard deviations, which show that conflicts are resolved by different people (teachers, UDC, Academic personnel) at different level. It further shows that resolution strategies are adopted according to the nature of conflicts. The highest mean score was recorded for (3.92 mean score) University Disciplinary Committee which shows the committee performs a great role in the resolution of students conflicts in universities.

Conclusion

The following conclusion was drawn from the results:

1. Majority of the respondents with mean scores (Range from 3.51 to 4.50) with all the statements agreed which represents the different natures of conflicts among university students. The highest mean score recorded for the effects of organizational performances on conflicts was 4.29.
2. The overall responses of the respondents on causes of conflicts in universities were (3.98 mean score) which shows that majority of the respondents were agreed with the identified causes in research instrument. The highest mean score 4.24 for the statement “conflict may occur due to misuse of powers” which was identified as a main cause of conflicts in universities.
3. The overall responses of the respondents on the strategies adopted for conflict resolutions were (3.74 mean score). The highest mean score recorded for “conflict resolution needs acceptable communication skills” (4.12 mean score), reflecting that communication skills helps to resolve conflicts in university environment.
4. The overall responses of the respondents on the role of academic personnel in conflict resolution were (3.74 mean score). The highest mean score recorded for (3.92 mean score) University Disciplinary Committee (UDC) which shows the UDC perform a great role in the resolution of students’ conflicts in universities.

Recommendations

Keeping in view the conclusion of the study the following recommendations are made.

1. Since conflict is indispensable in universities, academic personnel may not take it politely and kindly and may tackle it at gross root level as it could influence the organizational environment and resultantly affect the organizational performance.
2. The university should embark on training and retraining of its teachers in area of conflict management so as to create a congenial working environment for the students.
3. There should be efficient and effective communication between and among all categories of human resources in the organisation. This will reduce conflictual situations in the universities.

4. Problems of shared resources among the human resources by the management may be dealt with before it has emotional impact on the performance of the university.
5. Management may formulate policies that are based on equality and ensure that it may not provide base for conflicts among different stakeholders but it may contribute into the resolution of conflicts that may occurs within the organisation.
6. Relational conflict melting strategy —confronting — and relational conflict compounding strategy —this covers compromising, forcing, smoothing and withdrawing strategies may be adopted for the resolution of students' conflicts as these strategies benefit at any level and in any circumstances

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