

Conflict Resolution Strategies Used By Nursing Educators: Students' Perspective¹Ghada M. Hamouda, ²Eman El-Sayed Taha, ¹Ebtsam Aly Abou Hashish¹Nursing Administration Department, Faculty of Nursing, Alexandria University, Egypt²Nursing Education Department, Faculty of Nursing, Alexandria University, Egypt
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Abstract: Aim: This study aims to determine conflict resolution strategies used by nursing educators from students' perspective. The study conducted in Faculty of Nursing, Alexandria University. 50% of nursing students (n = 435) enrolled in the four academic years of the faculty was selected randomly. Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) questionnaire used in this study to determine conflict management styles educators use to handle conflict with students. Results: Nursing students perceived that avoiding style of conflict resolution was the highest style used by their nursing educators. While, integrating style was the lowest one. The findings highlighted the importance of providing appropriate training programs for conflict management and resolution frequently to nursing educators in order to teach them how to deal with student' conflict more effectively.

[Ghada M. Hamouda, Eman El-Sayed Taha, Ebtsam Aly Abou Hashish. **Conflict Resolution Strategies Used By Nursing Educators: Students' Perspective**] Journal of American Science 2012; 8(2):209-216].(ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.americanscience.org>. 33

Keywords: Conflict, conflict resolution strategies, nursing students, nurse educators

1. Introduction:

Conflict is healthy, common, and necessary for students' growth. However, conflict can become destructive to student learning when it is personal or becomes an obstacle to learning completion⁽¹⁾.

University students are known to experience stress inducing problems throughout their education. Nursing students' inability to effectively manage the conflicts they encounter with their teachers is considered to be one of the reasons they have these problems⁽¹⁾. Conflicts in the relationship between students and instructors may occur for a several reasons. The reasons of conflict were found to be; communication problems, lack of openness, time and feedback as students could lack dialogue skills with their teachers which could result in misunderstandings, a lack of shared meaning, and confusion which can result in conflict and create resentment. In addition to, the equivocal expectations between students and instructors difficulty in compromising with the values and the rules of the society, authority issues, anger and irritation, low performance and responsibilities, and disobedience to the rules and policies of the educational setting^(1,2). Another source of conflict is difference in thinking styles among students and teachers. Both teachers and Students have different backgrounds, unique views of the world, and a variety of thinking styles. This diversity provides rich resources for problem solving and conflict. Not understanding or appreciating the value of other students' thinking styles creates conflict⁽¹⁾.

The Effective and constructive management of conflict can minimize the negative effects and decrease its negative effects on the learning environ-

ment, students, and educators⁽²⁾. Moreover, in educational setting, successful navigation of conflict depends on norms indicating commitment to conflict resolution, clear resolution procedures, and individual skills of teachers⁽³⁾.

The conflict management conceptualization of **Rahim (2000, 1983)** is the most popular. He developed one of the most well-known questionnaires on styles of conflict management. Rahim differentiated the styles of handling interpersonal conflict into two basic dimensions: Concern for self and concern for others. The first dimension explains the degree to which a person attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns. The second dimension explains the degree to which a person wants to satisfy the concern of others. Conflict handling styles include integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising^(4,5).

In integrating style, also known as a problem solving style, an individual shows more interest in the concerns of the self and the others. This style includes cooperation between groups (openness, sharing of ideas, examination of differences) to reach a solution that can be accepted on both sides.

In the obliging style, the individual shows less concern for the self and a high level of concern for the other side. **In the dominating style**, which is also known as the competing style, the person shows high level of concern for self and a low level of concern for the other side. This style can also be described as being consistent with a win-lose resolution or as an individual strengthening their position to win.

In the avoiding style, the individual shows a low level of concern for the self and for the other side. This style is also known as assimilation or sup-

pression and is a combination of withdrawal, passively assuming responsibility.

In the compromising style the individual shows intermediate level of concern for the self and the other side. This style uses give-and-take or sharing the willingness to give up something to be able to make a decision that is acceptable to both sides^(4,6). Using the terminology of game theory, integrating style is identified with win-win term, obliging with no win/no lose, compromising style with lose-win, dominating style with win-lose, and finally avoiding style with lose-lose terms⁽⁴⁾.

Most of the research studies conflicts in nursing have been concerned with employee-centered research on the staff nurses in hospitals. Few studies in nursing have been concerned with modes of conflict resolution or sources of conflict and their resolution within educational setting⁽¹⁾. The shared opinion presented in all of research studies is that it is necessary to investigate the conflict style used to decrease instructor-student conflict, ensure student and instructor satisfaction, and create healthy learning environments. However, it is also reported that this particular issue has been rarely investigated in the institutions of nursing education, on which this study was planned. Based on such a need,

The aims of this study are to determine the conflict management styles used by nurse educators with nursing students.

Research question:

What are the conflict resolution styles commonly used by nursing educators from nursing students' perspective?

2. Material and Methods

Material

Research design:

The study used a descriptive design

Setting:

The study was conducted in faculty of nursing, Alexandria University.

Subjects:

The subjects comprised a random sample of 50% of nursing student (N = 435) 55,102,139 and 139 enrolled in the four academic years (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th) respectively 2010-2011.

Tool of the study

Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) Questionnaire was developed by Rahim (1983,2000) was used for this study to determine conflict resolution styles teacher use to handle interpersonal conflict with students^(4,5). It is a 28 item

classified into five styles namely: Integrating (I- seven items), Obliging (O- six items), Dominating (D- five items), Avoiding (A- six items), and Compromising (C- four items). Responses were measured on a 5-point likert scale ranged from "5" strongly agree to "1" strongly disagree. A higher score represents greater use of a conflict style.

In addition, a personal information form was developed by the researchers after review of related literature and contained a total of seven questions inquiring the students' sex, age, academic year, frequency of experiencing conflict, environment in which the conflict was experienced and evaluation of success in conflict resolution.

Methods

1-Written approval from administrative personnel as well as students were obtained in the identified setting to collect the necessary data.

2-Tool was tested for its reliability using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient to measure the internal consistency of the items. The dimensions of the tool were reliable (Cronbach's alpha coefficient = 0.852)

3-A pilot study was conducted on 40 nursing students (10%) that were not included in the study subjects in order to; check and ensure clarity and applicability of the tools; identify obstacles and problems that may be encountered during data collection and estimate the time needed to fill the questionnaires. In the light of the findings of the pilot study, no changes occurred in the tools and the tools were put in their final form.

4-Data was collected through an individual interview with each student using the structured questionnaires. Each interview took a period of 30 minutes for each student.

Data was collected in two months started from 1/12/2010 to 30/1/2011.

Statistical analysis

Data collected were processed manually and tabulated

3. Results:

The result of the present study showed that more than half of students had less than twenty years old and majority of them were female, one third of the students were enrolled in third as well as in fourth academic year. Table (1)

Regarding students' opinion about experiences of conflict with their teachers. The highest percentages of nursing students (64.4%) stated that they had experienced conflict with nurse educators during their learning experiences. More than half of them stated that they sometimes experienced conflict with

their teachers. 44.4% of the students experienced conflict in the clinical area. While, one third experienced conflict in both clinical area and classrooms. Finally, 56.1% of students felt that they were partially successful to manage conflict with their nurse educators. On the other hand, one quarter of students felt that nurse educators were successful in managing conflict with them (Table 2).

It was found that nursing student gave highest mean score to *Avoiding* conflict resolution style where ($x=55.7$), while the lowest mean score was related to *Integrating* style where ($x=49.8$). (Fig. 1)

A statistical significant difference was revealed between male and female nursing students regarding conflict resolution styles of integrating and compromising styles where $p= (0.005, 0.028)$ respectively (Table 3).

There are significant differences among students enrolled in different academic years and their perspectives on the conflict resolution styles of Integrating, Obligating, and Dominating styles where $p=(0.014,0.007,0.000)$ respectively. While, there is no significant differences among students regarding compromising as well as avoiding styles of conflict resolution where $p=(0.546)$ for each of them (Table 4)

There are statistically significant relationship between the frequency of experiencing conflict and

each of integrating, obligating and compromising conflict resolution styles of nurse educators. While, there is no significant relationship between experience of conflict and dominating as well as avoiding styles of conflict resolution. In addition, Obligating styles had the highest mean score among students who experiences conflict always where ($x=62.7$). While, the lowest mean score among students who sometimes or seldom experienced conflict with their teachers was related to avoiding style (Table 5).

There was no statistical significant relationship between conflict resolution styles and conflict experiences environment. Also, obligating and avoiding styles had the higher mean scores in both classroom and clinical area. While, integrating style had the lowest mean score in both classroom and clinical area (Table 6).

Significant relationship was found between degree of students' feeling of success in managing conflict and all conflict resolution styles of nurse educators. Avoiding style had the highest mean score among students who felt successful or partially successful in managing conflict with their teachers where mean (50.1, 56.6) respectively. While, Obligating style had the highest mean score (62.2) among students who felt unsuccessful in managing conflict with their teachers.

Table (1) Distribution of nursing students according to their demographic characteristics (N= 435).

Variable	No	%
Age (years)		
<20	221	50.8
20-	203	46.7
22-	11	2.5
Sex		
Male	117	26.9
Female	318	73.1
Academic Year		
First	55	12.6
Second	102	23.4
Third	139	32
Fourth	139	32

Table (2) Distribution of nursing students according to their conflict experiences

Variable	No	%
Previous experiencing conflict with teacher		
Yes	280	64.4
No	155	35.6
Frequency of experiencing conflict with teacher		
Always/Often	42	9.7
Sometimes	243	55.9
Seldom	150	34.5
Conflict experienced environment		
Classroom	74	17
Clinical Area	193	44.4
Both of them	168	38.6
Feeling of success in managing conflict with teacher		
Successful	111	25.5
Partially successful	244	56.1
Unsuccessful	80	18.4

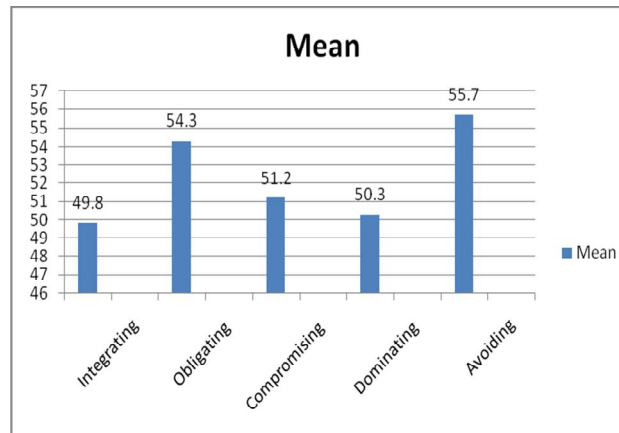


Figure (1) Nurse educators' conflict resolution styles from nursing student perspective (N= 435).

Table (3): Relationship between nursing students' sex and nurse educators' conflict resolution styles

Conflict resolution styles	SEX		F (P)
	Male	Female	
Integrating	46.2±15.69	51.1±16.27	7.970 * (0.005)
Obligating	51.9 ±15.88	55.2± 16.36	3.661 (0.056)
Compromising	48.2±17.24	52.4±17.62	4.841 * (0.028)
Dominating	51.1± 14.58	50.0±15.72	0.473 (0.492)
Avoiding	54.1±13.84	56.3±14.25	2.152 (0.143)

Table (4): Relationship between nursing students' academic year and nurse educators' conflict resolution styles

Conflict resolution styles	Academic year				F (P)
	1 st year (n=55) SD±x	2 nd year (n=102) SD±x	3 rd year (n=139) SD±x	4 th year (n=139) SD±x	
Integrating	13.44 ±56.3	17.14 ±48.9	16.72 ±49.4	15.64 ±48.2	3.595 *(0.014)
Obligating	10.91 ±60.8	18.1 ±52.7	17.70 ±52.4	14.52 ±54.9	4.111 *(0.007)
Compromising	13.71 ±54.1	18.94 ±50.2	19.83 ±51.6	15.48 ±50.4	0.711 (0.546)
Dominating	10.35 ±58.2	15.06 ±51.9	17.64±47.5	13.84 ±48.7	7.421 *(0.000)
Avoiding	13.10 ±54.7	14.35 ±55.9	15.79±57.0	12.66 ±54.7	0.711 (0.546)

Table (5): Relationship between nursing students' experience of conflict and nurse educators' conflict resolution styles

Conflict resolution styles	Frequency of experiencing conflict			F (P)
	Always (n=42) SD±x	Sometimes (n=243) SD±x	Seldom (n=150) SD±x	
Integrating	16.06±58.7	16.04 ±48.9	15.97±48.7	7.295 *(0.001)
Obligating	16.71± 62.7	15.66±53.4	16.58± 53.4	6.328 *(0.002)
Compromising	18.14±59.2	17.62±50.4	16.94± 50.3	4.854 *(0.008)
Dominating	15.10±53.8	15.83±49.6	14.77±50.4	1.280 (0.279)
Avoiding	12.73±57.9	13.86± 55.7	15.02± 55.5	0.561 (0.571)

Table (6): Relationship between Conflict experience's environment and conflict resolution styles

Conflict resolution styles	Conflict experiences environment			F (P)
	Classroom (n=74) SD±x	Clinical area (n=193) SD±x	Both of them (n=168) SD±x	
Integrating	16.38±51.0	16.05 ±48.9	16.45±50.3	0.582 (0.559)
Obligating	16.04±54.5	15.58±55.0	17.21±53.5	0.366 (0.693)
Compromising	16.84±52.6	16.36±50.1	19.25±51.9	0.702 (0.496)
Dominating	15.04±52.2	14.24±49.6	16.83±50.2	0.790 (0.454)
Avoiding	13.42±53.0	12.26±55.3	16.22±57.4	2.671 (0.070)

Table (7): Relation between feeling of success of conflict resolution and conflict resolution styles

Conflict resolution styles	feeling of success of conflict resolution			F (P)
	Successful (n=111) $\pm \times$ SD	Partially successful (n=244) $\pm \times$ SD	Unsuccessful (n=80) $\pm \times$ SD	
Integrating	12.33 \pm 39.7	15.08 \pm 50.6	16.14 \pm 61.2	1.355 *(0.000)
Obligating	45.6 \pm 13.83	55.7 \pm 15.46	16.68 \pm 62.2	29.854 *(0.000)
Compromising	42.3 \pm 14.45	51.9 \pm 15.91	20.19 \pm 61.6	32.719 *(0.000)
Dominating	14.71 \pm 48.5	49.6 \pm 14.04	19.29 \pm 54.8	4.387 *(0.013)
Avoiding	14.46 \pm 50.1	56.6 \pm 13.00	14.69 \pm 60.9	15.715 *(0.000)

4. Discussion:

Constructive conflict management strategies are important in maintaining a positive classroom environment yet little is known about interpersonal or school variables associated with teachers' use of such strategies with students. Although conflict experienced in education cannot be entirely eliminated, it is possible to minimize its negative effects with effective management of conflict. The goal of conflict management is to interfere with negative or dysfunctional conflict while encouraging healthy conflict that will incite the individuals, primarily, and groups to be innovative and successful⁽⁷⁾.

The result of the present study revealed that the highest percentages of all nursing students experienced conflict with nurse educators during their learning experiences, experienced conflict in the clinical area followed by classroom although there is no significant relationship between conflict resolution styles and conflict experience environment. Also, students feel that they were partially successful to manage conflict with their nurse educators. The reason was possibly that the students have more chance to develop a one-to-one relationship with their instructors in the clinical areas in comparison to the classroom environment and encounter a variety of clinical-specific problems. This relationship might involve difference in opinions and attitudes between teachers and students that could result in conflicting issues or situations. This could be supported by **Kim (2003)** who illustrated that anxiety levels and interpersonal relationships of the students with their teachers may be adversely affected by a variety of factors such as being monitored by the instructors in the clinical area, fear of making mistakes or being assessed by the instructors, and relationship with the health professionals in the clinical unit, which could

causes conflict and disagreement between teachers and students.⁽⁸⁾

This is consistent with the findings of **Kantek and Gezer (2009)** who revealed that the majority of the students stated that they had experienced conflicts with a faculty member during their educational and learning experience. Also, the results of **Kantek and Gezer (2009)** study have shown that the majority of students experienced conflict with teachers, that majority of those who experienced conflict stated, that the most common site for conflict was in the clinical field, and that the students perceived that they were successful in conflict management⁽²⁾.

In this respect, Meyers, Bender, Hill, and Thomas (2006) stated that instructors who had uncaring behaviors experienced higher levels of conflict with students and conflict was found to be associated with instructors' choice of teaching methods, their demeanor in clinical training, and the way they responded to demanding situations. Strategies like communicating respect, clarifying course goals, involving students in solving problems, and encouraging a sense of clinical and classroom community could be helpful in managing conflict successfully⁽⁹⁾.

The result of the present study revealed that nursing students perceived that **avoiding** style of conflict resolution was the highest style used by their nursing educators followed by obligating style. While, **integrating** style was the lowest style used by their nurse educators in managing teacher- student conflict. Also, avoiding style had the highest mean score among students who felt successful or partially successful in managing conflict with their teachers and students who sometimes or seldom experienced conflict with their teachers. This could be explained that both teachers and students might perceive that experiencing a conflict would damage their relationship. Student might fear of retribution and trouble

with teachers and fear about their achievement that could be affected by conflict with teachers. And teachers have a power in their relationship with their students. Accordingly, because a student has little chance of defying a faculty member it was expected that the both would use less aggressive styles in their conflicts such as avoidance behaviors. This could be supported by **Jamieson and Thomas (1994)** who stated that the predominance of avoidance behaviors when students experience differences or conflict with their teachers portrays a relative inability or unwillingness of the students to be other than passive, dependent receiver of whatever comes from the teachers at the same times teachers also tend to avoid and dislike problem and troubles with students⁽¹⁰⁾. Also, **Harrison (2007)** found that students harbor or avoid conflicts with their teachers because they are afraid or because they view pursuing a resolution to the conflict as futile will likely lessen their evaluations of the university, make interactions with teacher more difficult, and likely have an impact on the quality of education they experience⁽¹¹⁾.

On the other hand, nursing students perceived that *integrating* styles was the least styles used by nurse educators in managing conflict with students. This could be related to the perceived power differential that could separate students and teachers and the tendency of teacher not to confront issues openly with their students. Also, student might lack the self esteem that could contribute to difficulties in expressing negative emotion with their teachers and avoid to confront even to find a collaborative solution to any problem. This could be supported by **Valentine (2001)** who stated that infrequent use of integrating styles may be related to lack of student self assurance to confront conflict with their teachers and lack of commitment as well as recognition of collaborative situation between teachers and students⁽¹²⁾.

However, the result of the present study was inconsistent with **Kantek and Gezer (2009)** who revealed the most commonly used style was the integrating management style, followed in second by the compromising style. In addition, the least used management style was the dominating style which results in win-lose solutions.⁽²⁾ Also, **Rahim et al., 2000; 2002** found that the most frequently used conflict management style in the educational environment has been noted to be the integrating style, and the least used styles have been reported to be the dominating style and avoiding style^(6,13).

In this respect, (**Abdul-Basit et al., 2010**) stated that, the heart of conflict resolution is the management of conflict and an important aspect is enabling teachers and students to mediate and to find their own solution to a disagreement. This relates to promoting ethical and social development, inter-student and

student-teacher relations, and problem-solving skills⁽¹⁴⁾. Also, **Good and Brophy (1997)** stated that teacher who try to understand the problem from the student's point of view and approach classroom and clinical training management as a process of establishing and maintaining effective learning environments are more successful than teachers who place more stress on their roles as authority figures or disciplinarians⁽¹⁵⁾. In addition, **Abdul-Basit et al. (2010)** and **Good and Brophy (1997)** recommended that teachers should focus on the development of cognitive and interpersonal skills for conflict resolution instead of heavy and inflexible use of rules as it may lead to student dissatisfaction and resentment. In order to promote good behavior and reduce conflicts, teachers should listen to students, taking their points of view and use negotiating and using problem solving techniques^(14,15).

The present study revealed that there is significant difference among male and female nursing students. Female student have higher mean percent score regarding conflict resolution styles of integrating and compromising styles. This could be related to that teacher might take in consideration the nature of female students who could be more concerned with their interpersonal relationship with others; they could find conflict threatening to them so they have a tendency to compromise something or collaborate with teacher rather than confronting any problems with them. This could be supported by **Harrison (2007)** who found that females are more likely to be concerned with relationship than male and more likely to build coalitions and more concerned about relationship with teachers and demonstrating more concern for their future relationship through their collaborative and positive behaviors⁽¹¹⁾. This result is consistent with **Seren and Baykal (2007)** who found that female students have higher collaborative conflict resolution skills than male students⁽¹⁶⁾.

In the present study revealed, When some variables were compared with the conflict management styles, it was determined that there were statistically significant differences in style used according to the class year, frequency of experiencing conflict, and status of feeling successful in conflict and revealed that obligating style has the highest mean score among students enrolled in first academic year, among students who experiences conflict always and students who felt unsuccessful in managing conflict with their teachers. This result inconsistent with the findings of **Kantek and Gezer (2009)** which revealed that obliging style was used less by those who experienced conflict frequently, in comparison to those who experienced conflict rarely and occasionally. Moreover, the compromising and avoiding styles were used more by those who evaluated themselves

as unsuccessful in conflict management; and the integrating and obliging styles were used more by those who felt successful in conflict⁽²⁾. Also, **Rahime (2000)** revealed that those using the integrating style experiencing infrequent conflict and those using dominating or avoiding styles having more experience with conflict⁽⁶⁾.

In this respect, **Ustun and Seren (2008)** and **Seren and Baykal (2007)** suggested the emphasis on interpersonal relationships, communication and interaction covered in the nursing education curriculum, as well as skills employed during practice, are influential in developing conflict resolution skills^(1,16). Also **Martin (1998)** recommended that educators must change how they view and in turn use conflict. Through the use of appropriate training and an increased awareness of conflict management and resolution, schools and universities can produce not only good learners but also effective teachers⁽¹⁷⁾.

Conclusion and Recommendation:

The finding of this study concluded that:

Nursing students perceived that **avoiding** style of conflict resolution was the highest style used by their nursing educators. While, **integrating** style was the lowest style used by their nurse educators in managing teacher- student conflict.

Based on the previous findings the following are recommended:

- Appropriate training programs for conflict management and resolution should be provided frequently to nursing educators in order to teach them how to deal with student' conflict more effectively.
- Nurse educators should enhance a healthy learning environment with open communications and listen to students.
- Nursing educators should increase the stress on the importance of conflict and conflict management in core curricula of the nursing students especially from the first academic year for students' enrollment.
- Nurse educators should utilize strategies like communicating respect, clarifying course goals, involving students in solving problems, and encouraging a sense of clinical and classroom community which could be helpful in managing conflict successfully.
- Further research study is recommended for determining conflict resolution style utilized with students from nursing educators' perspective.

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