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Gender, age and nationality: assessing their impact on conflict resolution styles

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the conflict resolution styles used by university students in handling conflicts, and to determine the effects (if any) of age, nationality and gender on how students respond to conflicts.

Design/methodology/approach – The Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument was adopted to assess the conflict resolution styles (accommodating, avoiding, collaborative, competitive and compromising) of post graduate students in a University in Malaysia. Both ANOVA and t-test analyses were utilized to investigate the relationship between, nationality, gender, age and conflict resolution styles used by students.

Findings – Results of this study indicates that female students used competitive style more than male students, while male students are more likely to avoid conflicts. The older students were discovered to use more avoiding, while younger students are more likely to be competitive in nature. The findings did not reveal any significant differences in nationality.

Originality/value – This paper expands its focus from gender (which is the most commonly tested category) to other categories such as age and nationality, thereby giving room for these new categories to be tested extensively in future researches. The results reveal that students not only use different conflict resolution styles to address conflicts, but also there exists differences in the styles used by students of different age groups and gender.

Keywords Conflict resolution, Collaborative, Accommodating, Avoiding, Competitive, Compromising, Gender and Nationality

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
University setting is a large academic gathering of students from various countries, and backgrounds, each with unique, perceptions, beliefs, values and ideologies. It is impossible to have an environment of this nature devoid of conflict. Carpenter (2010), cited some reasons for conflicts that occur in university settings, e.g., academic egos, social class, high school locale among other factors. While it may be impossible to eradicate conflict totally from any organization or institution, it is very important to identify and understand the conflict resolution styles used by students in handling conflicts, because understanding conflict resolution strategies gives room for proper
conflict management that becomes beneficial to the organization or institution (McKenzie, 2002).

Researchers have identified an array of conflict resolution styles that can be used in the resolution of conflicts over the years. Blake and Mouton (1964) are credited with introducing five conflict resolution styles namely; smoothing, compromising, forcing, withdrawal and problem solving. These styles were later interpreted by Thomas and Kilmann (1974) as accommodating, avoiding, collaborating, competing and compromising; these models where hinged on two dimensions; concern for self (assertiveness and unassertiveness) and concern for others (co-operativeness and uncooperativeness).

In the light of the above, this study focusses on testing the popular conflict mode instrument of Thomas-Kilmann which was introduced in 1975, in a university setting, to help identify the degree to which some or all of Thomas-Kilmann conflict strategies are used by students. It also goes some steps further to prove if there are any differences in gender, age and nationality in the use of these strategies among students.

According to Thomas and Kilmann (1974), individuals tend to exhibit diverse behavioral patterns in resolving conflicts with other people. These patterns are commonly referred to as conflict resolution styles or strategies, namely; accommodating, avoiding, competitive, compromising and collaborating. They identified two dimensions that define the five different conflict styles for responding to conflict situations, namely:

Assertiveness: the extent to which a person attempts to satisfy his own concerns.

Cooperativeness: the extent to which a person attempts to satisfy the concern of another.

They further explained the relationship of these dimensions to the conflict resolution styles as thus:

Competing: assertive and uncooperative; an individual pursues his own concern at the expense of the other persons.

Accommodating: unassertive and cooperative; it is the complete opposite of competitive, in the sense that a person neglects his own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person, with an element of self-sacrifice.

Avoiding: is unassertive and uncooperative; an individual neither pursues his own concern or that of the other person, by not dealing with the conflict, postponing, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.

Collaborating: this is both assertive and cooperative; an opposite of avoiding, an attempt to work with others to find solutions that fully satisfies their concerns.

Compromising: this moderate in both assertive and cooperative, it aims to find a mutually acceptable position that partially satisfies both parties, it gives up more than competing and less than accommodating, it is like a middle ground (Thomas and Kilmann, 1974).

Competing has been identified with forcing behavior and win-lose arguing; collaborating has been identified with confronting disagreements and problem solving to find solutions; avoiding has been identified with withdrawal and failure to take a position; accommodating has been identified with attempting to soothe the other person and seek harmony; and compromising has been identified with the proposal of middle-ground positions (Blake and Mouton, 1964).

While individuals may often respond to conflicts using a particular approach or strategy, it is important to note that these strategies are not mutually exclusive,
in the sense that individuals may employ several approaches when attempting to resolve a conflict or influence behavior, depending on the nature of the conflict or the relationship. In other words it is possible for an individual to respond to conflicts with strategies they deem appropriate at the time (Thomas and Kilmann, 1975; Borisoff and Victor, 1998).

Although previous researches using the TK mode have been carried out in managerial context and focussed mainly on gender, it is rather interesting to note that this study reveals the presence of these strategies among students as well as some differences or preferences with not just gender but also age and nationality in the use of these Thomas-Kilmann strategies.

**Literature review**

The very first models of conflict management were introduced in the early 1970s and these models measured conflict mostly along the dimension of concern for others, represented by the bipolar anchors of cooperativeness and uncooperativeness (Deutsch, 1973). The models were later rejected based on the fact that they could not account for strategies involving concerns for self-interests (Thomas and Kilmann, 1975; Brahnam et al., 2005).

Blake and Mouton (1964) expanded the one dimensional model of Deutsch (1973) to two, thereby measuring conflict based on two orthogonal dimensions that includes concern for others (cooperativeness and uncooperativeness) and a concern for self (assertiveness and unassertiveness). Within these two dimensions Thomas and Kilmann (1974) developed a popular framework, which accounts for five styles of handling conflicts: avoiding, collaborating, competing, compromising and accommodating (Brahnam et al., 2005).

Over the past years’ models emerged in social research, which involved a five-category scheme for classifying interpersonal conflict handling modes. This scheme was first introduced by Blake and Mouton (1964), and reinterpreted by Thomas (1976), the scheme includes the five modes of avoiding, collaborating, compromising, accommodating and competing (Kilmann and Thomas, 1977). An advantage of the scheme is the reflection of independent dimensions of interpersonal conflict by the five specific modes.

According to Thomas (1976), cooperativeness attempts to satisfy the other person’s concerns and assertiveness attempts to satisfy one’s own concerns. High in concern for self, uncooperativeness and assertiveness is the competing style, low in concern for self and assertion is the avoiding style, which is also uncooperative, collaborating which is assertive and cooperative seeks to construct solutions that meets the needs of all the parties involved in a conflict, accommodating which is unassertive and cooperative, sacrifices self-interest to meet the needs of others and finally compromising which is the midpoint between cooperativeness and assertiveness, involves making concessions to arrive at a resolution (Thomas and Kilmann, 1975; Brahnam et al., 2005).

Although the Thomas-Kilmann styles and framework have become popular with respect to conflict resolution styles, it has been criticized by some researchers, Pruitt and Rubin (1986) cited by Morris et al. (1998) on theoretical grounds argued that it is redundant to model conflict resolution styles in terms of five dispositions (Brahnam et al., 2005). While there may be inconsistencies in the evidence that validates this taxonomy of conflict styles, especially because there exist three other instruments which purport to assess the same five conflict-handling modes, the Thomas and Kilmann instrument is believed to be valid and reliable in measuring conflict like others hence its wide use in academic research (Brahnam et al., 2005; Thomas and Kilmann, 1975) (Figure 1).
Gender and conflict resolution styles

The question of whether or how gender influences the use of conflict resolution styles has generated an array of views and controversies over the years. This maybe as a result of the fact that “history has to a large extent shaped the propensity to view the world as opposites and has led to the division of behavioral roles and norms according to sex.” Men are said to be adventurous, dominant, forceful and strong willed, while women are said to be emotional, passive, dependent, nurturing, assertive and co-operative (Borisoff and Victor, 1998).

Women have been taught traditionally to define their self within relationship, and socialized to abandon personal goals for the benefit of other people, on the other hand men are taught to define themselves based on domination and control and are socialized with aggression, assertion and independence (Gilligan, 1982; Eagly and Karau 1991). Some studies support the long-standing assumption about cultural stereotypes that women are mostly cooperative in conflict than men and that men have the tendency to be more competitive than women. Studies have revealed that women show strong preference for accommodation and compromise and less preference for domination and competition than men (Rubin and Brown, 1975; Thomas and Kilmann, 1975; Korabik et al., 1993).

Psychological studies have shown that men and women tend to endorse conflict management strategies that complement gender role expectations. Despite the belief that women in general population often show preference for accommodation and less favorable to competing style of resolving conflict, Brahnam et al. (2005) reported that, that was not the case in their research. However, the men demonstrated a gender-specific preference for the avoidance style of conflict management (Brahnam et al., 2005).

In handling conflicts females have often time rated males as less co-operative and more competitive, and males have rated females as more co-operative and less competitive (Esin and Ayhan, 2001). Recently some findings have shown that men tend to use avoiding strategies in conflict management more than women, and these findings are related to gender role expectations which portray men as less able to manage relationships and possess a calm demeanor naturally (Haferkamp, 1991).
Esin and Ayhan (2001), discovered that there actually existed amount of differences in the conflict resolution styles by male and female. The results revealed that males tend to use more competing behavior toward same-sex, avoiding behavior toward opposite sex, while compared to their female counterpart males reported more accommodating behavior toward both same-sex and opposite-sex peers.

On the hand other some researchers have argued that gender has little or no effect on conflict on resolution styles. Some have proposed in theories that the reason why there are fewer reported gender differences in the conflict resolution style of managers than among other populations is that women managers are socialized within the organization to become more like men (Korabik and Ayman, 1988; Brewer et al., 2002). The mixed views on gender may be as a result of two factors; first conflict resolution strategies are not mutually exclusive, that is individuals may employ several approaches in resolving conflicts and these approaches are used in diverse contexts such as professional or personal relationships (Borisoff and Victor, 1998).

Nationality and conflict resolution styles
The reaction of an individual in a conflict may vary; either as a result of situational variable or personality of the individual, evidence from previous research has indicated that an individual’s preference of conflict resolution style is hinged on their personal characteristics (Thomas and Kilmann, 1975; cited by Wafa, 1997). The development of one’s personality is believed to be influenced by certain factors such as psychological, culture, family or group, role and situational determinants. Based on this it would be safe to say that certain types of personalities are more strongly prevalent in certain cultures than others and this may in turn affect conflict resolution styles (Wafa, 1997).

It is believed that despite the universal existence of conflicts, chances are that they will be perceived and managed differently by managers of different ethnic origins as cultural factors as well as other structural variables are capable of influencing conflict (Thomas, 1976; Tang and Kirk Bride, 1986). The issue of culture and conflict also raises controversial views; some studies report no difference, while some report general cultural similarities with minor variation, and others report differences due to factors such as age, sex and role (Tang and Kirk Bride, 1986).

Sebastian (1997), his research findings although not conclusive hinted that potential differences do exist with respect to conflict behaviors using samples from three countries namely France, Germany and the USA. Although he stated that there was no significant difference in the use of competing, accommodating and avoiding, the USA showed greater significance in the use of compromising compared with the French and German. Wafa (1997) in his research which involved determining the preference mode of conflict resolution in Malaysian and Chinese managers did not see any significant differences between them, but rather both groups had similar preferences integrating (accommodating) had the highest score, while compromising, obliging (collaborating), dominating (competing) and avoiding modes followed.

Another research on Mexican-American and white non-Hispanic students revealed that there exist differences between the two groups in the handling of conflicts; For example, the results showed that Mexican-American students preferred a more collaborative orientation. Since the competitive mode is assertive but uncooperative whereas the collaborating mode is assertive and cooperative. They were more cooperative when approaching conflict than their white non-Hispanic counterpart (Watson et al., 1994).

Using the Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument, Tang and Kirk Bride (1986) found cultural differences in conflict handling styles between Chinese and British
Managers. With Chinese executives favoring less assertive (compromising, and avoiding) behaviors as their dominant style, while the British executives showed preference for more assertive (collaborating and competing) behaviors as their dominant style. Morris et al. (1998) argue that cross-cultural differences in conflict resolution styles cannot be reduced to single value dimension running from individualism to collectivism. The issue as to whether national cultures have effect in the way people handle conflict resolution has received a nod from most researchers who have indicated that to a very large extent culture has a significant role to play in conflict resolution styles exhibited by individuals (Kaushal and Kwantes, 2006).

Age group and conflict resolution styles
With respect to age and conflict resolution styles, not so much of attention is paid to it, but previous researches have indicated, the effect of age on conflict handling modes. Civelek and Dincyurek (2008) in their findings revealed that generally in studies on adults, it is observed that adults tend to use similar strategies like adolescents in different type of relationships.

Peterson and Peterson (1990); cited by Civelek and Dincyurek (2008) in their study that was performed in a school environment stated that both students and adults either use avoiding or confronting. Interestingly school principals tend to use accommodating strategies often, and avoiding less, while the perceptions of elementary and middle school teachers is different, this is because it was discovered that middle school teachers use forcing (competing) strategy more than elementary school teachers (Civelek and Dincyurek, 2008).

Wafa (1997), in his research titled “Malaysian managers: A study of their personality traits and conflict handling behaviors” discovered that age had a significant effect on conflict strategies, stating that as one grows older, the age influences the roles he or she is expected to play and significantly controls acceptable behavior patterns. In his findings Wafa (1997), discovered that older Malaysians are less likely to choose the avoiding mode of conflict handling behavior and less likely to withdraw from conflict situations. This could be associated with the strong importance Malaysians attach to age and seniority.

Purpose of study
The intent of this study is to investigate the conflict resolution styles used by students in a university and to also determine the role of factors like gender, nationality and age in the use of conflict resolution styles.

Hypothesis
Based on the foregoing reviews on the five conflict resolution styles with respect to age, gender and nationality, we hypothesize the following:

H1. There will be gender differences in conflict resolution styles used by students in a non-managerial environment.

H2. Older students will rate themselves higher in the use of avoiding strategy more than younger students.

H3. There will be differences in the conflict resolution styles used by students from different countries.
Methodology

Using the Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument (Kilmann and Thomas, 1977), post graduate students of a university in Malaysia were assessed with regard to their particular styles of conflict resolution. The reliability data for Thomas-Kilmann instrument have been reported as ranging from 0.65 to 0.68 (test-retest) and 0.69 to 0.71 (Cronbach α), which shows the reliability of the instrument for this kind of assessment (Rahim, 2001 cited by Brahnam et al., 2005). The collected data were subjected to a thorough statistical analysis, using ANOVA and t-test techniques to measure the effect of the three variables on choice of conflict resolution styles. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

This research investigated the conflict resolution styles used by the post graduate students of the university, according to age, nationality and gender, dividing them into males and females, four age groups and into nine nationality groups. The questionnaire is designed into two parts, part one includes six social and personal questions about gender, nationality, religion, race and field of study. Part two includes 45 statements to examine the five styles of conflict resolution. The researchers adopted eight statements about competitive style, 11 statements about collaborative style, seven statements about compromising style, nine statements about avoiding style, and nine statements about competitive style. The respondent ranked each statement by a number chosen from 1-5, where 1 = always, 2 = very often, 3 = sometimes, 4 = not very often, 5 = rarely, if ever.

According to the table for determining minimum returned sample size for a given population size for continuous and categorical data, which is developed by Bartlett et al. (2001), researchers chose a sample of 169 students from 425 active students. Random sampling method was adopted in this research.

Findings and interpretation

The sample of this study was 169 post graduate students, 64.5 percent of them were male, and 35.5 percent female. They were from different field of studies such as MBA, MA and PHD. Respondents were from Iran (11.8 percent), Nigeria (13 percent), Palestine (8.3 percent), India (7.7 percent) and Yemen (6.5 percent), China (4.7 percent), Malaysia (4.1 percent) and others 43.9 percent. The mean of age for the respondents was 26 years old:

H1. There will be gender differences in conflict resolution styles used by students in a non-managerial environment.

The research findings supported our H1 to a large extent; it revealed significant differences in the use of accommodating, avoiding, competitive and compromising among male and female students. With little or no significance difference in the use of collaborative approach. The result indicated that men used accommodating, avoiding and compromising styles more in handling of conflicts (with mean scores of 27.85, 29.65 and 19.84, respectively, which were considerably higher than that of the females; 21.41, 24.30 and 16.16, respectively also). Interestingly women were shown to be more competing in nature (with a mean score of 21.60 as against that of male students which came in at 15.88). The use of collaborating styles among the genders revealed little or no significant difference at 0.011 in handling conflict situations (refer to Table I):

H2. Older students will rate themselves higher in the use of avoiding strategy more than younger students.
The hypothesis was tested on all five conflict resolution styles, using the one-way ANOVA method to determine the relationship between students of four age groups: 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36 and above. The result supported our hypothesis two, as it revealed significant differences in the use of accommodating (significance 0.001), avoiding (significance 0.002) and compromising (significance 0.001) styles and no significant difference in collaborating (significance 0.758) and competing (significance 0.815). Younger students were seen to use accommodating and compromising strategy more, while older students preferred the avoiding strategy more.

Accommodating and compromising tables (respectively) that reveal younger students use these strategies more: (Table II(a)).

Avoiding strategy result, which reveals older students use it more than younger students (Table II(b) and (c): H3.

There will be differences in the conflict resolution styles used by students from different countries.

While the results revealed that students from different countries use the conflict resolution styles, it did not show preference for any particular style among the countries: accommodating (significance 0.230), avoiding (significance 0.261), collaborating (significance 0.801), competing (significance 0.681) and compromising (significance 0.810). Sebastian (1997), in his research findings hinted that potential cultural differences do exist with respect to conflict behaviors using samples from three national cultures namely France, Germany and the USA. Although he stated that there was no significant difference in the use of competing, accommodating and avoiding, the US culture showed greater significance in the use of compromising compared with the French and German cultures. It is important to note at this juncture, that no individual countries were analyzed against each other, but the researchers carried out a general analysis hence the generalization of our results (refer to Table III for full results).
| Conflict resolution styles | Sum of squares | df | Mean square | F    | Significance |
|----------------------------|----------------|----|-------------|------|--------------|
| **Accommodating**          |                |    |             |      |              |
| Between groups             | 1,087.927      | 3  | 362.642     |      |              |
| Within groups              | 10,299.540     | 165| 62.421      | 5.810| 0.001        |
| Total                      | 11,387.467     | 168|             |      |              |
| **Avoiding**               |                |    |             |      |              |
| Between groups             | 1,012.249      | 3  | 337.416     | 5.226| 0.002        |
| Within groups              | 10,653.313     | 165| 64.566      |      |              |
| Total                      | 11,665.562     | 168|             |      |              |
| **Collaborating**          |                |    |             |      |              |
| Between groups             | 96.774         | 3  | 32.528      | 0.394| 0.758        |
| Within groups              | 13,510.895     | 165| 81.884      |      |              |
| Total                      | 13,607.669     | 168|             |      |              |
| **Competing**              |                |    |             |      |              |
| Between groups             | 52.693         | 3  | 17.564      | 0.315| 0.815        |
| Within groups              | 9,210.148      | 165| 55.819      |      |              |
| Total                      | 9,262.840      | 168|             |      |              |
| **Compromising**           |                |    |             |      |              |
| Between groups             | 667.971        | 3  | 222.657     | 5.388| 0.001        |
| Within groups              | 6,818.029      | 165| 41.321      |      |              |
| Total                      | 7,486.000      | 168|             |      |              |

(a) **Accommodating strategy**: table showing that younger students use accommodating strategies more

| Age Group | Mean difference | SE  | Significance |
|-----------|-----------------|-----|--------------|
| 36-above  | 8.98558*        | 2.25871 | 0.002       |
| 21-25     | 7.73393*        | 2.18931 | 0.007       |
| 26-30     | 5.59476         | 2.43206 | 0.156       |

(b) **Compromising strategy**: table showing that younger students use compromising more

| Age Group | Mean difference | SE  | Significance |
|-----------|-----------------|-----|--------------|
| 36-above  | 6.14423*        | 1.83772 | 0.013       |
| 21-25     | 5.87500*        | 1.78126 | 0.014       |
| 26-30     | 2.79435         | 1.97877 | 0.575       |

(c) **Avoiding strategy**: table showing that older students use avoiding strategy more

| Age Group | Mean difference | SE  | Significance |
|-----------|-----------------|-----|--------------|
| 21-25     | 1.58187         | 1.47106 | 0.764       |
| 26-30     | 5.53164*        | 1.82329 | 0.030       |
| 36-above  | 7.15865*        | 2.29717 | 0.024       |

| Conflict resolution styles | Sum of squares | df | Mean square | F    | Significance |
|----------------------------|----------------|----|-------------|------|--------------|
| **Accommodating**          |                |    |             |      |              |
| Between groups             | 792.580        | 9  | 88.064      |      | 0.230        |
| Within groups              | 10,594.888     | 159| 66.635      | 1.322|              |
| Total                      | 11,387.467     | 168|             |      |              |
| **Avoiding**               |                |    |             |      |              |
| Between groups             | 777.969        | 9  | 86.441      |      | 0.261        |
| Within groups              | 10,887.593     | 159| 68.475      | 1.262|              |
| Total                      | 11,665.562     | 168|             |      |              |
| **Collaborating**          |                |    |             |      |              |
| Between groups             | 442.579        | 9  | 49.175      |      | 0.801        |
| Within groups              | 13,165.090     | 159| 82.799      | 0.594|              |
| Total                      | 13,607.669     | 168|             |      |              |
| **Competing**              |                |    |             |      |              |
| Between groups             | 367.579        | 9  | 40.842      |      | 0.681        |
| Within groups              | 8,895.261      | 159| 55.945      | 0.730|              |
| Total                      | 9,262.840      | 168|             |      |              |
| **Compromising**           |                |    |             |      |              |
| Between groups             | 239.000        | 9  | 26.556      |      | 0.810        |
| Within groups              | 7,247.000      | 159| 45.579      | 0.583|              |
| Total                      | 7,486.000      | 168|             |      |              |

Table II. Age and conflict resolution styles

Table III. Nationality and conflict resolution styles
Discussion
The above mentioned findings identify the effects of gender, nationalities and age groups on the five conflict resolution styles among post graduate students in a university in Malaysia. The findings indicated that there exist significant difference among men and women in the use of competing, avoiding and compromising styles of handling conflicts, with little or no meaningful difference in the use of accommodating and collaborating. Women were identified to use less avoiding and compromising than men and more competing. While men on the other hand use more avoiding and compromising and less competing.

Recently some findings have shown that men tend to use avoiding strategies in conflict management more than women, and these findings are related to gender role expectations which portray men as less able to manage relationships and possess a calm demeanor naturally (Haferkamp, 1991 cited by Brahnam et al., 2005). Esin and Ayhan (2001) discovered that there actually exist relationship between gender and conflict resolution styles, their findings discovered significant amount of differences in the conflict resolution styles by male and female. The results revealed that males tend to use more competing behavior toward same-sex, avoiding behavior toward opposite sex, while compared to their female counterpart also it reflects the result of previous studies.

The research did not reveal any significant difference among students from different nationalities in the use of the five conflict resolution styles, but it did show that choice of strategies varied among students from different nationalities. The findings revealed that students from various countries used all five conflict resolution styles. With respect to age and conflict resolution styles, findings revealed that older students used avoiding more than younger students, while younger students used accommodating and compromising more. This hypothesis is supported by Wafa (1997), in his research discovered that age had a significant effect on conflict strategies, stating that as one grows older, the age influences the roles he or she is expected to play and significantly controls acceptable behavior patterns (refer to age in the literature review on previous researches on age). All age groups did not have significant difference in the use of collaborating and competing.

It can be seen from the results that the three variable dimensions: gender, and age do have a large effect on the use of conflict resolution styles used by university students, although the results on nationality also indicate the use of the five styles, it did not what styles were peculiar to any country or group of countries.

Conclusion and recommendations
The aim of this research was to determine the conflict resolution strategies used by university students and to investigate the effect of three variables namely; nationality, gender and age on the use of these styles. Conflict is a phenomenon that cannot be separated from human existence, and people in conflict often exhibit certain behaviors in order to settle conflicts (Civelek and Dincyurek, 2008).

Although this research reveals results, it suffers some kind of limitations; first the university has a total of eight faculties but only one faculty which is the school of post graduate studies was investigated with respect to conflict resolution styles. Second the statements used in the survey were general statements made for each of the conflict resolution styles; the research was not measured with different types of relationship or task. The researchers therefore recommend that further research be carried out in order to address the limitations that have been cited above as this may produce a varied result especially with respect to nationality and conflict resolution styles.
While the research has established that students in this university use all five conflict resolution styles in handling conflicts, it did not reveal why some styles are preferred over others. For example, why are female students more competitive in nature? Future research is recommended to address the reason for the preferences. Also it would be necessary find out if the results would be different in different scenarios (e.g. conflict with a flat mate or classmate).

On the issue of nationality, future research should be carried out on a larger scale to determine if there is a difference in the use of conflict resolution strategies, since most previous researches have focussed more on cultures.

This research work contributes to the body of knowledge by showing that just like there exist differences in gender, there also exist differences in age and nationality when it comes to the use of these five conflict resolution strategies namely: accommodating, compromising, collaborating, competing and avoiding. So this gives room for a more elaborate research to be carried out on the two latter categories, especially in an organizational setting to either support our findings or introduce varied results.

Regardless of whether the source of a conflict is external or internal, it behooves administrators to understand the management styles of their students, as the application of ineffective conflict strategies can result in stress that can ultimately undermine the overall health of the institution. “Effective conflict management however requires that styles of handling be defined and measured and that those styles most conducive to positive outcomes be supported and encouraged” (Brahnam et al., 2005).

It would also be of great benefit to institutions of higher learning in developing policies that would make it easier for conflicts to be managed or possibly averted, the researchers reckon that this kind of research be carried out in schools (especially multicultural institutions) occasionally and for conflict resolution skills trainings be introduced to help students and lecturers understand how to address conflicting situations, in order to minimize friction and create a conducive learning environment.

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