Investigation of primary class teachers’ conflict approaches by gender

Ibrahim Habaci
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Faculty of Education, Education Sciences, Turkey.

Received 04 May, 2015; Accepted 18 June, 2015

The objective of this study is to identify the relationships between disagreements and conflicts that surface with respect to gender in educational institutions and the reasons behind them; to expose the relationship between personal variables and conflict management strategies; to determine how individuals adopt a particular attitude in regard to conflict results; and, by using the obtained results, to reveal gender-based teacher attitudes about conflict. The study group comprises 20 primary-class teachers selected by the purposeful sampling method in the province of Canakkale, city center. Face-to-face interviews have been held with these teachers and conclusions have been drawn with content analysis. The study was conducted in the summer term of 2015. In this qualitative research, the participant teachers were asked open-ended questions in line with a semi-structured interview form that had eight questions. Obtained data has been analyzed by employing the qualitative data analysis technique (content analysis). Our findings show that teachers experience conflicts with their managers, colleagues and parents of students. We have found that female teachers generally prefer to adopt a manner in favor of communication and compromise, whereas male teachers adopt an enforcing (oppressive) manner in line with their own opinions. The reasons for these behaviors from the gender perspective have been investigated by conducting a literature review.

Key words: Gender, conflict, conflict management, conflict management strategies, primary school teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Human interaction has become increasingly complex in social life, due to increasing population with a diversification of needs in recent years, and differing feelings and opinions have caused establishment of various organizations. With rapid advancements in technology human relations in organizations have become more complex, and as a result organizations have found themselves facing situations of intense conflict. The phenomenon of conflict is one of the most important ones that the organizations encounter today. Various definitions can be given to “conflict”. For example, one definition can be a difference of opinion between two or more individuals or groups for a variety of reasons, or disagreements between co-workers that cause normal activities to halt or become disrupted. It can be defined as the conditions that arise from differing goals, desires, and expectations of individuals within an organization or from other individuals and organizations.
Conflict has always existed between humans and is almost impossible to eliminate entirely.

Conflicts are events that arise from problems associated with individuals and groups who work together and that cause normal activities to stop or become complicated (Eren, 2009:585). Disagreement, confrontation, non-conformity, and opposition are the fundamental elements of conflict (Simsek et al., 1998:167). Conflict management, however, is a process whereby the disruptive effect of conflict is ameliorated or eliminated and is transformed into an efficiency-increasing element (Gumuseli, 1994:22).

Differences in an organization can be a source that positively affects change, innovation, development, and performance within the organization. However, poor management of these differences can have negative and disruptive results that threaten the existence of the organization. Since conflict in environments where people constantly interact with one another is an inevitable phenomenon, the appropriate course of action is to prevent negative consequences to the organization, to manage the conflict process in an effective way, and to steer the conflict in a direction that benefits the organization (Karip, 1999:50).

On the one hand, effectively managed conflicts contribute to the development of the organizational mission and culture, the strengthening of individuals' relations through development of their conflict methods, and the adaptation of individuals to the organization. Conversely, poorly managed conflicts force the organization into a static state and aggravate the problems (Dincer and Fidan, 1996:359).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict is a concept with many different meanings. The first difficulty in defining the concept of conflict stems from the fact that it means different things to different people. Since it is a social phenomenon, anthropology, economics, sociology, psychology, management and political science each tackle this concept from a different perspective, and this further deepens the ambiguity. Differences in value systems also affect the interpretation of conflict (Gumuseli, 1994, p. 24–25).

Conflict is a social phenomenon that has been identified in all social communities and that arises between individuals, groups, organizations and nations (Akin and Oztas, p. 9 referring to Rubin, 1994). According to another definition, conflict is a dynamic interaction process that comes to light in the form of disagreement, confrontation, incompatibility and opposition between individuals or groups and that can harm organizations and individuals if it is poorly managed (Gumuseli, 1994, p. 21).

Akkirman defines conflict as a social phenomenon that arises from differences between individuals and groups in regard to interests, objectives, preferences and value judgments, that causes one side to win and the other side to lose, and that causes negative behaviors such as uneasiness, pressure, stress, hostility and fighting (Akkirman, 1998, p. 2).

In a very short description, Karip defines conflict as “an interest, power and status dispute” (Karip, 2003, p. 1).

Although there is no universal consensus as to the meaning of the concept of conflict, it can generally be defined as a discrepancy in activities, relations and behaviors between social sides (Karip, 2003 referring to Rahim, 1992; Tjosvold, 1991a).

Conflict is inevitable in much of human interaction, because people's desires, goals and needs are different. These differences bring people into confrontation and cause the conflict. The ability of people in this day and age to live a comfortable life and to fulfill what is expected of them are to a great extent dependent on the sound establishment and good management of organizations (Gumuseli, 1994, p. 1).

Conflict in educational organizations arises from the very nature of the system. When one considers that the raw material of educational organizations is human beings and that human behaviors are varied and complex, conflict in such a system becomes inevitable (Durukan, 2004, p. 193).

Generally speaking, when conflict first occurs, it evokes negative feelings. But once conflict is understood in real terms, we see that it is the most important element ensuring the existence and continuity of an educational organization, as conflict gives dynamism and different points of view to individuals and organizations in the educational environment and in social life.

There exists two general approaches in regard to conflict: the traditional approach and the modern approach (Ozdemir, 2012, p. 5). There are certain differences between these approaches, and gender differences are significant in which of these approaches is adopted. In addition, gender differences can have an effect on types, reasons, solution methods and results of conflicts (Asunakutlu et al., 2005, p. 2).

In the traditional approach, conflict causes organizations to fall apart, existing systems to deteriorate and energy to be wasted.

Society expects certain duties of everyone (Baymur, 1994, p. 275). In educational organizations, female or male teachers are expected to utilize the organization's human resources in a way that will achieve the organizational goals. And this requires effective classroom management.

The concept of gender, which is formed by the society and defines values, roles, behaviors, etc. pertaining to women and men, also has a determinative effect on behaviors of those working in the organization. The organization's gender-related values determine the duties, behaviors, values, etc. of the employees. On the basis of organizational gender values, it is observed that
Conflict strategies

Conflict management is intended to bring the conflict level between individuals and groups in the organization under control and to steer the disagreement and discomfort between the parties in such a way as to be beneficial to the organization (Akkirman, 1998, p. 3, referring to Hampton et al., 1982).

Conflicts in organizations essentially arise by virtue of the dynamic structure of an organization. If there is no disagreement and conflict in an organization it does not necessarily mean that there is no problem in the organization, because a steady state is also a kind of problem. In organizations that are in steady state, it is virtually impossible to see a change in a positive direction. Therefore, conflicts observed in an organization cannot always be interpreted as bearing a negative meaning (Arslantas and Ozkan, 2012, p. 557).

In addition to acknowledgment of the differences, the objective of conflict management is to understand the value of differences in a social structure, to respect these differences and to continuously develop the ability to use conflicts to serve the purposes of individual growth and social advancement (Oztas and Akin, 2009, p. 13).

As is the case with all organizations, conflict is also an indispensable reality of educational organizations in particular. In order to avoid negative consequences for both the organization and individuals, conflicts in organizations must be managed effectively. It is particularly important for school managers to use conflict management strategies in an effective way (Karakus and Cankaya, 2009, p. 117).

Conflict management strategies are individuals’ self-expressed predispositions toward certain behavior models in conflict situations (Gumuseli, 1994). According to Rahim, strategies that parties can follow can be analyzed in five groups: integration, conformity-oblige, compromise, domination and avoidance (Karip, 2003, p. 63 referring to Psenicka and Rahim, 1989; Rahim, 1992, 1994).

Integration: Integration strategy is defined as solving the problems as a team. In this strategy, parties cooperate and address the real problem, causes of the problem and differences in a constructive way. By this method, parties are able to gain a broad perspective about what they can do (Karakus and Cankaya, 2009). According to this strategy, an individual neither waives his/her own right nor encroaches on others’ rights. This strategy can be employed when the balance of power between the parties is in equilibrium.

Conformity – Obedience: If in a conflict situation a person feels highly concerned about the other party while he feels less concerned about himself, he can choose to settle the conflict through conformity. This is also defined as “being ready to help” and “not resisting” (Oztas and Akin, 2009, p. 16). But continuously exhibiting this behavior in conflict situations is not acceptable for the individual. A person who always endures in silence and cannot say “no” to others even when he is right cannot be considered psychologically healthy.

Domination: This symbolizes an individual’s high interest in himself and low interest in others during the conflict. The competitive/domination-inclined person in this style calculates his own gains and ignores the other party’s wishes and expectations. A competitive person believes that he and/or his position are in the right and always wants to win, no matter what it takes (Arslantas and Ozkan, 2012 referring to Yagioglu, 1997). This type of person demonstrates a highly egocentric personality and often will be deemed undesirable by the organization. As a result, the organizational climate may be impaired and communication broken.

Compromise – Making Reciprocal Concessions: This strategy envisions finding a middle way and reaching mutual agreement. In this strategy a person concentrates on his own needs as much as on the needs of others (Karakus and Cankaya, 2009). For a person with a compromising attitude, a hidden level of discomfort on both sides will remain. Neither he nor the other party will be happy.

Avoidance: This involves unassertive and non-cooperative behaviors. Individuals support neither their own opinions nor the opinions of the opposing parties. They show withdrawal behavior. They remain indifferent to most of the events. Avoidance behavior can put a person in a relatively small or less important position (Kirel, 2013, p. 11). When they encountered a problem, they are unable to successfully fulfill either their goals or their relationships.
The use of the above-mentioned five conflict solutions can change with respect to contingency theory. In the utilization of these conflict strategies in educational institutions, various factors can be influential, i.e., the personal characteristics of the individual, the structure of the organization, and management style. At this point, one can ask this question: Which strategy is the best? This is difficult to answer. However, it is vital to not avoid conflict but manage it effectively.

Objective of the study

The first objective of this study is to determine the gender-based solutions and problem-solving strategies of primary class teachers when encountering problems in educational organizations. Second, it aims to identify the relationships between disagreements and conflict issues that emerge in schools, and the reasons behind them, by taking teachers' gender differences into account. Third, the study attempts to identify conflict management approaches in conflict situations. A further objective of the study is to identify how people develop their attitudes with regard to conflict results. And finally, it intends to present teachers' gender-based attitude differences with respect to conflict.

Significance of the study

The significance of the study arises from the fact that it determines the issues of disagreement and the opposing parties with which primary class teachers experience a conflict, it identifies the relationship between conflict issues and the reasons behind them, and it sets forth the relationship between conflict management strategies from the gender perspective. The study attempts to identify primary class teachers’ conflict management approaches in a given conflict situation in order to determine how they develop different attitudes with respect to gender in regards to conflict results. It also determines the fundamental factors from which these approaches arise.

Problem case

The negative effects of conflicts in educational institutions cause concern for the school's internal and external stakeholders. The inability to manage conflicts creates disruption in educational activities, failure to achieve targeted objectives, and agitation in the school climate. Consequently, the internal and external stakeholders of the schools are adversely affected. Poorly managed conflicts can threaten the very existence of a school. Administrators should be alert to the negative effects of conflict and should be able to manage or solve the conflict in a manner consistent with the organization's objectives (Kocak, 2012). The administrator must be objective, free of prejudices about conflict, and should know that avoiding all conflict is impossible. Likewise, administrators should know that effectively managed conflicts contribute to the development and changing of the school.

Educational environments are complex environments in which many stakeholders come together. Everyone frequently encounters various conflicts in daily life. But what particular types of problems do primary class teachers encounter in educational institutions, and how do they overcome them? Are there differences in solving these problems from a gender perspective? If so, from which strategies do primary class teachers benefit most? Our study tries to provide answers to these questions.

The conflicts that primary school teachers encounter and how they overcome them have been investigated using the following eight open-ended questions:

1. Who are the parties you have a conflict with in your school?
2. What are the conflict issues you experience?
3. What are the causes of your conflicts?
4. What are the effects of conflict on your performance?
5. What do you know about conflict management?
6. How do you find solutions to the conflict issues you experience?
7. What are your suggestions regarding conflict issues?
8. What does conflict mean for an organization?

METHODOLOGY

In our study we have used phenomenological design, which is a qualitative research method. In phenomenology studies the objective is usually to set forth and interpret individual perceptions or points of view pertaining to a certain phenomenon (Yildirim and Simsek, 2005). In the phenomenological model the objective is to focus on phenomena such as perceptions and feelings and to see and feel the essence. In other words, in the research with this model, essentially the focus is on the phenomenon that we are aware of but do not have in-depth knowledge about (Akbulut, 2012, p. 97).

This research adopts a qualitative research framework that brings to the forefront research on social phenomena within their environment. It seeks to describe primary class teachers’ opinions regarding conflicts experienced at schools with respect to their gender differences. It also analyzes these opinions with the content analysis method by grouping them under certain themes.

Data gathering instrument

The data of this research has been obtained by a semi-structured interview technique conducted on teachers in the sample. The semi-structured interview is a type of interview which is conducted in order to gather the same type of information on the intended analysis subject from each of the participants (Sali, 2012, p. 145).

In this technique, the researcher prepares in advance the interview protocol that contains his planned questions. Conversely, depending on the flow of the interview, he can change the course of the interview by asking side and sub questions and can facilitate
the interviewee’s opening answers and provide in-depth statements (Turnuklu, 2000, p. 547). The semi-structured interview form has been prepared by conducting a literature review and consulting experts’ opinion. In order to prevent data loss during interviews, teachers’ permissions were obtained and conversations were recorded electronically. Recorded conversations were then uploaded to a computer and transcribed. Later, they were arranged in accord with the interview form. Finally, obtained data were analyzed, coded and reported.

Participants

In the selection of participants for the research, purposeful sampling has been employed. Our sample in this research comprises ten male and ten female teachers. All of the teachers have been working at state schools. Eight of the teachers have experience of between 1-5 years, four of them have 6-10 years, three of them have 11-15 years, and five of them have 16-20 years. Fourteen of the teachers have an undergraduate degree and six have a master’s degree.

Data gathering

In order to effectively bring the teachers’ feelings and opinions to the surface in this research, specific interview techniques have been utilized. During the interviews, teachers were asked eight open-ended questions. This method is preferred to prevent and minimize deviations in the data being obtained from the interviews (Patton, 2002). Depending on the flow of the interviews, necessary changes were made in the order of the questions to be asked.

Before starting the study, expert opinion from four persons was consulted to prepare the form for the interview that would be conducted with teachers. Subsequently, interviews were carried out and teachers were asked questions about problems they experience and the reasons behind them. Each interview took between 25 and 35 minutes. Interviewed female teachers were assigned the codes “F1, F2,…” and male teachers were assigned the codes “M1, M2,…”

Analysis of data

In this research, which was designed in accordance with a qualitative research approach, “content analysis” has been employed in the analysis of data. The data has been analyzed in four stages (Yildirim and Simsek, 2008, p. 228):

1. Coding the data
2. Determining the themes of the coded data
3. Arranging the codes and themes
4. Defining and interpreting the findings

At the end of the interviews the concepts and sentences that the teachers used were diligently analyzed and the intended basic concepts in their feelings and thoughts were classified. Similarities and differences were coded. After the expert opinions, some generalizations were made and it was given its final shape. In stating the findings, direct quotations were made and teachers’ own statements were presented.

FINDINGS

On the basis of the teachers’ opinions, the findings that were obtained through the analysis of the data are elaborated below under the headings pertaining to the questions asked.

Findings related to teachers’ conflict issues and reasons behind them

The subject matter of conflicts that the teachers experienced and their reasons were asked of participants, and the teachers’ answers were assessed under the general headings. Accordingly, primary class teachers have conflicts with their managers, colleagues, parents of students and to some extent with students.

Subject matter of conflicts that primary class teachers experience with their managers

1. Negative consequences experienced after senior teachers assess performance of their managers
2. Unfairness in resource allocation
3. Differing opinions about disciplinary regulations
4. Differing opinions about how the courses should be taught
5. Managers’ inability to deal with teachers equally

The most frequently mentioned issue raised by the teachers was unfairness in resource allocation (F1, F3, F4, F7, F9, M2, M6, M10). F7, who voiced this matter as a conflict issue, says: “The computers sent to the school by the provincial directorate for national education should be distributed to teachers equally, but they were not given to my class. When I informed the administration about this issue in writing they told me that some of the computers were used in managers’ rooms.” Teacher M10 said: “Although projectors and screens were set up in other classrooms, my class was forgotten. And I call it arbitrariness.”

Every year in the Turkish National Education System senior teachers, heads of parent-teacher associations and newly appointed teachers appraise the performance of the school headmaster. Under normal conditions, these performance evaluations are kept confidential; however, some school headmasters can gain access to these evaluations and learn how the teachers evaluated their performance. If the assessment contains negative attitudes or opinions, teachers can be subject to psychological intimidation or bullying by the headmaster (F4, F5, F9, M1). For example, F9 says: “I am a senior teacher at the school, with 15 years of experience. I did not have any problem with our headmaster, but ten days after his performance evaluation his behavior toward me changed and, although they were not within my responsibilities, he began to assign new tasks to me.”

Another conflict issue that teachers experience regards the implementation of existing disciplinary regulations (F5, F6, M2, M8). These conflicts arise from differences in interpretation of certain articles of the regulations that
are sent to schools by the Ministry of National Education. When statements of teachers are analyzed, M2 says: “For instance, a student making a continual habit of being late to school is not acceptable. Although I warned my student many times, when he persisted, I called his parents. My talk with the parents was very positive. They then talked to the school’s headmaster. The headmaster asked why I called the parents about such a small and unimportant matter, and I had a verbal conflict with him.”

From the statements of teachers it is apparent that they often experience conflicts in the implementation of rules and regulations.

According to statements of the teachers, another issue of conflict is the manner in which courses should be taught, since headmasters have a responsibility to visit classes, assess the performance of teachers and advise them accordingly (F9, M7). By way of example, M7 speaks as follows: “I am a mathematics teacher. I am the one who is expert in my field and I think I know how this course should be taught. The headmaster came to my class, listened to my lecture for forty-five minutes and at the end of the class asked why I had called the students to the chalkboard so frequently, adding that I should only explain the subject and ask questions at the end. I stated that these kids were only third grade students and that problem-solving would ensure retention in learning.” Teachers accept headmasters’ attendance in classes, but they expect to be respected by them.

The last conflict issue that primary class teachers and managers experience is that managers do not treat teachers equally (F8, M1). In the words of F8: “A teacher colleague of mine who was teaching the same grade of students in another class requested that pin-boards be erected and internet connection be provided in her class. Although her request was fulfilled, when I requested internet I was given a negative answer.” M1 says: “At the end of the year when the report cards were distributed, the headmaster came to the teachers’ common room and congratulated Mrs. Zeynep publicly on her success. Although my class was more successful, she turned us a blind eye.”

Methods teachers use in conflicts with their managers

When the participant teachers were asked, “In a conflict situation, how do you overcome it?” the general answers were suggestions such as writing a petition, having a meeting, trying to persuade, requesting implementation of regulations and persisting. A majority of the participants stated that they were most successful in requesting implementation of regulations, having a meeting and trying to persuade. F5 stated: “I try to persuade my manager when I need to, and until I realize my goal I persist and continue to implement the regulations.” F8 stated: “I encounter a problem at my school, I have a meeting with my manager.”

Teachers’ suggestions about conflicts with their managers

A majority of the participant primary class teachers stressed that in order to minimize the number of conflicts experienced managers should receive comprehensive training before they assume managerial positions. They mentioned that if these training seminars and programs included “empathetic thought development, communication, group leadership, motivation, ability to appreciate success, fair behavior…” it would make managers’ jobs easier.

When we look at other suggestions of primary class teachers, we see that they raise points such as “universal importance of education (F4, M2), strong relationships with parents (M5), motivating the teaching (M10), informing teachers in advance about future programs (F10, M3), consistency between the words and actions of managers (F8).

Primary class teachers’ conflict issues with their colleagues

When we analyze the responses of participant primary class teachers concerning the problems they experience with their colleagues, we see the following issues:

1. Seniority-linked conflict between generations
2. Use of the same classrooms by different teachers
3. Egocentric behavior— inability to act together with the group
4. Not sharing accumulated knowledge (selfishness, competition)
5. Exhaustion (being closed to innovative approaches)
6. Reflecting political points of view regarding the educational environment (membership in different trade unions)
7. Inability to accept success of others (jealousy)

From the statements of teachers, it is clear that the most frequently encountered problems are selfishness and competition (F1, F4, F6, F8, F10, M2, M3, M4, M7).

About this point M3 states that “Although his class is academically far behind my class, Ali doesn’t refrain from bragging about himself continually, and he is not loved at all by other teachers due to his behavior and comments.” F5 says: “One of our colleagues gets demoralized when the success of another teacher is continually talked about.”

Another important problem teachers often face has been reported as reflecting a political point of view in the educational environment. As is widely known, each of the trade unions is unfortunately perceived as the affiliated institution of a political party. Differences of opinion arise between teachers who are members of different trade unions (F5, M7, M8, M10). To illustrate this conflict issue
M8 states: “Since we are members of the trade union that is linked to the government party, we can get done whatever we want, we can get appointed wherever we want.” According to our research, another problem arises from seniority-linked conflicts. Those who have 16-20 years of work experience see themselves as more experienced than those who have recently started their careers (M4, F5, F8, F9). F5’s statement illustrates this: “We have devoted fifteen years of our lives to education; you don’t understand these things.”

In the interviews with teachers, another conflict issue that comes to the fore is that which arises from use of the same classrooms by different teachers in the morning and afternoon sessions (F5, F9, M5). Such things as shared bulletin boards and changing of the classroom layouts give rise to conflicts. F9 says: “I come to school in the afternoon. Sometimes we can’t find the pictures, writings and notices on the bulletin boards.”

In addition, interviews with primary class teachers show that exhaustion (F6), not accepting others’ success (F9, F10), not acting in harmony with the group, individualistic behavior and not accepting the rules (M5, M6) are other reasons behind conflicts between teachers.

**Solutions to minimize primary class teachers’ problems with their colleagues**

When talking about solutions that they implement to resolve conflicts, participant class teachers have mentioned sharing information, meeting in the middle, communication, an empathetic approach, preferring others instead of self, attributing the success to others, or staying away from the conflict environment and pretending the problem does not exist as the behavior models they resort to. Most of the teachers have stated that, when faced with a problem, getting in touch with the other person is a more effective way than ignoring the problem. In their statements teachers F8 (being clear on the issue), M5 (being honest), M10 (not doing wrong, not speaking out against other people) and F5 (there is one truth, rules exist to be obeyed and everybody should accept this) suggested some effective ways to minimize conflicts.

In this research, teachers, when talking about how to eliminate the problems they experience with other colleagues, have said that provocative statements should be avoided (M5, M6). About the same topic (M5) says: “Individual differences should be respected in educational institutions. Even when I am right, I frequently give up my claim, perhaps avoiding discussion is the best way.”

**Solution suggestions of primary class teachers about the conflicts with their colleagues**

A majority of the primary class teachers who participated in the research have expressed that in their spare time school managers should facilitate social programs that can frequently bring teachers together; organize picnics, visits and volunteer social activities; and give weight to group work to strengthen the communication between teachers.

**Primary Class Teachers’ Conflict Issues with Parents**

At the end of the interviews that were conducted, teachers’ problems with parents have been summarized with the responses below:

1. inability to comprehend the importance of education
2. parents’ over-expectations of teachers
3. indifference to school matters
4. unwillingness to join social and cultural activities
5. not taking school programs into account
6. distrust toward teachers
7. not giving importance to students’ achievement
8. comparison between teachers
9. complaints of too much or too little homework
10. attributing students’ failures to teachers

In the interviews with primary class teachers the great majority of teachers have stated that parents are indifferent to school matters, some parents always stay at school and they have over-expectations of the school (F1, F4, F8, M3, M7). For example, F4 says: “When parent-teacher meetings were held, certain parents did not attend.” For parents with over-expectations, M3 says: “Some of our parents do not leave the school yard, as if they were the teachers, and they frequently talk about developments with their child and ask questions.”

Another point mentioned by the participant teachers has been that failures are attributed to the teachers (M5, M7, F6). A statement to illustrate this comes from M7: “As a matter of fact, my child doesn’t deserve these low grades, he should be getting higher, if this is so, then there is a problem with your course teaching or in motivating the students.”

Another conflict issue that primary class teachers are faced with is the comparison between teachers (M6, M9). On this point M9 speaks as follows: “Her teacher last year was following my child better, and she was doing her homework with more enthusiasm.” Also, in the interviews issues such as parents thinking teachers give too much homework (M1), thinking homework is inadequate (F5), distrust toward teachers (M4, M10), not giving importance to students’ successes (F4), and not joining social and cultural activities (M6, M8) have been encountered.

**Solutions adopted by primary class teachers in their conflicts with parents**

The participant teachers in this study have ranked the methods that would be effective in decreasing the
number of conflicts as follows: family visits, sending messages to families in writing, communication by phone, informing parents in advance about the activities to be performed at school, being in continuous contact, conducting seminars for families, ensuring that parents attend parent-teacher meetings. However, among the above-mentioned solution recommendations, they emphasized that informing parents in advance about the activities to be performed at school is the most effective way (F1, F3, F4, F6, F9, F10, M4). To illustrate this point, F6 says: “While planning all types of social and cultural activities, except teaching activities, I’ve identified parent representatives. While engaged in this process, I am also including them in the process.” Teachers mentioned that family seminars and communication are also effective, if these are done then teachers are considered to have fully performed their task, and after this stage families should also be willing to accept what is presently available (M1, M2, M3, M7, M8, M10, F5). Regarding this point, F5 says: “We are fulfilling our duties, despite all kinds of difficulties. Education does not require only a teacher, education starts in the family, and families should follow their kids as much as we do.” M10 says: “In our meetings with parents, no matter how much we keep on the right side of them, parents expect more and they aren’t satisfied.” Some also argued that the educational background of parents should be respected. (M9) says: “Sometimes parents criticize us. It is necessary to sit down and talk with such parents; they should be satisfied and we should make them feel valuable. Still, we should have the courage of our own convictions, we should avoid conflicts.”

Primary class teachers’ suggestions about their conflicts with parents

One of the most important findings of this study is that, according to primary class teachers, in minimizing the conflicts experienced with parents in educational environments communication and frequent meetings are the most effective ways. It has been emphasized that teachers’ visits with parents has an especially positive effect on the parents of primary school first and second year students. F2 says: “Being informed about a student’s developmental performance will give comfort to parents, and therefore parents will develop a positive attitude toward the school.” Being in contact with and calling parents at appropriate times are among the proposed solutions. As an example, F7 states: “If there is communication with parents and a teacher can pass on to parents the feeling that they are valuable and important stakeholders of education, then conflict is out of the question.” In recent years private schools have started four-week-long trainings which are called “family schools.” It has been observed that these schools help parents develop positive attitudes toward the school, understand the importance of education, know the academic staff closely, find answers to problems and develop vision and mission regarding their kids.

Primary class teachers’ conflict issues with their students

Interviews showed that primary class teachers experience some conflicts, albeit limited, with their students. The most prominent conflict issues are as follows:

1. not doing homework
2. being late to school
3. not listening to the teacher
4. harming friends
5. not wearing school clothes
6. absenteeism
7. fighting with friends

While half of the participant teachers observe these behaviors as problems that arise from family or the environment in which the child is raised, some of the primary class teachers do not see the problems they experience with their students as conflict issues. They mention that they can solve these problems by developing strong communication with students over time. They also recommend that teachers having such problems solve them by being patient, by loving and by accepting and showing emotion.

Conflict strategies of primary class teachers with respect to gender

Teachers were asked about the methods they use in overcoming conflicts, and conclusions have been reached from the answers they provided with respect to gender. Primary class teachers’ statements have been tabulated concerning all conflict issues with managers, colleagues and parents, the other parties in such conflicts. On the basis of solutions used by the teachers themselves, as well as suggested solutions, the conflict strategies have been matched with each suggestion or solution recommendation.

Accordingly, by looking at the above generalizations, the following conclusions have been made (Table 1): While females tend to be in favor of compromise and collaboration, males generally attain their goals through domination and enforcement. In some cases, males ignore the problem.

Primary class teachers’ opinions about organizational outcomes of conflict

Primary class teachers have been asked about organizational outcomes of conflict, and answers have
Table 1. Conflict management strategies.

| Conflict management strategies | Female teachers | Male teachers |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Compromise                     | F1/F3/F4/F6/F9/F10 | M4           |
| Collaboration                  | F2/F7/F8        | M1/M2/M3/M7/M8/M10 |
| Domination                     | F5              | M9           |
| Avoidance                      |                 | M5/M6        |
| Obedience                      |                 |              |

Table 2. Organizational outcomes of conflict.

| Results       | Female primary class teachers | Male primary class teachers |
|---------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Positive      | F5                            | M2/M3/M5/M6/M7/M8/M9/M10    |
| Negative      | F1/F2/F3/F4/F7/F8/F9/F10      | M1/M4                       |
| Does not affect | F6                           |                             |

been assessed under the following general groupings (Table 2). All the participant teachers were asked about the effects of conflict on educational institutions, and from a gender perspective, females perceived conflict negatively (F1, F2, F3, F4, F7, F8, F9, F10). In an illustrating statement, F7 says: “Rules are clear. What the school management or regulations require from us should be fulfilled. If people act in this way, there is no need for conflict. Besides, it causes devastation for the institution, motivation is lost and it causes people to feel bad about themselves.”

In the research, males have stressed that conflict can help the development of the organization and allow new ideas to emerge (M2, M3, M5, M6, M7, M8, M9, M10). It has been mentioned that conflict can facilitate people getting to know and understand each other better, can help identify aspects such as innovation, change, organizational effectiveness and deficiencies and can increase communication. A dominant idea is that in this way an organization can regenerate itself. On this point M6 says: “In the absence of conflict, no progress can be talked about, and this situation is a hindrance for development.” Another teacher, M3, speaks on this point as follows: “Conflict exists everywhere humans exist; what is important is to be able to manage the conflict well.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our research shows that primary class teachers experience conflicts with their managers, colleagues, students and parents of students. When we look at teachers’ gender-based attitudes, solutions and suggestions in regard to conflict, we find that female teachers are more in favor of compromise, whereas male teachers are more in favor of domination. In this study, females are open to communication and sharing while males are rather oppressive and prefer to establish domination. From a gender perspective it can be said that this finding is in line with the literature.

When we look at the reasons behind this we see that in patriarchal societies, males demonstrate assertive, harsh and materialist characteristics, whereas females demonstrate modest, kind, sensitive and emotional characteristics, and they give greater importance to the essence of life. In these societies determination, liveliness and ambition are perceived as more masculine, while kindness, affection and concern are perceived as more feminine. In patriarchal societies gender roles are clearly separated from each other and patriarchal characteristics are dominant, such as bragging, earning tangible things and the importance of money. In these societies the dominant values are materialistic success and progress. Women mostly assume the role of a mother raising kids. In patriarchal societies conflicts between people are usually settled by fighting. Traditional societies are mostly the ones where males are dominant. In these societies “maleness” and “being a man” are respected concepts. As a result of this, women are forced to live in a world where they must be like men to be successful. This situation can cause women to get hurt emotionally and psychologically (Leung and Moore, 2003).

Women face barriers when entering and advancing in the work life. These barriers can be summarized as the perceived traditional roles of women and the incompatibility of work life with social expectations in line with these roles, lack or high cost of institutions that provide child care and housekeeping services, certain jobs’ being
closed to women due to written and unwritten rules, lack of support for and outright prevention of women from rising in the hierarchy of work life, and sexual abuse (Gelegen, 2001, p. 27).

The reason behind the openness of females to communication and cooperation stems from their very nature. As an example of this, the following qualities can be mentioned regarding females: high communication skills, good command of body language, better language-expression skills than males, being better at the art of listening, being successful in social skills, ability to think empathetically, strong problem-solving skills, superiority in obeying rules, and playing the mother role.

In his study, Seker (2000) has set forth that, compared to female teachers, male teachers have a lower level of communication skills perception. In addition, educational environments are generally environments requiring communication. And teaching is a profession which is performed in an intense communication environment. In accord with the fact that teaching is considered a profession for women in our country, Strong (1943) states that from early ages on, cultures considered some professions primarily suitable for women. According to the author, society generally expects women to work in arts, music, literature, teaching, office jobs and social services (referred by Cimen, 1988). Accordingly, it could be expected that female candidates might perceive the profession of teaching as more suitable to themselves, and this in turn might have affected their communication skills perceptions positively.

Gulluoglu (2013) determined that there was a significant difference favoring female teachers in the "collaboration" and "compromise" strategies sub-dimensions. This finding is consistent with our finding that "female teachers use problem solving strategies more than male teachers". Contrarily, Uysal (2012) found a significant difference in favor of male teachers in the avoidance, obedience, and compromise strategies sub-dimensions, Altuntas (2008) found a significant difference in favor of male teachers in the avoidance strategy sub-dimension, Ozgan (2006) found a significant difference in favor of male teachers in the obedience strategy sub-dimension, and Gunbayi and Karahan (2006) found a significant difference in favor of male teachers in the compromise and strategy sub-dimensions. When we look at the usage averages of the "collaboration" strategy, we can say that in the process of the conflict resolution process, female teachers show a higher interest in themselves and the other party than male teachers. Female teachers put more value on sharing information with the opposing party, generating alternatives, questioning differences, and collaborating than male teachers. Thus, we can conclude that female teachers tend to find permanent solutions to conflicts between their colleagues. When one looks at the usage averages of the "obedience" strategy, compared to male teachers, female teachers are willing to surrender their own needs and interests in favor of the other party's. Female teachers are more interested in protecting their relationships than meeting their own expectations. The fact that they want to appease the other party and make concessions can be attributed to the reality that females are more self-sacrificing in nature than males. (Korkmaz, 2013)

Review of the literature also reveals that another factor behind males being dominant stems from their hormonal system. Testosterone and serotonin hormone levels trigger men's quality of being extremely dominant. As a matter of fact, these two hormones exist in both males and females. As the testosterone hormone level increases, males become more aggressive and dominant. If the serotonin hormone level decreases, the same effect is observed again. In this study, teachers have mentioned that conflicts have negative effects on their moods. In addition, they have mentioned that they can manage conflict well if they become adequately knowledgeable about conflicts. Some of the teachers may even perceive as conflict the communication that takes place in the ordinary course of life.

Suggestions

1. Females in patriarchal societies that arise from gender factor should abandon their recessive tendencies. While carrying out the role assigned by an organization, they should be able to protect themselves when necessary and should make their presence felt by the society.
2. In educational institutions, males should not think themselves superior to females. They should not forget that male and female individuals are equal and do not possess any intrinsic superiority to one another.
3. In order to minimize conflict, the authority and responsibilities of all parties should be told to them in an open and clear way.
4. In the life of a society which is becoming increasingly complex, everyone is engaged in the struggle for acquiring the best of everything, and this is the main driving force behind conflict. Therefore, seminars should be organized to help all parties to develop empathetic feelings.
5. All sides have deficiencies in communication skills. This problem should be tackled by the experts.
6. Women should be preferred for those positions requiring communication and cooperation.
7. Similar studies should be conducted which include other parties. For example, related subsequent studies might research what types of conflicts are experienced by managers and parents associated with educational institutions.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.
REFERENCES

Akbulut Y (2012). Data Analysis Techniques. Simşek A. (Ed.), Research Method, Soc. Sc.(pp.162-195). T.R. Anadolu University publications No: 2653, Open Uni. Pub. No: 1619.

Akkirman A (1998). Effective Conflict Management and Intervention Strategies. Dokuz Eylül University F.E.A.S. J.Volume:13, Number:2, 1-11.

Altuntas M (2008). Analyzing State School Secondary Education Teachers’ Conflict Management Styles, Masters Dissertation, Yeditepe Univ. Institute.Soc. Sci.Istanbul.

Asuncutulu T, Akbul A, Safran B (2005). Conflicts Arising from Gender Differences and a Study. Dokuz Eyülp University J.Manage. Faculty, Volume 5, Number 1, pp. 169-192

Baymurl F (1994). General Psychology. İstanbul. Inkilap Bookstore

Cimen M (1998). Effect of Gender and Some Socio-Economic Variables on High School Students’ Career Aspiration Interests, Unpublished Master Thesis. Hacettepe University, Ankara.

Durukan H (2004). Conflict and Conflict Management in Education. Turkish Soc. Res. J. / Year8, Number:2-3193-198.

Dincer O, Fidan Y (1996), Business Management, Beta Publishing, İstanbul, 359.

Eren E (2009), Management and Organization, Beta Printing and Publishing, İstanbul, 567.

Gelegen DG (2001). “Being a Women in Work Life”, Turkish Medical Association Journal of Occupational Health and Safety, p.27

Gulluoglu O (2013), Analysis of Conflict Factors and Conflict Management Strategies of Private Elementary School Teachers Working in the City of Kayseri, J.Communicat.Theory,Res.36,193-218

Gumuseli AI (1994), Izmir School Headmasters’ Conflict Management Styles In Handling Conflicts With Teachers, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Ankara Univ.Institute, Soc.Sci.Ankara, 22

Gumuseli AI (1994). Izmir Secondary School Managers’ Management Methods of Conflicts with Teachers (PhD dissertation). Ankara Univ. Institute, Soc. Sci., Ankara

Gunbayi I, Karahan I (2006), In-school Conflict Management Styles of Elementary School Teachers, Ayyonkarahisar Kocatepe Univ. J. Soc.l Sci.., 8(1), 209-230.

Karakuş MH, Cankaya I (2006). Effect of School Managers’ Personal Characteristics on Conflict Management Strategies. Adiyaman Univ. J.Institute, Soc.Sci.Number:3, 111-118

Karip E (1999), Conflict Management, PegemA Publishing, Ankara, 50.

Karip E (2003). Conflict Management. Ankara Pegem A Publications (3rd edition)

Kirel C (2013). Conflict. S.Unlu. (Ed), Social Psychology II (pp.2-17). T.R. Anadolu University Publication No: 2272 Faculty of Open University No: 1619, 3rd Edition, Eskisehir

Kocak S (2012). Conflicts Between Teachers and Comparison of Methods Used In School Headmaster- Teacher Conflicts and Their Effectiveness (Case of City of Usak), Master’s Dissertation, Hacettepe University Institute of Social Sciences, Ankara. Obtained from the following web address on 4 March 2014. https://tez.yok.gov.tr/ulusalTezMerkezi/TezGoster?key=7d53ed97e31a8bd307a257b743fb32ff825ea47b6fe2f166332d8bb4dae3e0dd4e5c6129e44b3

Korkmaz A(2013),Investigation between Primary and Secondary School Teachers Conflict Management Strategies and Job satisfaction,Master Dissertation,Ökan University.Institute Of Social Sciences

Leung C, Moore S (2003).Individual and Cultural Gender Roles: A Comparison of Anglo-Australians and Chinese in Australia, (12.12.2004) http://www.uiowa.edu/~grpproc/crisp/crisp.8.21.html

Ozgan H (2006), Analysis of Conflict Management Strategies of Elementary School Teachers, PhD Dissertation, Gaziantep University Institute of Social Sciences, Gaziantep

Patton QM (2002). Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods (3rd ed.), Sage Publications,Inc

Sali J (2012), Data Collection. A. Simsek (Ed.), Research Methods in Social Sciences (pp.134-158). T.R. Anadolu University Publication No 2653 Faculty of Open University Publication No: 1619, 1st edition , Eskisehir

Seker A (2000). Analysis of Relationship between Primary Class Teachers’ CommunicationSkills and Classroom Environment from the Perspectives of Different Variables. Unpublished Master Dissertation. Selcuk University, Social Sciences Institute, Konya.

Simsek H, Yildirim A (2008). Qualitative Research Methods in Social Sciences. Ankara: Seckin Publishing House. Simsek, S.M. (1998), Management and Organization, Damla Printing, Konya, 277.

Turnuklu A (2000). Interview: A Qualitative Research Technique that can be Used Effectively in Educational Sciences, Edu. Manage.Theory,Practice Number:24, 543-559

Uysal CT (2012), Analyzing State and Private Elementary School Teachers’ Conflict Management Strategies, Unpublished Master Dissertation, Maltepe University Institute of Social Sciences, Istanbul.