

## Conflict Management Model based on the Professional Experiences of Secondary School Teachers in North Khorasan: A Qualitative Study

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**Purpose:** The ability to manage conflict plays an important role in the teaching profession. Therefore, the purpose of the current research was to design a conflict management model based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers in North Khorasan schools.

**Methodology:** This was an applied study in terms of its purpose and qualitative in terms of its method. The research population included secondary school teachers of North Khorasan province in the academic year of 2018-2019. A total of 17 people were selected by purposive sampling method and according to the theoretical saturation, and were subjected to semi-structured interviews. Content validity and reliability was 0.86 based on the expert's opinion and 0.93 using inter-rater agreement coefficient. Open, axial and selective coding methods were used for data analysis.

**Findings:** Data analysis led to the emergence of 209 primary concepts and 18 secondary concepts in 5 categories for the conflict management model based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers in North Khorasan schools. The categories include active coping (with 5 secondary concepts of problem solving, information acquisition, seeking social support, negotiating and technology management), passive coping (with 5 secondary concepts of acceptance, emotional adjustment, keep work and home life separate, reframing and avoidance), reinforcement and management of relationships (with 4 secondary concepts of strengthening interpersonal communication, meeting expectations, paying attention to emotional needs and creating fun and entertainment), strengthening religious beliefs (with 2 secondary concepts of resorting to spirituality and developing morals and values) and developing personal growth (with two secondary concepts of self-analysis and going beyond personal needs). Finally, the conflict management model was designed based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers in North Khorasan.

**Conclusion:** According to the concepts and categories identified for the conflict management model based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers, they can be used to improve conflict management and improve the position of the organization.

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## 1. Introduction

Educational systems are the main pillars of transformations and development in any society and are regarded as the main factor for improving human capital. In the meantime,

Teachers are known as the most critical actors in these systems and the central element in the curriculum process, and having a professional identity for them ensures their professional effectiveness and progress to deal with and manage educational changes and developments (Gholampour & Ayati, 2020).

Teachers are considered the most important human resources in education and their position in all courses and levels of education is such that most experts do not consider the reconstruction and reform of education to be successful without the presence of teachers (Zinati, Ghaderi & Malaki, 2022). As an educational institution, the school is more complex than all social institutions and, like other formal organizations, it is involved with the duties of administration, direction, and management of human resources and resources. Unlike many organizations, the product of the school organization is human, which in turn makes school management more complicated, and one of the crucial issues in the field of school management is the issue of conflict and how to manage it (Mohammadi AhmadAbadi & Fallahzadeh, 2021). Human power is the main capital of organizations and the criterion for creating a competitive advantage, and the cooperation and empathy of this valuable resource is the most important key factor for the success of any organization. For this purpose, organizations must have highly adaptable employees and managers who can manage conflicts (Curcija, Breakey & Driml, 2019).

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human life today, and factors such as the continuous change of employees and individual and organizational goals, more diversity in the composition of employees, joint team activities, fewer face-to-face communications, the global economy, and the increase in intercultural exchanges are the inevitable causes of conflict in today's life. (Dackinson, McEvoy & Bruner, 2022). The existence of different people with different personality traits, needs, beliefs, expectations, and perceptions has caused conflicts in organizations and has made organizational conflicts inevitable (Lee, Won, Jang, Jung, Han, and Hoon, 2017). Conflict can be managed using skills such as effective communication, problem-solving, and negotiation, in which case the conflict is managed in a reasonable, fair, and efficient manner (Rodrigues, Huic, Lopes, and Kumashiro, 2019). Conflict is a process in which a person realizes that another person negatively and in opposition to him prevents him from reaching his goal or trying for this purpose (Schreiter & Beste, 2020). In other words, conflict is a process in which a person or group realizes that their goals and interests are opposed by another person or group (Taggart, Bannon, and Hammett, 2019). Conflict is a phenomenon that can have both useful and practical outcomes and negative effects on individuals, groups, and organizations. Therefore, it is important to have diagnostic tools to control, direct and manage it (Rego & Kilgour, 2022). On the one hand, conflict can increase creativity and innovation and provide the appropriate ground for reform and change, and on the other hand, it can cause a waste of energy and resources (Missotten, Luyckx, Branje, Hale, and Meeus, 2017). Therefore, conflict is not necessarily a negative thing and its improper management causes the conflict to turn into militancy and has many negative consequences for the organization, but its proper management brings about creativity, innovation, and prosperity in the organization (Kay & Skarlicki, 2020). Therefore, conflict is a double-edged sword that requires management, and conflict management means management that can manage and direct the organization in the best way under conflicting situations, create interaction between employees and the organization, and solve, control, or manage the created conflict in the best way. (Hastings, Kavookjian, and Ekong, 2019).

Conflict management is the appropriate and adaptive response to conflict situations, which can be different in various situations (Nunkoo and Sungkur, 2021). Conflict management is also defined as the act of identifying and managing conflict in a reasonable, fair, and efficient way, which is carried out in the form of recognizing and investigating conflicts in a logical and predictable situation in an effective and fair way (Upadhyay, 2021). Conflict management puts organizational conflicts in line with organizational goals and reduces its inefficient aspects by using appropriate methods. Efficient conflict management can help identify the nature, characteristics, and various conflicts, recognize the conditions and their triggers, and predict

conflicts, prevent the occurrence of harmful conflicts, allow beneficial conflicts to occur, use appropriate methods to manage conflicts, and direct conflicts to a constructive and creative path so as to improve the performance the productivity of the organization (Du, Cui and Su, 2018). Conflict management does not mean that we will always achieve our desires by having this skill, but it enables us to get acquainted with new developments and find appropriate solutions to deal with threats and use opportunities (Lu & Wang, 2017). Overall, there are two conflict management methods, including non-constructive and constructive. The first includes adaptability and appropriate and positive solutions, and the second includes threats and authoritarian and inappropriate solutions. Therefore, if the constructive conflict management method is used to resolve conflicts, it will have beneficial results for the organization (Caber, Unal, Cengizci, and Guven, 2019). Proper and effective conflict management improves performance and raises the level of success of the organization. Otherwise, it leads to the reduction of organizational performance and the creation of conflict in the organization (Vallone, Dell'Aquila, Dolce, Marocco, and Zurlo, 2022). Therefore, conflict management causes negative conflicts to be minimized and positive results and outcomes to be maximized. Accordingly, conflict management is a constructive approach to solving, controlling, or managing conflicts that help people to work with each other when they have conflicts in their relationships with others and reach a solution agreed upon by the parties (Gildberg, Fallesen, Vogn, Baker, and Fluttert, 2021).

There have been very few researches on the conflict management model, and the results of the relevant qualitative research are reported below.

Naalchi, Daraei, and PourHoseini (2022) researched the design of a conflict management model for managers and concluded that the conflict management model consists of 72 indices in 9 components of flexibility and compromise, cooperation, confrontation, change in relationships, avoidance, adaptability, control, and negotiation, and a suggestion system.

Sameri Nadafi, Nodehi, Falah, and Behlekeh (2022) researched the presentation of the conflict management empowerment model of young managers of gyms and concluded that there are three themes for the above-mentioned model, including individual, organizational, and macro factors, seven organizing themes of personality and communication characteristics, demographic characteristics, administrators, managerial, cultural and educational characteristics and 26 basic themes.

Dineva, Breitsohl, Garrod, and Megicks (2020) researched customer response to conflict management strategies and concluded that these strategies had five dimensions, including non-involvement, censorship, reinforcement, training, and cooperation.

Keshtkar & Amini Megicks (2014) researched the conflict management model in the life and statements of Imam Khomeini and the current Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and concluded that the above-mentioned model consists of 20 indices and ten components in 2 categories of avoiding and dealing with conflict and conflict supporting and strengthening so that the category of avoiding and dealing with conflict includes six components of convergence, group cohesion, organizational cohesion, country cohesion, the cohesion of Islamic nations and international coordination, and the category of supporting and strengthening conflict includes four components of constructive conflict, internal opponents, external opponents and the fundamental difference between Islam and blasphemy.

Conflicts arise between individuals, groups, and organizations, and differences in perception, personality, beliefs, social, economic, and politics, on the one hand, and different inferences about the goals of the individual, organization, and society, on the other hand, cause various conflicts between people. Among different organizations, schools are engaged in playing the role of the most difficult, complex, and fruitful social tasks, and since schools are social systems in which humans and group activities play an essential role in all processes, therefore, the lack of knowledge about the correct management of conflicts can lead to all kinds of tension and conflict. Therefore, it is very important to properly manage conflict in schools and the teaching profession and examine it from the perspective of teachers' professional experiences. Therefore, the current research was conducted to design a conflict management model based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers in North Khorasan schools.

## 2. Methodology

The present study was applied in terms of purpose and qualitative in terms of implementation method. The research population included secondary school teachers of North Khorasan province in the academic year of 2018-2019. A total of seventeen people were selected according to the principle of theoretical saturation using purposive sampling. In qualitative research, data saturation is closely related to the sample size, and the repetition of important and salient points in the case of continuing the study indicates the adequacy of the sample size, and the sample size is selected in such a way that the maximum qualitative content is extracted from the sample, or the so-called interviews reach saturation. Therefore, after interviewing 17 secondary school teachers, the research reached saturation in the present study, and the sampling and interview ended. The inclusion criteria included the minimum level of bachelor's education, the age range of 25 to 40 years, work experience of more than 5 years, willingness to participate in the research and accept the recording of the interview process.

After examining the theoretical foundations and designing interview questions, the eligible samples were identified. The ethical considerations included coordinating the time and place of the interview and obtaining participants' consent to the recording of the interviews, explaining the importance and necessity of the research. Afterward, both the teachers and the interviewer attended at the predetermined time and place, and the interview process was conducted and all of them were recorded. It should be noted that in order to ensure the accuracy of the interview results, the interviewer read the notes to the interviewer after finishing answering each question so that he can correct them if necessary. Thus, interviews were conducted with all 17 people, and the data obtained from the interviews were prepared for analysis.

In this study, two researcher-made tools including a demographic information form and a semi-structured interview were used. The first instrument consisted of three questions that collected information about age, education, and work experience, which were examined for their importance in the results of the study. The second tool included a semi-structured interview with 7 questions based on the results of previous studies. The interviews were conducted individually with each of the secondary school teachers and the average duration of the interview with each of them lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. In addition to recording the interviews, important notes were taken and approved by the interviewees. The content validity of the results obtained from the interviews was 0.86 according to the opinion of experts, and their reliability was 0.93 using the inter-rater agreement coefficient.

It should be noted that open, axial, and selective coding methods were used for data analysis in the present study.

## 3. Findings

The demographic information form of the present study investigated information about age, education, and work experience, the results of frequency and percentage of which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of frequency and frequency percentage of demographic information of secondary school teachers

Row	Age	Level of education	Work experience
1	32	Bachelor's degree	10
2	33	Master's degree	9
3	38	P.H.D	11
4	40	P.H.D	10
5	34	P.H.D	10
6	29	Master's degree	5
7	36	Master's degree	8
8	32	Bachelor's degree	7

9	40	Bachelor's degree	9
10	32	Bachelor's degree	11
11	34	Bachelor's degree	8
12	38	Bachelor's degree	12
13	33	Master's degree	7
14	35	Bachelor's degree	10
15	32	Bachelor's degree	7
16	36	Master's degree	9
17	39	Bachelor's degree	11

The age, level of education and years of work experience of secondary school teachers participating in the present study are shown in Table 1. The results of open, axial, and selective coding for the conflict management model based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers in North Khorasan schools were presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The results of open, axial, and selective coding for the conflict management model based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers

Category	Secondary concept	The basic concept (example)
Active coping	Problem-solving	Eighteen basic concepts (I plan and prioritize for work and school issues and time management is very useful)
	Information acquisition	Nine basic concepts (reading helps me a lot and watching educational videos and using educational aids are important)
	Seeking social support	Sixteen basic concepts (I ask colleagues how they deal with issues and get intellectual and practical help from the manager and colleagues)
	Negotiation	Eleven basic concepts (I exchange ideas with my colleagues and learn things from my successful colleagues while doing correct criticism)
	Technology management	Nine basic concepts (I turn off my mobile phone at night and on holidays and enable the use of social networks to use educational items)
Passive coping	Acceptance	Ten basic concepts (I try to adapt myself to the situation and the fact that conflict and challenges are always there)
	Emotional adjustment	Six basic concepts (I project my bad feelings and memories and try

		hard to solve problems through jokes)
	Keep work and home life separate	Twelve basic concepts (I leave school work issues at school and homework issues at home, and do not bring the discomfort of students and colleagues home)
	Reframing	Eight basic concepts (I think about the positive points and look at the problem from different angles)
	Avoid	Five basic concepts (I try to clear my mind by forgetting and focusing on the present moment, and to relax my mind I do exercises or engage in some other activity)
Strengthening and managing relationships	Strengthen interpersonal communication	Eighteen basic concepts (students' sensitivities should be taken into account and I try to increase my tolerance in discussions)
	Meet expectations	Thirteen basic concepts (I try to meet the expectations of students as much as possible and the reasonable expectations of students should be taken into account)
	Attention to emotional needs	Sixteen basic concepts (Affection should always be expressed to students and attention and love for colleagues are necessary)
	Create fun and entertainment	Ten basic concepts (I have one-day camps every month at school and we have fun with the students)
Strengthening religious beliefs	Resort to spirituality	Twelve basic concepts (Trusting in God has always been a principle in our culture, and I love participating in religious ceremonies)
	The development of morals and values	Thirteen basic concepts (Forgiveness is a constant and helpful principle at school, and I do my best to forgive my colleagues' mistakes)
Development of personal growth	Self-analysis	Twelve basic concepts (in my opinion, a person should first know his positive and negative

	points, and knowing and believing in the purpose of life is very important)
Going beyond personal needs	Eleven basic concepts (many times I reduce my rest and sleep time and satisfy them by buying more things and providing more services)

Table 2 shows the results of open, axial, and selective coding for the conflict management model based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers in North Khorasan schools. A total of 209 primary concepts and 18 secondary concepts were identified in 5 categories. The categories include active coping (with 5 secondary concepts of problem-solving, information acquisition, seeking social support, negotiating, and managing technology), passive coping (with 5 secondary concepts of acceptance, emotional adjustment, keep work and home life separate, reframing, and avoidance), strengthening and managing relationships (with 4 secondary concepts of strengthening interpersonal communication, meeting expectations, paying attention to emotional needs and creating fun and entertainment), strengthening religious beliefs (with 2 secondary concepts of resorting to spirituality and developing morals and values) and developing personal growth (with 2 secondary concepts of self-analysis and going beyond personal needs). According to the identified categories and concepts, the model of conflict management based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers in North Khorasan schools is presented in Figure 1.

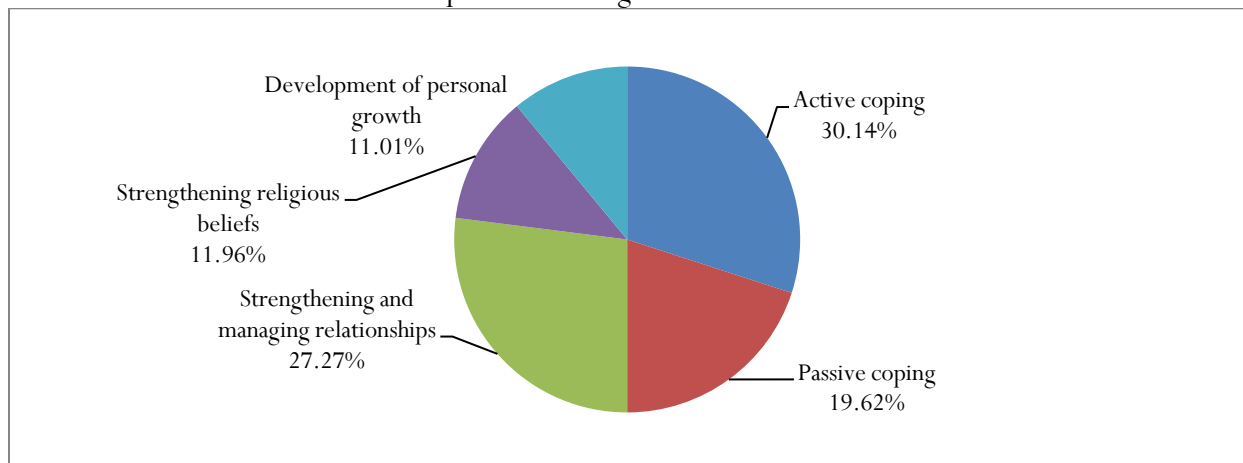


Figure 1. Conflict management model based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers

The results of the categories and concepts identified for the conflict management model based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers can be seen in Figure 1, among the 209 primary concepts, the highest primary concepts belong to the category of active coping ( $n=63$  concepts, 30.14%) and the lowest primary concept belong to the development of personal growth ( $n=23$  concepts, 11%).

#### 4. Conclusion

Conflict management plays an important role in improving academic performance in educational systems, including the education department. Therefore, the current research was conducted to design a conflict management model based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers in North Khorasan schools.

The results of the current research showed that the conflict management model based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers in North Khorasan schools included 209 primary concepts and 18

secondary concepts in 5 categories. The categories included active coping (63 primary concepts including 5 secondary concepts of solving problems, information acquisition, seeking social support, negotiating, and managing technology, passive coping (41 primary concepts including 5 secondary concepts of acceptance, emotional adjustment, keep work and home life separate, and reframing and avoiding), strengthening and managing relationships (57 primary concepts including 4 secondary concepts of strengthening interpersonal communication, meeting expectations, paying attention to emotional needs and creating fun and entertainment, strengthening religious and religious beliefs (25 primary concepts including 2 secondary concepts of resorting to spirituality and the development of morals and values, and developing personal growth (23 primary concepts including 2 secondary concepts of self-analysis and going beyond personal needs). The results of the current research were in some ways consistent with the findings of previous research, i.e. the research by Naalchi et al (2022), Sameri Nadafi et al (2022), Dineva et al (2020) and Keshtkar and Amini Megicks (2014).

With regard to the category of active coping with 63 primary concepts including 5 secondary concepts of problem-solving, information acquisition, seeking social support, negotiating, and managing technology, it can be concluded that many teachers take measures such as planning, prioritizing for better conflict management, time management, organizing professional and family affairs, studying, participating in training courses to obtain current information in the professional and family field, engaging in activities to receive support and informational and instrumental help from the spouse, family, friends, and colleagues, seeking emotional support from them, assigning some tasks to others, exchange information with colleagues, model successful people, learn to criticize correctly, turn off their mobile phones on days and nights off, and use social networks appropriately.

With regard to the category of passive coping with 41 primary concepts including 5 secondary concepts of acceptance, emotional adjustment, keep work and home life separate, reframing, and avoidance, it can be concluded that teachers use strategies such as accepting responsibility for problems and challenges, acknowledging the existence of conflict and stress and the impossibility of overcoming them, lack of complete activity in work and family areas, projecting negative emotions, joking or long-term walks to avoid thinking about negative emotions, keep work and home life separate, lack of family and professional or job emotions, problems and challenges entering into each other, checking other frameworks to solve problems and challenges, emphasizing positive points, examining a problem or challenge from different angles, avoid comparing themselves with others, and engaging in exercise activities or other activities for mental comfort.

With regard to the category of strengthening and managing relationships with 57 primary concepts including 4 secondary concepts of strengthening interpersonal communication, meeting expectations, paying attention to emotional needs, and creating fun and entertainment, it can be concluded that that for optimal conflict management, teachers need to pay attention to student's sensitivities, actively listen to their relatives, show honesty in their communication, raise their tolerance in discussions, pay attention to the expectations of important people in the family and professional life, and try to meet their reasonable needs, emphasize the importance of emotional needs among colleagues and students, pay attention to their needs, care about the students' need to have fun and to strengthen their lives.

With regard to the category of strengthening religious beliefs with 25 primary concepts, including 2 secondary concepts of resorting to spirituality and the development of morals and values, it can be concluded that teachers use strategies such as trusting God when doing academic and non-academic activities, belief in the presence of God and the role of religious issues in adjusting and solving problems and challenges, participation in religious ceremonies, attaching importance and paying attention to morals and values including forgiveness, commitment to perform duties, attention to the collective benefit and determining limits and boundaries in relationships.

With regard to the category of developing personal growth with 23 primary concepts including 2 secondary concepts of self-analysis and going beyond personal needs, it can be inferred that teachers can better manage conflict using indices such as challenging their beliefs, correctly understanding the goals in their life and



profession, paying attention to positive and negative characteristics in self-knowledge, analyzing their own existence, reducing rest and sleeping time, reducing recreation and personal needs, and trying to meet job needs despite ignoring their own needs. The most important limitations of the present study included the limited research background on the conflict management model and the comprehensive comparison of the results of the present study with them, the use of a non-random sampling method, and the limitation of the research population to secondary school teachers in North Khorasan province. Therefore, it is suggested to conduct further studies on the conflict management model in the Education organization and other educational organizations, including universities, using random sampling methods and interviewing experts other than secondary school teachers. For example, it is suggested that the conflict management model be designed based on the professional experiences of primary school teachers, students, or even parents of students. According to the findings of the present study, i.e. the categories and concepts identified for the conflict management model based on the professional experiences of secondary school teachers, it is suggested that this model be taken into consideration by experts, planners, and education specialists in educational planning and they use the basic concepts or the identified indices to improve conflict management in the education system and improve the position of this organization.

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