



## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE PREVALENT AMONG THE HEADS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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### ABSTRACT :

*The elementary school administration has not attracted the eyes of researcher for long. The review of literature connected with elementary school administration, does not bear out much concerning the administrative behaviour of the heads. The present study thus made an inroad into their managerial competence regarding conflict management. To be precise, in such investigation, it has focused only on elementary school heads in Salem district. The study has identified that competing style and collaborating style are highly prevalent among the total population; accommodating style and compromising style are moderately prevalent; whereas, avoiding style has emerged as the less prevalent style. The study has also established the impact of locality of the school and the length of administrative experience of the elementary heads on their conflict management styles.*



**KEYWORDS :** Conflict Management Style.

### INTRODUCTION

Dissatisfaction over something at emotional level is the starting point of any conflict in human life. When the feeling of conflict at emotional level catches up with the individual wholly, it may become a visible one, externally disturbing the individual's social behaviour. When the perceived conflict gets strengthened, and not to be contained within, it bursts into dialogues, arguments, discussions, quarrels and all sorts of ugly faces until it is resolved. In case, the conflict persists beyond all efforts, it is certain the larger unit will vanish with the formation of several small splinter groups. Hence the task of managing and resolving the perceived conflicts in the life of individuals as well as in educational institutions is of paramount importance for sustaining their growth and development.

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

There are crisp expressions brightly portraying the nature of conflict.

Conflict is inevitable, but conflict is optional - reports Max, L. (2017).

Wherever there are people, there always will be conflict - remarks Paul, M. (2015).

Conflict is a consistent and unavoidable issue with in health care teams - explains Laurie, M. (2017).

The occurrence of conflict is beautifully described in the following words: "The dissimilarity in the interests, thought processes, needs and attitudes of individuals result in a conflict. It is defined as a

clash among individuals resulting in verbal disagreements, physical abuses and tensions. A conflict never provides any solution to a problem; instead it just worsens the situation. It leads to disrespect among individuals, hampers the productivity and individuals often feel demotivated after a fight"<sup>1</sup>. As in other institutions of higher education, in elementary schools also the problem of conflict exists. Externally, the elementary schools may look small with few hundred pupils, being accommodated in a few blocks, managed by a handful of teachers, assisted by a few clerical and other technical staff. So any one coming into contact with such institutions outwardly, may take it as a problem free zone and those working there including the head may lead a stress free life. It is just a misconception. An educational institution, small or big, will have to execute its entire works for the benefit of the children, to the satisfaction of the parents, educational authorities and the community, the larger stake holders. Infact, the teachers and headmasters of elementary schools have to shoulder greater responsibilities than those at higher education, for being instrumental in structuring the 'personality' of the future pillars of the country, at the formative stage itself. Hence the problem of conflict management at elementary school level is worth investigating at present so as to take further investigations to address the research gaps identified in this area. Therefore, the present is taken up.

### NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Elementary Education in Tamil Nadu is totally free and compulsory as in other states in India, in the schools run by government of Tamil Nadu and local bodies. When something is given freely without asking for it, it naturally loses its importance, and both the giver's and the receiver's esteem is also at stake. At the same time, the private schools offering the same education by charging exorbitant fees, thrive like anything, and are being held in high esteem by the public. To reduce the gap between these two categories of institutions, the Govt. of Tamil Nadu is taking several steps such as starting pre-KG, LKG and UKG classes in the government run elementary schools as in the case of private schools. Moreover, the government is initiating steps to start English medium classes in elementary schools run by government/local bodies to raise its status in par with private schools. In this context, a study of the present type focusing on the conflict management styles of heads of elementary schools is much warranted for the following reasons:

- ✓ A collection of preliminary set of data from Salem district about elementary school heads' conflict management styles will throw light on their present psycho-social capability to identify, assess, and manage/resolve conflicts of different nature.
- ✓ The present study is designed to yield information about conflict management styles of elementary school heads in Salem district with different years of administrative experience, and also about those working in the elementary schools in village panchayat, town panchayat, and municipality/ corporation areas.
- ✓ The data thus generated about conflict management styles of elementary school heads will be helpful to infer the impact of local administration such as village panchayat, town panchayat and municipal/ corporation on the conflict management styles. Similarly, the present study will be helpful to estimate the effect of the length of administrative experience of elementary school heads on their conflict management styles.
- ✓ The present study will be instrumental to lay a foundation for starting a database about elementary school heads' in the region encompassing Salem district and the surrounding ones. In future, it may serve as a forerunner for other districts in Tamil Nadu, so as to evolve a database exclusively for elementary school heads' conflict management styles.
- ✓ As the present study about elementary school heads' conflict management style is first of its kind, it has necessitated the Researcher to develop and validate a Research Instrument for assessing Conflict management style of elementary school heads. Thus the present research fulfills the need for a valid instrument to open up a new vista of research on elementary school heads in Tamil Nadu focusing on their conflict management styles.

- ✓ The present study is a beginning in this field for the region encompassing Salem and other neighboring districts, and as such it is likely to initiate other similar studies with different demographic factors and psychological characteristics helpful for enriching the database.

**OBJECTIVES**

- To find the prevalence of conflict management styles among the heads of elementary schools.
- To find the prevalence of conflict management styles among the heads of elementary schools in terms of locality and length of administrative experience.

**METHOD & SAMPLE**

Survey method of research was used for the present study. All the elementary schools heads run by government and local bodies in Salem district as population of the study. 3%-5% of the population chosen randomly after due stratification will constitute the sample of the study. The final sample is to be formed of 150 elementary school headmasters.

**TOOL**

The research instrument used in the present study was prepared and validated by the Researcher and the Research Supervisor. The tool, **Conflict Management Styles Assessment Scale (CMSAS)** comprises FIVE dimensions namely Collaborating style, Competing style, Avoiding style, Accommodating style and Compromising style; and all the dimensions carry seven items each. Each one of the thirty five has to be answered against five options as Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely and Never; with allotted scores as 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Hence the maximum score of the tool will be 175 with a minimum of 35. The Researcher has established the Content validity, Construct validity, Item validity and Factorial validity. The reliability of the tool was established by Cronbach’s alpha (0.89).

**DATA ANALYSIS**

**Table 1: Prevalence of Conflict Management Styles among School Heads at Elementary Level**

Highly Prevalent	Moderately Prevalent	Low Prevalent
Competing, Collaborating	Accommodating, Compromising	Avoiding

**Table 2: Prevalence of Conflict Management Styles of School Heads at Elementary Level based on Locality**

Locality	Highly Prevalent	Moderately Prevalent	Low Prevalent
Village Panchayat	Competing, Accommodating	Compromising	Collaborating, Avoiding
Town Panchayat	Collaborating	Compromising, Accommodating	Avoiding, Competing
Municipality/ Corporation	Competing, Collaborating	Accommodating	Avoiding, Compromising

**Table 3: Prevalence of Conflict Management Styles of School Heads at Elementary Level based on Length of Administrative Experience**

Length of Experience	Highly Prevalent	Moderately Prevalent	Low Prevalent
Few Years	Accommodating, Collaborating	Avoiding, Compromising	Competing
Moderate Years	Compromising, Accommodating	Collaborating	Avoiding, Competing
Long Years	Competing, Avoiding	Collaborating	Accommodating, Compromising

## DISCUSSION

The findings provided in tabular form helps the Researcher to consolidate the wholesome outcome of the research. The subjects of the study are found to be highly prominent in using Competing and Collaborating styles for managing conflicts. It shows that the heads of the elementary schools in Salem district are much assertive and at the same time highly collaborating. Equal percentage of the subjects fall under these extreme poles of administration. From this the Researcher assumes that the heads of elementary schools are capable of changing the conflict management styles according to the nature of the problem being raised in the institution. That is, as far as conflict management is concerned, they are found to be competent.

Moreover, the heads of elementary schools are found to be using Accommodating and Compromising styles of conflict management at a moderate level. It clearly indicates the heads are found to be highly balanced, as whenever the conflicts are not much threatening they seem to make use of both the conflicting groups to come to a common understanding so as to be prepared to lose something on their side. In certain cases, the heads are found to get themselves highly accommodated with the group causing conflicts so as to show their fullest involvement in solving their problem. In this way, the elementary heads are found to be a genuine and reasonable and well balanced in managing the conflicts. Only in the case of the style Avoiding they seem to be less frequent in their adoption which actually is an encouraging act of resolving conflict on the part of the heads. That is, they don't want to be brutally avoiding the conflicting situations or negligent about the demand of the subordinates. On the whole, the conflict management styles of elementary heads in Salem district are an appreciable one.

The demographic factor locality of the institution is not found to be a highly influential factor in altering the conflict management styles of the elementary heads. The elementary heads in village panchayat, town panchayat and municipality/corporation are found to be almost on the right track in managing the conflicts arising in the institutions with the heads in Town panchayat schools ranking high with adoption of collaborating style followed by both heads of Village panchayat and Corporation schools with the positive encouraging style Accommodation and Collaboration respectively pairing with Competing. It clearly portrays that the demographic factor locality is of some influence on the heads of elementary schools to choose and adopt proper styles of management without much variations in the case of all the three categories of elementary school heads.

Another demographic factor length of administrative experience of elementary school heads is found to be pertinent in altering the conflict management styles adopted by the schools heads. The elementary school heads with few years of administrative experience are found to be at the top with the adoption of Accommodating and Collaborating styles of conflict management, followed by the subjects of moderate years of experience with Compromising and Accommodating styles, with the heads of long years of experience at the bottom with the adoption of somewhat negative aspects of management styles in the form of Competing style and Avoiding style. It indicates in the beginning of their career as the head of institution with few years of experience the subjects are highly positive in approaching the conflicts and managing them with adoption of the humane oriented manifestations such as the style of Accommodating and Collaborating with the groups demanding or creating conflict in the administrative aspect of the institution. However, with the increase in the years of experience that is at the moderate years they seem to practice humane oriented styles at a lesser degree such as compromising style and accommodating style. The subjects having long years of experience seem to have grown rigid and forcible to achieve their goals by practicing Competing styles and Avoiding styles of conflict management. Thus the length of administrative experience seems to be strong enough to alter the conflict management styles of the subjects.

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