

The Relationship Between Pre-Service Teachers' Communication Styles and Their Conflict Resolution Skills

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Abstract

The purpose of this study, which uses the quantitative research method, is to find out how and in what directions the communication styles of pre-service teachers studying at Cumhuriyet University influence their conflict resolution skills and whether or not there are significant differences between female and male students in terms of conflict resolution skills. To this end, Communication Style Scale and Conflict Resolution Scale were used. The study group consists of students attending Cumhuriyet University Faculty of Education Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance and Department of Preschool Education. The measurement tools were administered to 107 female and 51 male students. The students having open, friendly, attentive, animated, and impression leaving communication styles were found to have higher conflict resolution skills, whereas those having contentious communication style were determined to have lower conflict resolution skills. Dominant, dramatic, and precise communication styles, on the other hand, were seen to have no significant relationships with conflict resolution skills.

Keywords: Communication styles, conflict resolution behavior, university students.

1. Introduction

According to Dance and Laron (1976), communication refers to the relationship between an individual and his environment and enables the individual to adjust his own behaviors and to help others adjust their behaviors (qtd. by Rubin, Perse, and Barbato, 1988). Communication skills have an important place among social skills and stand as an important factor for successful interpersonal relations (Çetinkaya and Alparlan, 2011). A person is born as a member of a family and then becomes a member of larger communities such as school and work. In these communities, he, quite naturally, communicates and socializes with the people around him (Frone, 2000). While this communication is harmonious sometimes, it involves lack of harmony some other times. Such lack of harmony is associated with the concepts of conflict or interpersonal conflict.

A conflict refers to a situation in which individuals' goals clash or incompatibility and discord come out between them (Basım, Çetin, and Tabak, 2009; Bozoğlan, 2010). In the simplest sense of the concept, a conflict is likely to occur when a person brings forward an idea that contravenes with the goals and expectations of another person (qtd. by Yıldızoğlu, 2013 from Almost, 2005). The causes leading to a conflict fall into three categories: basic needs not met; limited resources; and different values (qtd. by Gündoğdu, 2010 from Schruppf, Crawford, and Bodine, 2007). Although interpersonal conflicts are mostly considered negative, they also lead to improvement and creative ideas. In addition, for a conflict to emerge, individuals have to have a goal they care about as well as a relationship they wish to maintain. From this perspective, the existence of a conflict may have a positive meaning. Whether conflicts will end up being positive or negative is determined by the way they are handled (qtd. by Türnüklü, 2007 from Johnson and Johnson, 1996; Hisli Şahin, Basım, and Çetin, 2009).

Conflict resolution can be defined as a process in which individuals come together and try to reach an agreement in order to solve a problem or negotiations are conducted by considering the needs of two conflicting parties (Koruklu, 2010). The conflict resolution method and whether the goal, the relations, or both of them are to be prioritized in the conflict resolution process determine whether the conflict will end up being positive or negative. Three results are mentioned for conflict resolution in general: win – win, win – lose, lose – lose. However, severe conflicts mostly end up with the losing of both parties (Miall, Ramsbotham, and Woodhouse, 2011). Conflict resolution styles are called with animal names to ensure common understanding. They are shark, teddy bear, fox, turtle, and owl. In case of a conflict, the shark engages in competition; the teddy bear yields; the fox compromises; the turtle evades; and the owl cooperates (Egan, 2014).

There are a lot of factors determining the conflict resolution styles which the individual will use. One of these factors is the communication style of the individual. In this regard, the investigation of conflict resolution skills requires the examination of communication styles as well.

There are many ways and causes of communication. Some of them are warning others, informing others, explaining something, entertaining, defining, or persuading (Dimpleby and Burton, 1992). There are different styles of communication performed for these reasons. Communication styles are listed as follows:

- **Friendly:** Friendly communicators sincerely listen to the person they are communicating with and

clearly show their interest.

- **Impression Leaving:** Though how impression leaving communicators achieve it is not known definitely, it is clear that these communicators are remembered by the ones they are communicating with and satisfy them during communication.
- **Relaxed:** Relaxed communicators are calm and self-confident during communication.
- **Contentious:** Contentious communicators tend to argue with and leave a negative impression on the person they are communicating with.
- **Attentive:** Attentive communicators listen to the people they are communicating with attentively, empathetically, and incessantly.
- **Animated:** Animated communicators influence the person they are communicating with through eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions. They are strong and assuring communicators.
- **Dramatic:** Dramatic communicators change tones of voice, make use of figurative meanings, and sensationalize the speech during communication.
- **Open:** Open communicators express themselves easily and speak frankly and as they are. Also, they display approachable and extroverted attitudes.
- **Dominant:** Dominant communicators tend to be self-confident, dominant, and authoritarian. They hold the control during communication.
- **Communicator's Image:** This is important for the impression to be left on the person one is communicating with. While individuals having a good communicator's image can easily start and maintain communication with others and express themselves regardless of whom they are communicating with, those having a bad communicator's image display negative characteristics (qtd. by Dursun and Aydın, 2011 from Norton, 1978, 1983; Çuhadar, Özgür, Akgün, and Gündüz, 2014).

The purpose of the present study is to find out how and in what directions the communication styles of individuals influence their conflict resolution skills.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to answer the question, "Are there any relationships between university students' communication styles and their conflict resolution skills?". In addition, some sub-questions of the study are as follows:

1. Does gender influence students' conflict resolution skills?
2. Does department influence students' conflict resolution skills?

2. Method

This section gives information about the sample, data collection tool, data collection process, and data analysis methods of the study.

Study Group

The study group consists of the third-grade students receiving undergraduate education at two departments of Cumhuriyet University Faculty of Education at which the effective communication course is open to students as an active course (i.e. Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance and Department of Preschool Education). While determining the groups, particular attention was paid to ensure the equal number of participants in them. Considering the missing data and extreme values, four data were excluded from evaluation. As a result, the study group consisted of 158 people in total. 51 of the participants were male, while 107 were female.

Data Collection Tool

1. **Communication Style Scale:** This scale consists of 51 items and 10 factors: friendly (4 items, $\alpha=.51$), impression leaving (4 items, $\alpha=.67$), relaxed (4 items, $\alpha=.69$), contentious (4 items, $\alpha=.68$), attentive (4 items, $\alpha=.63$), animated (4 items, $\alpha=.57$), dramatic (4 items, $\alpha=.44$), open (4 items, $\alpha=.64$), dominant (4 items, $\alpha=.62$), and communicator's image (5 items, $\alpha=.72$) (qtd. by Dursun and Aydın 2011 from Staley and Cohen). Of 51 scale items, 47 are included in evaluation.

2. **Conflict Resolution Scale:** In the present study, the university students form of Conflict Resolution Scale that was developed by Akbalık was used. The scale is composed of 55 items and 5 factors: understanding the person one conflicts with ($\alpha=.86$), listening skills ($\alpha=.82$), focusing on the needs of both parties ($\alpha=.75$), social harmonization ($\alpha=.78$), and anger control ($\alpha=.80$). The scale was prepared based on the question pool of McClellan and Schrupf, and the university students form was created.

3. Findings and Interpretation

The data collected through Communication Style Scale and Conflict Resolution Scale were evaluated through SPSS. Each communication style was analyzed through t-test for independent groups. In accordance with the research purpose, in what directions each communication style has a relationship with conflict resolution styles and how gender and department influence conflict resolution skills were investigated. The analysis results will

be separately presented in tables.

The Pearson correlation test was conducted to investigate whether or not there is a relationship between communication styles and conflict resolution skills. The findings regarding the test results are presented in the table below.

Table 1. Total Conflict Resolution Scores Based on Communication Styles

	Dom	Drt	Anmt	IL	Rlx	Att	Op	Frd	CS	Cont
Total Conflict	.094	-.078	.199*	-.208**	.266**	.243**	.274**	.397**	.150	-.175*
P	.240	.327	.012	.009	.001	.002	.000	.000	.060	.028
N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158

Dom: Dominant
 Drt: Dramated
 Anmt: Animated
 IL: Impression Leaving
 Rlx: Relaxed
 Att: Attentive
 Op: Open
 Frd: Friendly
 CS: Communicator's Style
 Cont: Contentious

According to the figures in Table 1, attentive communication style ($p < .05$) has a significant relationship with conflict resolution skill. Attention leaving, relaxed, attentive, open, and friendly communication styles ($p < .01$) are seen to have a high-level significant relationship with conflict resolution skill. Contentious communication style ($p < .05$), on the other hand, has a significant negative relationship with conflict resolution skill.

Table 2. T-Test Results Concerning Conflict Resolution Scores Based on Gender

	N	SS		sd	t	p
Female	107	173.7186	15.50459	156	2.734	0.58
Male	51	165.9608	18.9324			

Table 2 presents the conflict resolution t-test results by gender. The P value ($p > .05$) shows that there is no significant difference by gender. The mean X values indicate that females' conflict resolution scores are higher than males' conflict resolution skills, though such difference is not significant.

Table 3. Mean Conflict Resolution Scores Based on Department

	N	SS		sd	t	p
Psychological Counseling and Guidance	80	169.7375	16.94499	156	-1.106	.270
Preschool	78	172.7308	17.07331			

Table 3 demonstrates the conflict resolution t-test results by department. The P value ($p > .05$) indicates that preschool education students have higher conflict resolution scores than psychological counseling and guidance students, though such difference is not significant.

Discussion and Conclusion

Communication plays an important role in every period and field of human life. The quality and the style of communication determine how interpersonal relations are shaped. Interpersonal conflicts are one of the inevitable, natural results of interpersonal relations. They need to be solved properly. This way of solving conflict resolutions properly is called conflict resolution skill, which is influenced by many factors. Yıldırım, Hacıhasanoğlu, Karakurt, and Türkleş (2011) report that this skill can be influenced by factors such as age, gender, parents' educational levels, parents' jobs, and status of having a chronic illness. In this regard, communication style can also be said to be a natural determinant of conflict resolution skill.

The present study investigated how and in what directions communication styles influence interpersonal conflict resolution skills. It was found out that animated, impression leaving, relaxed, open, attentive, and friendly communication styles positively influence conflict resolution skills. The characteristics of these communication styles such as sincerely listening to the person one is communicating with, behaving openly, and getting involved in communication easily are predictors of higher conflict resolution skills. Karahan (2005) revealed that the individuals learning to use functional communication skills can reach more healthy solutions in case of a conflict without giving up their wishes and principles. In this sense, using animated, impression leaving, relaxed, open, attentive, and friendly communication styles is functional in terms of conflict resolution skills. Korkut (2005) found out, following the communication training given to adults, that an improvement was achieved in the participants' communication skills evaluation levels. Çam (2016) carried out a study with pre-service teachers and detected that the 12-week communication skills training positively influenced the participating individuals' perceived problem-solving skills. This result is consistent with the findings of the present study. As contentious individuals tend to argue with and leave a negative impression on the person they are communicating with, the individuals using this communication style are likely to have lower conflict resolution skills than others.

In the present study, females were determined to have higher conflict resolution skills than males. However,

this difference is not significant. Çevik (2011) investigated pre-service music teachers' problem-solving skills by gender and concluded that females have higher problem-solving skills than males. This result is also consistent with the findings of the present study. Rehber and Atıcı (2009) conducted a study on middle school students and concluded that male students are more aggressive than female students in problem-solving. Bonaguro and Pearson (1986) detected that the individuals having feminine characteristics use attentive and friendly communication styles more, whereas those having masculine characteristics use friendly communication style less. As to department, preschool education students were seen to have higher conflict resolution skills than psychological counseling and guidance students, though such difference is not significant.

Recommendations

1. The findings of this study are limited to the students of Cumhuriyet University Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance and Department of Preschool Education. A similar research may be conducted on a study group involving students from other departments.
2. The results obtained from the study are true for only university students. These results may be made more generalizable with students from other educational levels.
3. With effective communication and conflict resolution skills trainings to be given to students from various educational levels, students may be enabled to use more functional communication styles and improve their conflict resolution skills.

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