Unpacking The Dynamics: Students' Conflict Management Strategies in a Tri-Classroom Setting

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Publication Date: April 29, 2025

Abstract

Classrooms around the world become more diverse; students are increasingly exposed to different backgrounds, beliefs, and behaviors. While this diversity offers valuable learning experiences, it can also lead to misunderstandings and conflict. In the Philippines, implementation of heterogeneous or tri- people classroom sectioning has brought together students from various tribes and cultures, making conflict management an important area to explore. This study deals with how students handle conflicts in these mixed classroom settings. It revealed factors of interplay in conflict, kinds of conflicts occur, how students deal with them, and how effective their strategies are. Using a qualitative approach, ten students were interviewed, and their experiences were analyzed through thematic coding. Results showed that conflicts often stemmed in proximity, cultural differences, and

breakdowns emotional communication reactions and complicated group dynamics, ranging from minor disagreements to serious issues like physical altercations using weapons. Students shared that they manage conflict in different ways, some prefer to talk things out directly, others choose to stay silent, and many turn to teachers or trusted adults for help. While some of these methods worked to ease tension, they often only solved the problem temporarily. The students' responses were shaped by personal experience and advice from people they trust. The study suggests that while students are finding ways to cope, there's still a need for better support in helping them build long-term resolution skills. Encouraging open communication and mutual respect can help create a more peaceful and safe learning environment for students.

Keywords: Conflict Management Strategies, Tri-Classroom Setting, Phenomenology

I. Introduction

The concept of tri-classrooms, where students from diverse backgrounds and educational experiences learn together, has garnered attention in educational research. The Department of Education's initiative to create heterogeneous classroom settings has resulted in the grouping of students with varied perspectives, leading to potential conflicts. These conflicts are not confined to the classroom but extend into the community, necessitating an exploration of conflict management strategies among learners.

Globally, managing conflicts in increasingly diverse classrooms is vital, as research indicates that effective negotiation and mediation skills enhance both academic performance and social bonds (Kurtz, 2016; Chen, 2017; Lee, 2018). Adolescents often face challenges due to environmental changes, and the accumulation of emotions can lead to conflicts (Akan, 2020). While conflict is a natural occurrence, its impact can be both positive and negative, depending on the conflict resolution skills employed (Rahayu et al., 2021).

Nationally, the complexities of managing conflicts in multicultural and multiethnic classrooms are mounting. Studies have shown that unresolved conflicts can disrupt the learning process, emphasizing the need for conflict resolution programs (Santos, 2015; Reyes, 2016; Cruz, 2017). In the Philippines, research identified five conflict management styles: controlling, compromising, collaborating, accommodating, and avoiding, with collaboration being the most frequently employed strategy (Quiaoit & Buenaflor, 2022).

Locally, Dado High School faces a rise in conflicts due to the convergence of diverse tribal and cultural groups, including Christians, Muslims, and Lumad. These conflicts impact classroom dynamics and broader social challenges (Delos Reyes, 2018; Garcia, 2019; Torres, 2020). The lack of studies focused on conflict management techniques in tri-classroom settings creates a gap in understanding how students navigate conflicts in these complex environments.

Given the intricate interactions in diverse educational settings, this study aims to explore the conflicts experienced by students in Dado High School's tri-classroom context. It seeks to uncover the strategies employed to manage these conflicts, the influencing factors, and the impact of these approaches on classroom harmony.

Objective of the Study

The overall objective of this study was to explore and describe student conflict management strategies in a tri-people classroom setting at Dado High School, Alamada North District, Cotabato Division. Specifically the study had the following aims: (1) explore contributing factors to conflicts experienced by students in a tri-classroom setting, (2) discover types of conflicts do students encounter in a tri-classroom setting (3) discern conflict management strategies are employed by students to address these conflicts and understand students perceived effectiveness of their conflict management strategies in resolving disputes.

II. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of students regarding conflict and their conflict management strategies in a tri-classroom setting. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit in-depth narratives from participants about their tri-classroom dynamics, conflict experiences, employed strategies, and perceptions of their strategies effectiveness. There were ten (10) participants purposively selected from a tri-classroom at Dado High School in Alamada, Cotabato.

For the research instrument, a validated semi-structured interview guide, developed and translated into Filipino, was used. The guide comprised four sections focusing on: contributing factors to conflict, types of conflicts experienced, conflict management strategies employed, and participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of these strategies. A pilot interview was conducted to refine the instrument.

Further, in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with each participant, following the necessary permissions obtained from relevant authorities, including the Dean of Graduate Studies, Schools Division Superintendent, and School Head. Participants underwent an orientation, reviewed and signed informed consent forms, and were assured of confidentiality. Each interview, lasting approximately 45-60 minutes, was audio-recorded and concluded with member checking to validate the data. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview transcripts, involving familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and refining those themes, defining and labeling them, creating a thematic map, and writing a narrative report that incorporated illustrative quotes. The researcher, a social studies teacher with six years of experience, recognized their positionality and potential biases, with their teaching background and qualitative research training informing their



study approach, while the advisory committee significantly guided the research process. Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility via member checking and prolonged engagement, transferability through detailed contextual descriptions, dependability through an audit trail and peer debriefing, and confirm ability through reflexivity and the use of direct quotations. Ethical considerations were paramount, encompassing voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality through pseudonyms, the right to withdraw, and providing a token of appreciation to participants, with a strong emphasis on participant well-being and adherence to ethical guidelines.

III. Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Table 1. Factors to Conflicts Experienced by Students in a Tri-Classroom Setting

Emerging Theme	Clustered	Codes	Significant
	Themes		Statements
Classroom	- proximity that	- crowded,	" Our seats are really
Structure	affect conflict	noisy,	close, sometimes
	frequency	connected, in-	touching them or even
		between, move	looking them can start
	- physically	between them,	a fight."
	connected	attached,	
		frequent, physically aggressive, fight, pushed, bigger group, punch, fight	"we are physically connected they tend to raise voices when they speak which sounds like they're angry so other gets upset tooeventually leading to arguments physical fight"
Students Beliefs	-cultures and	-against our	" Like we eat pork,
and Pre-Existing	beliefs	beliefs, food,	they get offended."
Social		offended,	
Relationships	pre-eexisting	upset, Cliques,	"It began with joking
	friendships and	group,	remark that one could
	rivalries	ridiculed,	eat pork and simply
		misunderstood	marry a Christian,
			which provoked anger

all previous jokes were recalled, and a physical fight started"

"When they try to join us but something is against their practices...like we have pork....they get offended. Then their group get upset and it eventually leads to bigger conflict between our groups."

Misunderstanding and Communication Breakdown

misinterpretation in accent and pitch

- personality clashes

-talk among themselves, mentioned your name, frustration, gossiping, speaking ill, insult, throwing hurtful words, jokes

"..... They tend to talk among themselves, you only become aware of it if your name is mentioned. This often led to frustration and anger that results to bigger conflict... I realize that they are gossiping or speaking ill about me.

"Insulting us through their own dialect or they are throwing hurtful words that they are claiming to be one of the jokes....this provoke emotional reactions leading to group fights"

The dynamics in tri-classroom setting particularly the close proximity of students in the classroom, often characterized by crowded conditions and limited personal space, contributed to heightened emotional arousal and increased conflict frequency. Differing cultural beliefs and practices, particularly those related to food and



social norms, often led to misunderstandings and conflict. Pre-existing social relationships and rivalries, fueled by cultural differences, also contributed to conflict escalation. Language barriers, including accents, dialects, and communication styles, often led to misinterpretations and conflict. Students reported difficulties in understanding each other's conversations, which frequently resulted in misunderstandings and hurt feelings.

The findings highlight the complex interplay of factors contributing to conflict in the tri-classroom setting. The physical environment, cultural differences, and communication breakdowns create a context where misunderstandings and tensions are more likely to arise. This simply implied that school administrators must consider implementing strategies to address these factors, such as creating more spacious classroom environments, fostering cultural sensitivity, and promoting effective communication skills.

Table 2. Conflicts Experienced by Students in a Tri-Classroom Setting

Emerging	Clustered	Codes	Significant Statements
Theme	Themes	Coucs	Significant Statements
Escalating	- engaging in	- batter, fistfight,	" they said they are
Physical Physical	immediate	lurked, fight, pushed,	going to batter me."
•			going to batter me.
Violence	physical	bigger group, punch,	NT. 11 1 1
	fighting	fight outside,	"It was all started inside
		weapons, counter	the classroom Later
	engaging in	back	they became bigger
	group escalation		group ready to fight.
	and using		When I go home, group
	weapons		of students They punch
	weapons		me"
			me
			" when they started arguing, it escalated into a heated exchange of words and almost led to a fistfight. The next day, the number of enemies increased"
			"They argued, ma'am, and after school, they had a fight."



Aloysian Journals of Social Sciences, Education, and Allied Fields

Ongoing Verbal Teasing and Bullying	-engaging in bullying based on personal characteristics - engaging in general teasing and gossiping	bullied, fat, dark- skinned, dialects, teasing, gossip, language, misunderstanding	"I was bullied because I was fat and dark-skinned" "It was all started inside the classroom wherein we are teasing each other." "their conversations are hard to understand They will gossip about you. They will mention your name, and that's how the trouble starts." "It started with teasing"
Emotional Reactions	- feeling hurt and offended	hurt, offended, angry, carried away, couldn't accept	"I feel hurt by what they say about me"
Driving Conflict	- losing control of emotions	couldn't accept	"When I get angry, I get carried away by my emotions."
			"Emotional, because I couldn't accept just being pushed. My feelings changed"
Group and	- engaging in	classmates, friends,	"My classmates, some
Social	peer and group	group, instigating,	tried to stop it, but some
Dynamics in Conflict	involvement	teacher, adviser, older brother,	were instigating."
	- engaging in	parents, office,	"My friends inside and
	teacher and	suspended	outside the roommy
	authority intervention		attention was on the fight."
			" teachers helped by saying not to
Changes	- showing	weapons, physical	"Before it was resolved
Over Time	increased	violence, many	quickly but now it takes



in Conflict Patterns	violence intensity	involved, immature, heavier reasons	longer and there are weapons involved."
	- showing broader involvement in conflicts		"The reasons are heavier now compared to before."
			"Before, it was just us, no one helped each other. Now, if you hit one person, many will get involved."

Conflicts Experienced by Students in a Tri-Classroom Setting

Five emerging themes characterized the types of conflict experienced by students in the tri-classroom setting. Conflicts often escalated into physical altercations, including pushing, punching, and sometimes the use of weapons, frequently fueled by minor disagreements that quickly involved multiple students. Participants reported frequent verbal harassment, including teasing and bullying, often based on physical appearance and linguistic differences, contributing to emotional distress and social isolation. Students' emotional responses, primarily hurt and anger, served as potent triggers and intensifiers of conflict; misunderstandings, perceived disrespect, and feelings of being offended often led to emotional outbursts and escalated disputes. Conflicts were often embedded within a broader social context, with classmates and adults playing significant roles in both escalation and resolution; peer pressure, social validation, and the creation of "insider/outsider" dynamics contributed to conflict escalation. Finally, conflict patterns evolved over time, with previously minor verbal disagreements escalating into more intense, physically violent confrontations involving larger groups, attributed to factors such as adolescent development, shifting social dynamics, and exposure to violence.

The data revealed a range of conflict experiences, from verbal teasing and bullying to escalating physical violence. These conflicts are often rooted in emotional responses, social dynamics, and the complexities of adolescent development. This suggest the need of students to opportunities developing constructive conflict resolution skills in such schools provided comprehensive anti-bullying programs, promote emotional intelligence.



Table 3. Conflict Management Strategies Used by Students

	able 3. Conflict Management Strategies Used by Students Emerging Clustered Codes Significant Statements			
Emerging Theme	Clustered Themes	Codes	Significant Statements	
		4-11 4	" I also a to surdenstand	
Direct Peer	- talking and	- talked,	"I chose to understand	
Conflict	apologizing	apologized,	my classmates even though we have different beliefs."	
Resolution	uu dawatan din a	humbled,	we have different beliefs."	
	-understanding	expressed hurt	!!T	
	each's	feelings, made	"I made peace with them to end the conflict we	
	circumstance to end conflict	peace, shook		
	ena conflict	hands, weapons,	should end it so no one gets	
		counter back	hurt. We shook hands, ma'am."	
			"We went to guidance, and then we apologized We were all together."	
Authority- Mediated Conflict	- meeting with authority for clarification	older brother, parents, meeting in office,	"My older brother settled it. Then both parents had a discussion."	
Resolution		teachers,		
resolution		admitted faults, guidance	"The step I took was that after we went to the office, we admitted our faults they also admitted their faults."	
			"The main step I took, ma'am, was agreeing to meet in the office with the teachers and our parents present and everything was clarified."	
Avoidance	- avoiding and	avoid, don't	"I don't walk alone	
Strategies	distancing from	walk alone, not	anymore, ma'am. I prefer to	
	conflict	look for trouble,	walk with a group to avoid	
		setting mind it's	getting involved in trouble	
		like nothing happened	and misunderstandings."	
		11	"Yes, avoiding them like	
			when I walk alone on my	
			way to school, setting my	



			mind it's like nothing happened."
			"I listened to my parents that I shouldn't look for trouble, ma'am. I shouldn't get involved in fights."
Negotiation and Mediation	- negotiating and mediating with others	negotiation, mediating, talked to them, group discussion,	"Negotiation, because they thought I was angry with them. That was the only reason."
		adjusted to apologize	"I let myself talked to them All of us in our group, and all of them in the other side."
			"I tried to stop it, ma'am I was the one who mediated because it was really hard to end it,"
Learning and Influences in Strategy	- learning from personal experiences	personal experience, my own, from my	"From my parents"
Development	- learning from parents	parents, from myself, observed, from other people	"From myself because you can't always follow what others say. You need to know for yourself to avoid fights."
	- learning from oneself		fights." "I observed it from other
	- learning from observations		people. I saw, ma'am that they really teach their children not to get involved in trouble. Like my uncle, ma'am, he repeatedly tells his child. Because I grew up with my grandmother, ma'am, I saw that in them."
Seeking Guidance	- seeking guidance from	older brother, parents, cousin, head teacher,	"My cousin."



from Mentors and Authority	family members	grandmother, friends, classmates	"Yes, ma'am. The head teacher here at school. She said we should avoid
	 seeking guidance from 		trouble here at school."
	peers and		"My grandmother, ma'am.
	classmates		She often advised me not to look for trouble here "
	 seeking guidance from 		
	authority		
	figures		

Six key themes emerged regarding the conflict management strategies employed by students in the tri-classroom setting. Students often attempted direct peer conflict resolution through communication, apologies, and efforts to understand differing perspectives. Frequently, students sought authority-mediated conflict resolution, turning to teachers, parents, or other trusted adults for help mediating disputes, gaining guidance, clarifying misunderstandings, and establishing a structured framework for reconciliation. Avoidance strategies, while temporarily preventing escalation, were also observed, with students avoiding conflict-prone situations or individuals, often leading to unresolved tensions. Negotiation and mediation were employed, emphasizing dialogue, collaboration, and mutual understanding to resolve conflicts. Students' conflict management strategies developed based on personal experiences, observations, and advice from family and mentors. Finally, students actively sought guidance from trusted individuals, such as older siblings, family members, or teachers, for valuable insights and support in shaping their conflict resolution approaches.

Students employed a diverse range of conflict management strategies, including direct communication, seeking adult intervention, avoidance, negotiation, and mediation. The effectiveness of these strategies is often influenced by factors such as the nature of the conflict, the students' emotional state, and the support systems available. This signifies the need for teachers to integrate classroom discussion and activities with conflict resolution techniques including peer mediation, to create a safe learning space where students feel comfortable seeking help.

Table 4. Perceived Effectiveness of the Conflict Management Strategies



Aloysian Journals of Social Sciences, Education, and Allied Fields

Emerging	Clustered	Codes	Significant Statements
Theme Perceived Effectiveness of Conflict Strategies Defining Effectiveness by Short-Term Resolution	Themes - reporting no further physical conflict - conveying no more disciplinary records and recurrence - maintaining social harmony - conflict avoidance as a short-term strategy - quick resolution through immediate action - short-term resolution to	short-term, immediate, ended quickly, avoided trouble	"Yes. Because I haven't been involved in any fights anymore." "Effective, because there hasn't been a bigger fight in the classroom." " because there have been no more further records with the adviser and guidance." "Immediate result. Talk right away to resolve it quickly. So it ends quickly." "Short-term. To avoid many problems." "Immediate solution, ma'am. Talk to the opponent so the fight doesn't happen again."
Merging Internal	- listening and considering	listen, others say, perspectives, just	"Yes, because they said
Judgment with External Perspectives	others - relying solely on own judgment	myself, don't listen, personal	to avoid trouble so I wouldn't get kicked out of school. What they said was okay and correct." "Yes because I listen to them, before I say anything to others so they won't get hurt."



Tri-Classroom
Dynamics
Balancing
Connection and
Conflict

helping with mutual understanding

struggling with differences

helps, understand each other, respect, easy, harder, difficult, don't understand, tired, gossip "It helps, even though we are from different tribes and beliefs. Respect each other."

"It's difficult. It's like when they use their language, you feel like they are insulting you, but they aren't. It's unavoidable, ma'am, because we speak differently."

"It's not easy. It depends on them. Some really want to retaliate... they want trouble."

Advice for Handling Conflict in a Diverse Setting - promoting non-violence and avoiding conflict

- advocating for patience and understanding

seeking help from authorities

do not fight, have patience, avoid conflict, talk it out, call a teacher, respect,

understand

"You should have patience. Choose to understand each other in the room to avoid involving others."

"They should call a teacher to settle the fight. To avoid fights inside the classroom."

"Do not engage in fistfights. Do not engage in brawls because you will only hurt each other."

Students' perceptions of their conflict management strategies effectiveness revealed five key themes. Students considered their strategies effective when they prevented further escalation, minimized disciplinary actions, and maintained a

harmonious classroom environment. However, effectiveness was often defined by immediate outcomes, such as quick resolutions through apologies or discussions, sometimes leading to recurring conflicts due to unresolved underlying issues. Students balanced their own judgment with advice from peers, teachers, and family, demonstrating a thoughtful approach incorporating both internal intuition and external perspectives. They recognized the tri-classroom setting presented both opportunities for connection and challenges in managing cultural differences. Finally, students offered recommendations for navigating conflict in diverse settings, emphasizing non-violent approaches, patience, open communication, and seeking teacher intervention when necessary.

Students' perceptions of the effectiveness of their conflict management strategies are often based on short-term outcomes, highlighting the need for interventions that address both immediate and long-term conflict resolution goals. This suggests the importance of parents and other stakeholders supports in students' conflict resolution. In such they may facilitate open communication, empathy, and long-term solutions.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendation

This research explored the complex dynamics of student conflict in the triclassroom setting at Dado High School, revealing that physical fights and verbal teasing are often linked to emotions like anger and frustration. The findings highlight that conflicts can escalate when emotions are high and that individual reactions are influenced by personal histories and group dynamics. Effective conflict management strategies, such as direct peer resolution and mediation, not only promote peace but also foster personal growth. The study emphasizes the role of past experiences and influential figures in shaping conflict responses and reinforces the importance of empathy, respect, and patience in resolving disagreements. Ultimately, these insights equip students with tools to navigate conflicts constructively, enhancing understanding and resilience within the classroom.

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are suggested. School administrators may incorporate training focusing on conflict resolution strategies tailored to diverse environments, emphasizing communication skills, emotional regulation, and de-escalation techniques. Students may be encouraged to develop long-

term conflict resolution skills, including self-awareness, emotional regulation, and active listening. Teachers may incorporate discussions on cultural sensitivity into classroom activities and establish mentorship programs pairing older students with younger ones to guide conflict resolution and improve peer relationships. Parents shall actively assist in resolving conflicts among their children, creating a supportive environment for seeking help and resolving disagreements peacefully. Future researchers may explore the effectiveness of specific conflict resolution programs in tri-classroom settings, investigating their impact on student behavior, relationships, and academic performance, and incorporating perspectives from teachers, parents, and administrators for a holistic understanding.

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