



## The Relationship between School Administrators' In-House Communication and Conflict Management Strategies According to Physical Education Teachers' Perceptions

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### Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between school administrators' in-house communication and conflict management strategies based on physical education teachers' perceptions. The study sample consisted of 130 physical education teachers employed at state schools in Bartın provincial center who volunteered to take part in the study in a 2014-2015 academic year. "Interpersonal Communication Skills Scale" and "Conflict Management Strategies Scale" were implemented by teachers. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used in the study to analyze whether the data displayed a normal distribution. Since the data did not distributed normally according to teachers' ages and seniorities ( $p=0.000 < \alpha = 0,05$ ), non-parametric tests were used in the analysis. Descriptive statistics, Mann-Whitney U test and Spearman-Rho were used in data analysis. The margin of error was taken as 0.05. The study shows that physical education teachers prefer avoidance strategy ( $\chi=2,44 \pm 494$ ), controlled strategy ( $\chi=2,42 \pm 623$ ) and solution-oriented strategy ( $\chi=2,35 \pm 473$ ) respectively. As a result, the high-level relationship was identified between school administrators' interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies based on physical education teachers' perceptions while no statistically significant difference was determined in interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies subscale scores based on teachers' seniority and age.

**Keywords:** Physical education teachers, In-house communication, Conflict, Conflict management, Interpersonal communication skills.

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## **1. Introduction**

Today, one of the important practices in the sector of education to increase the level of services is the development of in-house communication skills as is the case in every sector. High levels of communication skills are necessary for individuals who work in professions that require frequent contact with people.

In-house communication skills is defined as “exchanging information”, “accurate perception of messages in interpersonal exchange of thought and feelings”, “communize meanings”, “mutual transmission and comprehension of emotions, information, and meanings” and “production and transmission of knowledge” (Arıcan, 2005; Cüceloğlu, 2005; Bambacas and Patrickson, 2008; Dokmen, 2008). These definitions show that in-house communication is a concept in educational settings as well. Individuals solve their problems by sharing information, emotions, thoughts, and problems, better understand and control their environment and can contribute to the development of education and training.

Individuals who succeed in communication are generally self-confident, considerate, willing to collaborate and share, open to the problems of their own and of others and problem solvers. Individuals who are insecure and fearful, who defend their ideas stubbornly, and who do not believe anyone's opinion but their own generally cannot communicate successfully. Unity of purpose is crucial to achieving success in communication (Bilen, 2004). When there is unity of purpose among individuals, the messages that are sent will be transmitted more easily. As this fact shows, increasing the quality of education and student satisfaction will only be possible through the development of communication especially between teachers and school administrators. According to Sisman (2001), the quality of education is directly proportional to teacher quality. In this sense, school administrators' ability to establish effective communication with teachers is thought to be positively reflected in the quality of education. There are studies in the literature that investigated school administrators' knowledge, skills and experience in conflict management and their use of effective communication skills in conflict management process (Gibson *et al.*, 2000; Pehlivan, 2007; Sirin and Yetim, 2010)

In addition to inefficiency in communication skills, inadequacy in conflict management skills is regarded as one of the main reasons in problems experienced at school. In general, conflict expresses negative emotions and behaviors such as notion of having different ideas, inadequate communication, disagreement, distress, stress, hostility and anxiety, it also reflects the source of creative and constructive actions, innovation, development, tolerance and a fundamental condition of existence (Sirin and Yetim, 2010; Disbudak, 2011).

The lack of harmony among individuals in terms of value judgments that hinder meeting both physiological and socio-psychological needs, attitudes, goals and ways that are believed to be successful in obtaining these goals, differences in ideas about perceiving problems and their solutions and discrepancy between feelings and behaviors may cause conflicts (Tekkanat, 2009) Conflict, considered to be an inevitable phenomenon in an environment where individuals interact, consists of simple differences, dissension, antagonism, contradiction, miscommunication, legal debates and violence/quarrels stages (Karip, 2003; Kandemir, 2006).

Conflicts arise from impulses and demands that contradict one another. In this process, the purpose of parties may present a non-violent feature such as the ensuring the acceptance of their own preferences or reaching the prioritized position in using power. In this case, conflicts arise from differences in sharing scarce resources, status, goals, values, and perceptions (Simsek, 1999). How the conflict environment is created and how this process is managed are important issues in conflict management as well as the in-depth perception of the concept by physical education teachers who undertake significant roles in sports and social activities.

Research has shown that conflicts, which can take be encountered in every organization, are caused by management styles, differences in goals, feelings of competitiveness and jealousy, insensitivity/indifference towards work or the topic of disagreement and behaviors that underlie individual problems (Sahin, 2007). One noteworthy point in these studies demonstrates that since methods used for conflict and methods used to cope with conflict are different in nature, conflict management will contribute to organizational success but it may negatively affect achievement.

How the conflict environment is created and how this process is managed are important issues in conflict management as well as the in-depth perception of the concept by physical education teachers who undertake significant roles in sports and social activities. Since conflicts are also processes of communication, the fact that communication is both a source of conflict and an effective means to manage conflicts increases its significance during conflict management process (Sahin, 2007).

In this sense, this study aimed to explore the relationships between interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies of school administrators based on physical education teachers' perceptions.

### **1.1. Research Model**

This study was undertaken as a descriptive study by using a survey model.

### **1.2. Study Group**

The study sample consisted of 130 physical education teachers employed at state schools in Bartın provincial center who volunteered to take part in the study in a 2014-2015 academic year. Incomplete or incorrect surveys were excluded from the study and 105 surveys were assessed.

### **1.3. Data Collection Tools**

#### **1.3.1. In-House Communication Skills Scale**

First, In-House Communication Skills Scale developed by Isik (2005) was used in the study to assess in-house communication skills. The 52-item scale is ranked by providing the following responses “Never”, “Rarely”, “Sometimes”, “Mostly” and “Always” that are scored as 0,1,2,3,4 respectively. The lowest and highest scores that can be obtained from the scale are 0 (neutral) and 208. High scores point to high tendency of the individuals to establish interpersonal communication. Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of In-House Communication Skills Scale was found to be 0.77 in this study and the scale is reliable.

**1.4. Conflict Management Strategies Scale**

“Conflict Management Strategies Scale” developed by Robt. E. Quinn was used in this study. Validity and reliability studies of the scale were undertaken by Turkan (2009). The questionnaire measures participants’ conflict management strategies in three categories. The questionnaire with a total of 30 items addresses conflict management in three dimensions.

**Table-1.** Conflict Management Strategies Scale (CMS) Sub Dimensions

	Number of Questions	Question Numbers
Solution Oriented Strategy	11	1.2.3.4.5.6.7.8.9.10.11
Avoidance Strategy	12	12.13.14.15.16.17.18.19.20.21.22.23.
Controlled Strategy	7	24.25.26.27.28.29.30.

Source: Turkan (2009).

Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of Conflict Management Strategies Scale was found to be 0.81 in this study and the scale is reliable. Cronbach Alpha Coefficients of the sub-dimensions for this scale change between 0.67 and 0.70.

**1.5. Data Analysis**

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used in the study to analyze whether the data displayed a normal distribution. Since the data did not distributed normally according to teachers' ages and seniorities ( $p=0.000 < \alpha = 0,05$ ), non-parametric tests were used in the analysis. Descriptive statistics, Mann-Whitney U test, and SpearmanRho were used in data analysis. The margin of error was taken as 0.05. data were analyzed via SPSS 16.0 program.

**2. Findings**

This section includes findings and interpretations of data in relation to problem statement.

**Table-2.** Demographic information for participating teachers

Variables	Sub Categories	f	%
Age Groups	22-29 Years	32	20,5
	Over 30	73	69,5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100</b>
Gender	Female	18	17,1
	Male	87	82,9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100</b>
Seniority	1-5 years	13	12,4
	6-9 years	34	44,8
	10 years or more	58	55,2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows that 69,5% of the participants were 30 or over. Gender distribution shows that 82,9% of the participants were males and 17,1% were females. Seniority information shows that 55,2% of the participants worked for 10 years or more and 12,4% had 1-5-year experience.

**Table-3.** Physical Education Teachers’ Conflict Management Strategies Scale Score Distribution

Conflict Management Strategies	Min	max	$\chi$	Sd
Solution Oriented Strategy	1,36	3,64	2,35	,473
Avoidance Strategy	1,58	3,75	2,44	,494
Controlled Strategy	1,14	4,43	2,42	,623

Table 3 shows that physical education teachers prefer avoidance strategy ( $\chi=2,44 \pm ,494$ ), controlled strategy ( $\chi=2,42 \pm ,623$ ) and solution-oriented strategy ( $\chi=2,35 \pm ,473$ ) respectively.

**Table-4.** Comparison of In-House Communication Skills Scale Scores Based on Age

	Age	Mean Rank	Rank Sum	U	P
In-House Communication	22-29 year	49,44	1582,00	1054,00	,427
	30 + years	54,56	3983,00		

N1=32 N2=73 T=105 P< 0.05

According to Table 4, there is no statistically significant difference between In-House Communication Skills Scale based on age ( $p>0.05$ ).

**Table-5.** Comparison of Conflict Management Strategies Scale Scores Based on Physical Education Teachers’ Seniority

Conflict Management Strategies	Seniority	Mean Rank	Rank Sum	U	P
Solution Oriented Strategy	1-6 years	49,63	2332,50	1204,500	,306
	7 years or more	55,73	3232,50		
Avoidance Strategy	1-6 years	50,38	2368,00	1240,000	,427
	7 years or more	55,12	3197,00		
Controlled Strategy	1-6 years	58,01	2726,50	1127,500	,128
	7 years or more	48,94	2838,50		

N1=47 N2=58 T=105 P< 0.05

No statistically significant differences were found among Solution Oriented Strategy, Avoidance Strategy and Controlled Strategy mean scores ( $p>0.05$ ).

**Table-6.** The relationship between the in-house communication skills scale and Solution Oriented Strategy Sub Dimension

	Solution Oriented Strategy	Avoidance Strategy	Controlled Strategy	In-house communication skills scale
Avoidance Strategy	1,000	,361**	,410**	,642**
Solution Oriented Strategy		1,000	,359**	,431**
Controlled Strategy			1,000	,394**
In-House Communication Skills Scale				1,000

\* Correlation is meaningful at the level of 0.05 \*\* Correlation is meaningful at the level of 0.01.

### 3. Discussion and Result

Table 2 demonstrates that 69,5% of the participating teachers were 30 years old or over. Gender distribution shows that 82,9% of the participating teachers were males and 17,1% were females. Seniority distribution shows that 55,2% of the participating teachers had 10 years or more experience while 12,4% had 1-5 year experience.

Table 3 shows that physical education teachers reported that school administrators adopted avoidance strategy. In other words, school administrators avoid disagreements with teachers and when they perceive a tense atmosphere, they tend to leave the environment, ignore the situation or "let them do what they want". These behaviors are significant determinants of avoidance strategy (Atis, 2010). Avoiding conflicts mean doing nothing at all in terms of conflict management strategies. The reason why school administrators adopt avoidance strategy may be related to the fact that they do not want to lose positive relationships in their interpersonal relationships. Polat and Arslan (2004) study which determined that in general, university administrators tended to utilize avoidance strategy confirms our findings. Karip (2003) associates the use of this strategy with the fact that conflicts harm both parties. Avoidance is the conflict management strategy in which both of the conflicting parties or one of these parties tend to display little interest in the conflict or tend not to take their own interests or interests of both parties into account. In this strategy, conflict is avoided and ignored. This strategy can be effectively used when the tension between the parties are so high that successful communication cannot be achieved. Conflict can be delayed up to a period when the parties can think more soundly and mutually discuss issues. According to Sirin and Yetim (2010), since avoidance hinders mutual interaction and exchange of ideas, it is not suitable for educational organizations. Therefore, this finding can be interpreted to mean that school administrators were not involved insufficient communication and interaction to enable them to assess conflict management strategies. Hence, the fact that school administrators prioritize avoidance strategy is not regarded as a suitable strategy in this study. Previous studies found that parties that prefer using this method had prior conflicts and had to face negative outcomes since conflicts were not managed appropriately (Sahin *et al.*, 2006; Yazıcı and Sunay, 2006; Sirin, 2008; Turkan, 2009)

The study found no significant differences in teacher views on school administrators' conflict management strategies and in-house communication skills based on teachers' age and seniority (Table 4-5). This finding pointing to the fact that age and seniority are not effective is an expected outcome since professional roles should not completely change according to age and seniority. In addition, it was also found that age and seniority were not significant determinants in reducing or increasing conflicts as well. Literature shows two separate and distinct result in terms of age and seniority: the studies that support our findings (Ascioglu, 2007; Aydin, 2007; Kilic, 2007; Sahin, 2007; Oztay, 2008; Firat, 2010) reported no significant relationships between conflict management and age/seniority. However, some other studies (Acar, 2006; Gunes, 2008; Topluer, 2008; Turkan, 2009; Basak, 2010; Ozyigit, 2010; Lal, 2012) demonstrated meaningful relationships between conflict management and age/seniority. Based on this data, it can be argued that lengthier professional seniority increases administrative experiences and therefore avoidance strategies are left behind and the importance of diagnosis, the basis of conflict management, is better comprehended.

The study found a high-level relationship between school administrators' interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies based on teacher perceptions (Table 6). Accordingly, conflict management strategies also increase when communication skills increase. This fact shows the significance of communications skills in managing conflicts. According to physical education teachers' views, the fact that all the relationships between school administrators' interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies were linear and positive shows that primary school administrators tended to use situational approaches in conflict management process (Sahin, 2007). According to these approaches, there is not one single strategy to be used in conflicts. On the contrary, multiple strategies should be used based on the scope and progress of the conflict and the attitudes of the parties. Shapiro (2004) also emphasized that conflicts, after all, our interaction and dialogue process and reported that they cannot be made constructive and functional without positive interaction, which is a type of communication itself. Some research data that support this view discussed that communication is related to many levels of conflicts and addressed competency issues theoretically such as discussions, convincing, data mining and development of relationships and emphasized that communication skills are among the crucial skills school administrators have (Ellis and Maoz, 2003; Ozerbas *et al.*, 2007; Cetinkaya and Alparslan, 2011) In this sense, improving interpersonal communication skills will allow effective use of conflict management strategies.

Communication is an unavoidable and significant aspect of human beings as social entities. Whether they are aware of it or not, people who live in a specific social environment communicate with one another. Solving interpersonal and social problems requires communication in addition to education. In communities in which sound communication skills are not developed, communication that aims to solve problems can turn into conflicts (Euwema *et al.*, 2003; Sahin, 2007).

It is believed that some of the interpersonal or personal problems encountered at schools are caused by the inability of administrators in comprehending teachers' feelings or in transmitting their interests and desires. According to Karip (2003) conflicts will continue as long as there are differences in the references, demands, values, beliefs, and interests of the parties involved in communication and interaction. Persuasive encouragement in the context of effective communication will result in efforts to succeed and ensures progress in feelings of personal competence and in development methods by increasing activities and strengthening motivation. Differences of perception in communication and communication barriers will cause increased anger and conflicts (Kilic, 2007). Accurately transmitting feelings, thoughts, desires, and experiences, making accurate and correct sense of received messages and creating a common sense is crucial for a sound school management (Argon, 2011).

As a result, a high-level relationship was identified between school administrators' interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies based on physical education teachers' perceptions while no statistically significant difference was determined in interpersonal communication skills and conflict management strategies subscale scores based on teachers' seniority and age.

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