Institutional Dynamics of Negotiating Styles and Academic Outcomes in Educational Settings through the Lens of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Framework

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between conflict dynamics—including triggers, frequency, and interpersonal contexts—negotiating styles, and academic outcomes in Philippine public schools, employing the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI). Data were collected from 276 teachers and eighteen school principals across nine central schools in Cagayan de Oro City, Northern Mindanao. Findings indicate that miscommunication was the primary conflict trigger among teachers (25.36%), whereas school principals most frequently cited gossip (55.56%). Teachers predominantly experienced conflicts with co-teachers (68.12%) and only occasionally (47.46%), while school principals primarily reported conflicts with teachers (77.78%) and seldom encountered disputes (55.56%). Correlation analyses revealed significant associations with academic performance, as measured by the four-year average mean percentage score on the National Achievement Test (NAT). Teachers' (collaborative) problem-solving style exhibited a moderate positive correlation (+0.546), while among school principals, accommodating (+0.492) and compromising (+0.531) styles were similarly beneficial. In contrast, avoiding and competing styles tended to correlate negatively with learning outcomes. These results demonstrate that the effectiveness of negotiating styles is context-dependent and role-specific, underscoring the need for differentiated conflict management strategies. The study recommends implementing professional development programs in collaborative negotiation, structured communication protocols, leadership training, and institutional policies that promote situational adaptability. Aligning conflict-handling behaviors with educational roles and objectives can enhance institutional harmony and improve student achievement.

Keywords: conflict management styles; school climate; academic achievement; Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument; educational leadership

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Resum. *Dinàmica institucional dels estils de negociació i els resultats acadèmics en entorns educatius a través del prisma de l'instrument de modes de conflicte de Thomas-Kilmann*

Aquest estudi analitza la relació entre les dinàmiques de conflicte (desencadenants, freqüència i contextos interpersonals), els estils de negociació i els resultats acadèmics en escoles públiques filipines, utilitzant l'instrument de modes de conflicte de Thomas-Kilmann (TKI). Es van recollir dades de 276 docents i 18 caps d'estudis de nou escoles centrals de Cagayán de Oro, al nord de Mindanao. Els resultats indiquen que la mala comunicació va ser el principal desencadenant de conflictes per als docents (25,36%), mentre que els caps d'estudis van assenyalar predominantment els rumors (55,56%). Els docents van reportar conflictes majoritàriament amb companys (68,12%) i de freqüència ocasional (47,46%), mentre que els caps d'estudis van identificar els docents com a principals interlocutors (77,78%) i van experimentar conflictes poc freqüents (55,56%). Les anàlisis de correlació van revelar associacions significatives amb el rendiment acadèmic (puntuacions mitjanes de l'Examen Nacional d'Assoliment, NAT): l'estil resolutiu (collaboratiu) dels docents va mostrar una correlació positiva moderada (+0,546); els estils acomodatiu (+0,492) i de compromís (+0,531) dels caps d'estudis van resultar igualment beneficiosos. Per contra, els estils evitatiu i competitiu van tendir a correlacionar-se negativament amb els resultats d'aprenentatge. Aquests resultats subratllen que l'eficàcia dels estils de negociació depèn del context i és específica del rol, la qual cosa justifica estratègies diferenciades de gestió de conflictes. Es recomana implementar programes de desenvolupament professional en negociació col·laborativa, protocols estructurats de comunicació, formació en lideratge i polítiques institucionals que fomentin l'adaptabilitat situacional. L'alineació dels comportaments de gestió de conflictes amb els rols i objectius educatius pot promoure l'harmonia institucional i millorar l'assoliment estudiantil.

Paraules clau: estils de gestió de conflictes; clima escolar; assoliment acadèmic; instrument de modes de conflicte de Thomas-Kilmann; lideratge educatiu

Resumen. *Dinámica institucional de los estilos de negociación y los resultados académicos en entornos educativos a través del prisma del instrumento de modos de conflicto de Thomas-Kilmann*

Este estudio examina la relación entre las dinámicas de conflicto (desencadenantes, frecuencia y contextos interpersonales), los estilos de negociación y los resultados académicos en escuelas públicas filipinas, mediante el instrumento de modos de conflicto de Thomas-Kilmann (TKI). Se analizaron datos de 276 docentes y 18 directivos escolares de nueve escuelas centrales de Cagayán de Oro, norte de Mindanao. Los hallazgos muestran que la mala comunicación fue el principal desencadenante de conflictos entre docentes (25,36%), mientras que los directivos señalaron predominantemente los rumores (55,56%). Los docentes reportaron conflictos mayoritariamente con pares (68,12%) y de frecuencia ocasional (47,46%), mientras que los directivos identificaron a los docentes como principales contrapartes (77,78%) y experimentaron conflictos poco frecuentes (55,56%). Los análisis de correlación vincularon estas dinámicas con el rendimiento académico (puntuaciones medias del Examen Nacional de Logros, NAT): el estilo resolutivo (colaborativo) de los docentes presentó una correlación positiva moderada (+0,546); los estilos acomodativo (+0,492) y de compromiso (+0,531) de los directivos resultaron igualmente beneficiosos. Por el contrario, los estilos evitativo y competitivo tendieron a correlacionarse negativamente con los resultados de aprendizaje. Estos resultados demuestran que la eficacia de los estilos de negociación depende del contexto y es específica del rol, lo que refuerza la necesidad de estrategias diferenciadas de gestión de conflictos. Se recomienda implementar programas de desarrollo profesional en negociación colaborativa, protocolos estructurados

de comunicación, formación en liderazgo y políticas institucionales que promuevan la adaptabilidad situacional. Al alinear los comportamientos de gestión de conflictos con los roles y objetivos educativos, las instituciones escolares pueden fomentar la armonía institucional y mejorar el logro estudiantil.

Palabras clave: estilos de gestión de conflictos; clima escolar; logro académico; instrumento de modos de conflicto de Thomas-Kilmann; liderazgo educativo

Summary

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1. Introduction

Conflict resolution in educational settings plays a crucial role in shaping institutional dynamics by fostering collaboration and ultimately enhancing learning performance outcomes (Kaya & Dönmez, 2010; Turnuklu et al., 2009; Bell et al., 2000). Understanding how conflict-handling behaviors influence academic success is essential in developing strategies that promote institutional effectiveness and student achievement (Mustafa & Othman, 2020; Bodine et al., 1996; Girard & Koch, 1996). Despite growing interest in conflict management, significant gaps regarding how specific negotiating styles correlate with measurable learning outcomes remain, particularly in Global South settings.

While prior studies have examined conflict styles in organizational settings (Bernaldez, 2016; Drew, 2024), few have empirically linked these behaviors to standardized academic performance, especially in Philippine public schools. For instance, Çetin and Hacıfazlıoğlu (2004) found that female academics at Turkish universities favored avoiding styles more than their male counterparts, yet their study did not assess how such preferences affect institutional or student-level outcomes. Similarly, Green et al. (1996) highlighted how organizational context and individual dynamics shape work relationships, though their findings largely reflect public library settings, limiting their direct applicability to school leadership. These studies provide foundational insights but lack contextual grounding in educational systems where relational harmony and hierarchical dynamics shape conflict resolution differently.

To address these gaps, this study draws explicitly on the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) as its theoretical framework. Developed by Thomas and Kilmann (1974) and later refined by Kilmann and Thomas (1975), the TKI conceptualizes conflict-handling along two dimensions, assertiveness and cooperativeness, yielding five distinct modes: competing, accommodating, avoiding, compromising, and collaborating (problem-solving). This framework is particularly suited to educational contexts because it acknowl-

edges the situational nature of conflict resolution: no single style is universally optimal; rather, effectiveness depends on relational roles, institutional goals, and cultural norms (Thomas, 1976). While the TKI has been widely applied in management and psychology, its integration into school-based research, especially in Southeast Asia, remains underexplored. Moreover, alternative models (e.g., Rahim, 2023) emphasize power distance and collectivism, suggesting that the TKI may require contextual adaptation in high-power-distance societies like the Philippines (Maphosa & Shumba, 2022). By anchoring the analysis in the TKI while acknowledging its limitations, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of conflict dynamics in non-Western educational settings.

Another critical gap lies in the limited empirical attention to conflict triggers, frequency, and relational patterns among school personnel (Onyinyechi & Wichendu, 2021). Most studies focus on individual conflict styles without examining how everyday stressors, such as miscommunication, gossip, or workload inequities, precipitate disputes. Mustafa and Othman (2020) highlight the value of professional development in conflict resolution but do not specify which triggers or relational configurations most undermine teacher collaboration or student outcomes.

Given global attention to school climate and relational dynamics (UNESCO, 2021), this study contributes context-sensitive evidence from Southeast Asia. Specifically, it investigates how conflict manifests among teachers and school principals in Philippine public schools and how their negotiating styles correlate with student performance on the National Achievement Test (NAT).

To achieve this, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) What factors trigger conflicts among teachers and school principals? (2) How frequently do these conflicts occur? (3) Who are the primary parties involved in these disputes? (4) How do negotiating styles, as defined by the Thomas-Kilmann framework, correlate with academic achievement?

This study holds global significance, since it sheds light on the vital role of leadership and teaching staff collaboration in fostering academic success, not only in Philippine schools where the research was conducted but also in educational institutions worldwide where interpersonal conflicts are an inevitable reality. By aligning empirical findings with a well-established theoretical model and contextualizing them within current global education priorities (UNESCO, 2021), this research offers actionable insights for improving institutional harmony and student learning outcomes.

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational design to systematically document conflict patterns among teachers and school principals and to examine the relationships between their conflict-handling behaviors and student academic performance, as measured by National Achievement Test (NAT) scores.

2.1. Locale of the Study

The research was conducted in the nine central schools of the Schools Division of Cagayan de Oro City, Northern Mindanao, Philippines. These schools were selected for their accessibility and representation of urban public educational settings, which provided a suitable context for investigating negotiating styles and their implications for institutional effectiveness.

2.2. Research Design

A quantitative descriptive-correlational approach was adopted to address the four research questions. This design facilitated the description of conflict triggers, frequency, and parties involved, while enabling statistical analysis of associations between negotiating styles and NAT performance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fraenkel et al., 2019). This approach is widely utilized in educational leadership studies linking interpersonal dynamics to measurable learning outcomes (Drew, 2024; Maphosa & Shumba, 2022).

2.3. Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) framework (Kilmann & Thomas, 1975). The instrument measured the five conflict-handling modes—competing, accommodating, avoiding, compromising, and problem-solving—on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). This scaling method is psychometrically robust and commonly employed in TKI-based educational and organizational research (DeVellis, 2017; Çetin & Hacıfazlıoğlu, 2004; Almazrou & Alhoshan, 2023). Additional sections gathered demographic information and data on conflict triggers, frequency, and parties involved.

2.4. Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Content validity was established through the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) procedure (Lawshe, 1975), with five subject-matter experts evaluating each item. The resulting CVR of 0.99 indicated excellent content validity. Construct alignment was confirmed by comparison with the original TKI (Kilmann & Thomas, 1975). Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.83, which exceeds the accepted threshold of 0.70 for social science instruments (Nunnally, 1978).

2.5. Sampling Design

A purposive sampling strategy was employed, targeting 276 teachers and eighteen school principals from the nine central schools (N = 294). Teachers were included due to their core role in instruction and peer interactions, while

school principals were selected for their leadership responsibilities in conflict mediation and institutional climate management. This approach aligns with established practices in educational conflict research (Onyinyechi & Wichendu, 2021; Mustafa & Othman, 2020). The sample size exceeds the recommended minimum for correlational studies ($n \geq 100$) and provides adequate statistical power to detect moderate correlations ($r \geq 0.30$) at $\alpha = 0.05$ (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

2.6. Data Analysis

Data analysis combined descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) to summarize conflict triggers, frequency, and parties involved, and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation coefficients) to assess relationships between negotiating styles and learning performance, operationalized as the four-year average mean percentage score (MPS) on the National Achievement Test (NAT). Covariance coefficients were also computed to examine directional variability between variables. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Framework served as the interpretive lens, enabling the findings to be contextualized within a well-established theoretical model of conflict-handling behavior.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

This study complied with the ethical standards set by the institutional review board of the University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines (USTP) and followed national guidelines for responsible conduct of research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after they were briefed on the study's objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were safeguarded by assigning codes instead of names and storing all data in secure, password-protected files. No identifying information was disclosed in the reporting of results.

Special attention was given to minimizing risks and ensuring that participation did not cause harm or undue burden. Such safeguards were implemented to protect participants' welfare.

All sources of funding and potential conflicts of interest were transparently disclosed. The author affirms that the study was conducted with integrity, respect for human dignity, and adherence to institutional and national standards of ethical research practice.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings address the four research questions in sequence: conflict triggers, frequency, parties involved, and correlations between negotiating styles and academic performance (National Achievement Test [NAT] mean percentage scores). Results are interpreted through the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument framework.

3.1. Factors that Trigger Conflict

Table 1. Percentage Distributions of Teachers' and School Principals' Perceptions and Experiences by Factors that Triggered Conflict

Factors that Triggered Conflict	Teachers (n = 276)	School Principals (n = 8)
Gossip	9.78%	55.56%
Work-Related Issues/Concerns	17.39%	11.11%
Professional Jealousy	13.41%	16.67%
Miscommunication	25.36%	5.56%
Decision-Making	10.51%	5.56%
Differences in Personal Traits	16.67%	5.56%
Unresolved Personal and Work-Related Issues	6.88%	–

Source: Own elaboration.

Miscommunication was the predominant trigger for teachers (25.36%), reflecting their frequent interpersonal interactions. In contrast, gossip emerged as the primary trigger for school principals (55.56%), highlighting leaders' vulnerability to reputational dynamics. Work-related issues (17.39% teachers) and professional jealousy (13.41–16.67%) were also notable across both groups. These patterns align with the Thomas-Kilmann framework: miscommunication often escalates into competing or avoiding behaviors, while gossip-related disputes among leaders may require compromising or problem-solving approaches to restore trust.

Regarding frequency, teachers most frequently reported occasional conflicts (47.46%), consistent with their daily peer and classroom interactions. Most school principals experienced conflicts rarely (55.56%), reflecting their mediating rather than directly engaged role. The modal occasional frequency among teachers allows space for collaborative (problem-solving) approaches, whereas the rarity of conflicts for school principals favors efficient accommodating or compromising styles.

3.2. The Frequency of Occurrence

Table 2. Percentage Distributions of Teachers and School Principals by Occurrence of Conflict Encountered in Schools

Frequency of Occurrence	Teachers (n = 276)	School Principals (n = 18)
All the time	–	5.56%
Most of the time	10.14%	11.11%
Occasionally	47.46%	11.11%
Rarely	33.70%	55.56%
Not at all	8.70%	16.67%

Source: Own elaboration.

The frequency with which conflicts occur provides additional insight into the dynamics of interpersonal relationships within schools. Teachers reported that they encountered conflicts occasionally as the modal frequency (47.46%), whereas school principals tended to experience conflicts rarely (55.56%). This contrast suggests that teachers are more frequently exposed to situations requiring negotiation and resolution due to their direct involvement in classroom management, peer interactions, and student supervision. School principals, on the other hand, may face fewer day-to-day conflicts because their roles often involve mediating disputes rather than directly engaging in them.

From the perspective of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Framework, the frequency of conflicts influences the choice of negotiating styles. For instance, teachers' frequent exposure to occasional conflicts may lead them to adopt accommodating or compromising styles to quickly resolve disputes and maintain harmony in their immediate environment. Conversely, school principals' tendency to encounter conflicts rarely aligns with their use of avoiding or problem-solving styles, reflecting their leadership role in maintaining institutional stability and addressing conflicts only when necessary. However, the overuse of avoiding styles by school principals could inadvertently allow tensions to escalate if unresolved issues are not addressed proactively.

A notable finding is that no teachers reported that they experienced conflicts all the time, while 5.56% of school principals admitted to encountering conflicts continuously. This discrepancy highlights the unique pressures faced by school leaders, who must navigate complex interpersonal dynamics and institutional expectations. According to Green et al. (1996), persistent conflicts can strain leadership effectiveness, particularly if not managed through collaborative or problem-solving approaches. Additionally, Mustafa and Othman (2020) emphasize that unresolved conflicts among school leaders can negatively impact teacher morale and student outcomes, underscoring the importance of addressing recurring disputes promptly.

Among teachers, 33.70% stated that conflicts occurred rarely, while 8.70% reported not encountering any conflicts at all. These findings suggest that a significant proportion of teachers experience relatively low levels of conflict, possibly due to established communication protocols or supportive peer relationships. However, 10.14% of teachers acknowledged that they encountered conflicts most of the time, indicating that a small but notable subgroup faces persistent challenges. Çetin and Hacıfazlıoğlu (2004) argue that such individuals may benefit from targeted professional development programs aimed at enhancing conflict-resolution skills, particularly in adopting assertive yet cooperative negotiating behaviors.

For school principals, 11.11% reported that they encountered conflicts most of the time, a proportion comparable to teachers. This similarity suggests that while teachers and school principals occupy different hierarchical levels, they share common stressors related to workload, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, 16.67% of school principals reported that they encountered no conflicts, which may reflect either effective conflict management strategies or a lack of awareness regarding underlying tensions. As Kilmann and Thomas (1975) note, conflict avoidance can sometimes mask deeper organizational issues, necessitating proactive measures to ensure transparency and trust within schools.

3.2.1. Conflict Frequency and Institutional Effectiveness: Leadership and Communication Strategies for Academic Success

Understanding the frequency of conflicts provides valuable insights into the dynamics of educational settings and their implications for organizational effectiveness and student achievement. Teachers' occasional conflicts highlight the need for structured communication and collaboration protocols to prevent disputes from escalating into competing or avoiding behaviors. Professional development initiatives targeting conflict-resolution skills can empower educators to adopt balanced negotiating styles that foster mutual respect and shared decision-making (Mustafa & Othman, 2020). In turn, the fact that school principals encounter conflicts rarely underscores the importance of fostering transparent leadership practices. As Çetin and Hacıfazlıoğlu (2004) emphasize, open dialogue and accountability are critical in reducing interpersonal tensions and enhancing institutional harmony.

3.3. The Parties Involved in Conflict

Table 3. Percentage Distributions of Teachers and School Principals by Parties Involved in Conflict

Parties Involved in Conflict	Teachers (n = 276)	School Principals (n = 18)
Co-teachers	68.12%	77.78%
Co-workers (but not teachers)	26.45%	16.67%
School Principal	5.43%	–
Assistant School Principal	–	5.56%

Source: Own elaboration.

The parties involved in conflicts within schools, as shown in Table 3, reveal distinct relational dynamics for teachers and school principals, reflecting their respective roles and responsibilities. A majority of teachers (68.12%) reported that they predominantly encounter conflicts with co-teachers, while a significant proportion (26.45%) acknowledged conflicts with co-workers who are not part of the teaching staff. These findings underscore the interpersonal nature of conflicts among teaching staff, often stemming from shared responsibilities, competition for recognition, or differences in pedagogical approaches. From the perspective of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Framework, these conflicts may arise due to competing styles, individuals prioritizing personal goals over relationships, or avoiding styles, where unresolved issues accumulate over time.

For school principals, the data indicates that the majority (77.78%) primarily encounter conflicts with teachers. This highlights the critical role of leadership in mediating disputes and fostering collaboration among educators. Çetin and Hacıfazlıoğlu (2004) argue that effective leadership involves adopting accommodating or compromising styles to address conflicts with subordinates to ensure alignment with institutional goals. However, school principal's reliance on accommodating styles, as suggested by the data, might inadvertently perpetuate unresolved tensions if overused. Additionally, 5.56% of school principals reported conflicts with assistant principals, reflecting hierarchical dynamics and potential power struggles within leadership teams.

The asymmetry in conflict involvement between teachers and school principals—teachers predominantly facing conflicts with peers and school principals encountering conflicts with subordinates—underscores the different sources of stressors across hierarchical levels. Teachers' conflicts with co-teachers and non-teaching staff may require collaborative problem-solving approaches to address underlying trust and communication issues. In contrast, school principals' conflicts with teachers often involve balancing authority and accountability, necessitating careful navigation between assertive (competing) and cooperative (accommodating/compromising) styles. As Green et al. (1996) note, resolving such conflicts effectively is essential for maintaining institutional stability and promoting a positive organizational culture.

A notable finding is that 5.43% of teachers reported conflicts with their school principals, while no teachers identified conflicts with assistant principals. This suggests that teacher-leader conflicts are relatively rare but potentially significant when they occur, often involving issues of workload distribution, decision-making authority, or professional autonomy. Mustafa and Othman (2020) emphasize that addressing such conflicts proactively through transparent communication and mutual respect can enhance teacher morale and, by extension, student outcomes.

3.3.1. Conflict Stakeholders and Institutional Harmony: Aligning Negotiating Styles for Academic Success

Understanding the parties involved in conflicts provides valuable insights into the relational dynamics within schools and their implications for organizational effectiveness and student achievement. Conflicts among co-teachers, which constitute the majority of disputes for teachers, highlight the need for structured collaboration protocols to reduce misunderstandings and foster a supportive peer environment. Professional development initiatives targeting conflict-resolution skills can empower educators to adopt balanced negotiating styles that enhance teamwork and instructional quality, which ultimately benefit student learning experiences. For school principals, conflicts with teachers underscore the importance of fostering transparent and inclusive leadership practices. According to Kilmann and Thomas (1975), the situational appropriateness of conflict-handling styles is crucial in achieving the desired outcomes. By aligning negotiating styles with institutional goals, school leaders can create a culture of mutual respect and shared decision-making that lowers disruptions and enhances teaching practices. Moreover, addressing hierarchical conflicts, such as those between school principals and assistant principals, ensures that leadership teams remain cohesive and focused on supporting both teachers and students.

3.4. Correlations and Coefficients between Negotiating Styles and NAT Results

The analysis of the parties involved in conflicts sheds light on the relational dynamics shaping disputes within educational settings and highlights the need for tailored conflict-resolution strategies. However, understanding the correlations and coefficients between negotiating styles and learning performance outcomes provides critical insight into how conflict-handling behaviors directly influence institutional effectiveness. By examining how these styles interact with contextual factors, such as conflict frequency and role-specific pressures, we move beyond description toward actionable explanation.

Table 4. Summary Table: Correlation and Covariance Coefficients between Learning Performance and Negotiating Styles

Negotiating Style	Teachers (n = 276)	School Principals (n = 18)
Competing Style	–0.030 (Very weak, negative correlation)	–0.164 (Weak, negative correlation)
Accommodating Style	–0.003 (Very weak, negative correlation)	+0.492 (Moderate, positive correlation)
Avoiding Style	–0.028 (Very weak, negative correlation)	–0.531 (Moderate, negative correlation)
Compromising Style	–0.033 (Very weak, negative correlation)	+0.531 (Moderate, positive correlation)
Problem-Solving Style	+0.546 (Moderate, positive correlation)	–0.090 (Very weak, negative correlation)

Source: Own elaboration.

3.4.1. Teachers' Negotiating Styles

The data demonstrate that teachers' problem-solving styles exhibit a moderate positive correlation (+0.546) with learning performance, indicating that collaborative approaches to conflict resolution significantly enhance academic outcomes. This finding aligns with the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Framework, which posits problem-solving as a win-win strategy that fosters trust, shared decision-making, and instructional coherence. Notably, this style is most effective in contexts where conflicts occur occasionally (as reported by 47.46% of teachers), a frequency that allows time and psychological safety for dialogue without chronic disruption.

In contrast, competing, accommodating, avoiding, and compromising styles among teachers show very weak negative correlations (ranging from –0.003 to –0.033) with learning performance. While not statistically significant, their consistent negative direction suggests that overreliance on these styles—even in moderation—may subtly erode team cohesion. For instance, avoiding styles may allow minor miscommunications (the top trigger for teachers) to fester, while competing behaviors could amplify tensions rooted in professional jealousy.

3.4.2. School Principals' Negotiating Styles

For school principals, the findings reveal a strikingly different pattern. Accommodating (+0.492) and compromising (+0.531) styles demonstrate moderate positive correlations with learning performance, underscoring the value of relational harmony in leadership. Given that school principals only rarely experience conflicts (55.56%), these styles likely function as efficient tools for swift resolution without destabilizing the institutional climate. In hierarchical, high-power-distance contexts like Philippine public schools, preserving face and authority through accommodation may be more effective than prolonged collaboration.

Conversely, avoiding styles show a strong negative correlation (–0.531) —the most pronounced in the study. This is particularly concerning because

unaddressed conflicts, even if infrequent, can disproportionately damage trust when they involve leadership. Gossip—the primary trigger for school principals—requires transparency, not silence; avoidance may allow rumors to metastasize into institutional distrust.

3.4.3. Covariance Analysis

Covariance coefficients reinforce these patterns. Teachers' problem-solving yields positive covariance (+22), while school principals' accommodating and compromising styles show +32 and +29, respectively. In contrast, school principals' avoiding style registers –37, confirming its detrimental impact.

3.4.4. Interplay between Conflict Frequency and Negotiating Style Effectiveness

A key insight emerges when we integrate Section 3.2 (Frequency) with Section 3.4 (Correlations): conflict frequency moderates style effectiveness. Facing occasional disputes, teachers benefit from problem-solving, a style that requires cognitive and emotional bandwidth that is best deployed in non-crisis settings. Given that they encounter conflicts rarely, school principals achieve better outcomes through accommodating/compromising styles, which prioritize stability over deep resolution. This suggests that optimal conflict management is not just role-dependent but rhythm-dependent: the temporal pattern of conflict shapes which styles yield academic gains.

3.4.5. Limitations of the Instrument

While the Thomas-Kilmann-based questionnaire demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.83$), it relies on self-reported preferences, which may be influenced by social desirability—particularly among school principals, who may overreport harmonious styles such as accommodating. Additionally, the instrument captures general tendencies, not context-specific behaviors. Future studies could triangulate these reports with interviews or observational data to capture how styles shift across conflict types (e.g., gossip vs. miscommunication).

3.4.6. Negotiating Styles and Academic Success: Correlational Insights from the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Framework

These findings confirm that no single style is universally optimal. Instead, effectiveness hinges on role, context, and conflict rhythm. In resource-constrained Philippine schools—where formal HR support is limited—this insight is transformative. It shifts the focus from "training everyone in problem-solving" to matching styles to situational demands: teachers need collaborative tools for peer tensions, while leaders require nuanced strategies for rare but high-stakes disputes.

3.5. Alternative Interpretations and Contextual Considerations

While the correlations between negotiating styles and academic outcomes are statistically and contextually meaningful, the data also permit alternative interpretations that enrich our understanding of school conflict dynamics.

First, the strong positive correlation between school principals' accommodating styles and NAT scores (+0.492) may reflect not only effective relational management but also cultural alignment with Filipino leadership norms. In high-power-distance, collectivist settings like the Philippines, school principals may be socially expected to prioritize harmony over assertiveness (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, their self-reported accommodating behaviors could partly represent conformity to role expectations rather than strategic conflict resolution, suggesting that the observed academic benefits may stem from perceived leadership legitimacy rather than style itself.

Second, the lack of significant correlation between most teachers' non-problem-solving styles and learning performance (all $r < -0.033$) does not necessarily imply ineffectiveness. Instead, it may indicate that institutional structures mediate individual behaviors. In schools with strong collaborative cultures or clear conflict protocols (e.g., regular faculty meetings, peer mentoring), the impact of individual negotiating styles on student outcomes may be diluted, which is consistent with Mustafa and Othman's (2020) finding that systemic support buffers interpersonal friction.

Third, the negative correlation between school principals' avoiding styles and NAT scores (–0.531) could be two0way: poor academic performance may induce avoidance (e.g., leaders withdrawing due to stress or perceived failure), rather than avoidance causing low performance. This aligns with Green et al. (1996) observation that leadership stress often triggers disengagement, which is a pattern that may be amplified in under-resourced Philippine public schools.

Finally, the finding that teachers' problem-solving style correlates positively (+0.546), while school principals' does not (–0.090), might reflect role-specific feasibility. Teachers operate in peer-based, collaborative spaces where joint problem-solving is logistically possible; school principals, in contrast, face time constraints, hierarchical barriers, and political sensitivities that limit deep collaboration, consequently rendering problem-solving less viable despite its theoretical appeal.

These interpretations do not contradict the primary findings but highlight the complex interplay among culture, structure, and role in shaping how negotiating styles influence academic outcomes. They also confirm the insight that the data are rich enough to support multiple analytical lenses—a strength that future mixed-methods studies could further explore.

4. Conclusion

This study addressed four research questions derived from the central inquiry into conflict dynamics in Philippine public schools: (1) What factors trigger conflicts among teachers and school principals? (2) How frequently do these conflicts occur? (3) Who are the primary parties involved? (4) How do negotiating styles correlate with academic achievement?

The conclusions below provide a direct response to each question grounded in empirical data and contextualized within existing literature.

First, regarding conflict triggers, miscommunication was the dominant factor for teachers (25.36%), reflecting the high-interaction nature of their roles; this finding is consistent with Green et al. (1996) emphasis on communication clarity in reducing workplace tension. In contrast, gossip was the primary trigger for school principals (55.56%), underscoring leaders' vulnerability to reputational dynamics. This extends Çetin and Hacıfazlıoğlu's (2004) observation of hierarchical sensitivity in conflict perception, now showing its measurable prevalence in Southeast Asian school leadership.

Second, regarding conflict frequency, teachers most commonly reported occasional disputes (47.46%), aligning with their frontline responsibilities. School principals, however, tended to experience conflicts rarely (55.56%), suggesting that their roles buffer daily friction. However, the 5.56% of school principals reported "all the time" conflicts, signaling potential burnout—a risk Mustafa and Othman (2020) link to leadership strain and declining institutional morale.

Third, concerning the parties involved, 68.12% of teachers conflicted with co-teachers, while 77.78% of school principals identified teachers as their main counterparts. This dyadic pattern reveals a two-layered conflict ecosystem, confirming Onyinyechi and Wichendu's (2021) call for role-specific conflict-resolution strategies in educational institutions.

Fourth, and most significantly, negotiating styles showed role-dependent correlations with National Achievement Test (NAT) scores.

— Teachers' problem-solving style correlated moderately and positively (+0.546).
— School principals' accommodating (+0.492) and compromising (+0.531) styles yielded similar benefits.
— School principals' avoiding style showed a strong negative correlation (–0.531).

These results affirm the Thomas-Kilmann Framework's core tenet: effectiveness is situational. They also reveal that conflict frequency, that is, how often disputes arise, moderates style impact. For example, occasional conflicts among teachers allow time for collaboration, whereas rare but high-stakes disputes for leaders favor swift harmony-restoration.

Critically, these findings offer actionable decision-making criteria for similar Global South contexts.

— When conflicts are gossip-driven and infrequent (as with school principals), transparent leadership forums yield greater returns than generic workshops.
— When conflicts are miscommunication-driven and occasional (as with teachers), structured peer collaboration protocols directly enhance academic outcomes.

In this way, this study transforms rich contextual data into a practical framework for resource allocation, professional development, and policy design, ensuring that even schools with limited capacity can foster institutional harmony and improve student achievement.

4.1. Recommendations

For resource-constrained schools in Southeast Asia and the Global South, the following actionable strategies are recommended:

1. For teachers: Embed micro-training in problem-solving during routine faculty meetings (e.g., 15-minute conflict-resolution drills) to address miscommunication before it escalates.
2. For school principals: Implement transparent leadership forums (e.g., monthly open briefings) to preempt gossip-driven tensions. Given that avoiding styles strongly correlate with lower academic performance ($r = –0.531$), leaders should be trained in "timely addressing"—a hybrid of compromising and problem-solving for rare but high-stakes conflicts.
3. For policymakers: Develop national or division-level guidelines that recognize the different conflict-handling needs of teachers versus leaders. One-size-fits-all conflict resolution manuals should be replaced with role-specific toolkits aligned with the Thomas-Kilmann framework.
4. For professional development: Use real conflict scenarios from local schools (e.g., workload disputes, rumor management) to build situational adaptability.
5. For future research: Triangulate survey data with classroom observations or focus groups to capture how negotiating styles shift across conflict types and frequencies.

These recommendations prioritize feasibility, scalability, and cultural appropriateness, thus ensuring that even schools with limited resources can foster institutional harmony and improve student achievement through evidence-informed conflict management.

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