

Conflict and Communication in Classroom

Abstract

This research deals with the conflict and communication problems in our schools. It shows that the situation is a real obstacle to the efficient learning process. The study was inspired from my learning and teaching experience during the studying years at "Aleksander Xhuvani" and "Tirana" University.

Firstly there were given a few theories, opinions, and other researches made on this topic. Then is explained the way that how this research was conducted through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was done in two schools, high and primary school, and was divided between teachers and students. The questions were based on these theories and aimed at verifying and proving some of them. These questions and their aims are also explained in the study.

The results of the study are presented at the end. A problematic situation about the conflict and communications in the classrooms is found in this research. Then the study discusses and analyzes the results, encourages further research to be carried on, and gives suggestions in order to improve this situation.

Key words: *Conflict and Conflict Resolution; Institutional Violence; Effective Teaching; Communication; Disagreements; Positive Climate*

1. Introduction

Conflict and communication are inseparable part of our everyday life. Conflict can be found everywhere, in different classes of society, at different generations, and that is since the very beginning of human kind. There are conflicts among friends, politicians, states, in a relationship, in a classroom, within a family, and wherever the communication occurs. So whenever there is a miscommunication, it leads to unclear expectation and that results in a conflict.

In Albania differing from other European countries the conflict and communication in classroom is still a major problem. This is due to several factors. Firstly, most of the teachers were trained at a period when no freedom of speech was allowed, so it was only teachers who decided on everything. Also their way of solving conflicts was by using force and violence. Unfortunately some of these behaviors are found even now days in our schools. Secondly, the Albanian mentality is another factor that contributes in generating conflicts. Albanians have some difficulties in expressing their problems and feelings. By doing so, they accumulate and keep the problems within themselves. As a result they are more likely to enter in a conflict.

Another reason that generates conflict within the class is the generation gap between teachers and students. In teachers' mentality they should not be contradicted by the students. Whatever they say should be accepted without any objection. On the other hand students now days have a different mentality. They like to be heard and taken into consideration. They also do not accept the use of any kind of violence from the teachers.

Having these kinds of conflicts and miscommunication in the class seriously affects the learning process, the personality of the students, and contributes to a negative climate in the class. It affects the learning process by lowering the students' interest and motivation on the lesson. If they have no sympathy for the teacher they will not be motivated to study his/her subject. Conflicts in the classroom also affect the personality of the students. If they are prevented from expressing their thoughts and ideas, it will have a negative effect on their future development.

Studying and analyzing the conflicts in the classroom will help to find out the reasons for such a disturbing situation and finding ways how to improve it. By improving the classroom climate, there will be two major groups that will highly profit from it. Firstly students will have a better environment to learn. Secondly teachers, will find it easier to have an effective and successful teaching in the classroom. During my studying years there have been enormous situations where miscommunication and conflicts were present in the class. Mostly these conflicts were not dealt and solved in the appropriate way. This is a strong reason for undertaking such a study that will hopefully contribute in improving the communication in the classroom.

2- Literature Review

How the world would be if nobody would communicate with others? Of course it would have been a sad place. So we are lucky to be humans and have different

ways to communicate with each other. We can express our thought and feelings with the spoken and written language, with gestures and facial expressions. But it often happens that we engage in a conflict. When dealing with conflicts it is vital to possess an effective communication. However, when we are found in conflicting situation, our communication becomes complicated and disturbing. Then, we have difficulties in expressing our real emotions or we lose our temper to that extend that others are not able to understand our spiritual state.

Communication and conflicts are inevitable in education. Teachers and students need to communicate in order to transmit and receive messages. For that reason conflict and communication in classroom is a well studied, discussed, and analyzed topic from different people. Despite having that many conflicts, their sources are limited. Most of the conflicts are caused by six sources listed below. The first is the basic needs of individuals, then the differences in values, opinions, interest, limited resources, and psychological needs (Shapiro, 1997).

Many people think that conflicts and violence is exactly the same thing. These two concepts are often connected to each other, but are not identical. Many people use violence to solve a conflict, but that is not the only mean of doing so. There are three types of violence: physical, psychological, and institutional (Shapiro, 1997). Physical violence has to do with the use of physical force in order to harm somebody. On the other hand psychological violence has to do with the harming of the feelings and the personality of the others, whereas the institutional violence is the rejection of the fundamental rights of a certain group of society from a certain institution.

One conflict that is very common in the classroom is peer conflict. It is very important for the teachers and parents to understand the peer conflict in order to reduce it. It is widely accepted that conflicts between children is unwanted and unacceptable, so adults usually try to stop them or intervene. However, now days several theories and studies have shown that the conflicts between children help their development and are vital for social interaction (Rende and Killen, 19992: Ross and Conant, 19992). Some educators are even trying to develop conflicts resolution strategies for the children without any intervention from the adults (Ramsey, 1991). Parents' help might also be valuable in developing such strategies.

In a study that was made in three schools when sixty nine children were involved in the research, it was found that during the activities that children made, the number of unresolved conflicts is bigger than the number of conflicts that were resolved (Killen and Turiel, 1991). The research has also found some important information. Despite the level of the conflict the adults resolved their conflicts more often than the children do.

An important fact that plays a key role in conflicts resolution is age and gender. While the younger children try to solve the conflict by using the physical strategies, the older ones use more discussions, debates and negotiations (Ross and Conant, 1992). In another study it is also found that older children relied more on insistence

then the younger ones (Lauresn and Hartup, 1989).

Another type of classroom conflict is the teacher student conflict. Whenever there is such a situation the teacher's reactions is of primary importance (Gjokutaj, 2005). The teacher should be really prepared to manage such situations. The teacher might also use reprimands and punishments to solve the conflict. Despite several disadvantages punishments play an important role in keeping the order when they are used adequately (Gjoci, 2008). Reprimands should also be used, but they should be limited (Gjoci, 2008). They should accomplish the effective teaching in general. The overuse of reprimands reduces the effective teaching and destroys the positive climate in the class. Sometimes students see the teacher's reprimands as disturbing and unfair. They think they are picked on for no reasons. So whenever the school climate is not positive, some kind of punishment and reprimands should be administrated (Orlich, 1995).

There are three ways of solving a problem between a student and a teacher (Myftiu, 2008). According to the first, the teacher should impose resolution in a conflicting situation. This can be necessary in such situations that can be considered as emergencies. According to the second way, the teacher accepts the student's demands. The problems become worse when neither the teacher, nor the student tolerate the other. In this case we can use the third way of solving the conflict, where nobody loses. In solving this conflict the needs of the teacher and the needs of the student are both taken into consideration. Nobody expect the other to totally agree with his or her demands and both parties respect themselves and each other. In this scenario we have an agreement between both parties.

3-Results

After collecting the questionnaires the next step was analyzing and studying the results. The first set of answers to be analyzed, were the teachers` responses. It was clearly the largest and hardest process in the study. Most of the answers are really interesting and worth analyzing.

Regarding the first question that was about the knowledge of the teacher for the children's rights there came out some interesting findings. None of the teachers in the high school had read the declaration of human and children's rights. Seven out of ten of them, or 70%, despite admitting that they have not read the declaration said that they already have some knowledge about it and they know the rights that their students should have. What was more interesting is that 30% of the teachers asked, said that they know about the existence of these declarations, but they have no idea what their content is.

On the other hand the level of knowledge about the children's rights from the teachers of the primary school was even lower. Similar to the teachers of high school none of them have read these declarations. The finding shows that only five out of ten teachers knew about the rights that their students should have. 40% of them said that they have heard about the declarations and the rights of children, but confessed that they have not read them. Surprisingly some of the teachers in

the primary school said that they do not even know that there exist such kinds of declaration for the rights of the children.

One of the key questions in the questionnaire asked the opinion of teachers whether the use of force and physical violence was necessary to resolve conflicts. The results of this question were important to see whether one of the three types of violence according to Shapiro, physical violence, is used or is thought as a necessary tool to solve a conflict. In the high school the vast majority of teachers were against the use of any kind of force or physical violence, while solving a classroom conflict. Eight out ten teachers, 80%, asked in the high school, strongly disagreed with the use of violence in the class. Only 20% or two out of ten teachers justified that the use of force or physical violence sometimes is necessary to resolve conflicts.

The research shows another picture in the primary school. Seven out of ten teachers agreed that the use of force and physical violence was necessary to solve classroom conflicts between a teacher and a student and between classmates. Only three out of ten teachers disagreed with the use of force in the class.

In the following question that was about whether students talk to their teachers about their feelings and problems, the answers were also very interesting. All the teachers in the high school have said that they have a very good communication level between them and their students. They say, they are always willing to help their students, and the students talk to them about their problems. Six out of ten teachers claim that their students talk to them even about their personal feelings and problems including their private life.

Also in the primary school the teachers claim to be helpful and communicative with their students. Differing from the high school, the teachers in the primary school complain that not all the students are willing to share their feelings and problems with the teacher.

The other question asked teachers` opinion about the acceptance of the disagreements and contradictions from the students. The study was encouraged by Gjokutaj`s theory that teacher`s reaction is of primary importance whenever there is a conflict. In the high school all the teachers admitted that is the student`s right to disagree or contradict their teachers. Some of the teachers have said that not everything that the teacher says can be contradicted, and while doing so the student should use an appropriate vocabulary and tone of voice.

The finding shows that nearly all the teachers claim to accept the disagreements and contradictions from the students as one of their rights. Despite that, some of the teachers do not judge equally disagreements with contradictions. While all the teachers admit to accept disagreements, some of them can accept contradictions only within a limited frame, and a couple of teachers in the primary school think that it is wrong if a student contradicts his/her teacher at all.

When asked about the frequency of classroom conflicts, the teachers gave a variety of answers. In the high school two teachers or 20%, said that they usually have any kind of conflict in the classroom. Five teachers or around 50% of them said that classroom conflicts do happen sometimes. Two teachers, 20%, said that they rarely have a conflict in the classroom, whereas one teacher said that he never has classroom conflicts.

In the primary school the answers were divided into three categories. No teacher used the word never to describe the frequency of conflicts. Three teachers said that they do usually have classroom conflicts. Four of them said that they sometimes do have conflicts in the class, whereas the other three teachers said that they rarely had any classroom conflict. The research has found that nearly all the teachers 19 out of 20 accept that they have any kind of conflict in the classroom. More less the frequency of conflicts is the same in both schools. Another common finding is that the majority of the teachers in both schools have chosen the word sometimes to describe the occurrence of the conflicts in their class.

After accepting the existence of conflicts in the class it was interesting to find out how these teachers cope with these conflicts. According to Joana's theory there were three ways of solving classroom conflicts between a teacher and a student. It is worth seeing and comparing these results in order to be aware of the manners that teachers think is most appropriate to use. Most of the teachers in the high school have said that the resolution of the conflicts depends on the kind and level of the conflict. They also said that for a certain kind of conflict they might use different ways of solving it. Never the less 40% of the teachers preferred talking to the students in order to solve the conflicts. 20% of teachers said that they would try to convince the students in order to resolve the problem. 10% would reprimand the student for their behavior, whereas the other 10% would use any kind of punishment in order to resolve the conflict.

In the primary school the answers from teachers differed in percentages from the teachers of the high school. Here, 40% of the teachers would talk or try to convince the students in order to solve the conflict. 30% would either force or punish the students for reaching resolution to the conflict. The other 20% said that they would use reprimands to solve the conflicts.

Another question whose answers were very interesting to look at, was the question whether the teachers require any feedback from the students for the behavior of the teachers and teaching methods they use in the class.

None of the teachers asked in the high school had made any evaluation survey for the subject or the teacher at the end of the academic year. Despite that, 80% of the teachers claimed to have asked for some kind of feedback from the students regarding the teaching methods, but only 20% of them have asked for feedback about the teacher. 20% of the teachers admit that they have never asked their students for feedback about the teacher and the teaching methods.

Same as the high school, in the primary school there are no written evaluation forms filled by the students at the end of the academic year. Here, most of the teachers said that asking for feedback from the students is not necessary. They do not consider their students to be able to judge about the best way for teaching them because of their age. As a result only 20% of the primary school teachers admit that they have asked for any kind of feedback from the students. The rest 80% do not remember to have ever done it.

The following question that was about the opinion of the teachers for the classroom climate also brought some interesting findings. Most of the teachers asked considered their classroom climate as positive. In the high school seven teachers, 70%, considered the classroom climate as positive, whereas three teachers, 30%, admit that the situation in the class is problematic to some extent.

Surprisingly the teachers in the primary school were even more positive. Eight out of ten of them considered the classroom climate as positive. Only two of the teachers or 20% said that the classroom climate is problematic.

When asked about the level of conflict and communication problems compared to other European countries, the teachers mostly agreed that the situation in Albanian schools is worse and need a lot of improvements. Six out of ten teachers in high school think that the communication and conflicts are worse in Albania compared to other European countries. Three teachers think that the situation in Albania is similar to the situation in the other countries and there is no reason why they should see any differences. There was a teacher who thought that the situation in Albania is better than the situation in the other European countries.

Same as the high school the majority of the teachers in the primary school think that conflict and communication in the Albanian schools is worse than other countries. Seven out of ten of them strongly supported this opinion. The other three teachers considered the situation to be more or less the same.

The students' results on the other side are vital in order to see the questionnaire from both points of view and reach a conclusion. In high school sixteen students or 80% admitted to have had a classroom conflict with at least one teacher, whereas 100% of them said that they had at least one classroom conflict with one of their class mates.

On the other hand the students in the primary school, in their vast majority said that they did not have any classroom conflict with their teacher. 60% of them said that they have good relationships with the teachers and never had conflicts. Despite that, 90% of them said that they had conflicts with their class mates. Nevertheless 40% of primary school students said that they had conflicts with their teachers.

In the question about the use of physical violence by the teacher, the results were contradictory to what the teachers have already said. In the high school three students, 15% said that the teachers would use physical violence in order to resolve a classroom conflict. The other 85% of the high school students said that

their teacher would not use physical violence.

The finding shows a different situation in the primary school. All the percentages were reversed. 70% of the students asked said that the teachers have used physical violence on them or on their class mates.

The finding shows a really problematic situation, especially in the primary school. When asked about how they solve their classroom conflicts only 30% of primary school teachers said that they would use the force or any kind of punishment to resolve them. On the other hand there are 70% of primary school students who admit that the use of physical violence by the teachers is present in classrooms. Even in the high school where none of the teachers admitted the use of force there is still a 15% minority of students who accuse them of doing so.

When asked whether students accept the use of force and physical violence in resolving conflicts, different answers were given in the questionnaire. In the high school there is a strong opposition towards the use of force by the teacher. Nineteen out of twenty students or 95% said that they totally disagree and that it is unacceptable that a teacher uses force and physical violence when solving a conflict.

A surprising result came out from the students of the primary school. 40% of them said that the use of force and physical violence by the teacher is necessary when solving a conflict. 30% of them said that they are against and do not accept the use of force by the teacher. The other 30% said that they do not know whether the use of force by the teacher to resolve the conflict is the right thing to do or not.

Asked about whether they do talk for their feelings and emotions to the teachers, students in the high school gave the following answers: 60% of them said that they do talk to their teachers about their problems and feelings, but only 10% of them said that they would talk to the teacher or school psychologist about their personal lives. The other 40% said that they would not talk to the teachers about their feelings and emotions; instead they would prefer someone else to talk to. However, in the primary school the situation is even worse. 70% of the students said that they would not talk to the teacher about their problems, feelings and emotions; whereas only 30% admitted that they would discuss with the teacher such things.

The students had a lot to say when asked about whether their ideas and opinions are taken into consideration by the teachers. Most of the students complained that their ideas are not heard or taken into consideration by the teachers. In the high school 40% of students said that their ideas are not taken into consideration. 30% of them said that they are only taken into consideration on some sporadic occasions. The other 30% said that teachers do take their opinions and ideas into consideration.

In the primary school 70% of the students claimed that their ideas and opinions are not taken into consideration. The number of students who believed that their

opinions are considered by the teachers is only 30%. So differing from the teachers who said that they are open and accept students' opinions, the students complained that their opinions are not heard.

Regarding teachers' answers about the frequency of the classroom conflicts, students have given a different opinion for the situation. They think that conflicts do happen more often than teachers claim. 40% of the students said there are often classroom conflicts, 30% said sometimes, whereas the other 30% used the word rarely to describe the frequency of the conflicts. The primary school students were more or less on the same percentages. When answered about the frequency of classroom conflicts, 45% of them used the word usually, 30% sometimes, and 35% rarely.

By answering the questions about the ways that these conflicts are solved, students gave us some important information for the study. Most of them in the high school think that the conflicts in the classroom are solved in democratic manners. 70% of the students asked said that the teachers would talk and convince them whenever they try to solve a conflict. 30% of the students claimed that teachers impose a solution whenever there is a conflict. The ways of doing so varies from punishments to reprimands.

In the primary school there was a balance in the answers from the students. 55% of the students asked said that the teachers do talk and consult them in order to solve a classroom conflict. 45% of them said that the teachers force a solution of the conflict. They say that the teachers rather punish them or use the physical strength in reaching the resolution.

Regarding any feedback or questionnaire that teachers ask students, still there is some kind of contradictions between the teachers' and students' results. In the high school only 50% of the students said that the teachers asked for feedback from the students about the teachers or the subject. The results given from the teachers' answers shows that 80% of the teachers claimed to have asked for some kind of feedback from the students. The other half of the students, believe that they are never asked to tell their opinions about the subject or the teacher. They also say that they have never completed any kind of questionnaire related to that topic.

In the primary school only 10% of the students admit that they have been required to express their opinion about the methods used in teaching but not for the behavior of the teacher in the class. The other 90% says that their opinions are not required from the teachers.

The classroom climate was one of the findings that had similar responses from teachers and students. Both in the high and primary school there were about 80% of the students, who think that despite some problems, the classroom climate is positive. The other 20% of the students in each school think that the classroom climate is either problematic or negative.

When asked directly about the conflict and communication problems compared to other European countries, again the majority of students admitted that the situation is worse here. 60% of the students in the high school think that communication and conflicts are worse in Albania than in other countries. The other 40% of the students said the situation is similar to the situation in the other countries. In the primary school 70% of the students described the conflict and communication as being more problematic in Albania than in the rest of the Europe. 10% saw no difference, while the other 20% did not know what to say.

4-Discussion

This study was inspired by several theories and my studying experience on conflicts and communication in classroom. Certain theories from different scholars such as: Shapiro, Rende, Ramsey, Killen, Ross and Conant were verified into practice and reinforced by some of these results from the findings. The results of this research clearly open the debate of conflicts in the classroom. It stresses the problematic issue of solving these conflicts and also gives suggestions on how to improve the situation.

The research was done in the form of a questionnaire and the results seem to be close to the reality of our schools. The results of each question are analyzed one by one and suggestions are given in order to improve the situation.

Teachers do not have enough knowledge about the rights that their students should have and the rights that they have as teachers. So they might misbehave because of the lack of knowledge. It is an important fact that some teachers still think that the use of force and physical violence is necessary in the class. Also nearly half of the primary school children agree with this idea. Teachers should be trained and informed about their and their students' rights.

The use of force was mostly found on older teachers, whereas the young teachers use more democratic means whenever there is a conflict in the class. This shows that there is a problem in the mentality of the old teachers. They should be supervised by the Directors in order to become aware of their own actions.

The survey also found that despite the openness from the teachers, still large number of students does not express their thoughts and feeling to them. This problem is mainly due to the mentality of the students. Not only the teachers and the school but the whole society should work in order to change this mentality.

Most of the students and teachers agreed that it is students' right to contradict or disagree with the teachers. Despite that most of the students claimed that their ideas are not taken into consideration. Also the majority of teachers do not ask for any written feedback from the students. How can they improve their teaching abilities if they do not ask their students how they want to learn? The teachers should be encouraged to make a course evaluation at the end of the year, and if possible take them into the consideration for the following year.

Also the study found that there are a lot of classroom conflicts occurring in our schools. Students described those conflicts as happening more often than the teachers say. Some of the conflicts are not solved in the appropriate way, such as imposing a solution by force and physical violence and what is more interesting, they see it as the right thing to do.

The majority of students and teachers considered that classroom climate as positive. When it comes to comparing the conflict and communication problems with other countries they see it in a pessimistic way. They think that the situation is worse here when compared to other countries.

5- Conclusion

The research is conducted in a specific region so in order to make generalizations further studies should be conducted in other parts of Albania. In doing the research there were some difficulties encountered. Firstly, there were a lot of questionnaires filled; sixty in total, so studying and analyzing them took a long time. Also comparing and contrasting the results between schools, teachers, and students requires a high level of concentration. The other problem that the finding encountered was the fairness in the responses. As it was obvious, there were often contradictions between the answers from students and the answers from the teachers. In that case confronting the results would be the only way of analyzing the results appropriately. Despite that the questionnaire has discovered some important findings. It was conducted in order to get the answers as honest as possible. They were anonymous, filled at home, and in large quantities.

As we can see from the results of the questionnaire the conflict and communications between teachers and students is problematic to some extent. In order to overcome these difficulties there should be an engagement from all the groups of interests. Firstly the teachers should be trained and informed more about the behaving in the class. They also should be open and accept more criticism or opinion from the students in order to improve their teaching skills and as a result have an effective teaching. Secondly students should feel free to talk to their teachers about their problems and difficulties and contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning process. Also the Regional Directories and the Ministry of Education should be more dedicated to teachers and students by supervising, helping, training, and informing them.

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