Collaborative Conflict Management: An Open Communication Approach to Resolving Conflicts Among Students at SMK Negeri 2 Buton and SMA Negeri 2 Pasarwajo

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Abstract

This study examines collaborative conflict management among students at SMK Negeri 2 Buton and SMA Negeri 2 Pasarwajo, emphasizing the role of open and coordinated communication in resolving inter-student conflicts. Conflicts in schools are common, particularly among adolescents who are navigating emotional development, identity formation, and social recognition. Such conflicts can manifest as relational tensions, communication misunderstandings, group identity differences, and even aggressive behavior that disrupts the school environment. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to explore the dynamics of conflict and the strategies employed to manage it collaboratively. The findings reveal that the success of conflict resolution is strongly determined by the quality of communication. Open, coordinated, empathetic, honest, and goal-oriented communication fosters mutual understanding, reduces tension, and encourages cooperation between students and the school. Collaborative communication emerges as the key mechanism for achieving peaceful conflict resolution and harmonious social relationships within the school setting. The study also highlights that a collaborative approach is more effective in restoring social relationships than coercive or purely punitive strategies, as it emphasizes dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding. Furthermore, coordination among school actors ensures that messages remain consistent, prevents further misunderstandings, and strengthens institutional support for sustainable conflict management. The study contributes to the literature on educational conflict resolution by demonstrating that collaborative communication is essential not only for resolving immediate conflicts but also for promoting long-term relational stability and a positive school climate. Practical implications suggest that schools should foster a culture of open, empathetic, and structured communication while coordinating across stakeholders to prevent recurrence of inter-student conflicts.

Keywords: Collaborative Conflict Management, Open Communication, Student Conflict, School Environment, Conflict Resolution, Empathetic Communication

INTRODUCTION

Conflict in schools is a common social phenomenon, particularly among adolescents who are in a critical phase of emotional development, identity formation, and the pursuit of social recognition. In secondary schools, student conflicts may arise in various forms, including interpersonal tensions, miscommunication, group rivalry, identity differences, and even aggressive behaviors that threaten school safety. According to (Ertürk, 2022) school conflicts are often rooted in complex social relationships, biased perceptions, and the absence of constructive conflict resolution mechanisms. These conflicts may escalate when influenced by peer-group dynamics, cyberbullying through social media, and external environmental factors that reinforce group solidarity and hostility.

Previous studies indicate that unresolved interpersonal conflict affects not only the students directly involved but also the overall school climate. (Noori et al., 2024) found that escalating student conflict correlates with decreased perceptions of safety and belonging within schools. Similarly, (Silva et al., 2025) emphasized that poorly managed conflicts can weaken social cohesion and disrupt collaborative learning environments. These findings suggest that conflict management is not merely a disciplinary issue but a crucial component of educational governance and school culture.

Despite its negative implications, conflict should not always be viewed solely as a destructive force. From an educational perspective, conflict can serve as an opportunity for social learning when managed appropriately. Collaborative conflict management offers a constructive alternative by promoting dialogue, empathy, and joint problem-solving. The conflict management framework developed by (Rahim, 2011) identifies collaboration as the most integrative style, aiming to satisfy the concerns of all parties through open communication and mutual engagement. Likewise, the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument introduced by (Kilmann, 2023) highlights collaboration as a strategy that fosters win–win outcomes and strengthens long-term relationships.

In educational settings, collaborative approaches have demonstrated positive outcomes. (Bashori et al., 2025) reported that collaborative conflict management enhances interpersonal relationships and reduces hostility among school stakeholders. Furthermore, (Schou, 2025) argued that effective collaboration depends on structured coordination and transparent communication mechanisms. Research on interpersonal communication by Kan (2023) also underlines the importance of socio-cognitive skills in understanding others' perspectives as a foundation for sustainable conflict resolution.

Open communication constitutes the core element of collaborative conflict management. (De Oliveira Cunha et al., 2025) emphasized that ethical, transparent, and dialogical communication reduces emotional escalation and prevents power domination in conflict situations. Moreover, (Adams et al., 2025) demonstrated that school leadership practices that promote openness and inclusive dialogue significantly contribute to creating a supportive and safe school environment.

Although existing studies highlight the significance of collaboration and communication in managing school conflicts, empirical research focusing specifically on collaborative conflict management through open communication in inter-school student conflicts remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore the implementation of collaborative conflict management through open communication in addressing student conflicts between SMK Negeri 2 and SMA Negeri 2 Pasarwajo. The study seeks to: (1) examine collaborative conflict management practices among students across schools; and (2) analyze the role of open communication as a primary strategy in constructing constructive and sustainable conflict resolution.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to narratively and in-depth describe phenomena, particularly conflicts among students in schools, and to understand the meaning, processes, and dynamics of interactions from the perspective of the actors involved (Moleong, 2007). The subjects of this study are students of SMK Negeri 2 Buton and SMA Negeri 2 Pasarwajo who have experienced or been involved in student conflicts. The research was conducted at these schools, focusing on social interactions and the dynamics of conflicts occurring within the school environment.

Data were collected using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to obtain direct perspectives from students regarding the conflicts they experienced, observations were used to capture interaction dynamics in the field, and documentation supported empirical evidence through school records, reports, and other relevant documents. Data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach, emphasizing the exploration of meanings and interpretation of conflict processes as well as collaborative management based on open communication. Data were analyzed thematically by identifying patterns, relationships, and interaction dynamics among students, and then presented narratively to provide a comprehensive understanding of the school conflict phenomenon (Moleong, 2007).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study indicate that collaborative conflict management between students at SMK Negeri 2 and SMA Negeri 2 Pasarwajo is largely determined by the openness and coordination of communication among the parties involved. Empathetic, honest, and purposeful communication contributes significantly to building mutual understanding, reducing tension, and fostering cooperation between students and the school. Collaborative communication emerged as the key factor in achieving peaceful conflict resolution and restoring harmonious social relationships within the school environment. These findings confirm that conflict resolution is not primarily determined by sanctions or the physical separation of disputing parties, but rather by the quality of dialogue and the school's capacity to facilitate healthy communication processes.

The study shows that open communication enables clarification of information that is often distorted during conflicts by rumors, prejudice, or one-sided interpretations. Interpersonal conflicts tended to escalate not solely because of the initial triggering events, but due to inadequate communication and the failure of the parties involved to understand one another. When empathetic, honest, and structured dialogue was facilitated, students were able to re-express their perspectives, clarify misunderstandings, and shift from confrontation toward joint problem-solving.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings reflect the core principle of collaborative conflict management, which emphasizes shared orientation toward solutions and long-term relational stability. In educational organizations, where students remain connected within ongoing social networks, post-conflict relational stability is crucial. The study demonstrates that collaborative communication serves as a prerequisite for cooperation and mutually agreed solutions, thereby reducing the likelihood of recurring conflict.

The importance of communication coordination among stakeholders also emerged as a significant finding. Inter-school conflicts could not be effectively managed through partial or isolated actions. Coordinated communication ensured consistency of messages, prevented further misunderstandings, and minimized the emergence of counter-narratives that could intensify disputes. Thus, coordination functioned not merely as a technical process but as a strategic component shaping the direction and effectiveness of conflict resolution.

Empathetic communication was found to function as a mechanism of emotional regulation and recognition of others' experiences. By providing a safe and nonjudgmental space for dialogue, schools enabled students to express emotions constructively. Honest communication, meanwhile, served as the foundation for rebuilding trust, which is often diminished during conflict situations. Purposeful communication—structured and goal-oriented dialogue—prevented discussions from devolving into emotional arguments and ensured that the resolution process resulted in concrete agreements and follow-up actions.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that collaborative communication strengthened cooperation between students and the school. The school did not act merely as an authority imposing discipline but as a facilitator guiding dialogue and bridging student needs with institutional rules and educational goals. This participatory process increased student responsibility and accountability, contributing to relational reconciliation rather than temporary peace.

Overall, the study concludes that collaborative conflict management in schools should be understood as a continuous communicative practice characterized by openness, empathy, honesty, structured dialogue, and cross-party coordination. Sustainable conflict resolution depends on institutional culture and consistent communication practices rather than incidental

responses to conflict events. Practically, the findings suggest that schools should institutionalize safe dialogue spaces, clarify coordination channels, and promote empathetic and purposeful communication as integral components of conflict management strategies.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that collaborative conflict management among students at SMK Negeri 2 and SMA Negeri 2 Pasarwajo is highly determined by the openness and coordination of communication among the involved parties. Empathetic, honest, and purposeful communication helps build mutual understanding, reduce tension, and encourage cooperation between students and the school. Furthermore, collaborative communication is key to achieving peaceful conflict resolution and harmonious social relationships within the school environment. These findings underscore that conflict resolution is not solely determined by sanctions or separating conflicting parties, but rather by the quality of dialogue and the school's ability to facilitate healthy communication processes.

The results, which position open communication as a critical factor in the success of collaborative conflict management, align with the development of conflict resolution literature in educational contexts that emphasizes the need for dialogue, ethical communication, and cross-party coordination. In inter-school student conflicts, open communication allows for the clarification of information that is often distorted during conflict by rumors, prejudice, or one-sided interpretations. (Freitas, 2025; Kan et al., 2023) emphasize that interpersonal conflicts often escalate not because of the core events themselves, but due to the failure of the parties involved to establish adequate communication and mutual understanding. Thus, the finding that empathetic, honest, and purposeful communication can reduce tension aligns with the concept that effective conflict resolution requires relationship restoration and understanding, not merely the cessation of conflict behavior.

Theoretically, collaborative conflict management emphasizes a shared orientation toward solutions and long-term relationships. In educational organizations, this relational orientation is particularly important because students exist within ongoing social networks, making conflict resolution require consideration of post-conflict social stability. Research on conflict management in educational institutions indicates that innovative strategies that promote collaboration and involvement of school actors can strengthen the institution's ability to prevent recurring conflicts (Bashori et al., 2025). The present study's finding that collaborative communication is key to peaceful resolution reinforces this idea, as collaborative communication serves as a prerequisite for cooperation toward mutually agreed solutions.

Moreover, the findings regarding the importance of coordinated communication among parties show that inter-school conflicts cannot be addressed partially. Coordination ensures that messages are consistent, prevents further misunderstandings, and avoids the emergence of "counter-narratives" that may exacerbate conflict. (Laajala et al., 2025; Tiippana et al., 2025) note that collaboration and collaborative governance highlight coordination as an essential mechanism for working under conditions of limited trust, particularly during active conflicts. Therefore, the study demonstrates that communication coordination is not merely a technical matter but forms part of a strategic approach that determines the course of conflict resolution.

Empathetic communication, as observed in this study, can be understood as a form of emotional management and recognition of the experiences of others. In educational contexts, ethically oriented leadership and emotional intelligence contribute to creating safe and nonjudgmental dialogue spaces (Anastasiou, 2025). Although this study emphasizes communication rather than leadership explicitly, the success of empathetic and honest communication in schools typically aligns with a supportive school culture that guides members toward peaceful resolution. This aligns with studies emphasizing the role of school leadership and collaboration as dynamics influencing the quality of the school environment (Adams et al., 2025)

From the perspective of conflict management styles, the study implicitly indicates that a collaborative approach is more dominant than competitive or coercive approaches. (Al Kabbani & Dalati, 2025) assert that collaborative conflict strategies tend to produce more stable outcomes in organizations that require repeated social interaction and group cohesion. In the context of inter-school student conflicts, a stable outcome implies creating peaceful conditions that not only stop conflict but also repair social relationships. The study's finding that "harmonious social relationships" emerge as an outcome indicates that conflict resolution extends beyond formal peace toward relational reconciliation.

Interestingly, the study also highlights the significant role of purposeful communication. Purposeful communication refers to structured, goal-oriented, and facilitated dialogue that prevents discussions from devolving into emotional disputes. Collaborative learning and research-practice partnerships in school development stress the need for structured dialogue to ensure collaboration yields tangible outcomes and avoids inconclusive discussions (Tiippana et al., 2025). In student conflict contexts, structured communication may include dialogue sessions, clarification, norm agreements, and follow-ups to prevent recurrence.

The study further emphasizes the importance of honest communication for building mutual understanding. Honesty provides the minimum trust necessary to initiate cooperation. In conflicts, trust often diminishes, making conflicting parties defensive. Literature on ethical conflict resolution highlights that honesty and ethical orientation help restore relationships and prevent communicative injustice (De Oliveira Cunha et al., 2025). These findings support the position that honest and ethical communication is crucial for collaborative approaches, not merely negotiation.

Additionally, the finding that collaborative communication "encourages cooperation between students and the school" shows that the school does not remain passive. The school acts as a facilitator of the conflict resolution process, bridging student needs with rules and educational goals. Studies on school leadership development and collaboration indicate that educational institutions capable of facilitating cross-party cooperation are better equipped to face social challenges, including conflicts (Hariyanti et al., 2025; Massang, 2025). Although this study focuses on student conflict, the finding that cooperation increases indicates the presence of institutional mechanisms enabling collaboration.

Conflict resolution in schools is also often linked to peer group-based interventions and dialogic approaches. Studies on peer-group interventions within dialogic prevention/resolution models emphasize that appropriately designed dialogue can prevent conflict escalation and promote anti-violence norms in the school community (Gómez et al., 2025). The present findings align with this principle, showing that dialogue and open communication act as a "brake" against conflict escalation, while involving multiple parties strengthens accountability in conflict management.

Ultimately, this study confirms that collaborative conflict management in schools should not be understood as a temporary mediation but as a continuous communication practice that involves openness, empathy, honesty, goal-oriented dialogue, and coordination among school actors. The sustainability of conflict resolution strategies depends on institutional culture and practices, not just incidental responses to conflict events (Sağır & Turhan, 2023; Sakara, 2024). This study contributes to this notion by positioning collaborative communication as a "key" that can be practiced and nurtured within daily school routines.

Practical implications of these findings highlight the need for schools to promote a culture of open, empathetic, and purposeful communication as part of conflict management. Schools can strengthen safe dialogue spaces, clarify coordination channels among parties, and normalize practices of clarification and joint agreements when tensions arise. Furthermore, schools should enhance collaborative capacity through cross-party coordination, as inter-school conflicts require shared communication understanding to avoid misinterpretation. Collaboration and educational

leadership practices suggest that strengthening collaboration requires systemic and structural support to ensure that an open communication approach is consistently implemented (Adams et al., 2025; Tiippana et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that collaborative conflict management in inter-school student conflicts at SMK Negeri 2 and SMA Negeri 2 Pasarwajo is fundamentally shaped by the quality of open and coordinated communication. Empathetic, honest, and purposeful communication proved to be the central elements in reducing tension, clarifying misunderstandings, rebuilding trust, and fostering cooperation between students and school authorities.

The findings demonstrate that effective conflict resolution in educational settings cannot rely solely on sanctions or separation of disputing parties. Instead, sustainable and peaceful outcomes are achieved through structured dialogue processes that prioritize mutual understanding and relational restoration. Open communication enables students to express perspectives transparently, correct distorted information, and shift from adversarial positions toward collaborative problem-solving.

Moreover, coordinated communication among school stakeholders plays a strategic role in preventing further escalation and ensuring consistency in conflict management efforts. The study highlights that when schools actively facilitate inclusive and goal-oriented dialogue, conflict resolution extends beyond temporary peace and leads to harmonious and stable social relationships.

In sum, collaborative conflict management in schools should be understood as an ongoing communicative practice embedded in institutional culture. Its success depends on openness, empathy, honesty, structured dialogue, and cross-party coordination, which together transform conflict into an opportunity for social learning and long-term relational reconciliation.

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