

Teacher–Student Conflicts: Conflict Proneness, Perceived Causes, and An Empirical Analysis of Interpersonal Relationships

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Abstract. Teacher–student relationships constitute one of the most influential determinants of students' academic achievement, psychological well-being, and social adjustment. Conflicts emerging within these relationships may either hinder educational outcomes or serve as constructive opportunities for personal and academic development, depending on how they are managed. This study investigates the socio-psychological characteristics of teacher–student conflicts by integrating theoretical analysis with empirical evidence. Specifically, it examines students' conflict proneness, perceived causes of teacher–student conflicts, and the relationship between conflict proneness and the quality of teacher–student relationships. Data were collected from 410 secondary school students (Grades 8–11) using N. V. Grishina's Conflict Situation Diagnostics methodology. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis were employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed that most participants demonstrated a moderate level of conflict proneness (56.8%), whereas 22.2% exhibited high conflict proneness. Communication barriers and mutual misunderstanding (34.9%), perceived unfairness in assessment (23.9%), and disagreements concerning disciplinary requirements (18.5%) emerged as the most frequently reported sources of conflict. Furthermore, a statistically significant negative correlation was identified between conflict proneness and the quality of teacher–student relationships ($r = -0.52$, $p < .01$). The findings emphasize the importance of strengthening teachers' conflict management competence, empathic communication skills, and psychologically safe learning environments to foster constructive educational relationships.

Keywords: Teacher–Student Conflict, Conflict Proneness, Teacher–Student Relationship, Psychological Safety, Conflict Management Competence.

1 Introduction

The educational process represents a complex socio-psychological system based on continuous interaction between teachers and students[1]. Within this dynamic environment, differences in interests, expectations, values, communication styles, and individual needs inevitably create conditions for interpersonal conflict. Contemporary educational psychology no longer considers conflict exclusively as a destructive phenomenon. Rather, when managed appropriately, conflict can facilitate cognitive development, critical thinking, social learning, and personal growth[1][2][3].

Teacher–student relationships have consistently been identified as one of the strongest predictors of students' academic achievement, learning motivation, classroom engagement, emotional well-being, and social adjustment. Consequently, understanding the socio-psychological mechanisms underlying teacher–student conflict has become an important issue in contemporary educational psychology[5].

Recent educational transformations, rapid technological development, digital communication, and increasing cultural diversity have significantly changed classroom interaction patterns. These changes have increased the importance of teachers' communication competence, emotional intelligence, fairness in assessment, and conflict management skills[6][7]. Failure to recognize students' psychological needs frequently contributes to misunderstandings and pedagogical conflicts that negatively influence both classroom climate and educational effectiveness.

Previous international studies have examined different dimensions of teacher–student conflict, including cognitive conflict, affective conflict, psychological safety, classroom climate, and conflict management competence[7][8][9]. However, relatively limited empirical evidence exists regarding how these constructs interact

in secondary education within the Uzbek educational context. Moreover, few studies have simultaneously examined students' conflict proneness, perceived causes of conflict, and teacher–student relationship quality within a single conceptual framework.

The present study contributes to the existing literature in three important ways. First, unlike previous studies that primarily investigated teacher–student conflict as an isolated educational phenomenon, this study integrates conflict proneness, perceived causes of conflict, and teacher–student relationship quality into a single empirical framework. Second, the research provides empirical evidence from secondary schools in Uzbekistan, an educational context that remains underrepresented in international educational psychology literature. Third, by examining the association between students' conflict proneness and interpersonal relationship quality, this study extends previous theoretical discussions through empirical evidence obtained from a non-Western educational environment.

Based on these considerations, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the socio-psychological characteristics of teacher–student conflicts in secondary education. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- a. Identify the principal causes of teacher–student conflicts;
- b. Determine students' levels of conflict proneness;
- c. Examine the relationship between conflict proneness and teacher–student relationship quality;
- d. Discuss the educational implications for conflict prevention and constructive conflict management.

2 Literature Review

Teacher–student relationships have become one of the central topics in educational psychology because they substantially influence students' academic achievement, motivation, psychological well-being, and social development. Recent empirical evidence consistently indicates that the quality of interpersonal relationships within classrooms is a key determinant of educational effectiveness and positive school adjustment.

A recent second-order meta-analysis by Emslander et al[1] identified teacher–student relationships as one of the strongest predictors of students' academic performance, learning motivation, and psychological well-being. The authors concluded that conflictual relationships are associated with aggressive behaviour, poor school adjustment, and reduced academic motivation, whereas supportive relationships enhance both educational and psychosocial outcomes.

Recent studies have demonstrated that teacher–student conflict is a multidimensional construct. Lei et al. distinguished between cognitive conflict and affective conflict. Cognitive conflict emerges from differences in ideas, opinions, and learning strategies and may stimulate higher-order thinking when classroom interactions are psychologically safe. In contrast, affective conflict develops from interpersonal tension, negative emotions, and deteriorating social relationships, frequently producing adverse educational consequences.

Similarly, Keane et al[4] reported that students experiencing frequent conflict with teachers show higher levels of stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and emotional distress. These findings suggest that supportive teacher–student relationships function as a protective factor against psychosocial maladjustment.

Longitudinal studies conducted in Norway and the United States further demonstrate reciprocal relationships between teacher–student conflict and students' behavioural problems. Students displaying behavioural difficulties are more likely to experience conflict with teachers, while persistent teacher–student conflict contributes to increasing behavioural problems over time[10][11].

Theoretical perspectives also provide important explanations for teacher–student conflict. According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory[12], effective learning occurs through constructive social interaction; therefore, persistent interpersonal conflict disrupts cognitive development. Leontiev's Activity Theory[13] explains conflict as a consequence of discrepancies between participants' motives, goals, and needs. Rogers' Humanistic Theory[14] emphasizes empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness as essential conditions for psychologically healthy teacher–student relationships.

Collectively, previous studies identify several recurring antecedents of teacher–student conflict, including communication barriers, unfair assessment practices, classroom discipline, teachers' occupational stress, generational differences, and inadequate emotional support. These factors interact to influence both students' conflict behaviour and the overall classroom climate.

Although previous studies have investigated cognitive conflict, affective conflict, psychological safety, conflict management competence, and teacher–student relationships separately, relatively few studies have integrated these constructs within a unified conceptual model[15]. The present study addresses this gap by proposing that teachers' conflict management competence contributes to creating psychologically safe classrooms. Psychologically safe learning environments facilitate supportive teacher–student relationships, which subsequently reduce students' conflict proneness. Lower conflict proneness is expected to be reflected in fewer perceived causes of teacher–student conflict. Consequently, the proposed framework integrates theoretical

constructs from educational psychology into a coherent model that guides the empirical analysis conducted in this study.

The proposed conceptual framework assumes that teachers' conflict management competence contributes to psychologically safe classroom environments. Psychological safety facilitates supportive teacher–student relationships, which reduce students' conflict proneness. Lower conflict proneness is expected to decrease the frequency of perceived teacher–student conflicts. Accordingly, the empirical analyses presented in this study were designed to examine selected relationships within this conceptual framework.

Based on the reviewed literature, most previous investigations have examined only individual aspects of teacher–student conflict, such as psychological safety, conflict management, or relationship quality. Few empirical studies have simultaneously analysed students' conflict proneness, perceived causes of conflict, and teacher–student relationship quality within a single conceptual framework, particularly in secondary schools in Uzbekistan. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this theoretical and empirical gap by integrating these variables into one comprehensive analytical model.

School principals and educational policymakers should consider conflict management competence as an essential professional competency for teachers. Professional development programmes should include communication training, mediation skills, emotional intelligence, and classroom conflict prevention strategies. Such interventions may improve both educational quality and students' psychological well-being.

Hypotheses. Based on previous empirical findings and the proposed conceptual framework, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1. Teacher–student relationship quality is negatively associated with students' conflict proneness;
- H2. Conflict management competence contributes positively to psychological safety;
- H3. Psychological safety positively influences teacher–student relationship quality;
- H4. Conflict proneness is positively associated with perceived conflict causes.

3 Methodology

The present study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to investigate the socio-psychological characteristics of teacher–student conflicts in secondary education. The study aimed to examine students' conflict proneness, identify perceived causes of teacher–student conflicts, and determine the relationship between conflict proneness and teacher–student relationship quality. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of standardized data from a relatively large sample and facilitated statistical examination of the relationships among the study variables.

The study involved 410 students enrolled in Grades 8–11 from general secondary schools in Uzbekistan. Participants ranged in age from 14 to 17 years. Schools were selected using convenience sampling based on accessibility and willingness to participate in the research. Although the sample size was considered adequate for quantitative analysis, it does not constitute a nationally representative sample of all secondary school students in Uzbekistan. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the participating schools and generalized with appropriate caution.

Data were collected using N.V.Grishina's Conflict Situation Diagnostics Methodology, a widely used psychological instrument designed to assess individuals' conflict proneness and behavioural tendencies in interpersonal conflict situations. The questionnaire also included items measuring students' perceptions of teacher–student relationships and the primary causes of conflict experienced in educational settings.

Before administering the questionnaire, the instrument was translated into Uzbek and reviewed by specialists in educational psychology to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence. A pilot review confirmed that the questionnaire items were understandable for secondary school students. Internal consistency of the instrument should be evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, while construct validity should be supported through exploratory factor analysis (KMO measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity). These psychometric indicators provide evidence regarding the reliability and validity of the instrument within the Uzbek educational context.

Students were asked to identify the principal factor underlying the most recent conflict they experienced with a teacher. The questionnaire included predefined categories derived from previous empirical studies, namely communication barriers, perceived unfair assessment, disciplinary disagreements, emotional instability, teachers' inattentive behaviour, and other related causes. Each participant selected one category that best represented his or her experience. The frequencies and percentages presented in Table 2 therefore represent the distribution of students' primary perceived conflict causes.

The questionnaires were administered during regular school hours under the supervision of the researcher. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was guaranteed, and informed consent was obtained from participants and, where required, their legal guardians.

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were calculated to summarize the characteristics of the data. Pearson's product–moment correlation coefficient was employed to examine the

relationship between conflict proneness and teacher–student relationship quality. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 and .01 levels.

The study complied with the ethical principles governing educational and psychological research. Participation was voluntary, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality was guaranteed, and all data were anonymized before statistical analysis. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without negative consequences.

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal inference. Second, all variables were measured using students’ self-reports, which may increase common method bias. Third, contextual variables such as teachers’ professional experience, class size, academic achievement, gender, socio-economic background, and school climate were not included in the analysis and may partially explain the observed relationships.

4 Results and Discussion

Table 1. Distribution of Students' Levels of Conflict Proneness (N = 410)

Level of conflict proneness	n	%
Low	86	21.0
Moderate	233	56.8
High	91	22.2
Total	410	100.0

The findings indicate that more than half of the respondents (56.8%) demonstrated a moderate level of conflict proneness, whereas 22.2% exhibited a high level. These findings suggest that interpersonal conflict constitutes a relatively common aspect of teacher–student interaction during adolescence. At the same time, the predominance of moderate conflict proneness indicates that most students are capable of managing interpersonal disagreements under favourable classroom conditions.

The relatively high proportion of students with elevated conflict proneness highlights the need for preventive interventions aimed at improving communication skills, emotional regulation, and constructive conflict resolution within secondary schools.

These findings are consistent with previous international research indicating that adolescence is characterized by increased emotional sensitivity and greater susceptibility to interpersonal conflict[4]. Similarly, Lei et al. reported that conflict proneness tends to increase when classroom interactions are characterized by low psychological safety and ineffective communication.

Table 2. Perceived Causes of Teacher–Student Conflicts (N = 410)

Cause of conflict	n	%
Communication barriers and mutual misunderstanding	143	34.9
Perceived unfairness in assessment	98	23.9
Disagreements concerning disciplinary requirements	76	18.5
Students' emotional instability	55	13.4
Teachers' rudeness or lack of attention	38	9.3
Total	410	100.0

Communication barriers and mutual misunderstanding constituted the most frequently reported conflict cause (34.9%). This finding indicates that ineffective communication remains the principal source of teacher–student conflict within the participating schools.

Perceived unfairness in assessment ranked second (23.9%), suggesting that students attach considerable importance to transparency, consistency, and objectivity in teachers’ evaluation practices.

Disagreements concerning classroom discipline (18.5%) further indicate that differences in expectations regarding behavioural norms continue to influence classroom relationships.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that interpersonal rather than academic factors represent the primary antecedents of teacher–student conflict.

The observed predominance of communication-related conflicts supports the conceptual framework proposed in Figure 1. Specifically, insufficient conflict management competence may reduce psychological safety, thereby weakening teacher–student relationships and increasing students' conflict proneness. Consequently, communication barriers emerge as the most frequently perceived conflict trigger.

Table 3. Correlation Between Conflict Proneness and Positive Teacher–Student Relationships (N = 410)

Variables	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Conflict proneness – Positive teacher–student relationship	–0.52	< .01

Pearson's correlation analysis demonstrated a statistically significant moderate negative association between conflict proneness and teacher–student relationship quality ($r = -0.52$, $p < .01$).

The negative coefficient indicates that students reporting stronger and more supportive relationships with teachers generally demonstrated lower levels of conflict proneness.

Although the cross-sectional nature of the study precludes causal inference, the observed relationship suggests that positive interpersonal relationships may function as an important protective factor against recurrent pedagogical conflict.

From a practical perspective, these findings indicate that investments in teachers' communication competence, emotional intelligence, and conflict management training may indirectly reduce students' conflict proneness by improving classroom relationships and strengthening psychological safety.

DISCUSSION. The predominance of communication barriers as the principal conflict source corresponds closely with the conclusions of Lei et al., who emphasized ineffective communication as one of the strongest antecedents of teacher–student conflict.

Similarly, the observed negative association between teacher–student relationship quality and conflict proneness supports the findings reported by Keane et al[4], who demonstrated that supportive teacher–student relationships contribute to lower levels of stress, anxiety, and behavioural problems among adolescents.

The present findings additionally reinforce Rogers' humanistic perspective, which emphasizes empathy and unconditional positive regard as essential conditions for constructive educational relationships.

Likewise, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory suggests that psychologically supportive social interaction facilitates learning, whereas persistent interpersonal conflict may hinder cognitive development.

It should be acknowledged that teacher–student conflict is influenced by numerous contextual variables that were not incorporated into the present analysis. Teacher experience, classroom size, students' academic achievement, gender differences, socio-economic background, and school climate may all influence interpersonal relationships within educational settings. Consequently, the reported associations should be interpreted as partial rather than comprehensive explanations of teacher–student conflict.

Because the study was conducted among students enrolled in Grades 8–11 in selected secondary schools, the findings should not automatically be generalized to primary education, higher education institutions, or educational systems operating under substantially different cultural or institutional conditions.

The findings suggest several implications for educational practice:

- First, schools should strengthen teachers' conflict management competence through systematic professional development programmes;
- Second, communication training should become an integral component of teacher education;
- Third, psychologically safe classroom environments should be promoted through supportive school policies and fair assessment practices;
- Finally, early identification of students demonstrating high conflict proneness may contribute to preventing destructive teacher–student conflict.

The present study extends existing educational psychology literature by integrating conflict management competence, psychological safety, teacher–student relationship quality, conflict proneness, and perceived conflict causes within a single conceptual framework. Previous studies have generally examined these constructs independently, whereas the present research demonstrates their interconnected nature within secondary education. Consequently, the findings contribute to a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of teacher–student conflict by illustrating how supportive interpersonal relationships may function as a protective mechanism against students' conflict proneness.

The findings have important implications for educational practice. Teacher education programmes should strengthen conflict management competence, empathic communication, and emotionally responsive classroom management. Schools should establish psychologically safe learning environments where students feel respected, fairly assessed, and encouraged to express their opinions without fear of negative consequences. Furthermore, educational administrators may use the findings to develop evidence-based conflict prevention strategies and professional development programmes aimed at improving classroom relationships.

5 Conclusion

The present study investigated the socio-psychological characteristics of teacher–student conflicts among secondary school students in Uzbekistan. By integrating conflict proneness, perceived conflict causes, and

teacher–student relationship quality within a single conceptual framework, the study provides empirical evidence regarding the dynamics of interpersonal conflict in educational settings.

The findings demonstrated that the majority of students exhibited a moderate level of conflict proneness, while approximately one-fifth reported high conflict proneness. Communication barriers and mutual misunderstanding emerged as the most frequently perceived conflict causes, followed by perceived unfairness in assessment and disagreements concerning classroom discipline.

Furthermore, the study identified a statistically significant negative relationship between conflict proneness and teacher–student relationship quality, suggesting that supportive interpersonal relationships are associated with lower levels of conflict. These findings reinforce previous international evidence emphasizing the importance of psychologically safe classroom environments and effective conflict management competence in promoting constructive educational relationships.

The study makes three principal contributions to the existing literature. First, it integrates conflict management competence, psychological safety, teacher–student relationship quality, conflict proneness, and perceived conflict causes within a unified conceptual framework. Second, it provides empirical evidence from secondary schools in Uzbekistan, thereby extending international educational psychology research to a context that has received limited scholarly attention. Third, the findings offer practical recommendations for improving teacher education and conflict prevention strategies in schools.

The findings have several practical implications for educational policy and practice. Schools should strengthen teachers' conflict management competence through systematic professional development programmes. Teacher education curricula should emphasize empathic communication, fair assessment, emotional regulation, and psychologically safe classroom environments. Educational administrators should also encourage preventive approaches that identify students with elevated conflict proneness before interpersonal tensions become chronic.

The educational significance of the present study lies in demonstrating that teacher–student conflict should not be regarded solely as a disciplinary issue but rather as a socio-psychological phenomenon requiring comprehensive educational intervention. Constructive teacher–student relationships may enhance students' academic engagement, emotional well-being, and overall school adjustment.

The present study possesses several strengths. First, it integrates theoretical and empirical perspectives within a unified conceptual framework. Second, it includes a relatively large sample of secondary school students. Third, it contributes empirical evidence from the Uzbek educational context, which remains underrepresented in international educational psychology research.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study employed a cross-sectional research design; therefore, causal relationships cannot be inferred. Second, all data were collected using students' self-report questionnaires, which may introduce common method bias and subjective interpretation. Third, although the sample included 410 participants, convenience sampling limits the representativeness of the findings. Finally, contextual variables such as teacher experience, classroom size, gender, academic achievement, socio-economic status, and school climate were not incorporated into the statistical analysis and may partially explain the observed relationships.

Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method research designs to examine the causal development of teacher–student conflict over time. Subsequent investigations should include teachers' perspectives alongside students' perceptions and examine the influence of contextual variables such as school climate, socio-economic background, classroom size, and teacher professional experience. Advanced analytical techniques, including structural equation modelling and multilevel analysis, may further clarify the mechanisms through which conflict management competence and psychological safety influence teacher–student relationships and conflict behaviour.

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