

BEYOND TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS OF AGUILAR DISTRICT IN HANDLING CLASSROOM CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

This case study discusses the experiences and approaches of public school teachers in Aguilar District, Pangasinan, in responding to classroom conflict. Using 429 public school teachers as respondents from 22 public schools, the study examines the nature of conflict encountered, its effect on the teaching-learning process, and conflict management styles. Findings reveal that behavioral disruptions, interpersonal student conflicts, and authority issues are the most common forms of conflict. These diminish instructional time considerably, lower students' involvement, and cause teachers' burnout and stress. Teachers at the elementary level adopt accommodating and compromising styles, but high school teachers adopt more assertive or collaborative styles. The class size, experience, school climate, administrative support, and cultural norms like *pakikisama* and *hiya* are the effectors of influencing factors. Findings support that classroom conflict is not just a behavior but a system-level, multi-faceted problem entrenched in the socio-emotional and institutional culture of Philippine public schooling. The teacher is not just a teacher but a mediator and emotional nurturer. The research emphasizes the necessity of contextualized professional development, institutional support, and culturally responsive pedagogy to assist teachers in this multi-faceted endeavor. It centers on the empowerment of teachers with constant training and support to create more harmonious, inclusive classrooms.

Keywords: Classroom conflict, Conflict Management Styles, Public School Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Classroom conflict is an inevitable aspect of the teaching–learning process and often manifests through behavioral disruptions, peer disagreements, and tensions between students and teachers. Recent research highlights that conflict, when managed effectively, can support social-

emotional development and improve classroom relationships. Teachers' ability to regulate emotions plays a crucial role in managing such situations and maintaining a positive classroom climate (Valente et al., 2022).

Filipino teachers operate under situations where bureaucratic limitations and social expectations intersect with classroom realities (Ocampo, 2019). Amidst such tension, public school teachers are positioned in a doubled location—to be instructional facilitators and managers of behavior. For example, Talidong (2020) stressed that during the COVID-19 situation, Filipino teachers were not only undertaking pedagogical tasks but also affective care work for learners who needed to navigate trauma and uncertainty.

This research aims to do this through a case study of Aguilar District's public school teachers. Drawing inspiration from Magno (2016) that Filipino teachers will devise their own "indigenous" conflict management strategies based on local values and culture, this research aims to identify such strategies in the routine teaching environment.

Recent literature emphasizes the importance of socio-emotional competence and adaptive teaching strategies. Teachers who demonstrate strong emotional regulation and flexibility are more effective in preventing and managing classroom disruptions (Collie, 2022). In addition, research indicates that teachers' professional experiences and evolving identities influence how they respond to classroom challenges (Kim et al., 2023).

Existing Philippine conflict management literature has typically centered on student- and administrative-level interventions. Francisco (2018), however, in a study of a Mindanao school, found teacher agency and adaptability in resolving conflict as important but not overt dimensions of school climate.

The post-pandemic educational context has further increased the complexity of classroom environments. Teachers are now required to address not only academic learning but also students' behavioral and emotional needs. Studies show that teachers experience increased stress and emotional demands, which affect their ability to manage classroom conflict effectively (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Consequently, teachers act not only as facilitators of learning but also as mediators of conflict.

In addition to this, Ramos and Pelaez (2018) further emphasized the significance of culturally congruent conflict resolution techniques in multi-cultural classrooms. Aguilar Districts consist of heterogeneous learners from heterogeneous barangays and socio-economic backgrounds as well. Teachers are therefore subjected to managing conflicts using a range of conflict management techniques suited to specific contexts—often with no suitably targeted training.

One of the most striking aspects to analyze is the perception of teachers towards their training and preparedness for conflict in the classroom. In the study of Dizon and Umali (2020), the teachers had painted a picture of a need for additional programmatic training in conflict de-escalation, peer mediation, and student-centered discipline approaches. These are aligned with initial interviews between researchers and teachers within the Aguilar District, where the teachers consistently identified insufficient support mechanisms in controlling ongoing behavioral issues.

The study of Gomez and Sabio (2021) pointed out the way the excess focus on curriculum execution sometimes keeps social-emotional learning at a distance. Instead of being helped, the teachers are blamed if there is trouble in the classroom. This case study aims to critically explore

how teachers internalize such expectations and how these affect teachers' conflict resolution strategies.

Second, public school teachers are anchored in an institutional context defined by the policy of the Department of Education (DepEd) and school institutional cultures. There is nonetheless a broad policy-practice gap, as explained by Lagdamen (2022), under which teachers are occasionally pressured to accede to quasi-fixes for behavioral problems that resist neat formal procedures, offering a dissociation which warrants scholarly investigation.

This research is not a description of conflict management in the classroom but placing it in the larger socio-cultural, institutionally-shaped, and emotional labor contexts of teaching in Philippine public schools. As Corpuz (2018) argued, education research should be based on teachers' lived realities if they are to become a means for empowerment and change.

At a broader level, classroom conflict is also influenced by institutional and systemic factors. School climate, leadership support, and access to professional development significantly affect teachers' ability to manage conflict effectively (OECD, 2023). Teachers who receive adequate training and institutional support are more likely to use constructive and student-centered approaches.

Finally, the case study method allows for a close examination of not only what teachers do but why they do it—transcending research-praxis divisions. Document analysis, interview, and observation in the classroom enable the study to draw the reader's eye to teachers' rich, largely concealed work in facilitating learning and maintaining harmony in the face of conflict.

Problem Statement

1. What are the most common types of classroom conflicts encountered by public school teachers in the Aguilar District?
2. How do these conflicts affect the teaching-learning process in Aguilar District?
3. What conflict management styles do public school teachers in the Aguilar District commonly employ when handling classroom conflicts, and what factors influence their choice of these strategies?

Research Objectives

The objective of the case study in this context is to critically examine the nature of class conflict suffered by public school teachers in the Aguilar District and identify the influence of the conflicts on their teaching-learning process.. Thus, the study aims to give answer on the following objectives,

1. Identify the common types of classroom conflict encountered by teachers in Aguilar District
2. Determine the effects of conflict on the teaching–learning process
3. Examine the strategies used in managing classroom conflict
4. Analyze the factors influencing teachers' choice of strategies

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study research design to explore the experiences, perceptions, and conflict management strategies of public school teachers in the Aguilar District, Schools Division Office I Pangasinan. A case study approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for an in-depth examination of real-life situations within a specific context, particularly focusing on how teachers handle classroom conflicts in their natural teaching environment.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the Aguilar District, Pangasinan, which consists of 20 public schools, including elementary schools, integrated schools, and national high schools. The district represents a mix of rural and semi-urban communities, providing a contextualized setting for examining classroom conflict within the Philippine public school system.

Respondents

The respondents of the study are the Public School teachers of Aguilar District for the School Year 2024 – 2025. The Aguilar District has total of 20 public schools – fourteen (14) elementary schools, three (3) Integrated School (has elementary and secondary level), and three (3) National High Schools.

School	Total No. of Teachers	Total No. of Key Stage 1 Advisers (K-G3)	Total No. of Key Stage 2 Advisers (G4-G6)	Total No. of Key Stage 3 Advisers (G7- G10)	Total No. of Key Stage 4 Advisers (G11- G12)	Total No. of Non- Advisers
Anonang Elementary School	15	7	6	0	0	2
Baybay Elementary School	14	7	6	0	0	1
Bocacliw Elementary School	16	8	7	0	0	1
Bocboc East Elementary School	14	7	5	0	0	2
Bocboc West Elementary School	8	4	3	0	0	0
Buer Bayaoas Elementary School	21	11	9	0	0	1
Calsib Elementary School	15	7	6	0	0	2
Casagatan Elementary School	8	4	3	0	0	1
Doña Catalina Elementary School	15	7	6	0	0	2

Manlocboc Elementary School	10	4	6	0	0	0
Niñoy Elementary School	15	7	8	0	0	1
Panacol Elementary School	10	6	3	0	0	1
Pogonsili Elementary School	12	6	6	0	0	0
Sipitan Elementray School	9	4	3	0	0	2
Aguilar Integrated School	103	14	12	28	18	31
Mapita Integrated School	20	4	3	4	2	7
Tampac Integrated School	25	7	5	6	4	3
Bocboc East National High School	30	0	0	22	8	14
Don Gaudencio B. Dumlao National High School	16	0	0	7	2	7
Enrico T. Prado National High School	53	0	0	21	10	22
Total	429	114	97	88	44	100

RESULTS

For objective and 1 and 2

Classroom conflict is a perennial issue for Aguilar District public school teachers. Through the use of interviews and thematic analysis, various categories of conflict were found to frequently occur in these classrooms. The most common are disturbances of behavior (e.g., inattentiveness, talking out of turn, or not following directions), interpersonal conflict among peers (e.g., teasing, bullying, or ostracism), and challenges to authority (e.g., challenging the teacher's judgment or not following policies). These are aligned with those presented by Magno (2016), citing that interpersonal and behavioral conflicts permeate the Philippine classroom culture, especially in the enormous settings of public schools.

Behavioral problems were the most common and were brought up by almost all the participants. The reasons cited by the teachers were the huge class sizes, absence of support from parents, and influence of electronic media.

Most of elementary teachers remarked, “*Mahirap silang i-handle kapag marami at sabay-sabay na hindi nakikinig.*”

This is a pointer to the challenge that has been experienced in controlling the classroom when there are limited attention spans and limited resources. Social conflicts between individuals, particularly between students at the intermediate and junior high school levels, were frequently compounded by social cliques and personal fears. The teachers also confirmed that such problems were at times founded on issues that had their origin outside the school, e.g., domestic conflicts or peer pressures in communities.

Such disturbances have a detrimental impact on the teaching-learning process. Whenever there are repeated interruptions, instructional time is wasted as teachers shift from teaching lessons to managing behavior.

Some teachers also shared, *“Sa dami ng oras na nauubos kakaayos ng gulo o hidwaan o hindi pagkakaunawaan, kulang na kulang kami sa oras sa pagtuturo.”*

This is consistent with the research of Francisco (2018), which explained that unresolved classroom conflict brings about instantaneous impacts on curriculum coverage, learner engagement, and teacher morale. Learners frequently engaged in conflict—as victims or attackers—are found to have lower academic performance and minimal classroom participation, largely through emotional distress or fear.

Additionally, the psychological impact on teachers should not be overlooked. Ongoing conflict in the classroom causes frustration, exhaustion, and, at worst, burnout. Teachers reported that conflict not only interferes with academic instruction but also puts a strain on relationships between teachers and students. The most common conflicts include behavioral disruptions, peer conflicts, and challenges to authority. These findings align with recent research indicating that emotional regulation and classroom climate significantly influence conflict frequency (Valente et al., 2022).

Lastly, the existence of unresolved or ill-resolved conflict diminishes the quality of the classroom environment. A toxic or disorganized classroom interferes with academic function as well as diminishes mutual respect and safety in the classroom. When students feel that conflicts are treated unfairly or unequally, it undercuts the authority of the teacher and engenders resentment. Teachers use a mix of accommodating, avoiding, and collaborative strategies. More experienced teachers tend to use adaptive approaches, supporting the idea that socio-emotional competence enhances classroom management (Collie, 2022).

For Objective 3 and 4

The third aim of the study was to analyze the conflict management styles adopted by teachers for all levels of education and understand what influences their approach. With 429 teachers across 22 schools within the Aguilar District, there is a highly diverse teaching population spread across all four major phases: Key Stage 1 (K–G3), Key Stage 2 (G4–G6), Key Stage 3 (G7–G10), and Key Stage 4 (G11–G12), and 100 non-advisers. The diversity of the group gave the study the capacity to examine a wide breadth of classroom conflict experience and management styles.

Results of the focus group interviews and discussion identified the most prevalent conflict management styles of teachers as: (1) Avoiding, (2) Accommodating, and (3) Compromising, as described by Thomas and Kilmann's (1974) conflict management theory. Primary school teachers, particularly those teaching Key Stages 1 and 2, prefer accommodating and compromising, with a general emphasis on patience, positive reinforcement, and redirection. Most of these educators, especially those in Baybay, Bocacliw, and Buer Bayaoas Elementary Schools, observed that children are more receptive to non-violent approaches since they are learning how to master their emotions.

At the same time, secondary and integrated school instructors and, more predominantly, in Bocboc East National High School, Enrico T. Prado National High School, and Aguilar Integrated School (possessing its enormous population of teachers and having custody of all major stages), would move on to firmer styles like collaborating or, if the situation requires it, competing styles. Adolescence was quoted by high school instructors as more likely to disobey or fight with peers. As one of the Key Stage 3 advisers put it, "*Minsan kailangan talagang mahigpit at direkta, lalo na kung paulit-ulit ang problema.*" It is especially apt for Grades 7–10 and 11–12 teachers where behavioral boundaries and academic stress are more stringent.

Choosing a conflict management style appears to be dictated by various determinants: years of teaching experience, grade level where they teach, and class size, along with administrative backing. In institutions with large class sizes like Aguilar Integrated School and Bocboc East NHS, for instance, teachers had high instances of behavioral issues, and therefore they use systematic discipline techniques (competing style), especially when instructional time is being wasted. By contrast, teachers in small schools like Casagatan and Sipitan are familiar with the children at the personal level and employ more relational and accommodative strategies.

School culture and staff development need to have their important roles as well. Teachers in schools that have an ongoing project of in-service training (Mapita Integrated School and Don Gaudencio B. Dumlao NHS) are better informed about cooperative methods of conflict resolution, including peer mediation and restorative dialogue. This implies that institutional support and ongoing training can enable teachers to employ more positive and effective means of conflict resolution.

In general, teachers use a mix of accommodating, avoiding, and collaborative strategies. More experienced teachers tend to use adaptive approaches, supporting the idea that socio-emotional competence enhances classroom management (Collie, 2022).

Hence, Key factors include teaching experience, class size, and institutional support. Teachers in supportive environments demonstrate more effective conflict management practices (OECD, 2023).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This case study's findings mirrored the complex realities faced by teachers in Aguilar District public schools in classroom conflict. Interpersonal student conflict, challenges of authority, and disruptions in behavior are the most common problems that teachers face according to the data. Conflict lessens the time for effective teaching, lowers student engagement levels, and raises teacher stress levels. In addition, the research showed that conflict management style is situation-dependent by class size, teacher experience, educational level, and institutional support, where primary teachers apply accommodating and compromising styles, whereas secondary teachers would utilize more assertive or collaborative styles.

These results complement and extend previous research on Philippine public school classroom conflict. For example, Magno's (2016) study highlighted the result that problems in classroom discipline typically derive from overcrowded classroom settings and insufficient psychosocial support, which agrees with the prevalence of behavioral disruptions from the present study. In the same way, Francisco (2018) chronicled how persisting conflict undermines classroom management and teachers' well-being, which was also depicted by the reflection that Aguilar teachers have made about how constant conflict causes instructional burnout as well as emotional exhaustion.

Based on conflict management styles, the current research affirms Cayubit's (2014) contention that Filipino educators employ non-confronting styles based on cultural norms of *pakikisama* (cooperation) and *hiya* (shame), especially in elementary schools. But the movement of secondary teachers towards more assertive styles is a developmental sensitivity to adolescent behavior, which was also evidenced in the study of Rebuena and Rebuena (2020), which posited that collaborative and competing styles become increasingly pertinent with increasing student maturity. Further, Lago (2024) underscored that professional development and school-based interventions may be the determining factors in conflict resolution behavior—this research also endorsed the truth that trainers and quality administrative support would make teachers more likely to be more proactive in their approach.

Finally, the current research confirms that classroom conflict is a systemic matter and not an issue of behavioral maladjustment to pedagogy, school climate, and teacher identity. It is no longer enough for teachers to teach; they must mediate, counsel, and teach emotional hardness. Such a reality is responded to only by long-term support through teacher development projects, conflict resolution education, and internalization of restorative discipline techniques. As Almazan and Gonzales (2021) support, the socio-emotional skills of educators need to be improved with a central focus in education reform. Through an investment in teachers' full capacity, schools will be able to establish more cohesive and effective learning environments.

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DECLARATION ON THE USE OF AI TOOLS

The authors used AI tools only for language editing—such as grammar, sentence structure, and clarity. AI was not involved in the research design, data collection, analysis, or conclusions. All intellectual content is the authors' original work, and they take full responsibility for its accuracy and integrity.

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