Exploring Conflict Resolution Techniques Reducing Aggression Among Students At Primary Level

Hamid Ali Nadeem\textsuperscript{1}, Dr. Wajiha Kanwal\textsuperscript{2}, Arshad Mehmood Qamar\textsuperscript{3}, Huma Tariq\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1}Lecturer Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad.

\textsuperscript{2}Chairman Department of Education University of Wah.

\textsuperscript{3}Lecturer Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad.

\textsuperscript{4}M.Phil (Scholar) National Defense University Islamabad.

ABSTRACT

In this study, it was investigated that, what are the techniques teachers presently used in the classroom to deal with class conflicts? What is the level of understanding among students and teachers about peaceful resolution of conflicts? For this study, forty primary school teachers from two private school were interviewed, children behaviors in school were also observed. The findings suggest that there is presence of aggression and intolerance in student’s behavior which lead to verbal and physical violence in classroom schools. The analysis of the data shows that teachers have very low level of understanding about conflict resolution techniques, but most of them emphasized on inclusion of conflict resolution techniques in courses books and classrooms.

Key words: conflict resolution, children, behaviour, intolerance, aggression, conflicts

INTRODUCTION

School is a place where people (children, teachers, and administrator) come from different backgrounds and work for a common goal that is teaching and learning. A trend of increased aggression and intolerance among students behaviour has been seen, and the alarming situation is that this trend is also present at primary school level. Children consider violence either physical or verbal as the only way of resolving their conflicts. Presence of conflict is not negative in fact; these conflicts can become an opportunity for change if people have skills to manage them peacefully. It is the time that techniques about peaceful conflict resolution should be taught to children in the schools to reduce level of aggression among their behavior. If
children learned these techniques in schools, they can apply these techniques in community at large.

School is the place where people from different backgrounds comes and cooperate for a common purpose that is the teaching-learning process. Parents send their children in schools not only to learn curriculum-based activities but also to learn that how to live while cooperating with others. Unfortunately, education system in Pakistan fails to achieve this goal, our children do not have any skill to manage their conflicts peacefully which results a day by day increase in the level of aggression and intolerance in young people and, eventually in whole society. For creating a peaceful society, governments and leaders of the worlds starts investing on children by teaching them about a new way of dealing with their conflicts, so that after few years they will become grownups who knows that how to dialogue and negotiate instead of waging a war. Gandhi once said that, “If we are going to bring about peace in the world, we have to begin with children.” In homes and schools most of time children have been taught that how to remain number one and dominate over others, despite teaching them forgiveness, respect and empathy, which generally results increased intolerance in the societies (UNESCO, 1985).

Conflicts at domestic, national and international level, do not come out of blue. There are certain root causes of behind any conflict. These can include “clashing of interests, individual differences, lack of material benefits, prejudices and stereotypes, ideological or religious believes, stereotypes and prejudices, frustrations with interpersonal relations, or a lack of knowledge, skills and experience for overcoming differences” (Ohana et al., 2012). Therefore, while considering the growing increase in aggressive conflicts among student’s in classroom or at school, it is the urgent need of time that student’s learned about peaceful ways to deal with these differences and conflicts.

Conflict resolution skills that are: “negotiations, dialogues, forgiveness” must be taught in schools and homes which not only enhance learning environment in the classroom but also helps children to grow up to be responsible citizens who feel empathy for others and resolve their own problems peacefully. Our goal should not be elimination of conflicts because it is the universal truth that conflicts are part of human interaction, our goal should be to learn and teach about peaceful management of conflicts (Sinclair, 2004). Two primary variables of the present research study were ‘conflict resolution techniques’ and ‘aggression in student’s behaviour. Before explaining conflict resolution techniques, it is necessary to explain that what is conflict? Most commonly a conflict is defined as the state of opposition between two parties or as a contradiction of views among two people. Wall and Callister (1995) define conflicts as “A process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party.” Manning (2015) explained the process of conflict resolution as giving a win-win solution for all the parties involved in any conflict. In past four decades an increase in level of extremism and intolerance was observed in Pakistan at every part of society. People are not accepting others with different views from themselves. Therefore, it is the responsibility of school’s administration and teachers to introduce their students with a new and peaceful way of dealing their conflicts and to ensured that, this learning will be remained with them in their practical life.
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Whenever two or more than two people interact with each other, there is the potential chance of conflicts. This is especially true for students in the classroom, who have such a wide range of personalities. In classroom teachers are bound to come across different conflicts that are virtually unavoidable. Apparently, these class conflicts: such as a student using another student’s property without permission or unprovoked contact, are the minor but can lead to major conflicts. These conflicts disturbed the classroom learning environment and distract the teacher attention during teaching. For adults it is somehow easy to control the anger and frustration but for children who are not mature enough it is not at all easy to manage their frustration which latterly converts in to aggression. Therefore, it is the task of teachers to teach students about different techniques, which lead to the peaceful resolution of their conflicts.

The purpose of this research study was that conflicts can be prevented when students and teacher known that how to peacefully deal with these conflicts. Opoku-Asare, et al. (2015) outline that verbal and non-verbal interaction among pupils, teachers and administration, result different types conflicts which included fighting, heckling, bullying, indiscipline, use of offensive language and other forms of relationship conflict. Another type of conflicts written in that paper was ‘teacher–pupil conflicts’ which may results the exclusion of affected pupils from teaching and learning activities, denying their right to ask questions, which leads to lowered pupil self-esteem, reduced concentration during learning activities and even truancy and school dropout. This is the case also in Pakistan, where mostly teachers are unaware about some specific skills of conflict management. Due to which they are unable to transfer these skills to their students. The purpose of this study is to taught students a way of dealing with their conflicts other than fighting and violent actions. It is not an easy task backbreaking work for is necessary for the inclusion of peace values in people minds. Education about peaceful resolution of conflicts must be given at early age because children minds are blank slate, they learned what parents, teachers and society taught them. These children will after few years became teacher, doctor, artist of even the leaders of their people but most important for them is to become peace makers where ever they will and should contribute for peaceful culture in the world. Another purpose of this study is to find that why the level of intolerance and aggressive in school going children is continually increase and what are the methods teachers currently using to address this issue. Are school teachers have knowledge about non-violent conflict resolution techniques? It is necessary to find the answers of these questions because every new generation will develop its way of thinking and norms by means of socialization; essential part of socialization of our present and future generations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Following research questions were framed for this study:

1. What are the conflict resolution techniques which can be used in the classroom settings?
2. What is the level of understanding among students and teachers about peaceful resolution of conflicts?
3. Are primary school teachers applying conflict resolution techniques in the classroom?
4. To what extent use of conflict resolution techniques are feasible in the classroom at primary school level?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Whenever two or more than two people unite and struggle for some common goals, there are chances of conflict. Which is good in the sense that, it reflects people interaction and communication, but it can become worst when people do not know how to deal with them. Same is the case with students in classroom, who for instance; struggles for remained number in the class, compare themselves with another student, tried to become more popular in the class or in front of the teachers. Which results aggression and violence in the classroom that directly affects learning process. This study will contribute to direct the attention of policy makers, school administrators and teachers towards the increasing level of aggression and use of violence (verbal or physical) among students in schools. This study also discusses use of different conflict resolution techniques; such as listening to others, empathy, forgiveness and, negotiations to counter this increased level of aggression among students. This study stressed that children should learned that peace and nonviolence is not the sign of weakness, but it is the sign of control over our actions and emotions. This research is the pilot research, because due to the shortage of time researcher is unable to conduct large scale research. This research surely directs the attention of future researchers and policy makers toward this important issue.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Qualitative research methodology was employed to conduct this research study. Basically, descriptive research design was used in this research study. Descriptive research design “is a scientific method which involves observing and describing the behavior of a subject without influencing it in any way” (Shuttleworth, 2008). Two different research methods were used for conducting this research which were, interviews from primary school teachers and observation of student’s behavior in classroom. For present research, focused population was primary school students and teachers. For this research study, interviews were taken from forty primary school teachers. For observation purpose, two private schools were selected on the basis researcher convenience. An interview protocol was developed for conducting interviews from teachers. This protocol consisted on fifteen open-ended structured questions which explores that how teachers addressed and resolved the classroom conflicts among their students. An observational checklist was also developed to note the student’s behavior observations. Participants responses against all interview questions were descriptively analyzed and described through narrative analysis, which involves the “reformulation of responses presented by respondents taking into account context of each case and different experiences of each respondent.” It can be said that; narrative analysis is the revision of primary qualitative data by researcher. Findings of participant observations were also be interpreted through observational checklist, which helps to analyze level of aggression in student’s behavior.
FINDINGS

Present research study was based on the notion that there was constant increased has been witnessed in aggression level among student’s behavior at primary level. For adults it is somehow easy to control the anger and frustration but for children who are not mature enough it is not at all easy to manage their frustration which latterly converts in to aggression. Therefore, it is the task of teachers to teach students about different techniques, which lead to the peaceful resolution of their conflicts (Carlson, 1999). Fortunately, there are lots of approaches to resolving conflict between students; such as dialogues, mediation, roleplaying and listening to others, which eventually lead to the peaceful environment in the class (Akgün & Araz, 2014). This research put focus on these techniques and their use in the classroom to counter increased aggression in student’s behavior. Forty primary school teachers from two private school of Islamabad were selected for conducting structured interviews and observation of student’s behavior in classroom and play area were also done.

The interview guide was consisted on fifteen questions, which were mostly about conflict resolution and its techniques. What did teachers know about conflict and conflict resolution techniques? Did they really face any conflict among students in the classroom? How helpful and feasible it was to apply these techniques in the classroom? There was a question that, suppose in their class two students starting fight with each other, how would they deal with it? Most of them said that they first listen point of view of both students and then helped them to understand each other and to resolve their conflict peacefully. Here responses of three different research participants are shared which shows their way to deal with a conflict.

“I resolve such disputes by listening to the both the students and accommodate them by finding a midway solution.”

“First of all, I will be asked the reason of fight from both the students and then to resolve a conflict, I would prefer to do their counselling and make them understand that it is not a good act.”

“As primary school teacher, I made a classroom that is touching is not allowed. If anything, Initiates I remind them the rule or stop them by reward or punishment.”

When asked about that did, they ever experienced a class conflict arouse again which they resolved once? Most of the participants responded that no they never experienced this type of situation but some of them said that yes, they have been experienced such situation and then involve administration. While responding to the question that what did they know about conflict resolution strategies and their application? Only few of them know about these strategies and most of the participants were unaware about conflict resolution techniques.

Sixth question was regarding to the methods they were using to create a peaceful and safe environment in their classes? A teacher replied that:
“We used to assign different topics to the students related to peace values. Student when prepare for the topics they learned the blessings of peace and learned different strategies to resolve their conflicts.”

While responding to another question that, how can violence be prevented in the class? Almost every participant said that when children were taught about other’s rights and their own duties only then the violence can be reduced. Participants also stressed that peace principles should be taught in the class once a week, which helps in the prevention of violent conflicts. In response to another question, research participants said that yes conflict resolution training if given properly would always remain in their minds and helped them in their practical life. When asked about that did, they ever received any classroom management training during their service in any school? Most of the participants said that no they have not received such type of training. Some of them said that yes, we got trainings, but those training workshops does not provide any knowledge about conflict resolution and its techniques. By responding to the question about different barriers in the implementation of conflict resolution techniques in classroom, participants told that time constraint is the most significant barrier because they have to complete the syllabus and deliver their lessons. Therefore, they were unable to practice these techniques in the classroom. Another important issue on which they through light, was the management of classroom that if teacher was busy in resolving conflicts among two or three students than what would happen to others, who will control the whole class.

Thirty participants said that ‘yes they are in capacity to resolve class conflicts’ but again the ways they have been used were scolding and strictness which eventually suppressed the conflict instead of resolving it. Other ten participants were told that due to administration rules and orders they were not fully in capacity of resolving conflicts. Another question was about the need of parent’s cooperation in resolving class conflicts peacefully. Almost all the research participant shown agreement upon parents’ collaboration with teachers to peacefully resolve their children conflicts in class. They have been also said that parents are the important corner of learning triangle, there should be conflict resolution training sessions not only for students and teachers but also for parents.

There was significant difference among the opinion and responses of research participants, in the question related to school administration supports in resolving class conflicts. It was may be due to different schools, participants from first school said that yes, the administration of the school help us a lot to sort out any conflict situation within classroom and outside the classroom and in many instances played the role of mediator among students. while participants from second school said that unfortunately they did not find much support from administration. It’s their responsibility to deal all conflicts and problems in the classroom but they acknowledged the need of administration support in resolving conflicts in classroom or at school.

Findings of the research proposed that although teachers have not much knowledge about conflict resolution techniques but still, they acknowledged the effectiveness and need these techniques for reducing level of aggression in student’s behavior. It has been also
suggested by research participants that, there should be some trainings given to the teachers about conflict management and resolution skill, so that they would be able to use these skills while teaching. Most of the research participants shown agreement with this notion that it was feasible to employ these techniques not only for resolving conflicts but also for giving skills to the students about peaceful resolution of conflicts in future.

In this research participants observation was done to explore the aggression level in students. For this purpose, classroom observation of students was done and notes on an observational checklist. Observations in the classrooms and play time also endorsed the significance of conflict resolution techniques because it was observed that student’s shown very aggressive behavior towards others on small issues. Interpretation of observations show a very alarming situation, it reflects that most of the students considered verbal or physical violence as the only way to resolve their conflicts. Children do not want to share their things with others, name calling and make fun of each other are the common practices in the classroom. Started pointless scuffles and annoyed other student by name calling and verbal abusing, physical fighting was not uncommon. Teachers only scolded and punished the students who gets in to the arguments in the class. During the observation a situation happens when two students get in to a conflict because one was eaten others lunch without asking, other classmates called the duty teacher who gave shut up call to both, which only play a role of seize fire. That unresolved conflict changes into a big fight at off timings. It was also observed that most of teacher’s actions contradicts with responses in the interviews. Which means that maybe teachers were properly using conflict resolution techniques in the classroom. It was also observed that tolerance level among the student’s was very low and even they did not want to understand others point of view.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Conflicts are inevitable in human life, they are not always sign of disagreement, but they are the sign of interaction among people. These conflicts become negative and violent when people do not know appropriate ways to deal with them. The question is that from where to start teaching these conflict resolution strategies? Childhood is the most appropriate time to instill these values because aggression level in student’s is continuously increasing and learning of childhood will remain throughout the life. It’s a common practice in our daily lives that most of the times the last solution we have for any conflict is verbal or physical violence. Same is the case with children they do not know about other peaceful ways for dealing with their conflicts, that is the main cause of increased level of aggression among children behavior. The basic idea behind this research study is to create a scenario, in which a child learned appreciation of diversity and tolerance. He learns how to become mediator and peacemaker and after few he became a leader or common man who responsibly and peacefully deal with his domestic, national and international conflicts. For successful conduct of this research two private schools were selected female teachers selected from two private primary schools of Islamabad with ratio of twenty from each school. The structured interviews from these teachers were conducted. The research findings show that most of the teachers wants the inclusion of conflict resolution techniques in their classrooms and consider these techniques as great source
to reduced level of aggression among students. this was maybe because the applied all other classroom management techniques and found them not working. Therefore, they acknowledged the inclusion of conflict resolution techniques in primary schools. Findings also reflect that most of the teachers did not have knowledge about the contemporary field of conflict resolution, but still they have idea about the significance of peaceful resolution of conflicts. Due to slow development and lack of governmental support our education sector remained backward as compared to other developing countries. No refresher courses or training were provided because of which our teachers are unaware about new trends and techniques of teaching and managing the students. All research participants that were interviewed, have consensus on the importance of childhood in human’s life because they said that it is the time when new concepts and schemas were developed in children minds. They learn about manners of interaction, difference between right and wrong and how to adapt in a different situation. If in this stage of life children learned conflict resolution practices it will surely help them in their personal and social lives. Another crucial issue which was also highlighted by participants was of ‘parental ignorance’ that mostly children come from families where both parents are working and did not have much time to listen to their children due to which children spend their time with electronic gadgets, which increase aggression among children. Most of the teachers agreed with the notion that it is feasible to use conflict resolution techniques are the best solution for managing the aggressive behavior of students.

Students behavioral observation became great source of understanding about their level of thinking and helps to understand that how small class conflicts lead to verbal or physical violence. Findings of observations was suggested that there is urgent need of developing a curriculum which not only provide subject knowledge but also address the issue of increased aggression among student’s behavior. If children learn how to share their stuffs with others and how to accept other views which may be against them, then it results a peaceful environment in the class. A good, peaceful and managed class also increased the level of students learning outcomes. Aggression comes in the behavior when a person is frustrated, confused and unable to deal with some conflicts but this aggression reduced when the person knows how to manage that conflict peaceful.

Conflict resolution and peace education are the contemporary field of study and people did not have much knowledge about these fields especially in case of developing countries like Pakistan. Therefore, not much researches are available on this topic. Like most of the social sciences researches this research is not perfect. Data collected from authentic sources but due to limited resources and time sample was small, due to which research generalization decreased. Still, it may be a turning point and attracts other researchers to work on this area of education. It may also direct the attention of educational policymakers and curriculum developers.

REFERENCES


