Causes of Conflict and Conflict Resolution Styles

among Bahir Dar University Students

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. ## Abstract

This study examined the causes of conflict and conflict resolution styles among university students. The participants were 390 (49 female and 341 male) sophomore (87.7%), junior (5.6%), and senior (6.7%) university students. Students identified themselves as Amhara, Oromo, Tigre, and as belonging to other ethnic groups. Results from qualitative analysis indicated that the major sources of conflict were ethnicity, religious diversity, defying rules, and sexual and love affairs, in that order. Students reported that the major conflict resolution styles were compromise, avoiding, third-party mediation, and dominating. Results from quantitative analysis, on other hand, showed that integration, compromise, and obliging were the most frequently used styles of conflict resolution. ANOVA showed that sex differences were found in dominating in favour of males. Ethnic differences were observed in integration and dominating, the Oromo tending to use more of integration than Amhara and Tigre, dominating being used by Amhara and Tigre. Amhara and Tigre students use dominating more recurrently than Oromo and other groups. Discussions on major findings and implications for preventive interventions are included.

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Introduction

Theoretical and Empirical Bases of the Study

Conceptualization of Conflict and its Causes

In every day living conflict of various forms ensue due to different reasons. Though every conflict may not be detrimental to the proper functioning and effectiveness of organizations and communities, conflicts do usually have unsettling and destructive effects in accomplishing personal, organizational, and national goals; mainly when they are sever and remain unsolved. Recent literature in organizational behavior and management indicate that conflicts are almost unavoidable. Unlike classical organization theorists, conflict in social and open systems theories is considered as a crucial element for organizational effectiveness and improvement (Rahim, 1992 cited in Cetin and Hacifazhoglu, 2004:325). According to Rahim, classical theorists were propagating for the complete avoidance of conflict from organizations with the belief that its absence brings commitment and stability among members of an organization. In recent days, however, not only is there the acknowledgement that conflict is unavoidable but also the notion that conflict within certain limits is useful for enhancing productivity. When handled in a proper way, conflicts "encourage creative solutions, lead to unity and support people through change and stressful periods" (King, cited in Cetin and Hacifazhoglu, 2004:325).

The term conflict has been defined in different ways. Rahim defined conflict as an "interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities" (Rahim, cited in Cetin and Hacifazhoglu, 2004:325). Gilbert and Brown (2002:549) defined conflict as "a natural outcome of interpersonal interactions when the parties perceive themselves as being in opposition to each other." Similarly, Wall and Callister (1995:517) defined conflict as a "process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party." These definitions indicate that conflict is a result of disagreements and misperception that people develop in their interactions and is a natural phenomenon. If so, understanding its sources and how it could be managed are of great importance.

Sources of conflict range from simple communication misunderstandings to events that occurred in the past. Wall and Callister (1995) grouped causes of conflict into six major groups: Individual characteristics (personality, goals,

values, stress, anger, desire for autonomy), interpersonal factors (distrust of others, perceptual interface, misunderstanding, others' intention counter the other party), behavior (blocking party's goals, low interaction, power struggle), structure (preferential treatment of one side, status differences, power imbalance), and previous interactions (previous conflict, past failure to reach agreement).

Other researchers relate sources of conflict with culture. According to Triandis (2000), culture can be a cause of conflict from two directions. First, cultural differences may lead to miscommunications and misunderstandings. "Conflict is greater when the two cultures are very different than when they are very similar. Technically this difference is called cultural distance" (Triandis, 2000:145). This is particularly so when cultures are characterized by differences in language. Cultural distance is greater when people speak different languages, have different social structures, religions, and significant differences in standards of living. The argument is that variations such as these lead to rules and beliefs which are acceptable for one group but unacceptable for another culture or group.

Second, one culture may in itself be a fertile ground for conflict and another culture may promote tolerance and diversity. Triandis (2000) identified many dimensions of culture: Individualism and collectivism, vertical and horizontal cultures, active and passive cultures, universalism and particularism, diffuse and specific, instrumental and expressive, and emotional expression and depression. According to Triandis, there are cultures wherein differences are not tolerated. Such cultures have attributes that generate conflict. If we take Triandis' classification of culture as individualism and collectivism, collectivism is a feature of societies that are simple and tight. It is characterized by high degree of conformity. Tightness has to do with the existence of many rules, norms and ideas about what is wrong and right. On the other hand, individualist cultures are complex and loose. Complexity refers to the existence of subgroups with different beliefs, attitudes, and rules. Unlike collectivist cultures, which tend to have commonality in their belief and attitudes, individualist cultures have diversity of beliefs, attitudes, rules, and so on.

This signifies that the type of culture that prevails in a certain society may determine the extent to which conflicts are incited in that society. Hence, people of collectivist cultures tend to be receptive and helpful when interacting with people of the same group members. But when they interact with people of

different groups, they tend to have less concern and when their interests are competitive or different, they become aggressive. On the other hand, according to Triandis, people in individualist cultures are exposed to many different ways of living and beliefs, and tend to be tolerant and accommodative albeit cultural differences.

Another aspect of culture that has to do with conflict is ethnicity. Some researchers believe that ethnic identity is associated with past events and present trauma which could be a potential source of conflict. Moreover, there might be competition for power, resources, and other forms of symbolic values among different ethnic groups (Polkinghorn and Byrne, 2001). Such competition can result in conflict among different ethnic groups. In fact, students may or may not be directly involved in such competitions. However, students' values and thinking are largely shaped by the community in which they were brought up through the socialization process. Hence, what is residing in the wider community or society mirrors itself in the behavioral manifestations of students. Moreover, Triandis (2000:151) noted, "all humans are ethnocentric." People tend to believe that their group values, norms, behaviors and culture in general are good and proper while others' cultures are wrong and unnatural. Ethnocentrism, when it is high, prevents people from questioning their own values and norms, and forces people to reject out-of-group members. According to Triandis, ethnocentrism is mainly dangerous in collectivist cultures as people tend to believe others are inhuman and inferior. However, it has been indicated that ethnocentrism should not be necessarily related with hatred and disparagement of out-of-group members as "people may favor the in-group over the out-group but still may view both the in-group and out-group positively–that is, in-group favoritism may occur without derogation of the out-group" (Weber cited in Valk and Karu, 2001:585). Supporting this argument to some degree, some studies reported no relationship between ethnocentrism and hostility towards out-group members while others indicated positive relationships (Valk and Karu, 2001).

Furthermore, there are social scientists (e.g., Gurr, 1993) who think that the existence of many different ethnic groups in one community or country increases the eruption of conflict among people. For this group of writers, ethnic diversity entails variation in language, religion, and beliefs which craft a sensitive platform for conflict. In view of this argument, Ethiopia, along with Nigeria, Sudan, Lebanon, Israel, and India, has been indicated as one of the highly tensioned places for social or ethnic conflict (Reynal-Querol, 2002).

Conversely, some (for example, Ellingsen, 2000) contended that ethnic heterogeneity is a beauty and should not be considered as a source of conflict by itself. What matters most, according to Ellingsen, is the political and socio-economic condition of the country wherein many ethnic groups live together. The inclusiveness and type of the political system (whether it is 'proportional or majoritarian') (Reynal-Querol, 2002), the level of democracy (Ellingsen, 2000), polarization among ethnic groups (indicated by adherents of rent seeking model), and línguistic fragmentation have been indicated as mediating factors that influence the possibility of conflict. Even within each factor, consensus is far from being reached. For example, Lijhardt (1984) cited in Reynal-Querol (2002:36) believes that a proportional system in pluralistic societies reduces the risk of conflict as it "does not artificially force the establishment of larger but less representative parties". Horowitz (cited in Reynal-Querol, 2002), on the other hand, contends that a majoritarin system works better as it encourages the creation of coalition among different parties.

In sum, it seems difficult to fully support or refute either of these arguments as there are a number of other overriding factors that make it hard to reach a conclusive judgment. Triandis's individualist cultures are characterized by ethnic diversities in a sense that there are many values, norms, and behavioral forms creating a peaceful community. Tolerance is high despite differences. However, it has been also argued earlier that language variations, one instance where ethnic groups tend to vary, may be a source of conflict due to communication misunderstandings. Ethnocentrism is also another case where diversity of ethnic groups may lead to conflict. Gurr also supports this idea. But Ellingsen attributed conflict to socio-economic and political conditions rather than ethnic diversity per se.

Conflict Management Styles

Notwithstanding the importance of conflict and its causes, what is of great interest to people engaged in conflict research is how it is managed. In relation to this, Rahim and Magner (1995) have developed conflict resolution styles of people based on two axes: Concern for self and concern for others. These are avoiding, dominating, compromising, integrating and obliging. Others (Ohbuchi, Fukushima, and Tedeschi, 1999; Derlega, Cukur, Kuang, and Forsyth, 2002) have included third party intervention as conflict management style besides the above ones. Some also made classifications based on assertiveness, threatening, and avoidance. Recent study on validating Rahim

and Magners' classification (Ting-Toomey, Yee-Jung, Shapiro, Garcia, Wright, and Oetzel, 2000) found that obliging failed to show up as an independent style of solving conflict whereas third party intervention did so. Taking into consideration the various classifications made on conflict management styles, third party intervention, which is conceptualized as seeking help or advice of a third party for resolving conflicts (Derlega, Cukur, Kuang, and Forsyth, 2002), is the missing style from Rahim and Magners' framework. Other differences in classification mainly stems from using synonymous terms to describe similar styles. In this study, Rahim and Magners' classifications are treated in detail.

Integrating style focuses on handling conflict in a collaborative way (Gross and Guerrero, 2000). People who are using integrating style 'try to find new and creative solutions' by considering their needs and others – high concern for self and others. According to Hocker and Wilmot (cited in Gross and Guerrero, 2000), communication in integrating behavior focuses on keeping relationship in good terms for future interaction and is characterized by conciliatory remarks such as supportive statements, concessions, and statements showing acceptance of responsibility. It is a direct and co-operative style of handling conflict. Gross and Guerrero (2000) noted that integrating is both effective and appropriate kind of managing conflict as it helps to meet the expectation of other people and achieve ones desired objective. In a study conducted by Gross and Guerrero (2000) on 100 business students, integrating was reported to be perceived as the most appropriate and effective way of solving conflict.

Obliging is giving priority for the needs of others at the expense of ones own need. It is "associated with accommodating behaviors that include putting aside one's own needs to please the partner, making yielding or conceding statements, denying or failing to express one's needs, and explicitly expressing harmony and co-operation in conflict episode" (Hocker and Wilmot cited in Gross and Guerrero, 2000:206). According to them, obliging style, while co-operative and appropriate may sound, tends to be ineffective in achieving the goals of both parties. It is appropriate when a conflict cannot be solved in a way that satisfies both parties. It is also a comfortable way of resolving conflict as it, at least for a time being, does not intensify disagreements and may avoid further conflicts. In light of the axis developed by Rahim and Magner (1995), obliging is characterized by high concern for others but low concern for self.

The third style is avoiding. In avoiding style, people withdraw themselves from the conflict event often by "denying the conflict, being indirect and evasive,

changing and/or avoiding topics, employing noncommittal remarks, and making irrelevant remarks or joking as a way to avoid dealing with the conflict at hand" (Gross and Guerrero, 2000:207). People avoid interacting with their counterparts which may in turn lead to a "chilling effect," cooling of conflicts with one of the parties withdrawing or moving away from the conflict (Roloff and Cloven, cited in Gross and Guerrero, 2000:7). As such, avoiding is an indirect and uncooperative way of solving conflict. In Rahim and Mangers' (1995) analysis, it is characterized by low concern for self and others. Hence, though it may be appropriate in situations where an issue cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of neither of the parties and where further interaction could worsen the conflict, it is generally found to have a negative correlation with perception of appropriateness, effectiveness, general competence, and relational satisfaction (Gross and Guerrero, 2000).

Dominating style is the use of power, aggression, verbal dominance, and other means to reach one's objective with less or no concern for others (Gross and Guerrero, 2000). Despite being perceived as least effective and least appropriate in interpersonal contexts, dominating is perceived to be effective in attaining some organizational objectives when there are production oriented goals. Hence, individuals may use their power to attain their needs (effectiveness) by ignoring the need of others. This procedure may be considered inappropriate; yet it may be effective. According to Rahim and Magners' (1995) classification, dominating is characterized by high concern for oneself but low concern for others. It is a win-lose situation.

Compromising style is a way of handling conflicts by satisfying some aspects of the needs of both parties. It involves both winning and losing between the people engaged in conflict. Hence, it is "unique in that it represents the mid-point on the dimension of production orientation versus people orientation" (Gross and Duerrero, 2000:208). Production orientation refers to Rahim and Magners' concern for self whereas people orientation refers to concern for others. It demonstrates a moderate concern for oneself and also for others involved in a conflict (Rahim and Magner, 1995). In many situations in which people have contradictory goals and needs, collaboration may not be reached. But through compromise both parties give up some of their needs and reach at some agreement. That is why this style is considered to be relatively effective and also appropriate.

In general, people may use any of these conflict handling styles in various situations. Judgment of effectiveness and appropriateness of the style depends on the context and nature of goals pursued (Antonioni, 1998). Yet, it is possible to assign who the winner and loser of the process is. Based on a win-lose analysis, according to Antonioni, integrating or collaboration brings a win-win outcome, dominating results in a win-lose situation, obliging results in a lose-win outcome, avoiding is a lose-lose interaction, and compromising is a no-win and no-lose process. Hence, collaboration is the best method of handling conflict as both parties will be winners; whereas dominating and avoiding may be considered as least effective styles. However, we have to bear in mind that each style may be worthy in some situations.

Factors that Affect Conflict Management Styles

People handle conflict by using one or a combination of different styles. Researchers have been trying to identity personal, cultural, and organizational factors that could determine the use of these styles. As far as our review is concerned, three main factors seem to be critical in affecting the use of conflict management styles: personality of the person, sex, and culture. In this review we concentrate on sex and culture.

Sex is a personal factor that matters in conflict management styles. Research outcomes on sex and conflict management styles are inconclusive. In Antonioni's (1998) study sex was not found to be a significant predictor of conflict management styles. However, Tannen (1990) (cited in Polkinghorn and Byrne, 2001), noted that young women have the affiliation to maintain relationships and consequently resort more to the indirect styles of conflict management than the direct and competitive styles, which are favored by young men. Yet, in a study that involved University students from South Africa, Serbia, Northern Ireland, and Israel, Polkinghorn and Byrne (2001) found out that men respondents opted for avoidance, which is an indirect style of resolving conflict, more than female respondents did. Male University students´ desire not to be engaged in wars was given as an explanation for males' preference of the avoiding style. This may strengthen the assumption that people's preference to conflict management style depends on situations. In the same study, it was reported that male students preferred controlling (dominating) more than female students. In another study, a significant positive association was found between sex and dominating style and a negative correlation with the other conflict management styles, where males were rated

as 1 and females were rated as 0 (Brewer, Mitchel, and Weber, 2002). There was mainly strong negative correlation between sex and avoiding, indicating females' preference to use this style. Similarly, Ohbuchi, Fukushima, and Tedeschi (1999) reported that, despite cultural differences, female students (Japanese and Americans) preferred third party intervention more and assertive tactics less than male students did. Males' preference for assertive and dominating style may be explained also from biological differences between the sexes. These results were not consistent across different studies. Females were found to be avoiders in some studies and males were found to be so in other studies (Polkinghorn and Byrne, 2001; Brewer, Mitchel, and Weber, 2002).

Worth considering in the study of conflict resolution is the effect a setting has in deciding which conflict management style will be preferred. Research on conflict management indicates that every individual has his/her own style of managing conflict (Polkinghorn and Byrne, 2001). However, it does not mean that every individual has a unique style; rather a combination of them. Equally worth noting is, however, the tendency of people to rate their preference differently in different situations. People's preference of style is liable to existing conditions during responding (Polkinghorn and Byrne, 2001). Hence, if the same people are asked to indicate the conflict resolution style they would prefer under two extreme different circumstances, responses are more likely to be different.

Apart from sex and situation, a decisive factor in conflict resolution style is culture. As different cultures have various degrees of tolerance, openness, and other aspects that may sway the extent conflicts would be created, they do also have impact on the way conflicts are solved (Triandis, 2000; Kozan and Ergin, 1997). Through the socialization process, young people acquire cultural values and norms from past generations, develop attitudes and perceptions that mould the way they should interact in interpersonal and inter-group relations, and shape their conflict management styles (Polkinghorn and Byrne, 2001:26). Indicating how culture impacts the conflict management style of young adults in collectivist cultures and segregated societies, they state that "young adults often remain entrapped within static societies, their conflict management styles conditioned by their socio-cultural and political milieu."

Hofstede and Glen (cited in Kozan, 1997) also noted that culture shapes 'the collective minds' of the people living in it. Indicating conflict as an outcome of

interpretive behavior, Ross (cited in Kozan ,1997:341) argued that dispositions rooted in socialization process 'shape a culture's style of interaction with others and interpretations of behavior.' Based on this assumption, Kozan developed a theoretical framework that related conflict management styles with cultural dimensions offered by Hofstede and Glen.

Accordingly, in collectivist or associative cultures conflict resolution tends to follow a harmony model in which members of the culture give high value for consensus or absence of conflict within group members. Collectivist culture also encourages members to be less expressive of their emotions in conflict as it promotes displaying positive emotions to bring in reconciliation. As a result of these cultural bases or roots, people in collectivist cultures tend to be less competing and more accommodating and avoiding (Ting-Toomey et al. cited in Kozan, 1997). In their study in four collectivist countries (China, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea), they found that the people in these countries have high other-face concerns (high concern for others) and low self-face concerns (low self concern). Consequently, avoiding and obliging were found to be the preferred methods of resolving conflict so as to promote harmony among members. Triandis (2000) also explained that people in collectivist culture tend to give priority to group goals than individual goals; entailing a possible preference for obliging and avoiding.

However, such commitments work mainly to members of the same group. People in collectivist culture may tend to be competitive and more assertive when interacting with out-of-group members. Hence, in negotiation processes involving other groups or when they are in conflict with others, these people may resort to mechanisms of domination and retaliation, and some may prefer to compromise (Sinha, cited in Kozan, 1997). Another interesting feature of collectivist cultures is the role third parties have in mediating conflict among different parties (Kozan and Ergin, 1997). In an experimental study that involved Turkish and American subjects, Kozan and Ergin (1997) reported that Turkish subjects (collectivist) preferred to negotiate through intermediary while American subjects (individualist) preferred direct negotiation. Two explanations were given for this. Firstly, people in collectivist cultures think harmony would be spoiled and group cohesiveness would be endangered if they face directly and negotiate. Secondly, the fact that people have high concern for others in the group encourages them to opt for indirect styles of conflict resolution (Kozan, 1997). On the other hand, in individualist cultures people are more likely to be involved in confrontation and compromise

(Kozan, 1997). Third party negotiations are not also as common as they are in collectivist cultures.

Supporting some of these findings, Ohbuchi, Fukushima, and Tedeschi (1999) found out that American university students strongly used assertion as compared to Japanese university students. On the other hand, Japanese students used avoidance more frequently than American students. Contrary to the findings of Kozan and Ergin (1997), Ohbuchi, Fukushima, and Tedeschi (1999) indicated that American students used third party intervention more frequently than Japanese students. This demonstrates inconsistencies among the results of various studies. Relating conflict management styles with goal orientation of students, they found out that American students were justice oriented, whereas Japanese were relationship oriented. People in individualist cultures prefer active, assertive and confrontational tactics to resolve conflict while people in collectivist culture are inclined to use passive, avoiding, and collaborative tactics (Trubisky, Ting-Tommey, and Lin, 1991).

It seems orderly to examine briefly whether Ethiopia as a multination and multicultural state could be characterized as individualist or collectivist country. According to Hofstede (1991) (cited in Allik and Realo, 2004:32), collectivism "pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty". On the other hand, individualism pertains to "societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family." Relating individualism and collectivism to countries' economic development, Hofstede further indicated that rich, developed, and industrialized societies are individualistic, whereas traditional, poorer, and rural societies tend to remain collectivistic. This argument appears to entail that modernization and individualism are casually interrelated. However, Allik and Realo (2004) cautioned that there are modern countries (for example, Japan) which are still considered by researchers as collectivist. Besides, even within individualist countries such as USA, there are variations on the dimensions of individualism and collectivism among various ethnic groups (Vandello and Cohen, 1999, cited in Allik and Realo, 2004). Hence, they noted that the characterization of countries as individualist and collectivist does not depend only on level of modernity rather on having western cultural practices, institutions and values. Based on the futures presented above, Ethiopia's cultural practices and traditions seem, by and large, to be collectivist type.

Another element of culture that received little attention in affecting conflict management style is religion. As far as our review is concerned, no thorough comparative study was carried out in this direction. However, in a study done among university students in Israel, South Africa, Bosnia, and Northern Ireland, Polkinghorn and Byrne (2001) indicated that most religions participants in comparison to non-religious participants prefer to use avoidance as conflict management style. All religious groups (Catholics, Protestants, Christians, Jewish, Muslims) prefer to use accommodation or obliging as conflict management style. However, many Bosnian Muslims as compared to other religion groups preferred controlling (dominating) as an effective style.

Ethnicity is also another factor that has got the attention of some researchers. A comparative study on the relationship between ethnic identity and conflict styles indicated that Asia- Americans and Latino-Americans use avoiding and third party intervention more than Africa Americans; and Asia-Americans used avoiding more than European-Americans (Ting-Toomey, Yee-Jung, Shapiro, Garcia, Wright, and Oetzel, 2000).

In general, these are some of the factors that could create variation in people's preference of conflict management styles by determining the values they seek to achieve and expectations regarding the efficacy of various tactics (Ohbuchi, Fukushima, and Tedeschi, 1999:51).

The Problem

As indicated earlier conflicts arise out of interactions among or between individuals. In Ethiopian situation, people mainly grow up in collectivist cultures. Students from rural areas of Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations and Nationalities, Tigray, and other regions are mainly exposed to cultural elements of their regions and have their own languages. While studying in universities, these students are expected to transact with other groups when living in campuses, sharing rooms, and eating together in cafeterias.

As conflicts are natural, disagreements occur among students. It is not uncommon to hear among the student population and university communities that conflicts are pervasive in campuses. Informal communication with students and our everyday observations revealed that conflicts are common events in higher learning institutions. Though conflicts have been happening in

almost all Ethiopian universities and colleges, the magnitude, sources of conflicts, and resolution strategies used to resolve them are not exactly known.

Of the few studies conducted on the area, Demewoz (2007) reported that focus group discussion with Deans of Students Affairs of three higher learning institutions and an analysis of disciplinary case documents of two higher learning institutions did not show evidence, except very few cases in one of the colleges, on the prevalence of ethnic conflict in Ethiopian higher education institutions,. Territorial/region difference rather than ethnicity was reported to be the source of conflict among students though it is unclear how the two can be distinctly separated when regions are demarcated on linguistic bases and language is the defining construct in the conceptualization of ethnic identity/group in Ethiopia. Contrary to Demewoz's findings, Tamirat et al (2004) (cited in Demewoz) indicated that about 80 percent of conflicts among students of Debub University are related to ethnic origin.

Besides, empirical evidence on conflict resolution styles on Ethiopian context is very limited. The existing evidence centers on traditional marital and inter-ethnic conflict resolution methods (Habtamu, 1998; Tassew, 1998; and Tsega, 2002). These studies illustrate the crucial role negotiation and third-party meditation play in resolving conflict in Ethiopian context. For example, Tassew (1998) indicated that marital conflict resolution among Orthodox Christians in Addis Ababa usually involves arbitration via elderly people and friends unless one of the couples takes the case to a court. Similarly, marital conflict in different parts of Ethiopia is resolved by appealing to *Yäwil Abat* (persons who chair and mediate agreements reached between couples during marriage), family arbitrators, priests, and elderly people (Remnick, 1973; Solomon, 1984; and Genna, 1983 cited in Tassew, 1998).

In relation to inter-ethnic conflict resolution styles, Tsega (2002) reported that the Shanqila, Oromo, Amhara, and Gumuz in Mettekel region use *Michu* to establish positive relationships and forgive previous misdeeds. *Michu* involves discussion among elderly people of the various ethnic groups and oaths not to attack each other. According to Tsega, it has not only prevented and alleviated ethnic conflict but also created a platform for ethnic integration. In general, the above studies indicate that negotiation and third party mediation are commonly used traditional means of resolving conflict in Ethiopia. However, none of the above studies has addressed conflict resolution in view of the various styles identified earlier.

Conflict in this study is conceptualized as interpersonal and inter-group disagreements which may range from abusive remarks to physical assault. Conflict in higher learning institutions, when sever and remains unsolved, is aversive to the teaching-learning process; and impedes the psycho-social and educational progress of students and the normal functioning of the institutions. Conflicts could occur within organizations, between countries, among individuals or institutions. What is important is resolving conflicts in a healthy and effective manner. An understanding of the sources of conflict and how they are resolved is of great importance to handle and deal with conflicts. Accordingly, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the major sources of conflict among students of Bahir Dar University?

2. What are the students' preferred conflict resolution styles?

3. Are there differences in conflict resolution styles between female and male students and among students of different ethnic groups?

Significance of the Study

Scrutinizing sources of conflict helps concerned bodies to design proper intervention mechanisms. The information unveiled by the study can be used in developing projects, training, or forums of discussion that are meant to alleviate conflicts. Though avoiding conflicts may be impossible, it is yet imperative to identify the sources of conflict to take proper measures directed in tackling them. Without such measures the teaching learning process or other academic activities in educational institutions could be jeopardized. Hence, this study is crucial in harnessing the teaching-learning processes.

Besides, knowing how students manage their conflicts would help to examine whether they are really solving their problems or avoiding them. If they are solving their problems, are they doing it in an effective and constructive way? This could provide useful information for the University and other concerned bodies to design proper intervention mechanisms in training students on conflict management styles.

Method

Participants

The participants were 390 (49 female and 341 male) sophomore (87.7%), junior (5.6%), and senior (6.7%) Bahir Dar university students. More than 66.4 percent of the sample students identified themselves as Amhara (n = 259), 17.7 percent Oromo (n = 69), 7.9 percent reported they were Tigray (n = 31), and the remaining 8 percent reported that they belong to more than 12 ethnic groups which were categorized as 'Other groups'. The students came from almost all corners of the country. They reported that they were from more than 55 cities, towns, and villages in Ethiopia. The religious composition of the students was 268 (68.7%) Orthodox, 70 (17.9%) Protestants, 34 (8.7%) Muslim; "Waqe," "No Religion," and Unspecified, each 4 (1%), Adventist, Catholic, and Christian each 2 (0.5%).

Students who participated in this study were selected randomly in their regular classrooms. All students who were in their classrooms at the time of data collection were given the questionnaire after the teachers as well as the students were asked for their consents. At first 393 students filled in the questionnaires. However, during screening of the data, it was found that 3 students failed to complete the questionnaires and they were rejected from the study, which made the number of participants to be 390.

Measures and Variables

A questionnaire, consisting of two parts, was used to assess type of strategies students employ to resolve the conflicts. The first part of the questionnaire dealt with demographic data and open-ended questions that require students to list the types and sources of conflicts they themselves or their friends were engaged in, the reasons why students went into conflicts and the nature of conflict resolution strategies or styles they employ. In this part, students were free to describe and express what they knew about conflicts and the strategies they used to resolve the conflicts within their groups or with other groups or individuals. The second part of the questionnaire contains 28 items originally developed by Rahim to measure organizational conflict and adapted by Brown & Gilbert (2002). Some of the items of the scale were revised to fit the purpose of this study and the

cultural contexts of Ethiopia. First the items were translated into Amharic. Then the original and the Amharic versions of the scale were given to two psychologists (measurement and evaluation experts) and two language experts to evaluate the concordance of the translations and to ensure their face validity. Based on their comments and suggestions, some items were revised.

The scale was rated on a 4-point Likert scale with response values ranging from 4 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree), when statements were positively worded. Otherwise, reverse coding was used. The scale was meant to measure 5 conflict resolution styles; namely, integrating, avoiding, dominating, obliging and compromising. Originally, 7 items were used to measure integration but one item that correlated very low and suppressed the reliability of the measure was eliminated. Similarly, there were 5 items to measure dominance but through item analysis one item was discarded. Avoiding, obliging, and compromise were measured with 6, 6, and 4 items each, respectively. Finally 26 items were retained for the final analysis.

The students were asked to indicate the level of their agreement for each item on the scale values. Their responses indicated the types of conflict resolution strategies used or preferred to be employed by them when confronted with conflicts. The internal consistency estimate of integration as determined by Cronbach alpha was 0.792, for avoiding it was 0.568. Dominating and obliging scales had alpha coefficients of 0.718 and 0.738, respectively. For compromise it was 0.708. The overall reliability of the scale was 0.726.

Procedure of Data Collection

The questionnaire was administered to the participants during their regular classes after securing their and their teachers' consents. The teachers and the students were informed about the purpose of the study. The students were also told that they had the right to refuse filling in the questionnaires without any consequences. Fortunately all students who were present in their classes at the time of data collection have participated. Since first year students were admitted to the university shortly before the study and had not yet fully started classes, they were not included in the study.

Data Analyses

There were two types of data collected through two types of items – open-ended and closed ended. The open-ended items produced qualitative data. These data were analyzed through content analysis particularly, theme identification, narration and simple counting of frequencies. The responses of the participants were analyzed to determine the conflict resolution styles used by students. The responses were categorized into conflict resolution styles students employ.

The second types of data were obtained through closed-ended items. To analyze the results, descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and trend analysis were used. Because of high variation in the number of cases in the comparison groups, Welsh robust test of equality, or asymptotic F was employed. This would help to avoid spurious mean differences among or between the groups. Once a significant F-test was obtained, Tukey honestly significant mean difference or Scheffe method was employed to identify means that significantly differ from each other.

Results

The major purpose of this study was to investigate sources of conflict and to identify major conflict resolution styles employed by Bahir Dar University students. In this section, the findings of the study are presented in two parts.

Quantitative Results

In this part, group differences in the types of conflict resolution strategies students employ, and the effects of different background data on the use of conflict resolution have been presented. First the means and standard deviations of the students on the five conflict resolution strategies are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Students on Conflict Resolution Types

	Variables				
	Integration	Avoiding	Dominating	Obliging	Compromise
Mean	3.365	2.821	2.481	3.193	3.406
Sd	0.479	0.564	0.723	0.481	0.505

As indicated in Table 1 the most commonly used conflict strategies were Compromise, Integrating, and Obliging, in that order. The least used ones were dominating and avoiding. Repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out to determine whether there exist significant differences in the type of conflict resolution used by students, irrespective of any group difference. The results indicated that there was an overall significant difference in the strategies employed by students. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary Table for Repeated Measures ANOVA for Strategy Use

Sources of variation	SS	Df	MS	F
Between strategies	242.884	4	60.721	217.314*
Between students	170.923	389	0.439	
Error	434.769	1556	0.279	
Total	848.576	1949		

$P < 0.0001$

To assess which group means contributed to the significance of the overall F, a further analysis of mean comparisons using a Tukey honestly significant difference method (employing harmonized n) was undertaken. The results showed that, except the difference between integration and

52

compromise, all differences were significant at 0.01. Based on these results, we rank ordered the strategies based on the magnitude students reported they employed. The two most frequently used strategies were integration and compromise followed by obliging, avoiding, and dominating.

Table 3. Summary Table for one-way ANOVA for Strategy use by Ethnic Groups

Strategy Type	Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
Integration	Between Groups	3.062	3	1.021	4.227	0.006
	Within Groups	93.209	386	0.241		
	Total	96.271	389			
Avoidance	Between Groups	1.454	3	0.485	1.531	0.206
	Within Groups	122.259	386	0.317		
	Total	123.714	389			
Dominating	Between Groups	6.706	3	2.235	5.378	0.001
	Within Groups	160.454	386	0.416		
	Total	167.160	389			
Obliging	Between Groups	0.681	3	0.227	.981	0.402
	Within Groups	89.268	386	0.231		
	Total	89.948	389			
Compromise	Between Groups	0.206	3	0.069	0.267	0.849
	Within Groups	99.003	386	0.256		
	Total	99.209	389			

Further analysis was conducted to investigate whether there were differences in strategy use of students from various ethnic groups. The results from one-way ANOVA (see Table 3) revealed that there were significant mean differences in the use of Integration and Dominance. Since there were very large discrepancies in the sample sizes of each ethnic group, the Welch Degree of Freedom Adjustment method was used to avoid spurious significant values of F. The results were the same for both cases. The multiple mean comparison procedures, as determined by Scheffe` method, indicated that the significant differences among the ethnic groups in Integration were accounted by significant variation between Amhara (mean = 3.319) and Oromo (mean = 3.536) students, where the Oromo students tend to use this strategy more frequently than the former. The difference in Dominating strategy was contributed by the significant mean difference between Tigray (Mean = 2.686) and students from "Other ethnic group" (mean = 2.218). This shows that students from the Tigray ethnic group tend to use Dominating more often than those from other minority ethnic groups. The rest of mean differences were not statistically significant. Sex-wise comparison indicated that significant mean differences were not observed between male and female students in four of the five strategies employed by students to resolve their conflicts. The only significant variation was obtained in Dominating in favor of males.

A graphic display of conflict resolution strategy use by ethnic group and sex clearly showed that the two most common types of resolution strategies were integrating and compromise and the least used in both cases was dominating (see Figures 1 and 2). Though the overall use of dominating as a conflict resolution is low in all groups, comparatively it has been found that members of the Tigray ethnic group, followed by Amhara, reported that they tend to use dominating more than the other ethnic groups. The ethnic group that reported the least use of dominating is "Others", which constituted Wolaita, Gurage, Siltie, Agew, Hadiya, Adere, Yem, Dawro, Harrari, and other minority groups. The Oromo students reported that they used integrating more frequently than other ethnic groups. Sex-wise comparison also revealed that males tend to use dominating more regularly than females do.
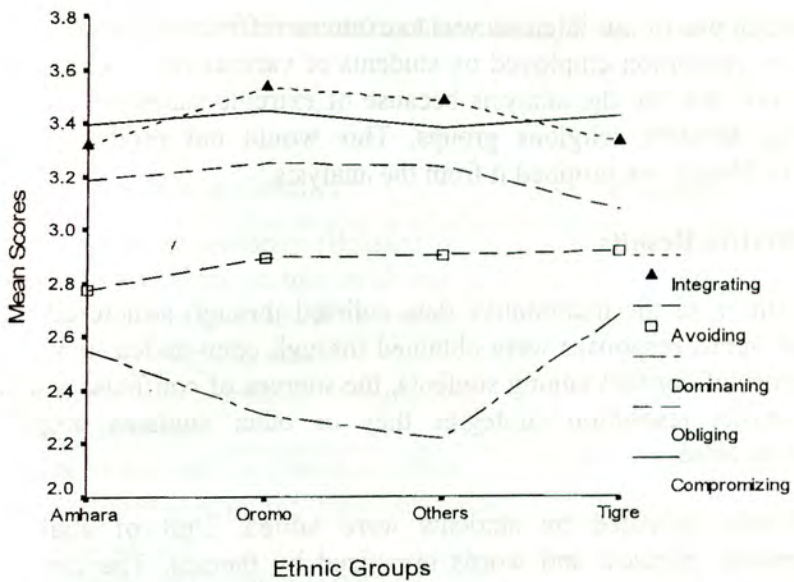
Figure 1. A graphic display of group variation in the use of conflict resolution strategies by ethnic groups
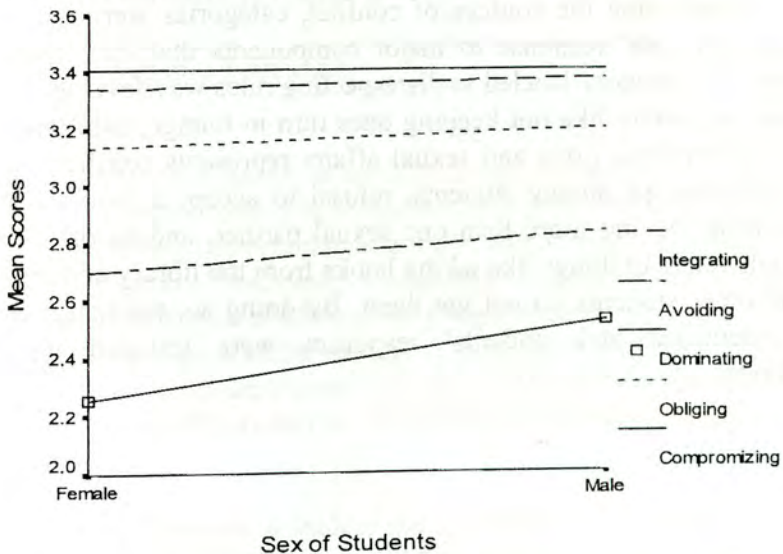

Figure 2. A graphic display of group variation in the use of conflict resolution strategies by sex

Although one of our interests was to examine differences in the strategies of conflict resolution employed by students of various religious backgrounds, we could not run the analysis because of extreme sample size differences among different religious groups. This would not produce dependable results. Hence, we dropped it from the analysis.

Qualitative Results

In addition to the quantitative data colleted through structured or closed-ended items, responses were obtained through open-ended items regarding the types of conflict among students, the sources of conflicts, and the types of conflict resolution strategies they or other students employ when conflicts arise.

Responses provided by students were tallied. Unit of analyses were statements, phrases, and words organized by themes. The categories for analyzing the strategies of conflict resolution were those used in the quantitative analysis. Besides, while tallying students' responses an additional category emerged, which is a conflict resolution using a third party. In analyzing the sources of conflict, categories were developed by merging students' response to major components that they refer to. For instance, the category labeled as disrespecting rules was developed based on sources of conflict like not keeping ones turn in lounge, cafeteria, or other facility provisions. Love and sexual affairs represents conflicts caused by love relationships among students, refusal to accept a request for sexual relationship, having more than one sexual partner, and so on. Scarcity of materials refers to things like taking books from the library and hiding them so that other students do not get them. By doing so, ten major categories were identified and students' responses were grouped under these categories.

Table 4. Frequency of Sources of Conflict among Bahir Dar University Students

Sources of Conflict	Frequency
Ethnic differences and problems (Related to downgrading other ethnic groups, evolving personal differences in to ethnic differences)	248
Disagreement over religious issues	178
Defying regulations in cafeteria, lounges, and other service provisions	144
Disrespecting others and interfering in others rights in dormitories (Dormitory based sources)	117
Sexual and love affairs	110
Political disagreement (Related to being a supporter of the government and various opposition parties)	94
Scarcity of materials (Mainly related to textbooks shortage)	81
Tension due to academic difficulties	50
Drugs	43

The most frequently cited sources of conflict among students were ethnic problems (248), disagreements over religious issues (178), defying regulations (144), and disrespecting others and interfering in others' rights in dormitories (117). Students underlined that conflicts arise when students of one ethnic group undermine the dignity of other ethnic groups while interacting in lounges, cafeteria, and other social settings. A factor related to this was conflict based on regions where students come from. It is not surprising that regions become a source of conflict as they are mainly demarcated based on ethnic groups.

With regard to this problem, a student stated "conflicts are mainly based on ethnic differences as students do not respect each other and some students feel their ethnic group is better than others." Another student reported, "when I hear someone is speaking in a language I don't understand, I feel I am being

insulted and say something negative toward that ethnic group." Other students said, "friendship is based on ethnicity and region, so when one student has

some problem with another student from a different region, his friends join the conflict", "students who come from some regions do not trust others, they are suspicious of others and quarrel with others on minor differences," and "there is a tendency to associate or attribute every problem to one ethnic group." A response from one student may help to exemplify how ethnic related conflicts are usually created. He wrote:

> *Some students (from different ethnic groups) are highly ethnocentric, knowingly or unknowingly. They have the impression that their ethnic group is better than other groups and downgrade others. They are not ready to accept ideas coming from others. They are racists.*

These responses indicate that lack of trust among students of different ethnic groups, lack of respect, and associating personal differences and problems with ethnicity are major sources of conflict among students. Given that the political administration of the country is based on linguistic boundaries and historical and current feelings of misdeeds and rivalries, as can be observed in graffiti literature, written on toilets and classrooms' walls, it may not be surprising that ethnicity could be the major source of conflict.

The second most frequently mentioned source of conflict was religion. Responses to this category were stated usually in words or phrases. Students stated simply 'religious causes and variations' as source of problem without further explanations. Yet, phrases like not respecting others' religion and insulting others because of their religion were commonly indicated. The third most frequently cited source of conflict was infringement of simple daily life procedures and defying rules and regulations like not keeping ones turn in cafeteria, library, classrooms, lounge, and other service provision centers. "When some students want to go into the cafeteria without waiting for their turn, others will oppose and conflicts arise," writes one student. Another student also stated, "there are some students who rebel against rules. They don't care about others. I hate such kinds of students."

Disrespecting others, insulting, intervening in others' ways of living, love and sexual relationships, political disagreements, and scarcity of materials were also mentioned as sources of conflict by relatively large number of students.

Many students reported that lack of mutual respect among roommate in dormitories, desire to dominate others, disturbing others when they are studying or sleeping, ridiculing others based on the styles and manners of speaking or other behaviors caused conflicts among students in the university. Generally, the sources in this category include factors related to violation of personal rights of other students. Love and sexual relationships were also major sources of conflict in the university. This happens, according to the majority of responses, when two or more students (mainly boys) love one (female) student. Problems arise in claiming "ownership" and forcing same student to the request of more than one lover, according to the respondents.

Some students also mentioned political disagreements as a source of conflict. The difficulty the researchers face in analyzing this source was in deciding whether it has to do with ethnicity or other cross-ethnic issues. Currently, political views seem to converge with ethnic identities. Hence, it would be difficult to rule out the role ethnicity may have on such disagreements. Students' responses were also of little help to clarify whether they are referring to ethnic problems or not. Responses like "students support different political groups and that causes a conflict" and "some students use derogatory terms towards students belonging to other political groups" were common.

Other factors that were mentioned by students include scarcity of materials, tensions resulting from academic tasks, drugs like drinking too much alcohol and chewing 'Khat', and stealing or taking the properties of others, and not returning borrowed money. With regard to scarcity of materials, like difficulty to get books in sufficient number, and hiding books that are borrowed from library by other students were mentioned by students. Competing for chairs and desks in TV rooms, lounges, and classrooms and other services were also listed as sources of conflict. Students also stated that when some students find life difficult in the University, they tend to quarrel with other students. Moreover, students claimed that frustration in academic performance, stresses during exam times, and failing to join ones choice in selecting a field of study caused conflicts among students.

In order to triangulate the data gathered through close-ended questionnaire on students' conflict resolution styles, students were asked to state the conflict resolution styles they used in the university. Some students listed down two or more responses that could fall to the different categories. Some others failed to respond to the question, and still others did not respond to the question

properly. The result in Table 5 indicated that students do not resolve their conflicts much of the time (98), i.e., they employ avoidance. The second type of conflict resolution reported by the students was a third party mediation strategy (67), and sometimes they try to discuss the issue and reach a compromise (63). Still others resolve through domination (16). However, no one student has mentioned obliging and only a single student mentioned a style which can be categorized as integrating.

Table 5. Types of Conflict Resolution Strategies Reported by Bahir Dar University Students

Conflict resolution strategies type	Number of times the conflict resolution mechanism was mentioned by students
Avoidance	98
Compromise	63
Third-party mediation	67
Dominating	16
Integrating	1
Obliging	0

Compared to the five strategies presented in the quantitative part, avoidance was reported to be the commonest way of resolving conflict among University students. Responses like "keeping in heart", "stopping to talk with the student", "not going to the place where I meet him/her", "leaving the problem for God", "calming down oneself", and "ignoring differences and keeping away from each other" were some of responses that students have listed which illustrate avoidance as way of conflict resolution.

Third-party mediation refers to strategies that involve appealing to dean of students, guidance and counselors, advisors, proctors, and close friends. There was no indication whether the outcome was avoidance, compromise, or any other thing. Responses like "I tell the issue to dean of students", "appealing to guidance and counseling office", "telling the problem to the proctor", "talking to his/her close friends and find a solution", "praying to God to look for the best solution", and "going to religious places and asking religious people to serve as mediators" were some of the responses under this category.

Compromise was also reported to be one of the common ways of resolving conflict. Responses like "tolerating each others differences", "asking for excuses and respecting each others' right", "discussing differences through close friends and reaching at some mediating solutions", and "putting boundaries to their interaction and friendship, talking only on similar ideas" were under this category. Some students also stated that they use domination to resolve conflict. "If someone annoys me, I prepare myself to fight", "I like to fight with people who insult my ethnic groups", and "some become superiors and others will accept that" indicate domination.

With regard to kinds of conflict, insulting, aggressive debates, and physical assaults were the three mentioned types.

Discussion and Implications

Some of the findings of the study are consistent with previous research reports. Male students tend to prefer dominant conflict resolution strategy as compared to female students. Similar findings have been reported by other researchers (Brewer, Michtel, and Weber, 2002; Ohbuchi, Fukushima, and Tedeschi, 1999). Socially acceptable strategies such as compromise and integration have been reported as preferred strategies of resolving conflict and the findings of this study also confirmed this in the quantitative analysis. Conversely, the qualitative analysis indicates avoidance and dominance, which were reported to be the least preferred strategies in the quantitative analysis, were the first and third frequently used strategies.

This could be due to different reasons. Firstly, it could be that the respondents rated socially desirable strategies of resolving conflict rather than those which they actually use in their daily life interaction when they were given the options to rate. In deed, the tendency to report socially desirable responses by educated people, which is called 'acquiescent response bias,' has been indicated in studies which deal with ethnocentrism and other human behavior (Wagner and Zick, 1995, cited in Coenders and Scheepers, 2003). However, in the qualitative part, students have to generate by themselves the ways which they or their friends have used or could use in resolving conflict as there are no options to be rated. Hence, there is a possibility that respondents come up with actual conflict resolution mechanism in the qualitative response. Strengthening

this assumption, third party mediation which was not included in the quantitative part was disclosed in the qualitative aspect in the form of responses like consulting and reporting to deans' office, asking friends for mediation, praying for God, and so on. The second explanation could be related to respondents' inability or difficulty to articulate features of integrating and obliging in the qualitative part. Respondents were simply asked to state how students resolve conflicts. Such questions may pose difficulty to clearly mention characteristics of the aforementioned strategies.

Moreover, the way the questionnaire items were stated for the qualitative and quantitative parts could be more explanatory and persuasive. The inconsistent findings on the qualitative and quantitative analyses alerted us to be aware of one major difference in the manner questionnaire items were stated in the two parts. In the open-ended part (qualitative part), the item reads as 'How do students resolve conflicts when they happen?' In close-ended part (quantitative), on the other hand, students were asked to express their level of agreement, in a four point rating scale, to what extent the items 'reflect their own behavior'. So, the open-ended item elicits responses which students assume are used by other students whereas the rating responses show students' own reported practices of handling conflicts. Therefore, when students were asked to agree or disagree to items which are assumed to reflect their own conflict resolution strategies, they might have more positively rated the items in socially acceptable ways of resolving conflict – integrating, compromise, and obliging – than dominating and avoidance which could be perceived as unsocial. Whereas when students were asked to simply describe the conflict resolution strategies of others, they may have taken into consideration what actually happens in reality rather than social desirability. Albeit inconsistent, the findings of this study could be explained from a number of perspectives.

A common denominator in analyzing the use of conflict resolution strategies is culture. The qualitative analysis revealed that students use or prefer to use avoidance, third party mediation, and compromise, according to that order. This is consistent with previously established generalizations that people in collectivist culture tend to use strategies that are harmonious, indirect, and non-competitive (Triandis, 1994). However, in view of the quantitative findings, except for obliging, the other strategies that have been reported as most frequently used – compromise and integrating – are also reported to be inherent in individualist cultures as well.

Even so, despite the difficulty to explain the whole findings of this study in view of culture, it is still possible to consider the pervasive effect of culture in some of the findings. One consistent result both in the qualitative and quantitative findings was the less frequent use of dominating. It is well documented in the literature that people in collectivist culture want to avoid confrontational strategies whereas those in individualist prefer to use assertive and direct tactics (Trubisky, Ting-Tommey, and Lin, 1991). Students may not want to hurt their future relationship with their friends; implying a less frequent use of dominating. Hence, Ethiopia's collectivist culture may be the reason behind this finding. Another finding which could be explicated in light of culture is the relatively high mean value for avoidance (2.82) in the quantitative part. As it stands, the mean value of avoidance is very close to the category of 'Agree', which was represented by 3. Add to this the fact that avoidance was the most frequently used strategy by students, as reported in the qualitative analysis. It could, then, be concluded that students frequently employed avoidance as a conflict resolution strategy. This fits very well with previous findings and generalizations that indicate collectivists prefer to avoid conflicts that confront them (Ohbuchi, Fukushima, and Tedeschi, 1999).

The most interesting and challenging finding in this study is the fact that the qualitative and quantitative analysis differently indicate two oxymoron conflict resolution strategies – avoidance and integrating – as most frequently used by the students. If students are frequently using integrating (finding of the quantitative analysis) as a conflict resolution strategy, conflicts are being solved in a win-win scenario. If students are using avoidance, conflicts are not solved, though not worsened. So it is a lose-lose situation. The two cannot go hand in hand in a real world. So, what? It could be, as stated above, because students rated socially desirable rather than daily used strategies of resolving conflict when rating items. This needs further investigation using other research methods.

Another important finding of the study is the variation in conflict resolution strategies among students of different ethnic groups. When seen in terms of preference, students of different ethnic groups do not vary much. Compromise, integrating, obliging, avoidance, and dominating are the preferred strategies, on that order; the only difference being with Oromo and 'Others group' students favoring integrating to compromise but vice versa for Tigray and Amhara students. Significant differences were observed in integrating and dominating among the different ethnic groups. Oromo students had the highest mean score

for integrating and comparatively Amhara and Tigray students had the least. In dominating Tigray and Amhara students had the highest and 'Others groups' had the least. It is not simple to explain this result. However, the Amhara and Tigray elites have been politically dominant forces for many years in Ethiopian history which could probably have a spill over effect on the conflict resolution style of students. Supporting this line of argument, Polkinghorn and Byrne (2001:26) state that "young adults often remain entrapped within static societies, their conflict management styles conditioned by their socio-cultural and political milieu." The lowest mean score by 'Others groups' – minority ethnic groups – for dominating could be because minority ethnic groups would prefer strategies that work best for co-existence and respect for others.

With regard to the sources of conflict, it has been found that ethnicity, religion, defying rules, disagreements while living in dormitories, sexual and love affairs, political disagreement, scarcity of materials, academic tensions, political disagreements, drugs like 'Khat', and stealing properties were reported to be the major ones. Many of these factors could be addressed through some rules and regulation and by enacting strict measures against those who violate rules and regulations. Some of them may not be as pervasive as ethnicity and religion. Ethnicity is a major source of conflict in multiethnic societies like Ethiopia. In interethnic interaction altruism and tolerance are very important; yet evidence shows that the more diversified the groups are the rarer these values figure in relationships, resulting in conflict and violence (Hannigan, 1990; Varshney, 2001).

This is not to say multiethnic countries are always destined to ethnic conflict. Rather, if interactions among members of different ethnic groups are not handled in such a way that symbiotic relationships are encouraged, conflicts will recur. Conversely, when individuals from various ethnic groups interact in a positive environment, it is believed that it will have a strong impact in tackling prejudices towards others. So, what is worth investigating is why ethnicity becomes a very pervasive source of conflict among students of Bahir Dar University. It is possible to come up with many postulates. It could be because students have been living in regions where their ethnic group is the dominant one before joining higher education. In the University, they have to interact with students of different ethnic groups which was not the case before. This could result in transgressing the rights of others. Secondly, as ethnocentrism, though low or high it could be, appears to be a phenomenon of human behavior (Triandis, 2000), students could side with in-group members

when different problems arise among students for various reasons, concealing the real and inherent problems via ethnic differences. Past historical events could also be the source of conflict between students of some ethnic groups.

Contrary to the findings of this study, Demewoz (2007) contends that ethnicity is not a major source of conflict in Ethiopian higher education institutions nor is ethnic conflict prevalent despite hue and cry by various local media. Results of other studies in Ethiopia are also inconclusive. Tamirat et al (2004), cited in Demewoz, reported that about 80 percent of the causes of conflict reported by Debub (Southern) University students are related to ethnicity. Quite the reverse, in his analysis of the Amharic newspapers from 1991 to 2005, Kebede (2006), cited in Demewoz, recorded only 20 small individual conflicts. We believe that differences in the conceptualization of ethnicity and ethnic conflict rather than variation in existing situations of Ethiopian higher learning institutions contributed to the inconsistent findings of some of these studies.

What are the lessons from the research? An interesting area of further research could be in the way future conflict resolution strategies have to be studied. In the study of conflict resolution strategies, in addition to self-reported strategies, it could be more revealing to triangulate such studies by putting the point of reference on a third person so that respondents could come up with strategies which are used by others. Such diversion in the point of reference may ease response biases that could come from social desirability.

As far as the practical implications are concerned, it has been indicated that conflicts are pervasive in every society; and are unavoidable. Some of the sources of conflict in this study are manageable by stipulating rules and regulations with corresponding punishments. However, the most frequent reasons such as ethnicity, religion, and love relationships require a coordinated effort. With regard to ethnicity, we feel that in current Ethiopia differences rather than similarities, past misdeeds rather than positive contributions and achievements, are emphasized by political groups, civic associations, and mass media, which would result in the creation of ethnic prejudices and antagonistic feelings. Such feelings would definitely surface in universities.

To rectify the sources of conflict and conflict resolution styles among students, a coordinated effort ranging from families' upbringing styles to adapting the education systems to the demands of multicultural citizens is imperative.

Hence, our suggestions consider what we think are missing elements in Ethiopian society. This entails:

- Organizing formal and informal educational forums in which students learn the various ways of conflict resolution strategies to enable them to weigh the relevance of each style in promoting mutual respect and peaceful co-existence. There is adequate evidence that role-playing and other forms of training in conflict resolution produces considerable changes in students' behavior (Avery, 2001). However, such intervention should be designed beginning from early years of schooling as attitudes and values at that age are flexible to be changed and developed.

- Avoiding any kind of derogatory and inflammatory comments on ethnic groups in political speeches, publications, and any other interactions and coming up with strict rules which would be enacted when people fail to do so. The university could stipulate disciplinary measures for such kind of behaviors. When students fail to adhere to a proper way of behaving, sanctioning rules and regulations would at least help to minimize problems.

- Creating interethnic clubs and associations so that students of different ethnic groups could gather on common interests and share ideas. Such interactions would help to develop positive attitude and erode prejudices. In vacations students from one region may be sent to other regions so that they experience the cultural atmosphere, living conditions, and artifacts of other ethnic groups or nationalities. This is extremely important in developing mutual understanding and tolerance for difference.

- While it is necessary that students should realize similarities and differences in multicultural societies, similarities rather than differences, achievements rather than misdeeds need to be *emphasized* in schools and other settings. This is not saying promoting assimilation or imposing ones values on others but preaching ethnic group 'A' has divergent values and attitudes to ethnic group 'B' deviates not only the individualistic nature of human beings but results in more cultural distance which in turn causes conflict. Research on multiculturalism and tolerance indicated children develop positive attitude toward out-

group members when similarities rather than differences are emphasized (Borba, 2001; Vrig, Akehurst, and Smith, 2003).

- Civic education courses need to address ethnic prejudices and negative feelings in a systematic manner. Tolerance, respect for others, and commonalities need to be inculcated in students. Educational visits to other regions that would give students the opportunity to get acquainted with students of other ethnic groups while they are in schools could facilitate the development of positive attitude toward ea. ` other.

- Apply the principles of multicultural education in curriculum development and other school activities. Morrow and Torres (1995:125) state, "education should always include the plurality of values, voices, and intentions of subjects ...with all sorts of contradictions, tensions and conflicts among themselves."

A word of caution to the reader. This research is a survey study that is conducted on single university students, though the sample size was large enough to make some generalizations. Other research that sample many of the existing universities should be carried out to strengthen the results of this study using multi-method data collection.

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