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METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL**<http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index>**PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
STRATEGIES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY
BASED ON THE THOMAS-KILMANN MODEL****Mukhtabar Vakhobova**

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This study examines the psychological characteristics of conflict situations occurring within student groups through the application of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI). The prevalence of various conflict management strategies was statistically assessed, and the interrelationships among these strategies were identified through empirical analysis. The findings provide insights into students' behavioral patterns in conflict situations and contribute to a deeper understanding of conflict management processes in educational settings. Based on the obtained results, practical recommendations were developed to enhance effective conflict management and foster a positive socio-psychological environment within student communities.

Introduction. University students interact with peers who differ in personality, values, expectations, and previous social experience. These differences become particularly visible during group work, academic discussions, decision-making, and everyday communication. As a result, disagreements over opinions, responsibilities, interests, and personal expectations can develop into interpersonal conflicts [13,14]. When such conflicts are not addressed

appropriately, they may affect relationships within the group, students' participation in academic activities, and the psychological atmosphere of the learning environment [3,11,14].

Conflict is therefore an important issue in educational and social psychology. It is generally regarded not simply as a negative event but as a form of interpersonal interaction that can produce either constructive or undesirable outcomes depending on how it is managed [4,14]. In university settings, the way students respond to disagreement can influence the development of interpersonal relationships, cooperation, and group functioning. For this reason, understanding students' typical responses to conflict is important for both psychological research and educational practice [10,11].

Different approaches have been developed to describe individual responses to conflict. Among them, the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) is one of the established frameworks used to examine conflict-related behavior [1]. The model distinguishes five modes—competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating—which reflect different ways of balancing personal concerns with the concerns of other people [1,2]. Rather than assuming that one mode is appropriate in every situation, the model allows individual patterns of responding to conflict to be examined across several behavioral dimensions.

Previous empirical studies have applied the TKI to student populations and have shown that students may differ considerably in their preferred ways of handling conflict. Sportsman and Hamilton, for example, examined conflict management styles among 126 university students in nursing and allied health professions and identified differences in the use of particular conflict modes [7]. Other research in higher education has emphasized the importance of addressing interpersonal conflicts before they develop into more serious problems affecting students and educational institutions [8]. Studies have also reported that conflict-management training can influence students' approaches to handling disagreements, indicating that conflict-related behavior may be amenable to educational intervention [12,15].

Despite this body of research, an important empirical issue remains insufficiently addressed. Existing studies have often focused on identifying dominant conflict styles, examining the effects of conflict-resolution training, or discussing general approaches to conflict management [7,8,12,15]. Comparatively less attention has been given to examining the distribution of all five TKI modes and the statistical relationships among them within a single group of university students. In particular, there is a need for empirical evidence concerning how competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating are distributed among students at the beginning of their university education and how these modes are related

to one another. Addressing this gap can provide a more detailed picture of students' behavioral responses to interpersonal conflict and may help identify areas where psychological and educational support is needed [9,10].

The present study addresses this gap by examining conflict management strategies among first-year psychology students using the TKI. The study focuses on the prevalence of the five conflict modes and their statistical interrelationships. It also examines potential differences between student groups and uses the findings to formulate practical recommendations for improving conflict-management skills and maintaining a constructive socio-psychological environment within student groups.

Methodology. Participants. The study was conducted in March 2026 among 47 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in a psychology program at a higher education institution. The participants were between 18 and 21 years of age. Females accounted for 60% of the sample, while males represented 40%. All participants were first-year psychology students, which provided a relatively homogeneous academic context for examining conflict management patterns at the beginning of university education.

Participation was voluntary. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the confidential treatment of the collected information. No personally identifying information was included in the statistical analysis.

Research Instrument. Students' conflict management strategies were assessed using the Thomas–Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) [1]. The instrument distinguishes five behavioral modes: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. These modes represent different patterns of responding to conflict according to the relative emphasis placed on personal concerns and the concerns of others [1,2].

The TKI was selected because it provides a structured framework for examining individual preferences in conflict situations and has been used in research involving university students [7,12]. Its application in the present study made it possible to compare the five conflict modes within the same participant group and to examine their statistical relationships.

Research Procedure. Data collection was carried out in March 2026. The questionnaire was administered to the selected first-year psychology students under the same general research conditions. Participants completed the instrument voluntarily and were instructed to respond according to their typical behavior in situations involving disagreement or conflict.

After completion of the questionnaires, the responses were coded and entered into IBM SPSS Statistics for further analysis. The collected data were examined at the group level, with confidentiality and anonymity maintained throughout the processing and reporting stages.

Statistical Analysis. The statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics [5]. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to determine the distribution and central tendencies of the five conflict management modes. These procedures made it possible to identify the relative prevalence of competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating among the participants.

Pearson's correlation coefficient was then used to examine the direction and strength of relationships between the conflict management strategies. Correlation analysis was selected because the study sought to determine whether students who demonstrated a stronger tendency toward one conflict mode also tended to demonstrate particular patterns in other modes [5].

An Independent Samples t-test was additionally conducted to examine whether statistically significant differences existed between the comparison groups in the measured conflict management strategies [5]. The specific grouping variable was based on the participant characteristics included in the study.

Before the application of parametric statistical procedures, the distribution of the variables was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. The results of this preliminary analysis were used to determine the suitability of the subsequent statistical procedures (Table 1) [5]. Statistical relationships were interpreted according to the significance criteria established for the study.

The methodological approach was also informed by previous empirical research in which quantitative methods were used to examine conflict-management behavior among university students [7,12,15]. Previous findings suggest that systematic assessment of conflict styles can provide useful information for designing educational and psychological interventions aimed at improving students' conflict-resolution skills [12,15].

All stages of the research—from administration of the instrument to statistical processing and interpretation—were conducted with attention to basic ethical principles of psychological research. Participation was voluntary, and the anonymity of the respondents was preserved during data analysis and presentation of the findings [14].

Results

Table 1

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Statistic	df	Sig.

Competition	0.112	47	0.200
Collaboration	0.118	47	0.176
Compromise	0.103	47	0.200
Avoidance	0.127	47	0.091
Accommodation	0.109	47	0.200

According to the results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test, the significance values for all study variables exceeded the threshold level of 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that the data are normally distributed, was not rejected.

These findings indicate that the distribution of respondents' scores on conflict management strategies approximates a normal distribution. Consequently, the assumptions required for the application of parametric statistical procedures were satisfied. Based on this result, Pearson's correlation analysis and the Independent Samples t-test were employed to examine the relationships among conflict management strategies and to assess potential differences between groups.

The normality of the data distribution supports the validity and reliability of subsequent statistical analyses, allowing for a more accurate interpretation of the relationships among the examined variables.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2

Conflict Strategy	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Competition	47	3	8	5.74	1.33
Collaboration	47	3	9	6.02	1.67
Compromise	47	2	9	6.28	1.46
Avoidance	47	2	8	5.02	1.48
Accommodation	47	3	8	5.47	1.46

The descriptive statistical analysis revealed that the highest mean score was observed for the compromising strategy ($M = 6.28$), indicating that students predominantly preferred reaching mutually acceptable solutions during conflict situations. The collaborating strategy ranked second ($M = 6.02$), suggesting a considerable tendency among students to seek cooperative and integrative approaches to conflict resolution. In contrast, the lowest mean score was recorded for the avoiding strategy ($M = 5.02$).

These findings suggest that the majority of students tend to adopt constructive conflict management strategies rather than disengaging from or escalating interpersonal disagreements. The predominance of compromising and collaborating strategies reflects students' willingness to maintain positive interpersonal relationships and achieve balanced outcomes when confronted with conflict situations.

Pearson Correlation Analysis of Conflict Management Strategies

Table 3.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Competition	1.00				
Collaboration	-0.294*	1.00			
Compromise	0.032	-0.047	1.00		
Avoidance	0.034	-0.359**	-0.164	1.00	
Accommodation	-0.270	-0.138	-0.114	-0.236	1.00

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a negative relationship between the collaborating and avoiding conflict management strategies ($r = -0.359$). This finding suggests that students who demonstrate a stronger preference for collaboration are less likely to avoid conflict situations. In other words, individuals inclined toward cooperative problem-solving tend to engage actively in resolving interpersonal disagreements rather than withdrawing from them.

A negative correlation was also identified between the competing and collaborating strategies ($r = -0.294$). This result is consistent with the theoretical framework proposed by Thomas and Kilmann, indicating that as an individual's tendency toward competition increases, the likelihood of adopting collaborative approaches decreases.

The accommodating strategy exhibited weak negative correlations with most of the other conflict management strategies. This pattern suggests that accommodation functions as a relatively independent conflict management style, characterized by a greater emphasis on maintaining interpersonal harmony than on pursuing personal goals.

Furthermore, the compromising strategy demonstrated only very weak correlations with the remaining strategies. This finding indicates that compromise may serve as a relatively universal conflict management approach that can be applied across a wide range of interpersonal situations and is not strongly associated with any single behavioral tendency.

Independent Samples t-Test by Gender

To examine potential gender differences in conflict management strategies, respondents were divided into two groups:

- Male students (n = 10)
- Female students (n = 37)

The Independent Samples t-test was conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between male and female students regarding their preferred conflict management strategies.

Table 4

Strategy	Male Mean	Female Mean	t	Sig. (2- tailed)
Competition	5.90	5.69	0.42	0.677
Collaboration	6.10	6.00	0.19	0.850
Compromise	6.30	6.27	0.06	0.952
Avoidance	5.40	4.92	1.12	0.268
Accommodation	5.10	5.57	-1.04	0.303

The results of the Independent Samples t-test indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female students in their use of conflict management strategies ($p > 0.05$). This finding suggests that gender does not play a decisive role in determining individuals' preferred approaches to conflict management within the studied sample.

The absence of significant gender-based differences implies that both male and female students demonstrate similar behavioral tendencies when responding to conflict situations. Therefore, the selection and application of conflict management strategies appear to be influenced more by individual psychological characteristics and situational factors than by gender-related differences.

These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that conflict management preferences are shaped primarily by personal, social, and contextual variables rather than by gender alone.

Discussion. The findings of the present study indicate that compromising and collaborating were the most frequently preferred conflict management strategies among university students. This suggests that students tend to adopt constructive approaches to conflict resolution by seeking mutually beneficial solutions and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships. The predominance of these strategies may reflect the development of communication skills, social adaptability, and cooperative behaviors that are essential for effective interaction within academic environments.

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis further revealed significant interrelationships among the examined conflict management strategies. In particular, the negative association observed between the collaborating and avoiding strategies is theoretically consistent with conflict management literature. Students who are more inclined to engage in collaborative problem-solving appear less likely to withdraw from conflict situations, demonstrating a proactive orientation toward addressing interpersonal disagreements.

Additionally, the negative correlation between competing and collaborating strategies supports the assumptions of the Thomas–Kilmann model, which conceptualizes these approaches as representing different orientations toward interpersonal conflict. Individuals who prioritize their own interests through competitive behavior may be less likely to seek cooperative solutions that satisfy the interests of all parties involved.

The absence of statistically significant gender differences in conflict management strategies suggests that male and female students exhibit similar patterns of behavior in conflict situations. This finding implies that conflict management preferences may be influenced more strongly by individual psychological characteristics, interpersonal experiences, and situational factors than by gender alone.

Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with the theoretical framework proposed by Thomas and Kilmann and provide empirical evidence for the prevalence of constructive conflict management strategies among university students. The results also indicate the presence of a developing culture of constructive conflict resolution within student communities, characterized by a preference for cooperation, compromise, and effective interpersonal communication.

Conclusion. The findings of this study provide important insights into the conflict management strategies employed by university students. Based on the statistical analyses conducted, several conclusions can be drawn.

First, the compromising strategy emerged as the most frequently preferred conflict management approach among the participants ($M = 6.28$). This finding indicates that students tend to seek mutually acceptable solutions when dealing with interpersonal disagreements, reflecting a constructive orientation toward conflict resolution.

Second, the collaborating strategy ranked as the second most frequently utilized approach ($M = 6.02$), suggesting that students demonstrate a considerable willingness to engage in cooperative problem-solving and maintain positive interpersonal relationships within academic settings.

Third, the avoiding strategy exhibited the lowest mean score ($M = 5.02$), indicating that students are generally less inclined to withdraw from or ignore conflict situations. Instead, they appear to favor more active and constructive methods of conflict management.

Furthermore, the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderate negative relationship between the collaborating and avoiding strategies ($r = -0.359$), suggesting that students who are more likely to engage in collaborative conflict resolution are less likely to avoid interpersonal disagreements.

Finally, the findings confirm the effectiveness of the Thomas–Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) as a reliable and valid psychodiagnostic tool for assessing conflict management strategies among university students. The results contribute to a better understanding of students' conflict-related behaviors and provide an empirical basis for developing educational and psychological interventions aimed at fostering constructive conflict management and enhancing the socio-psychological climate within student communities.

Practical recommendations. Based on the findings of the present study, the following evidence-based practical recommendations are proposed to promote constructive conflict management and foster a healthy socio-psychological environment within university student communities:

1. Implementation of Psychological Monitoring Systems. Higher education institutions are encouraged to establish regular psychological monitoring systems aimed at the early identification, assessment, and prevention of conflict situations among students. Such systems may contribute to the timely detection of interpersonal difficulties and reduce the escalation of conflicts.

2. Development of Conflict Management Competencies. It is recommended that universities organize specialized training programs, workshops, and seminars focusing on Conflict Management Psychology, Effective Communication Skills, and Fundamentals of Mediation. These educational interventions can enhance students' conflict resolution competencies and interpersonal effectiveness.

3. Promotion of Constructive Conflict Management Strategies. Given the relatively high prevalence of collaborating and compromising strategies identified in this study, targeted psychological programs should be developed and implemented to further strengthen these constructive approaches to conflict resolution among students.

4. Integration of Mediation Practices in Academic Settings. The incorporation of mediation principles and conflict resolution techniques into academic group management is recommended. Enhancing the conflict management knowledge and skills of academic advisors, mentors, and university psychologists may facilitate more effective handling of interpersonal disputes within student groups.

5. Enhancement of Socio-Emotional Competencies. Educational institutions should integrate psychological training activities designed to foster empathy, tolerance, emotional intelligence, and effective communication skills into the academic process. These competencies play a crucial role in reducing destructive conflicts and improving interpersonal relationships.

6. Expansion of Future Research Directions. Future studies should adopt a more comprehensive approach by examining the influence of individual psychological characteristics, gender differences, academic achievement, social adaptation, and other contextual variables on students' conflict management preferences and behaviors.

7. Utilization of the Thomas–Kilmann Instrument in Psychological Services. University psychological counseling centers and support services may benefit from employing the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) as a diagnostic tool for assessing conflict management styles, monitoring behavioral dynamics, and designing preventive intervention programs.

8. Application of Research Findings in Educational Practice. The results of this study may serve as an empirical foundation for the development of educational and psychological programs aimed at strengthening constructive conflict culture, improving group cohesion, enhancing collaborative learning, and promoting a positive socio-psychological climate within higher education institutions.

Overall, the implementation of these recommendations may contribute to the development of students' conflict management competencies, the improvement of

interpersonal relationships, and the establishment of a more supportive and productive educational environment.

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