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TEACHER CONFLICT IN ISLAMIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: SOURCES, TYPES, AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES ACROSS URBAN AND SUBURBAN CONTEXTS

Arismunandar[1*], Nurhikmah H.[2], Hengki Wijaya[3]
[1]Department of Educational Administration, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia
[2]Department of Educational Technology, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia
[3]Department of Education Science, Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Theologia Jaffray, Indonesia
[*]Corresponding Email: arismunandar@unm.ac.id

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ABSTRACT
Teacher conflict is a significant organizational issue in schools because it can influence teacher well-being, professional collaboration, and institutional effectiveness; however, limited research has simultaneously examined sources of conflict, types of conflict, and conflict management strategies in Islamic elementary schools across regional contexts. This study aimed to investigate the sources and types of conflict and to analyze the strategies used by teachers to manage conflict in suburban and urban Islamic elementary schools. A convergent mixed-methods design was employed involving 124 teachers in Makassar, Indonesia, consisting of 70 teachers from suburban schools and 54 teachers from urban schools. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-tests, while qualitative data were collected through Focus Group Discussions to explore teachers' experiences and perceptions of conflict. The quantitative findings revealed no statistically significant difference between suburban and urban teachers in overall sources of conflict (t = -0.57, p = .570), indicating comparable levels of perceived organizational tension. Significant differences were found in process conflict (t = -2.04, p = .044) and conflict management strategies (t = -21.51, p < .001), with urban teachers reporting stronger use of structured conflict management practices. Qualitative findings showed that suburban conflict was primarily associated with limited resources, workload pressures, and overlapping responsibilities, whereas urban conflict was more closely related to miscommunication, interpersonal tensions, and unclear work procedures. This study contributes an integrative framework for understanding how conflict emerges, manifests, and is managed within Islamic school organizations.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Islamic Elementary Schools, Teacher Collaboration, Teacher Conflict, Urban–suburban Comparison

INTRODUCTION
Educational institutions worldwide increasingly operate under complex organizational pressures that directly affect teachers' professional relationships, well-being, and school effectiveness. Schools are expected to improve student outcomes while simultaneously responding to accountability demands, administrative reform, technological change, and limited resources. These pressures often intensify workplace tensions and make teacher conflict a significant issue in contemporary educational management (Ball, 2003; Jerrim & Sims, 2022). Because schools depend heavily on collaboration among teachers, administrators, students, and parents, unresolved conflict may weaken teamwork, reduce job satisfaction, and negatively affect instructional quality. At the same time, conflict is not inherently destructive; when managed effectively, it may stimulate reflection, innovation, and organizational learning (Behfar et al., 2008).

Recent studies indicate that teacher conflict should be understood alongside broader concerns about teacher stress, emotional labor, and resilience. Teachers increasingly work under high-performance expectations, expanding responsibilities, and emotionally demanding environments, all of which may increase the likelihood of interpersonal tension and organizational strain (Floress et al., 2024; Kariou et al., 2021). In many countries, teacher shortages have intensified workloads and reduced opportunities for professional collaboration (Ingersoll, 2018). Research also shows that positive school climate and teacher efficacy are associated with lower burnout and stronger job satisfaction, suggesting that organizational conditions play a major role in shaping teachers' workplace experiences (Malinen & Savolainen, 2016). Strengthening teacher resilience is therefore increasingly recognized as essential for sustaining healthy and productive school communities (Chen, 2024).

From an organizational behavior perspective, conflict is a natural feature of institutions whose members depend on one another to accomplish shared goals. Schools operate through formal structures, interpersonal relationships, distributed responsibilities, and collective expectations, making disagreement and tension inevitable (Robbins, 2018; Owens & Valesky, 2014; Tyson & Jackson, 2000). Daft (2011) explains that conflict commonly arises from limited resources, unclear lines of authority, communication breakdowns, incompatible goals, and personality differences. In school settings, these pressures may be amplified by administrative complexity, overlapping duties, and growing accountability demands. Prior studies have shown that unresolved conflict may contribute to emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation, and lower instructional effectiveness (Almost, 2016; Göksoy & Argon, 2016; Zhao et al., 2022).

International research further demonstrates that conflict in schools is strongly shaped by leadership practices, collegial relations, and institutional coordination. Studies conducted in Nigeria, Greece, Jordan, and Ethiopia found that communication problems, unclear expectations, ineffective management, and weak cooperation frequently trigger conflict among teachers, while negotiation, mediation, and collaborative approaches are commonly used to resolve disputes (Aliyu & Rabiu, 2018; Jubran, 2017; Saiti, 2015; Shanka & Thuo, 2017). Other studies note that teacher collaboration itself may generate emotional tension, particularly during periods of reform and organizational change (Datnow, 2018). However, much of the existing literature examines only one dimension of conflict, such as its causes, styles, or leadership responses, rather than integrating multiple dimensions into a single analytical framework.

Several important gaps remain. First, few studies integrate conflict sources, conflict types, and conflict management strategies into a single framework that explains how conflict emerges and is resolved. Second, research on conflict in Islamic elementary schools remains limited, despite their distinctive moral, organizational, and community contexts. Third, little is known about differences between urban and suburban schools, where staffing, resources, communication culture, and workloads may vary. To address these gaps, this study examines teacher conflict in Islamic elementary schools through an integrated framework linking conflict sources, conflict types, and management strategies. It aims to identify dominant conflict sources, compare task, relationship, and process conflict across contexts, and explore how teachers manage workplace disputes. The findings offer practical insights for strengthening teacher collaboration, organizational climate, and conflict management in schools.

METHOD

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of teacher conflict (Creswell et al., 2003; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007; Bakla, 2020). The study was guided by an integrative framework covering three dimensions: sources of conflict, types of conflict, and conflict management strategies.

Sources of conflict included resource limitations, communication problems, role ambiguity, and interpersonal tensions; conflict types consisted of task, relationship, and process conflict (Robbins, 2018); while management strategies included negotiation, cooperation, mediation, and rule-based resolution (Balay, 2006; Behfar et al., 2008; Saiti, 2015). The research was conducted in several Islamic elementary schools in Makassar, Indonesia. Participants were full-time teachers with at least one year of experience, randomly selected from school-based lists. A total of 124 teachers participated, including 70 from suburban schools and 54 from urban schools.

Quantitative data were collected through a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire measuring the three study dimensions. The instrument was adapted from relevant literature, validated through expert review and Pearson correlation, and demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.84) (Carmines & Zeller, 1979; Taherdoost, 2016; Taber, 2018). Ethical procedures included voluntary participation, anonymity, and informed consent. Qualitative data were obtained through two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), one suburban and one urban, each involving 6–8 teachers and lasting 60–90 minutes. Sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically coded. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 25 through descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-tests (de Winter, 2019; Kronthaler, 2023), while qualitative findings were used to explain how conflict emerges, manifests, and is managed across school contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents findings from the convergent mixed-methods design. Quantitative results are reported first to identify patterns and differences in conflict variables between suburban and urban teachers, followed by qualitative FGD findings that explain and enrich the statistical results. Both datasets are then integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of conflict dynamics across the two contexts.

Descriptive Statistics of Conflict Variables

Descriptive statistics were used to examine responses to conflict sources, conflict types, and management strategies, using the mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and confidence intervals. Skewness and kurtosis values were within acceptable ranges, indicating approximate normality and supporting parametric analysis. Descriptive results for conflict sources are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Sources of Conflict

Source of conflict	Median	Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Dev.	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Islamic elementary school (Suburban)	50.00	-0.36	-1.43	16.13	39.33	47.02
Islamic elementary school (Urban City)	46.00	-0.46	-0.69	9.95	41.88	47.31

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics on sources of conflict among Islamic elementary school teachers in suburban (IESS) and urban (IESU) areas. The median score for suburban schools was slightly higher (50.00) than for urban schools (46.00). The 95% confidence interval for the mean ranged from 39.33 to 47.02 for IESS and from 41.88 to 47.31 for IESU. Both groups showed negative skewness (IESS = -0.357; IESU = -0.461) and negative kurtosis values (IESS = -1.431; IESU = -0.687), indicating slightly left-skewed and relatively flat distributions. The standard deviation was higher in IESS (16.127) than in IESU (9.950), suggesting greater variability in suburban teachers' perceptions of sources of conflict.

Overall, the average level of perceived conflict sources was relatively similar between the two groups, as indicated by the overlapping confidence intervals. However, responses from suburban teachers were more dispersed, whereas responses from urban teachers were more consistent. Table 2 further confirms this pattern in the paired-samples statistics for sources of conflict.

Table 2. Paired Samples Statistics for Sources of Conflict

Source of conflict	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Islamic elementary school (Suburban)	70	43.17	16.13	1.93
Islamic elementary school (Urban City)	54	44.59	9.95	1.35

Table 2 shows that the mean score for IESS (M = 43.17, SD = 16.127) was slightly lower than that of IESU (M = 44.59, SD = 9.950). In addition, the standard error was higher for IESS (SE = 1.928) than for IESU (SE = 1.354), indicating slightly lower precision in the suburban group estimate.

Sources of Conflict Among Teachers

To determine whether significant differences exist between suburban and urban Islamic elementary school teachers in their perceived sources of conflict, an independent-samples *t*-test was conducted. This analysis was used to compare the mean conflict-source scores between the two groups and assess whether the observed differences were statistically significant. The test provides evidence on whether school context is associated with distinct patterns of organizational tension. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Independent Samples Test for Sources of Conflict

Source of conflict	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	*t*	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
IESS/IESU	27.91	<.001	-0.57	122	.570	-1.421	2.50

Note. $p < .05$ indicates statistical significance. Equal variances were not assumed due to a significant Levene's test.

Table 3 presents the results of an independent-samples t-test comparing sources of conflict among Islamic elementary school teachers in IESS and IESU. The Levene's Test results showed a significant difference in variances ($F = 27.91$, $p < .001$), indicating unequal variances between groups. Therefore, the t-test for unequal variances was used. The significance value (2-tailed) was 0.570. As this value exceeds 0.05, it can be concluded that there is no statistically

significant difference in the sources of conflict between IESS and IESU teachers. In other words, teachers' perceptions of sources of conflict in both groups are similar.

Types of Conflict Experienced by Teachers

To examine how conflict is manifested in daily school operations, three dimensions of conflict were analyzed: task conflict, relationship conflict, and process conflict. Descriptive statistics were calculated to compare the level and distribution of each conflict type between suburban and urban Islamic elementary school teachers. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Types of Conflict

Type of conflict	Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Dev.	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Task conflict (IESS)	13.67	-0.47	-1.10	4.41	12.62	14.72
Task conflict (IESU)	12.24	-0.50	-1.00	3.94	11.16	13.32
Relationship conflict (IESS)	21.16	-0.34	-1.40	8.71	19.08	23.23
Relationship conflict (IESU)	22.85	-1.10	0.87	5.54	21.34	24.36
Process conflict (IESS)	8.34	-0.21	-1.32	3.72	7.46	9.23
Process conflict (IESU)	9.00	-0.30	-0.69	2.15	8.91	10.09

Notes: Islamic Elementary School Suburban (IESS); Islamic Elementary School Urban (IESU)

Descriptive statistics for the three types of conflict, task conflict, relationship conflict, and process conflict, are presented in Table 4. The findings show that suburban Islamic elementary school teachers (IESS) reported a higher mean score for task conflict (M = 13.67) than urban teachers (IESU) (M = 12.24). In contrast, urban teachers reported slightly higher mean scores for relationship conflict (M = 22.85) and process conflict (M = 9.50) than suburban teachers. Table 4 also indicates that variability was consistently greater among IESS respondents across all conflict types. The standard deviation for task conflict was higher in IESS than in IESU (4.409 > 3.943), and the same pattern was found for relationship conflict (8.71 > 5.54) and process conflict (3.72 > 2.15). These results suggest that suburban teachers experienced more diverse perceptions of conflict, whereas responses among urban teachers were relatively more consistent. Group statistics presented in Table 5 further confirm these patterns across the two teacher groups.

Table 5. Paired Samples Statistics for Types of Conflict

Types of conflict	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Task conflict (IESS)	70	13.67	4.409	0.527
Task conflict (IESU)	54	12.24	3.943	0.537
Relationship conflict (IESS)	70	21.16	8.714	1.042
Relationship conflict (IESU)	54	22.85	5.540	0.754
Process conflict (IESS)	70	8.34	3.718	0.444
Process conflict (IESU)	54	9.50	2.152	0.293

Islamic Elementary School Suburban (IESS); Islamic Elementary School Urban (IESU)

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for task conflict, relationship conflict, and process conflict among suburban (IESS) and urban (IESU) Islamic elementary school teachers. For task conflict, IESS reported a higher mean score (M = 13.67, SD = 4.41) than IESU (M = 12.24, SD = 3.94), indicating slightly higher task-related tensions among suburban teachers. In contrast, IESU reported higher mean scores for relationship conflict (M = 22.85, SD = 5.54) compared with IESS (M = 21.16, SD = 8.71), and for process conflict (M = 9.50, SD = 2.15) compared with IESS (M = 8.34, SD = 3.72). The standard error for task conflict was slightly lower in IESS (0.527) than in IESU (0.537), while IESU showed smaller standard errors for relationship and process conflict, indicating more stable estimates for these variables. An independent-samples t-test (Table 6) revealed that differences in task conflict (p = .063) and relationship conflict (p = .215) were not statistically significant. However, a significant difference was found in process conflict (t = -2.038, p = .044), suggesting that variations in work procedures, task coordination, and administrative processes contribute to differences in conflict experiences between suburban and urban teachers.

Table 6. Independent Samples Test for Types of Conflict

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
Types of conflict	*F*	Sig.	*t*	*df*	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Task conflict	2.45	.120	1.88	122	.063	1.43	0.76
Relationship conflict	29.15	<.001	-1.25	122	.215	-1.70	1.36
Process conflict	27.53	<.001	-2.04	122	.044	-1.16	0.57

Note. $p < .05$ indicates statistical significance.

Table 6 displays the results of the independent-samples t-test examining differences in task, relationship, and process conflict levels between teachers from suburban schools (IESS) and those from urban schools (IESU). The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in task conflict, with a *t-value* of *1.88* and a *p-value* of *.063*, indicating similar perceptions of task-related disagreements across both groups. Likewise, relationship conflict did not differ significantly, evidenced by a *t-value* of *-1.25* and a *p-value* of *.215*, suggesting comparable experiences of personal or interpersonal conflicts among suburban and urban teachers. In contrast, a notable and statistically significant difference was observed in process conflict, which pertains to disagreements over procedures, coordination, and work-related processes, with a *t-value* of *-2.04* and a *p-value* of *.044*. This finding indicates that perceptions or occurrences of conflict related to work processes vary meaningfully between teachers in suburban and urban settings.

Conflict Management Strategies

Table 7 illustrates that educators working in urban areas reported higher average and median scores compared to their counterparts in suburban settings, which suggests that urban teachers are more actively engaged in conflict management practices and are perhaps more frequently involved in addressing classroom disputes.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Conflict Management Strategies

Conflict management strategy	Median	Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Dev.	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Islamic elementary school (Suburban)	21.00	.324	-.02	3.33	20.48	21.95
Islamic elementary school (Urban City)	40.00	-1.00	1.52	6.29	38.02	41.46

Table 7 presents descriptive statistics for conflict management strategies among Islamic elementary school teachers in suburban and urban areas. Urban schools reported substantially higher scores (M = 40.00, 95% CI = 38.02–41.46) than suburban schools (M = 21.00, 95% CI = 20.48–21.95), indicating clear differences in the use of conflict management practices. Median scores also reflected this contrast, with suburban schools at 21.00 and urban schools at 40.00. Regarding the distribution of responses, suburban schools exhibited a slight positive skewness with a value of 0.324, which indicates that the responses were relatively balanced with a slight tendency toward higher scores. In contrast, urban schools demonstrated a pronounced negative skewness of -1.00, suggesting that the majority of respondents reported higher strategy scores, thereby indicating a concentration of responses at the higher end of the scale.

Urban schools also demonstrated greater variability (SD = 6.29) than suburban schools (SD = 3.33), suggesting more diverse perceptions of conflict management practices. Overall, the findings indicate that urban schools tend to implement conflict management strategies more intensively or systematically than suburban schools. Table 8 further confirms this pattern, showing that suburban teachers reported a mean score of 21.21 (SD = 3.10), while urban teachers reported a substantially higher mean score of 39.74 (SD = 6.29).

Table 8. Paired Samples Statistics for Conflict Management Strategies

Conflict management strategy	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Islamic elementary school (Suburban)	70	21.21	3.097	.370
Islamic elementary school (Urban City)	54	39.74	6.292	.856

Table 8 shows clear differences in conflict management strategy scores between suburban and urban teachers. Suburban schools (n = 70) reported a mean score of 21.21 (SD = 3.10, SE = 0.370), whereas urban schools (n = 54) reported a substantially higher mean score of 39.74 (SD = 6.29, SE = 0.856). The larger standard deviation among urban teachers indicates greater variability in responses, while the smaller standard error among suburban teachers suggests a more precise group estimate. An independent-samples t-test (Table 9) confirmed that this difference was highly significant (t = -21.505, p < .001), indicating that urban teachers tend to use more active or structured conflict management strategies than suburban teachers.

Table 9. Independent Samples Test for Conflict Management Strategies

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Conflict management strategy	15.67	<.001	-21.51	122	<.001	-18.53	.86

Moreover, Table 9 presents the results of the independent samples t-test comparing conflict management strategies between IESS and IESU teachers. Levene's test indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variances is violated ($p < .001$). Therefore, the results are interpreted using the "equal variances not assumed" row. The t-test results show a statistically significant difference in conflict management strategies between IESS and IESU ($t = -21.51$, $p < .001$). Since the p-value is less than 0.05, this indicates that the difference between the two groups is statistically significant. These findings suggest that teachers in urban Islamic elementary schools report significantly higher levels of conflict management strategies compared to those in suburban schools.

To enhance the quantitative findings, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with selected teachers from both suburban and urban Islamic elementary schools. The qualitative analysis sought to examine teachers' experiences and perceptions related to sources of conflict, conflict types, and conflict management strategies within their schools. The results were organized according to the study's analytical framework and are summarized in Tables 10–12. Overall, the FGD findings indicate that teacher conflicts stem from a combination of organizational conditions, interpersonal relationships, and work processes, with variations observed between suburban and urban school settings.

Sources of Conflict

The qualitative findings related to the sources of conflict are detailed in Table 10. These results reveal that the primary origins of conflict vary notably between suburban Islamic elementary schools (IESS) and their urban counterparts (IESU), highlighting differences in the underlying factors contributing to conflicts in these two different settings.

Table 10. Sources of Conflict with the Highest Mean Scores Among IESS and IESU Teachers

Rating	School	Statement of sources of conflict	Average score
1	IESS	Limited elementary school resources and facilities	3.34
	IESU	Miscommunication among IES personnel	3.87
2	IESS	Miscommunication among elementary school personnel	3.30
	IESU	Personal relationships between teachers and teachers are less than harmonious	3.78
3	IESS	There are tasks that must be carried out at the same time	3.30
	IESU	Unclear work processes	3.72

In suburban schools, as shown in Table 10, the three highest-ranked sources of conflict were limited school resources and facilities (*M* = 3.34), miscommunication among school personnel (*M* = 3.30), and simultaneous task demands (*M* = 3.30). Participants explained that the lack of facilities, insufficient teaching staff, and overlapping responsibilities frequently create tension among school personnel. As one participant explained, *"The main source of conflict in our school is limited resources and facilities. Teachers often have to share equipment or teaching materials, and this sometimes leads to misunderstandings or competition among staff"* (FGD-1, Personal Communication, April 2024).

Participants also described how assigning multiple tasks simultaneously could increase pressure and trigger disagreements among teachers. *"Teachers are often required to complete several tasks at the same time. While teaching, we must also prepare administrative reports and support school programs. When tasks accumulate, conflicts can easily arise"* (FGD-1, Personal Communication, April 2024).

On the contrary, teachers from urban schools identified miscommunication among staff (3.87) as the primary source of conflict. This was followed by less harmonious interpersonal relationships among teachers (3.78) and unclear work processes (3.72). Participants noted that differences in communication styles and expectations frequently lead to misunderstandings between colleagues. *"Sometimes conflicts arise simply because of miscommunication. Messages are interpreted differently by each teacher, and this can create tension between colleagues"* (FGD-1, Personal Communication, April 2024).

Another participant highlighted how unclear procedures may also contribute to conflict by stating, *"When work processes are not clearly explained, teachers may interpret responsibilities differently. This often leads to confusion and disagreement about who should handle certain tasks"* (FGD-1, Personal Communication, April 2024).

Overall, the qualitative findings suggest that while conflict exists in both contexts, suburban schools tend to experience conflict related to resource limitations and workload pressures, whereas urban schools experience conflict related to communication patterns and interpersonal relationships.

Types of Conflict

The qualitative analysis of conflict types is detailed in Table 11. The findings highlight notable differences in the main conflict categories that educators encounter, varying between suburban Islamic elementary schools (IESS) and their urban counterparts (IESU).

Table 11. Types of Conflict with the Highest Mean Scores Among IESS and IESU Teachers

Rating	Statement of types of conflict	Average Score	
		Islamic elementary School in the Suburban area (IESS)	Islamic elementary school in Urban city (IESU)
1	Task conflict	3.34	3.06
2	Relationship conflict	3.30	3.26
3	Process conflict	2.80	3.17

Table 11 captures that in IESS, task conflict emerged as the most prominent type of conflict (*M* = 3.34), followed by relationship conflict (*M* = 3.30) and process conflict (M = 2.80). Participants explained that task conflict often arises because teachers must complete multiple responsibilities simultaneously due to limited human resources. One teacher described this situation by stating that *"The main conflict we face is task conflict. Teachers often receive additional responsibilities while still completing previous tasks. We have to manage teaching, administration, and school*

programs at the same time" (FGD-2, Personal Communication, May 2024). Participants further noted that teachers frequently need to perform administrative work alongside teaching duties, which increases pressure and can lead to disagreements about workload distribution.

In contrast, IESU showed a different pattern. Relationship conflict ranked highest (M = 3.26), followed by process conflict (M = 3.17) and task conflict (M = 3.06). Participants explained that relationship conflicts often emerge from communication problems and differences in interpersonal interaction. One participant noted that*"Relationship conflicts among teachers often occur because of misunderstandings in communication. Sometimes teachers interpret comments or instructions differently, which can create tension"* (FGD-3, Personal Communication, June 2024).

Participants also explained that ambiguous administrative procedures can lead to conflicts in the process. *"Another issue is the lack of clarity in work procedures. When responsibilities are not clearly defined, teachers may feel that tasks are unfairly distributed"* (FGD-3, Personal Communication, June 2024).

These findings indicate that although both school contexts experience the three main forms of conflict, suburban schools are more likely to experience task-related conflicts, whereas urban schools are more likely to experience relationship and process conflicts.

Conflict Management Strategies

Table 12 offers an in-depth overview of the qualitative findings concerning conflict management strategies. Teachers described a range of approaches they utilize to resolve conflicts within schools, highlighting notable differences in the emphasis placed on these strategies between suburban and urban environments.

In suburban schools (IESS), the three most prominent strategies were negotiation through discussion (M = 4.32), awareness of shared goals and responsibilities (M = 4.26), and training programs to improve conflict resolution skills (M = 4.22).

Table 12. Conflict Management Strategies with the Highest Mean Scores Among IESS and IESU Teachers

Rating	School	Conflict management strategy statement	Average score
1	IESS	Negotiation strategy by discussing disputed matters to find a solution	4.32
	IESU	Awareness of the tasks and goals, and the importance of cooperation between the parties involved in the conflict	3.96
2	IESS	Awareness of the tasks and goals, and the importance of cooperation between the parties involved in the conflict	4.26
	IESU	There is a willingness to cooperate on the part of the parties in conflict	3.94
3	IESS	Training for school personnel to resolve conflicts in Islamic elementary school (IESS)	4.22
	IESU	Strict application of regulations	3.89

In these schools, as portrayed in Table 12, participants reported that open dialogue and negotiation are commonly used to address disagreements. As one participant explained, *"When conflict occurs, we usually discuss the problem together and try to find a solution through negotiation. Open*

communication helps us resolve misunderstandings" (FGD-4, Personal Communication, June 2024). Likewise, teachers emphasized the importance of professional development programs that help school personnel manage conflicts more effectively.

Meanwhile, teachers in urban schools (IESU) highlighted slightly different strategies. The most frequently mentioned strategies were awareness of shared goals and cooperation (*M* = 3.96), willingness to cooperate among conflicting parties (M = 3.94), and strict implementation of school regulations (*M* = 3.89). It is proven by one participant who stated, *"Cooperation is the most important strategy. Teachers must remember that we all have the same goal, which is to support students and improve the school"* (FGD-4, Personal Communication, June 2026). Another teacher emphasized the importance of rules in resolving disputes, *"When conflicts occur, we usually refer to school regulations. Clear rules help ensure that conflicts are resolved fairly"* (FGD-4, Personal Communication, June 2026).

Through both contexts, teachers highlighted several common strategies for managing conflict, including negotiation, cooperation, awareness of shared institutional goals, mediation, and adherence to school regulations. These strategies reflect a preference for collaborative and constructive approaches to conflict resolution, although the specific emphasis differs between suburban and urban school environments.

The quantitative and qualitative findings revealed several important patterns. First, although the results showed no significant differences were found in overall conflict sources, qualitative findings indicated that the nature of these sources differed. Suburban schools faced resource shortages and workload pressure, whereas urban schools faced communication and relational tensions. Second, the significant quantitative difference in process conflict was supported by qualitative accounts describing unclear responsibilities, inconsistent procedures, and fairness concerns, particularly in urban schools. Third, the significant difference in conflict management strategies was reinforced by qualitative evidence showing stronger use of cooperation, regulations, and structured mechanisms in urban schools, while suburban schools relied more heavily on interpersonal negotiation. Taken together, the findings suggest that conflict in Islamic elementary schools is shaped not only by individual relationships but also by organizational context, resource availability, and administrative systems.

This study examined the sources and types of conflict, as well as conflict management strategies, among Islamic elementary school teachers in suburban and urban contexts, using an integrative framework that links conflict antecedents, manifestations, and responses. Overall, the findings indicate that teacher conflict is a multidimensional organizational phenomenon shaped by structural conditions, interpersonal dynamics, and institutional practices. This supports organizational behavior perspectives, which argue that conflict in schools should not be viewed merely as isolated interpersonal tension, but as part of broader organizational processes involving role expectations, coordination, and resource allocation (Robbins, 2018; Owens & Valesky, 2014). The present study, therefore, extends prior work by showing how school context influences the configuration of conflict sources, conflict forms, and management responses.

The findings on sources of conflict reveal that suburban schools were more strongly affected by limited resources, overlapping responsibilities, and heavy workloads, whereas urban schools experienced conflict primarily through miscommunication, strained collegial relations, and unclear work procedures. These patterns are consistent with Daft's (2011) argument that conflict commonly arises from resource scarcity, communication breakdowns, ambiguous authority, and incompatible goals. The results also align with research showing that organizational context can serve as either a barrier or a lever to professional work, depending on how resources and systems are structured (Allen & Heredia, 2021). In this sense, conflict is

not simply produced by individuals, but by the organizational conditions in which they must operate.

The salience of resource limitations in suburban schools deserves particular attention. When schools lack sufficient facilities, staffing, or administrative support, teachers may be required to perform multiple roles simultaneously, thereby increasing work pressure and competition for time and resources. Similar findings have been reported in studies emphasizing the relationship between workload demands and organizational tension in schools (du Plessis & Cain, 2017; Makaye & Ndofirepi, 2012). Teacher shortages may further intensify role conflict, especially when instructional, administrative, and extracurricular duties accumulate. Studies of occupational stress similarly indicate that constrained resources can contribute to emotional exhaustion and strain among human service professionals (Lampert & Hornung, 2025). Thus, the conflict observed in suburban schools appears to be closely tied to structural capacity rather than solely to interpersonal disagreement.

In contrast, urban schools in this study were characterized by more pronounced communication problems and less harmonious interpersonal relations. This suggests that when material resources are relatively more available, conflict may shift toward relational and procedural domains. Previous studies have likewise found that collegial trust, communication quality, and interpersonal expectations strongly shape conflict experiences in educational organizations (Göksoy & Argon, 2016; Jubran, 2017). Urban schools face complex environments with multiple actors, rapid communication, and diverse expectations, increasing misunderstandings. Research shows educators often navigate conflicting organizational logics, complicating communication and interpretation (Bridwell-Mitchell & Sherer, 2017; Cooney & Cohen, 2024).

The analysis of conflict types further reinforces the contextual nature of school conflict. Task conflict was more dominant in suburban schools, whereas relationship conflict was more visible in urban schools. This pattern is consistent with Robbins' (2018) typology, which distinguishes among task, relationship, and process conflict. In suburban settings, task conflict likely reflects disagreements over workload distribution, priority setting, and completion of multiple responsibilities under constrained conditions. In urban settings, relationship conflict appears to be more closely associated with communication styles, expectations, and emotional reactions during daily interactions. These findings suggest that different school environments may not necessarily differ in the amount of conflict they experience, but rather in the forms conflict tends to take.

The prominence of task conflict in suburban schools is understandable when considered alongside the reported shortage of personnel and overlapping duties. Teachers who must simultaneously teach, complete reports, and support institutional programs may experience tension over how to prioritize and share their work. Similar patterns have been found in studies linking excessive workloads and role overload with teacher stress and burnout (Desouky & Allam, 2017; Zhao et al., 2022). Westmoreland (2024) also notes that educators occupying multiple professional roles are particularly vulnerable to role conflict when expectations are unclear or competing. Therefore, reducing task conflict in suburban schools likely requires structural solutions such as staffing support, clearer job design, and streamlined administration.

The stronger presence of relationship conflict in urban schools highlights the emotional and social dimensions of organizational life. Conflict among teachers is often embedded in communication tone, perceptions of respect, and interpretations of colleagues' intentions. Zembylas (2007) argues that emotions are central to educational practice and should be understood as part of institutional relationships rather than purely private experiences. Likewise, Datnow (2018) shows that collaboration among teachers may itself generate emotional tension, especially during periods of change or heightened accountability. In this study, urban schools

may face greater relational complexity because more intensive interactions and a faster organizational pace increase the frequency of misunderstandings. This indicates that relationship conflict should be managed not only procedurally, but also through emotional awareness and trust-building.

Process conflict was also more evident in urban schools, particularly regarding unclear procedures, task coordination, and role ambiguity. Behfar et al. (2008) note that process conflict emerges when team members disagree about how work should be organized or who should be responsible for particular tasks. Although often considered less visible than relationship conflict, unresolved process conflict can significantly weaken team coordination and institutional efficiency. The present findings support broader research suggesting that schools respond to external pressures through internal adjustments in systems, routines, and coordination practices (Diehl & Golann, 2023). Where procedures are unclear or frequently changing, conflict may emerge even when interpersonal relationships remain functional.

With regard to conflict management strategies, teachers in both contexts reported a preference for constructive approaches such as negotiation, cooperation, awareness of shared goals, and adherence to school regulations. These findings are consistent with prior studies showing that collaborative and problem-focused strategies are generally more effective in school organizations than coercive or avoidant responses (Balay, 2006; Owan, 2018; Saiti, 2015). In professional communities such as schools, where members must continue working together over time, preserving relationships while resolving disagreements becomes particularly important. The use of shared-goal awareness also reflects the normative orientation of educational institutions, where collective responsibility for students may encourage reconciliation.

Interestingly, urban teachers reported stronger use of structured conflict management strategies than suburban teachers. One possible explanation is that urban schools may possess more formalized administrative systems, clearer regulatory mechanisms, or stronger leadership intervention. Research on school leadership in urban contexts shows that principals often need to balance control, care, and responsiveness when managing discipline and staff relations (Golann & Jones, 2024). Where organizations are larger or more complex, formal systems may become more necessary for maintaining coordination. By contrast, suburban schools may rely more heavily on informal negotiation because of smaller staff size, limited administrative support, or stronger dependence on interpersonal familiarity.

Another notable finding is that teachers tended to rely on cognitive and dialogic strategies rather than confrontational approaches. Discussion, negotiation, and mutual understanding were emphasized more than punishment, avoidance, or competition. This pattern aligns with Snyder and Anderson's (1986) argument that productive organizations depend on dialogue through which differing perspectives are filtered into collective solutions. It also resonates with contemporary perspectives on resilience and flourishing, which emphasize reflective coping, adaptive relationships, and constructive problem-solving in demanding professional environments (Chen, 2024). Similarly, coaching and professional learning studies indicate that even difficult interactions can become productive when trust and shared purpose are maintained (Schneeberger McGugan et al., 2023).

Finally, these findings have practical implications for educational leadership and school improvement. Conflict reduction in suburban schools may require investment in staffing, facilities, and workload management, whereas urban schools may benefit more from communication development, procedural clarity, and relational leadership. Across both contexts, professional learning on conflict resolution, collaborative norms, and emotionally intelligent communication may strengthen school climate. Resistance to organizational change is often intensified when workplace logics and expectations collide (Malhotra et al., 2021),

suggesting that conflict management should be integrated into broader school reform efforts. Overall, the study demonstrates that conflict in Islamic elementary schools is contextually shaped but manageable when schools align organizational support, interpersonal trust, and constructive resolution strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the sources of conflict, types of conflict, and conflict management strategies among Islamic elementary school teachers in suburban and urban contexts using a mixed-methods approach. The findings reveal that conflict is an inherent aspect of school organizations and arises from both structural and interpersonal conditions. In suburban schools, conflicts are primarily driven by limited resources, workload pressures, and simultaneous task demands, which tend to generate task-related conflicts. In contrast, urban schools experience conflict mainly due to miscommunication, less harmonious interpersonal relationships, and unclear work procedures, which contribute more strongly to relationship and process conflicts. Despite these contextual differences, teachers in both settings tend to adopt constructive and collaborative conflict management strategies, particularly negotiation, cooperation, and an awareness of shared institutional goals. These findings highlight the importance of improving communication practices, clarifying work procedures, and ensuring adequate organizational support to reduce unnecessary tensions among teachers. Strengthening these aspects can help transform conflict from a disruptive factor into a productive mechanism that enhances collaboration and organizational effectiveness in schools.

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