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Beyond Similarities: Exploring Differences in Conflict Management Styles Between Finnish and Estonian University Students

Master's thesis

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to examine the differences in conflict management styles between Finnish and Estonian university students. The study involved 180 students aged between 18-30, 89 from the University of Tartu and 91 from the University of Eastern Finland. Conflict management styles were examined using a questionnaire. The findings showed that the most common conflict management styles in both countries were collaborating and accommodating. Statistically significant differences were found only in compromising style, which was chosen more often by Finns than by Estonians. The results of the study did not support the initial assumptions, based on the responses, the conflict management styles of Finnish and Estonian students are similar.
Keywords: conflict management styles, cultural differences, young adults, students

Kokkuvõtte

Uuringu eesmärk oli uurida konfliktide lahendamise stiilide erinevusi Soome ja Eesti üliõpilaste vahel. Uuringus osales 180 üliõpilast vanuses 18–30 aastat, neist 89 Tartu Ülikoolist ja 91 Ida-Soome Ülikoolist. Konfliktide lahendamise stiile uuriti küsimustiku abil. Tulemused näitasid, et mõlemas riigis olid kõige levinumad konfliktide lahendamise stiilid koostööle orienteeritus ja kohanemine. Statistiliselt olulisi erinevusi leiti ainult kompromisside tegemise stiilis, mida soomlased eelistasid sagedamini kui eestlased. Uuringu tulemused ei toetanud esialgseid eeldusi – vastuste põhjal on Soome ja Eesti üliõpilaste konfliktide lahendamise stiilid sarnased.
Märksõnad: konfliktide lahendamise stiilid, kultuurilised erinevused, noored täiskasvanud, üliõpilased

Introduction

Conflict Management Styles

Conflict means a disagreement that arises between individuals or groups when their behaviors or views are opposite or incompatible (Laursen & Hafen, 2009). Different norms, values and beliefs across cultures can affect how individuals manage conflict situations (Gomez & Taylor, 2018). Conflicts can arise due to cultural differences, and that's why cross-cultural research is important for understanding diversity (Holt & DeVore, 2005). Cultural differences can appear in differences of behavior, which can lead to misunderstandings due to ignorance or surprising reactions. To improve cooperation and communication, it is important to understand how and why another individual from another culture behaves (Gomez & Taylor, 2018). Understanding cultural differences can also facilitate cultural integration and commitment.

Conflict management style refers to the way an individual reacts when faced with a disagreement with another person. Kilmann's (2024) conflict management theory is one of the most well-known models for describing individuals' styles of reacting to and handling conflicts in various situations. Theory emphasizes five different approaches: accommodation, avoidance, collaborating, competing and compromise. The theory has been used for example in organizational psychology (Altmäe et al., 2013) and intercultural research (Gbadamosi et al., 2014) to explain the different ways people resolve conflicts. Next, we will examine these conflict resolution styles in more detail based on Kilmann's (2024) theory.

According to Kilmann (2024) theory an accommodating style means someone who easily gives in and admits making a mistake, even when they haven't necessarily done so - maintaining relationships is more important. One neglects their own concerns and puts the welfare of others first; accommodation is the opposite of competition. Avoiding style is unassertive and uncooperative. The one who is avoiding does not participate in the conflict at all or delays a response because they are feeling threatened or hopeless. Kilmann (2024) theory tells that collaborative style can be described as confident and cooperative, one who listens positively to differing opinions and the aim is a mutually beneficial outcome. A plan to resolve the conflict is made jointly and requires time and trust from both parties. Competitive style means a pursuit to reach their own interests at the expense of the other. Kilmann (2024) describes that the competitive style uses power to "win" the situation and does not trust the other party in a disagreement. A competitive style of managing conflict can be seen as the idea that only one party can be right, and the other party is wrong. Compromising style is relatively assertive and cooperative. In conflict situations, they tend to seek quick solutions that partially satisfy both parties, which means that both

are likely to "lose" to some extent. Compromise differs from cooperation in that the aim is to resolve the situation more quickly. The aim of compromise is to accept mutual disagreement through mutual concessions.

When considering the necessity of conflict research, studies show that people react to conflict situations in different ways, and these reactions can be linked to cultural differences (Gomez & Taylor, 2018), so it's important to study differences in conflict management, also from a cultural perspective. By understanding various conflict management styles, it becomes possible to anticipate others' behavior and respond more constructively to their emotions. Conflicts are common in many areas of life (Laursen et al., 1993), from personal relationships to workplaces, and especially in international contexts, hence it is important to understand cultural differences to prevent misunderstandings (Guo, 2025). Awareness of conflict management styles also enhances self-awareness and encourages more conscious responses to disagreements (Malherbe, 2023). Knowing that there are multiple conflict management styles increases the likelihood of choosing the most suitable, effective, and fair approach for each situation.

The study examines university students aged 18–30. Young adults are an important target group for research because disagreements are a critical developmental challenge (Laursen et al., 2001) and conflicts are an important part of an individual's cognitive and socio-emotional development (Laursen & Hafen, 2009). Especially for young adults, being accepted by others is important, and experiencing acceptance helps foster a sense of security and closeness in relationships (Powell, 2004). Therefore, it is essential to study the conflicts among young adults. In a university environment, it is also common to encounter people from different cultures, which is why university students are an interesting and valuable target group.

Conflicts are part of relationships, and not always negative. According to Erikson, life includes different stages of development, where growth takes place through different conflict solutions. Resolving those conflicts promotes well-being and success in the future (Erikson 1968, cited in Powell 2004). By understanding the differences in conflict management styles among young adults, especially in an international university environment, it is possible to enhance intercultural understanding, personal growth of individuals, and improve collaboration.

Cross-cultural studies

Cultural differences can arise by factors such as communication styles (Lü, 2018), learned hierarchy and authority (Van Den Haak & Wilterdink, 2019), collectivism or individualism in the culture (Gomez & Taylor, 2018), background factors such as religious status (Fox, 2000) or socio-

economic status (Beyene, 2014) etc. Emotional expression may also differ between cultures (King & Emmons, 1990).

The occurrence of conflicts between different cultures are usually explored from the perspective of conflict resolution or conflict management styles. Gomez and Taylor (2018) conducted research comparing the conflict strategies of American and Mexican students using hypothetical conflict situations and looking at how likely the participant was to ignore the situation, negotiate in the situation, or use social influence. Based on the study, Mexicans preferred social influence and negotiation more than Americans, and this difference was at least partly explained by collectivism. Martinez-Lozano et al. (2011) investigated cultural differences in conflict behavior among young children (5-6 years old). The study involved children from the Netherlands (individualistic culture) and southern Spain (collective culture). In the collective culture, more conflict situations were observed, and conflict situations lasted longer, in contrast to the individualistic culture, where there was more normal to wish that the situation would end soon enough. Posthuma et al. (2006) compared the conflict resolution strategies of American and Mexican counterparts in their study. One hypothesis was that because Mexico is a more collectivist culture, its culture is characterized by more collectivist strategies such as negotiation and compromise, and the results showed support for the hypothesis. In other words, people from more collectivist cultures tend to prefer negotiation and compromise, aiming for a mutually satisfactory outcome. In collectivist cultures, conflicts may occur more frequently and last longer because it is important to reach a mutually accepted outcome.

Conflict studies have also been carried out in Europe. Tamm et al. (2016) conducted a study among Estonian, Russian and German young people that examined how young people react to the controversial expectations of peers and parents, which revealed, that Russians try to maintain good relations with both parents and peers, while Estonians and Germans express a greater need for autonomy. Sheets & Lugar (2005) examined which conflicts end friendships in Russia and the US. For Russians, betrayal of trust was the most likely cause, and for Americans, keeping secrets from a friend. These studies also reflect the underlying cultural values, particularly the differences between collectivism and individualism, which influence how conflicts are handled, what is considered important, and what factors affect conflict resolution.

The aim of this study is to examine whether there are differences in conflict management styles between Finnish and Estonian students. Finland and Estonia are geographically close Western countries, but they have differences in their cultural background and societal development. Finland and Estonia are both relatively individualistic countries. However, according to Realo and Allik (1999), Estonia has retained some collectivist traits due to its Soviet heritage, which is why, for example, family-centered values hold greater significance in Estonia. Finland, on the other hand, is

generally identified as a more individualistic country (Hofstede, 2001). As in the studies mentioned earlier elsewhere, individualism and collectivism can create differences in the way conflicts are handled. Therefore, it is possible to find differences between Finland and Estonia as well, for example in conflict management styles.

When beginning to consider the differences between Finland and Estonia, it is important to note that, Finland and Estonia have different historical paths. Finland was under the rule of Sweden and Russia for a long time but gained independence long before Estonia, which was also part of the Soviet Union for an extended period. Estonia also has a large Russian-speaking minority, which continues to influence Estonian culture even today (Rovny, 2024). Finland has experienced a longer period of Western development, which may have strengthened Finnish culture and fostered a more individualistic and direct approach to interpersonal interactions. Estonia's recent history has been more unstable, and its culture is also influenced by minority cultures. Estonia has a more collectivist historical background, which could support more indirect and relationship-preserving conflict resolution styles. Despite their historical roots, since the 1990s, both Finns and Estonians have been able to grow up in increasingly similar environments due to digitalization and media (Jakobson et al., 2012), which may have brought the countries closer together and made their ways of thinking more alike, especially among younger population.

Historical roots, values, and society shape individuals, and these factors are passed down from generation to generation. Parenting and upbringing also play a crucial role in shaping thought patterns and interpersonal interaction. Tulviste & Ahtonen (2007) compared Finnish and Estonian parents and found that Finnish fathers and mothers are more similar in their values than Estonian fathers and mothers. Finnish parents emphasize hedonism, whereas Estonian mothers value benevolence and conformity. Values affect parenting styles and values are typically cherished in upbringing and passed on to future generations. Value-based parenting can relate, for example, to how communication and interaction take place within the family, which in turn can influence how children handle their own interactions, such as in conflict situations. Kunnas (2008) compared the politeness strategies used by Finns and Estonians in conversation. Estonians use more imperative forms and address people with formal pronouns, while in Finnish, formal pronouns are used only when the person being addressed is considered an authority. Estonians also use polite expressions like please *(palun*), which is not commonly used in Finnish. Such factors can influence social interactions and may lead to misunderstandings and disagreements.

No research has been done on the conflict management styles of Finns and Estonians. Based on research, Finns have a tendency to resolve conflicts through discussion. For example, a Finnish thesis studied how conflicts between students are resolved in schools, concluding that the most

common method is participatory discussion (Nevala ja Rantanen, 2024). This approach aims to find a solution that meets the needs of both parties, which can be considered typical for the compromise style. Pehrman's (2011) study aimed to examine how mediation functions as a conflict resolution method in Finnish workplaces. The research showed that open and straightforward communication, while still respecting the other party, was the most effective approach to conflict situation. Also, based on Lappi's (2018) interview study, ward nurses expressed a desire for quick response and openness in addressing conflicts within the workplace community. Based on these studies, it is assumed that Finns prefer a more direct approach to conflict by discussing and addressing the issue openly, while at the same time, the aim is to achieve a mutually satisfying outcome.

When examining the Estonian style of managing conflict Kink's (2022) master's thesis found that, Estonian primary school students resolve conflicts using an "effective solution," which could involve mutual discussion, apologizing, or making a compromise. Another mentioned approach was conflict avoidance, either by forgetting the situation or giving in. According to Jõesaar's (2022) master's thesis research, the most common conflict management method in the workplace is compromise, while in the healthcare sector, avoidance is also frequently used. Collaboration is considered an effective method, but it is used less often as it requires time and commitment. Based on these studies, Estonians seem more willing to resolve conflicts quickly, for example by avoiding the situation or by accommodating at their own expense. That's why the assumption is that Estonians also prefer compromise in conflict situations, but they tend to avoid conflicts more than Finns and may be more willing to accept an unfavorable resolution if it helps avoid the conflict. This study aims to strengthen these assumptions and find support for earlier research.

Understanding cultural differences helps to understand diversity and can create flexibility in conflict situations and to avoid unnecessary conflicts. There has been research on conflict resolution methods, including cross-cultural research, but there has been no research between Finland and Estonia. This study examines Finnish and Estonian university students aged 18-30. The main research question of the study is whether there are differences between Finnish and Estonian university students in conflict management styles. The assumption is that there are differences how Finnish and Estonian students resolve conflicts. More specifically, hypothesis is that Estonians use an avoidant management style more than Finns, when Finns are assumed to be more confrontational or willing to solve conflicts thoroughly. Also, the assumption is that Finns will seek a mutually beneficial solution, which characterizes compromising style, while Estonians will settle for a solution that is less favorable to them personally if it avoids conflict, which characterizes accommodating style. The study will be conducted using a questionnaire created by the STEPP Program at East Caroline University (Johnson, James, King, Williams, & Grandy, 2013), followed

by a comparative analysis of the results based on literature. The questionnaire was chosen as the data collection method because it is based on a well-known conflict management theory (Kilmann, 2024) and was well-suited for the implementation of this type of study. The aim of the study is to find possible differences in conflict management styles in the Nordic-Baltic context among young university student adults and to increase understanding of the impact of culture on differences in interaction.

Method

Participants

The study sample consisted of Finnish and Estonian university students aged 18 to 30. 185 students responded to the survey, but five responses had to be removed from the final count because the respondents were over 30 years old. Therefore, the final number of respondents was 180.

The study was conducted among students from the University of Eastern Finland and the University of Tartu. There were 89 respondents from the University of Eastern Finland and 91 from the University of Tartu. A total of 141 women and 30 men responded to the questionnaire. Nine did not wish to specify their gender. The age distribution of the survey was: 18-30 years. The mean age of subjects was 22.3 years (*SD* = 2.66) for the Estonia sample and 23.9 years (*SD* = 2.83) for the Finnish sample.

Procedure and Materials

The survey data were collected among students at the University of Eastern Finland and the University of Tartu aged 18-30. Respondents to the survey were sought through university communication channels, student email lists, student associations and Facebook student group discussions. The survey was open from 4.12.2024 until 10.3.2025.

Willingness to participate in the study was requested on the first page of the questionnaire, which explained that participation is completely voluntary and that the respondent may withdraw from the study at any time. Responses were anonymous.

The data was collected using the Conflict Management Questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed by STEPP Program at East Carolina University (Johnson et al., 2013). The author(s) has given permission to use this questionnaire in this research. The questionnaire contained 15 indicating questions from scale 1-4 (1=rarely, 4=always). Each conflict management style was measured using three questions. For example, the collaborating style was measured with the

question "*I explore issues with others to find solutions that meet everyone's needs*" and the avoiding style with the question "*Being at odds with other people makes me feel uncomfortable and anxious*."

The reliability of the questionnaire has been measured in previous studies. In this study, reliability was generally weak. The value for collaborating style ($\alpha = 0.63$). The measurement of collaborating style can be considered reasonably reliable, but there is room for improvement. The reliability of competing style ($\alpha = 0.56$) and accommodating style ($\alpha = 0.58$) is weak. The value for avoiding style ($\alpha = 0.65$) is acceptable. Although it is not excellent, it is sufficient unless the results can be significantly improved. The reliability of compromising style is particularly weak, with a value of only 0.42. It is possible that the questions are not at all consistent or do not measure the desired conflict management style properly. Such a low reliability value might undermine the overall reliability of the study.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, the respondent was asked about their gender (female, male, prefer not to answer), age in numbers, country of residence (response options: Finland and Estonia), and university (response options: University of Eastern Finland and University of Tartu). The questionnaire was presented in English. Respondents were expected to have a good command of English, which was addressed before the questionnaire started. The questionnaire took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire was possible to fill with mobile or computer.

Data analysis

The data was analyzed with the help of R Studio and JASP software. The subscale scores, that is, the scores for different conflict management styles, were calculated based on the average of the statements belonging to each style. Since the distributions of several variables were not normal, non-parametric statistical tests were used for the analysis. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare Finnish and Estonian students (independent groups).

Results

Table 1.
Descripitive Statics of Conflict Management Styles

Conflict Management Style	***Mean***	***Std.Deviation***
Accomodating	2.80	0.54
Avoiding	2.46	0.70
Collaborating	2.91	0.56
Competing	2.23	0.56
Compromising	2.71	0.50

Table 1 shows descriptive factors of different conflict management styles. When examining all responses combined, collaborating emerged as the preferred conflict management style among participants (M = 2.91), while competing was the least used, based on its lowest mean score (M = 2.23). Compromising (M = 2.71) and accommodating (M = 2.80) ranked in the middle, while avoiding (M = 2.46) was among the least used styles alongside competing.

When comparing the descriptive statistics between the universities, the results align with the overall findings. Collaborating style was the most preferred conflict management style in both universities, though slightly more common at the University of Eastern Finland (M = 2.94) than at the University of Tartu (M = 2.88). Competing was the least preferred in both institutions, with mean scores of M = 2.20 in Eastern Finland and M = 2.26 in Tartu. Accommodating and compromising were somewhat more prevalent at the University of Eastern Finland compared to the University of Tartu. Avoiding style received relatively low mean scores at both universities.

Most conflict management styles among Finnish and Estonian students were similar. Finnish students tend to choose the accommodating style slightly more often, while Estonian students prefer the competing style a bit more. Neither of these differences was statistically significant. Based on the Mann-Whitney U test, responses related to the compromising conflict resolution style differ statistically significantly ($U= 4865.00$, $p = 0.02$) between Finnish and Estonian respondents as shown on Tabel 2. Compromising style was more frequent among Finns.

The normality of the results was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test. Based on this test, the distributions significantly deviated from normality ($p < .05$), which justified the use of non-parametric methods in the analysis. Based on the Mann-Whitney U test, responses related to the compromising conflict resolution style differ statistically significantly ($p = 0.02$) between Finnish and Estonian respondents. A p-value below 0.05 suggests that the result is unlikely to be random and may indicate a cultural difference.

Table 2.

Comparison of Conflict Management Styles by University with P-values

Conflict Management Style	University of Eastern Finland M (*SD*)	University of Tartu M (*SD*)	P-value
Accomodating	2.81 *(0.54)*	2.79 *(0.54)*	0.84
Avoiding	2.50 *(0.66)*	2.43 *(0.74)*	0.55
Collaborating	2.94 *(0.60)*	2.88 *(0.53)*	0.35
Competing	2.20 *(0.51)*	2.26 *(0.60)*	0.56
Compromising	2.79 (*0.51)*	2.63 *(0.48)*	0.02

Discussion and conclusions

The aim of the study was to examine the typical conflict management styles of Finnish and Estonian university students and to determine whether there are differences between Finns and Estonians that could potentially be explained by cultural differences. The results indicated that there are some differences in conflict resolution styles between Finnish and Estonian students, but overall, the differences were small. The hypotheses set forth did not receive strong support from the research findings, but small trends existed. Only in the compromising style was a statistically significant difference observed between Finnish and Estonian students.

Based on the results, the proposed hypotheses cannot be confirmed. The hypothesis suggested that there would be differences in conflict management styles between Finnish and Estonian students. While some differences were found, they were minor. The hypothesis that Estonian students would more frequently choose the avoiding style is not supported by this study. Similarly, the assumption that Finnish students would be more confrontational is not confirmed either, if we consider the competing style to reflect a confrontational approach. The only statistically significant difference found between the two groups was in the compromising style. Finnish students used this style more frequently than Estonian students. This result partially supports one of the hypotheses, which assumed that Finnish students would be more likely to choose a style that leads to mutually satisfactory outcomes. The compromising style can be characterized as such.

The research findings showed that the conflict resolution styles of Finnish and Estonian students are quite similar. In both cultures, collaborating and accommodating were the most common conflict management styles among students. When comparing the results to previous research, it can be noted

that collaborating is relatively common conflict resolution style, especially among women (Gbadamosi et al., 2014) and this survey was mostly participated in by females.

It is possible that certain conflict resolution styles have become more common among young people, especially among highly educated youth. According to Noakes and Rinaldi (2006), conflict resolution styles become more sophisticated with age, which could explain why the accommodating and collaborating styles were the most common management styles. In university, proper behavior is generally expected, and university students are already more mature and are presumed to use more sophisticated conflict management strategies than, for example, teenagers. Conflicts may be quite similar among Finnish and Estonian young adults, which could also lead to similar ways of resolving them. According to Riesch et al. (2000), young people often report similar everyday issues as sources of conflict, for example with their family. According to Öztürk et al. (2023), the sources of conflict among young people are often related to family, school, and friendships. In contrast, the study by Tamm et al. (2018) found that conflicts tend to arise from differences in opinions, talking behind someone's back, and romantic relationships.

Both Finland and Estonia can be considered as cultures that have elements of both individualistic and collectivist cultures. However, both lean more towards an individualistic culture, where personal freedom, individual rights, personal choices, and responsibility are valued (Hofstede, 2001). Compared to Finland, Estonia can be considered slightly more collectivist, as the importance of community and family in Estonia may be somewhat greater than in Finland (Realo & Allik, 1999). There was no statistically significant difference between Estonia and Finland in the competing style, but it was the only style that appeared a little more frequently among Estonian respondents than among Finnish ones. Triandis (1995) studied collectivist and individualist cultures. According to him, cultural values shape, among other things, conflict resolution styles. While collectivist cultures are generally inclined to avoid open conflicts, it is possible that the competitive conflict resolution style is still chosen if the group's interest requires it and if it helps maintain the group's unity more effectively. This study did not specify what types of conflict situations respondents should consider, so if Estonians were thinking more about conflicts in communal situations, it is possible that, as a culture with more collectivist traits, they chose the competitive style a bit more frequently.

If we consider the formation of cultures more closely, Finland and Estonia have gone through distinct historical paths. Finland has lived under Swedish and Russian rule, and after gaining independence, went through the Winter War and the Continuation War, which have influenced the national identity of Finns (Kivimäki, 2013). These historical experiences may have contributed to a tendency among Finns to avoid conflicts and to seek common consensus in situations of disagreement (Kivimäki, 2013). Estonia, on the other hand, was part of empires such as Sweden and the Soviet Union for a

longer period and gained its independence much later than Finland. Estonia's time under Soviet rule may have influenced how Estonians approach conflicts or authority. Estonia also has a large Russian-speaking minority, which has its own impact on the culture and society (Rovny, 2024). Despite historical differences, Finns and Estonians now lead very similar everyday lives, which may also smooth out differences arising from history.

Due to Finland and Estonian close relations and relatively close geographical proximity, it is possible that their cultures and ways of functioning will gradually converge over time. The transnational connection between Finland and Estonia has increased over the years, especially following Estonia's accession to the EU and the Schengen Area, which has facilitated labor mobility and strengthened ties between the two countries (Jakobson et al., 2012). The countries share a long common history and have cooperated in various fields, which may have contributed to the convergence of Finnish and Estonian behavioral patterns. Finland and Estonia also belong to the same language family, which facilitates mutual understanding and contributes to more similar forms of interaction (Frick et al., 2018).

The globalization and digitalization of the world may also have an impact on the results of the study. Young Finn and Estonian adults have likely grown up under similar media education and digital culture, which may have led to these young adults having similar worldviews and values. Digital platforms and internet usage shape the values and worldview of university students (Caldeiro-Pedreira et al., 2021). Due to global digital media, the thoughts and values of young adults of the same age may become increasingly uniform, as they use similar social media platforms and applications and adopt similar behavioral and cognitive patterns (Buckingham, 2007). Cultural change is one possible interpretation of why the conflict resolution styles of Finns and Estonians are similar. Stronger interpretations require more and broader research.

According to Laursen et al. (1996), conflict is handled differently depending on the relationship in which the conflict occurs, weighing the benefits and harms that result from the situation. There is no additional background information on the respondents other than their gender, age, country of origin, or university, so it is possible that students from the same fields of study participated in the survey, leading to similar response patterns. It is possible that the respondents to the survey share similar values and perspectives. According to McPherson et al. (2001), especially in academic communities, individuals tend to form networks with others who share similar values and educational backgrounds.

Cognitive homogeneity creates a form of groupthink, characterized by ideological similarity, meaning that academic individuals are often politically and ideologically aligned.

The study participants were mostly women, which may have influenced the responses. As Gbadamosi et al. (2014) found in their study, women in particular tend to use a more collaborative style, which was also the most typical style among this study group. According to Brewer et al. (2002), men are more likely to use competitive and dominating conflict management styles, whereas women tend to prefer less aggressive approaches. The age distribution of the respondents was also relatively narrow (18–30 years). According to the study by Blanchard-Fields et al. (2004), age plays a role in how people regulate their emotions in everyday problem situations. The study found that older adults tend to prefer more passive strategies, whereas middle-aged adults were more proactive, especially when the situation had greater emotional significance. Gender and age distribution may therefore be significant explanatory factors that can be explored in more detail in future research.

In summary, the conflict management styles of Finnish and Estonian students are similar. The only statistically significant difference was found in the compromising style, which was more typical for Finns. However, based on this result alone, no generalizations can be made about the cultural differences between these two groups. There are numerous opportunities for further research. With better resources, the sample size could be significantly increased, and a random sampling method could be used, which would improve the validity of the study. The research topic is interesting and has been studied, but not specifically between these two countries and cultures. By refining the study and improving resources, the research can be taken further, which may allow for the discovery of differences.

Limitations

Possible limitations related to the data include sample size, convenience sampling and age distribution. Expanding the study's age range might have yielded more diverse results, as older individuals may have developed different approaches to conflict resolution. The sample size might have also been bigger, which usually gives better opportunities to generalize the results. Limitations related to the instrument may include the response language of the questionnaire and the cultural appropriateness of the instrument. The questionnaire may have been problematic because it was in English, which was presumably not the native language of any respondent. However, it was assumed that the university student's level of English was good enough to answer the questionnaire. It is possible that the questions were understood differently or even incorrectly among respondents, and it may be challenging to distinguish nuances in a foreign language. The questionnaire used was

developed in the United States and therefore may not be sufficiently culturally sensitive to detect subtle differences between the two countries in other cultural contexts.

The reliability of the study is low. Although the questionnaire used in this study was designed to measure differences in conflict management styles, it was not specifically suited to this study. It is possible that respondents misunderstood the questions or that the survey does not measure conflict management styles as intended. Low reliability may also be related to sampling. Since the study only included participants from two universities, the results cannot be generalized to represent the entire student population of Finland and Estonia. Additionally, due to the uneven gender distribution, generalizations related to gender cannot be made.

If limitations related to response behavior are also taken into account, the study relies on self-assessment, which makes responses susceptible to social desirability bias. Especially in conflict situations, individuals may not want to perceive themselves negatively and may, therefore, evaluate their own attitudes in a more favorable light than they do. Conflicts are often linked to an individual's self-image and social relationships. Furthermore, the situations presented in the questionnaire may feel distant if the respondent has never experienced a similar conflict before. Also, open-ended questions could be included to obtain more in-depth insights. Open-ended questions would allow cultural nuances to emerge that might be overlooked in multiple-choice questions. The original STEPP program questionnaire (Johnson et al., 2013) also included an open-ended conflict scenario with three questions, but this part was eliminated to keep the study manageable for a master's thesis. Furthermore, the context of conflict situations could be specified more clearly to help respondents relate to the scenarios (e.g., conflicts in academic settings vs. personal life). The conducted research provides a solid foundation for follow-up research, but conclusions should be drawn cautiously.

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