



INTERRELATION BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE WAYS OF RESPONDING TO CONFLICTS IN STUDENTS - SPORT TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The role of sports teachers is complex, often requiring them to navigate various situations. Conflict situations can arise during sports events, and their successful resolution depends on the sports educator's specific knowledge and skills supporting them in choosing the proper behavior and actions. Our research aims to reveal the state and degree of determination between the emotional intelligence of students - sports teachers and their ways of reacting to conflicts. A total of 153 students from the Faculty of Sport and the Faculty of Pedagogy at the National Sports Academy 'Vassil Levski' were studied. Methods: The main research methods, adapted for Bulgaria, were: 'The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence' and 'The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument.' The results were processed using variation and correlation analysis. Results: The indicators of the two tests revealed a high emotional intelligence level and harmony in reacting to conflicts among the studied. The motivation for overcoming obstacles and the ability to control emotions were leading and directly related to the participants' attitude to collaboration, accommodation to the situation, and the manifestation of a reasonable compromise. The highest determination (74%) was between 'Perception of own emotions and self-control' and 'Collaborating' in a conflict situation. Conclusion: General emotional intelligence and all its factors are highly determined by the indicators of conflict-handling modes.

Key words: dependence, conflict situations, behaviour, students.

INTRODUCTION

The work of sports educators is associated with high responsibility and increased pressure, primarily due to the democratic reforms in recent decades. While creating favorable conditions for social development, these reforms have also given rise to several adverse outcomes, such as crises in people's spirituality, upbringing, and value systems. Inevitably, all of this has directly impacted our educational system and sport, where the teacher and coach are the main factors for the comprehensive development of young people. The role and

functions of sports educators continue to be neglected, and their social and professional status remains significantly limited (1, 2).

Today, democratic freedom is increasingly giving rise to problems in interpersonal relationships. Conflicts are escalating, often leading to aggression and, in some cases, even to violence. This issue remains unresolved despite numerous initiatives by international sports organizations and educational institutions to prevent negative behaviors during sporting events (3, 4). A conflict is a process in which one party perceives its interests as opposed to or negatively affected by the other party (5). There are different types of conflicts, the most common being intrapersonal and interpersonal (6). Intrapersonal conflicts are related to contradictions between various mental processes, states, and qualities within an

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individual (7). Interpersonal conflicts, on the other hand, are triggered by disagreements, differences, and clashes between people. They are complex and are strongly influenced by a person's attitudes and mental state. In their actions, individuals develop an internal mindset for responding to conflicts. In the field of sport, sports educators need to be able to identify the causes of conflicts that may arise between athletes and to find ways to resolve them. Numerous studies indicate what the effective conflict management styles should be, with collaboration, compromise, or accommodation considered effective styles, while competition and avoidance are deemed ineffective (8-10). However, in extreme situations, including conflicts, a person's first reaction is often emotional. To ensure proper actions, adequate control over emotions through thinking is necessary. Nowadays, emotional intelligence is considered an essential criterion for choosing successful behavior in specific situations. It is defined as "a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions" (11). Higher emotional abilities suggest more effective coping mechanisms in certain circumstances (12, 13). In various scientific fields (such as education, management, sport, etc.), numerous studies are related to emotional intelligence and how to respond to conflicts. However, few studies clarify the relationships between emotional intelligence indicators and the indicators of preferred conflict management styles.

METHODS

Our research aims to reveal the state and degree of determination between the emotional intelligence of students—sports educators—and their ways of responding to conflicts. To achieve this, the following tasks were carried out:

1. To reveal the theoretical foundations of the researched issue.
2. To determine the state of emotional intelligence and the methods of responding to conflicts.
3. To reveal the relationships and determinacy between the individual indicators of emotional intelligence and the predominant way of responding to conflicts.

The research subject is the patterns in the relationships and determinacy between emotional intelligence and ways of responding

to conflicts. The research object consists of 153 students from the Faculty of Sports and the Faculty of Pedagogy at NSA "Vassil Levski," divided by gender (89 men and 64 women).

The following were applied to achieve the research goals: 1) The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test - adapted for Bulgarians. The test contains 33 questions. Responses are evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 – "Strongly disagree" to 5 – "Strongly agree." The test results have a 4-factor solution, including four subscales: "Sharing of Emotions and Empathy," "Motivation for Overcoming Obstacles and Optimism," "Perception of Non-verbal Expression of Emotions in Others," and "Perception of One's Own Emotions and Self-control" (14, 15).

2) An approved test for determining typical ways of responding to conflicts (Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument). We used some given keys to determine the five instruments for reaction to conflict situations: 1) Competing, 2) Collaborating, 3) Compromising, 4) Avoiding, and 5) Accommodating (16, 17). The test results were processed using 1) Frequency analysis (distribution of frequencies in %), 2) Variation analysis (to calculate the mean value), and 3) Correlation analysis – Pearson's r coefficient for linear correlation and r^2 – coefficient of determination (18). All participants were informed that their test results would be published in a scientific report.

RESULTS

After the statistical analysis of the test results, **Figures 1-a and 1-b** present the distribution of indicators related to conflict management styles and emotional intelligence among men. It can be said that the structure of conflict management styles in the studied men is harmonious. The most preferred management style is "Collaborating," which is prominent in 31% of the cases, with an average score of 8.37 points. Engaging in sport helps men develop skills for team cohesion, which positively transfers to conflict situations. They seek ways to avoid conflict, foster understanding, demonstrate respect, and show mutual goodwill. In pursuing their goals, future sports educators are strongly guided by "Motivation to overcome obstacles and optimism" (**Figure 1-b**). In 33% of the cases, with an average score of 31.9 points, this emotional intelligence

component is the participants' leading factor. The knowledge and experience gained from previous situations enable the men to respond

appropriately to emerging problems, and thanks to their higher willpower, they continue to move forward with confidence.

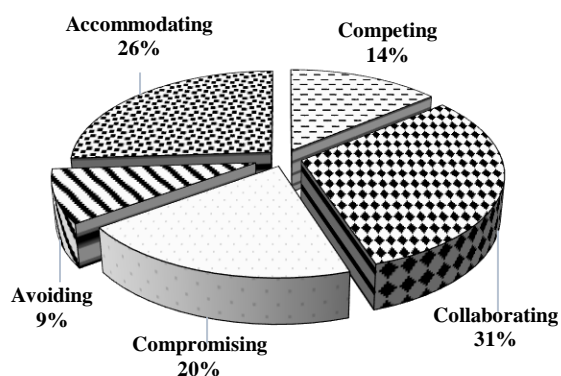


Figure 1-a. Ways of managing conflicts

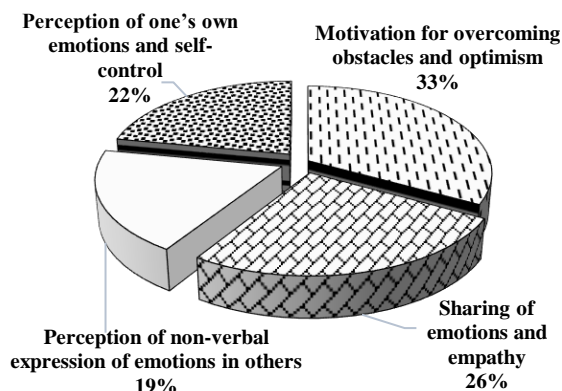


Figure 1-b. Emotional intelligence

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of the men's results from both tests (1-a and 1-b)

In second and third place among the positive strategies are "accommodating" for 26% of the men (with an average score of 7.17 points) and "compromising" for 20% of the men (with an average score of 6.20 points). These results indicate that future sports educators have well-developed abilities to adapt to changing environmental conditions, and in conflict situations, they would likely maintain composure. By demonstrating reasonable compromise, they would limit the escalation of tension and reduce the risk of deepening the conflict.

The fourth and fifth places are occupied by "competing" in 14% of cases and "avoiding" in

9% of cases. The position of these conflict management styles within the overall structure suggests that future sports educators would not shy away from responsibility in conflict situations. Instead, they would show respect for their opponent while resolving the issue. High levels of emotional intelligence support this, reflected in its components—high levels of "Sharing emotions and empathy," evident in 26% of cases with an average score of 26.7 points and high levels of "Perception of one's own emotions and self-control," observed in 22% of cases with an average score of 19.7 points.

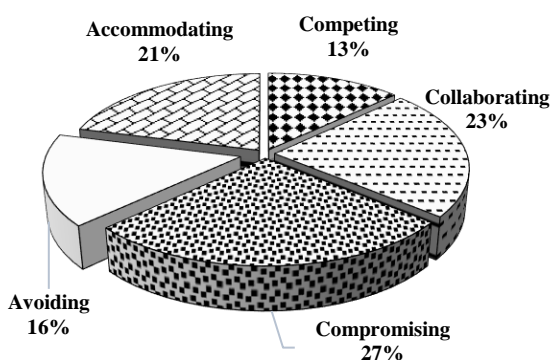


Figure 2-a. Ways of managing conflicts

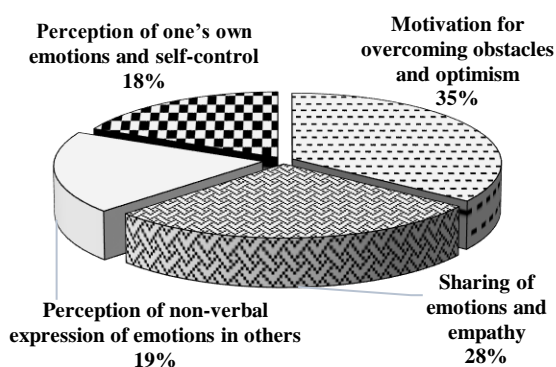


Figure 2-b. Emotional intelligence

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of the men's results from both tests (2-a and 2-b)

For women, the leading response style to conflicts is reasonable "compromising" (**Figure 2-a**), with an average score of 7.1 points, shown by 27% of the participants. In conflict

situations, women are guided by a desire for diplomatic concession while seeking ways to manage the situation. High levels of emotional intelligence, reflected in "Motivation for

overcoming obstacles and optimism" (35%, with a score of 31.9 points) and "Sharing of emotions and empathy" (28%, with a score of 27.3 points), support their tendency to temporarily step back from their position, consider the opponent's perspective, and later search for a compromise to resolve the situation (Figure 2-b).

The structure of conflict management styles in women can also be described as harmonious. In second and third place are "collaborating" (in 23% of cases with a score of 7.0 points) and "accommodating" (in 21% of cases with a score of 6.8 points). At the same time, the least

favorable conflict management styles, "avoiding" and "competing," are ranked as the least preferred choices. Rivalry, a characteristic trait in sports competitions, takes a back seat in situations where tension may escalate, the conflict may intensify, and the risk for both sides increases.

We need to determine the connections between the leading conflict management style and the participants' emotional intelligence.

Figure 3 presents the strength of the relationships between "collaborating" and the indicators of emotional intelligence in men.

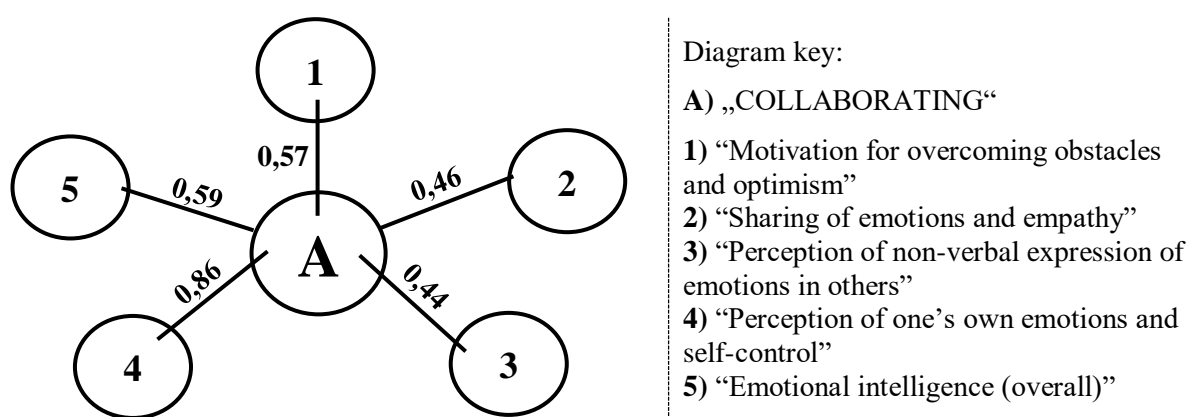


Figure 3. The relationship between "Collaborating" and the indicators of emotional intelligence in men – future sports educators

The strongest correlation, $r = 0.86$, is between "collaborating" and "perception of one's own emotions and self-control." It has been proven in practice that engaging in sports positively impacts regulating athletes' emotions and behavior (19). In our case, the positive effect of sport and participation in competitions contributes to developing self-control skills over one's emotions, which are in alignment with the emotions of others. This, in turn, positively influences their decision-making, and in conflict situations, attitudes focused on understanding, goodwill, mutual respect, and showing good intentions dominate. The data fully supports this finding through the high correlation and corresponding determinacy of 74.0% between the two indicators.

The strong correlations between "collaborating" and "emotional intelligence (overall)" ($r = 0.59$) and "collaborating" and "motivation for overcoming obstacles and optimism" ($r = 0.57$) indicate that the positive attitude of future sports

educators is based on achieving a balance in the relationships within the groups they interact with. The moderate correlations between "collaborating" and "sharing of emotions and empathy" ($r = 0.46$) and "collaborating" and "perception of non-verbal expression of emotions in others" ($r = 0.44$) support our observation that men are capable of effectively managing their own emotions. This allows them to respond appropriately in conflict situations with high difficulty and risk. They have sufficient knowledge to assess the emotional state of their opponent based on their expressions (body language and facial expressions), which allows them to quickly and promptly understand the situation and take the appropriate actions to resolve it.

Figure 4 presents the correlation between women's leading conflict management style—"compromising"—and their emotional intelligence indicators.

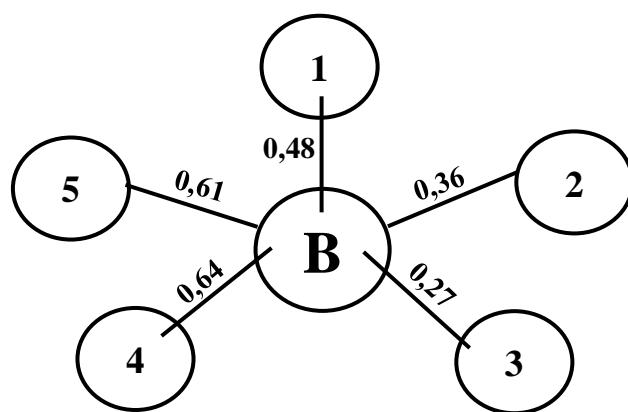


Diagram key:

B) „COMPROMISING“

- 1) “Motivation for overcoming obstacles and optimism”
- 2) “Sharing of emotions and empathy”
- 3) “Perception of non-verbal expression of emotions in others”
- 4) “Perception of one’s own emotions and self-control”
- 5) “Emotional intelligence (overall)”

Figure 4. The relationship between "Compromising" and the indicators of emotional intelligence in women – future sports educators

‘Compromising’ is most directly related to "perception of one's own emotions and self-control" ($r = 0.64$) and "overall emotional intelligence" ($r = 0.61$) in women. The correlation dependencies are significant and reveal determinacy of 41.0% and 37.2%, respectively. In this case, the positive impact of sport shapes women's behavior so that they develop a mindset where managing their emotions helps mobilize their strengths and demonstrate readiness for appropriate actions in conflict situations. The established significant correlations of ‘compromising’ with the two emotional intelligence indicators show women's ability to diplomatically concede in situations while seeking ways to manage them based on self-control and objective self-assessment of their thoughts and emotions.

‘Compromising’ correlates moderately with "motivation for overcoming obstacles and optimism" ($r = 0.48$). The efforts invested in sport over the years and achieving success in competitions have contributed to greater confidence in their actions, which fosters increased optimism in reaching their goals. The presence of optimism when manifesting compromise enhances its effectiveness, especially when the opponent's actions are appropriate. This allows both parties to partially concede their intentions and goals, reach an agreement, and thus resolve the conflict. From this perspective, for compromise to be a preferred response style in conflicts, self-control over thoughts and emotions and the expression of optimism emerge as leading factors for its practical application. With the other two indicators of emotional intelligence in women—"sharing of emotions

and empathy" and "perception of non-verbal expression of emotions in others"—the conflict management style "compromising" reveals a moderate correlation ($r = 0.36$) and weak correlation ($r = 0.27$), respectively. Sharing emotions and empathy support compromise solutions in a conflict situation, especially when careful consideration of the opponent's arguments is necessary—arguments that will form the basis for developing a course of action. The impact of knowledge about the significance of expressive movements in recognizing emotional states is weak, leading to difficulties in actions through the manifestation of compromise.

CONCLUSION

Based on our theoretical analysis and conclusions, we can make the following summary:

The leading conflict management styles for men are "collaborating" and "accommodating," while for women, they are "compromising" and "collaborating." Both genders' preferred emotional intelligence factors are "motivation for overcoming obstacles and optimism" and the ability to "perceive one's own emotions and self-control." Various indicators of emotional intelligence show strong correlations with conflict management strategies. The strongest correlation is between "perception of one's own emotions and self-control" and "collaborating" for men at 74% and "compromising" for women at 41.0%. Our results convincingly support the view that sport positively impacts the regulation of athletes' emotions and behavior, thus enabling them to be prepared for effective actions in different situations.

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