Proceedings of ICEIPI 2026 Symposium: Inclusive Education, Cultural Transformation, and the Ethical Dimensions of Learning
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.LD35874

Factors of Teacher-Student Conflict in China and Regional Strategies

Siyu Yang

Wuhan Britain-China School, Wuhan, China
siyuy2597@gmail.com

Abstract. This paper studies teacher-student conflict and teacher emotional health in the context of Chinese secondary education, I surveyed 246 Chinese secondary school teachers and classified conflict types, solutions, and emotional responses as well as teachers' job satisfaction. My questionnaire results show moderate overall negative emotion (mean 4.42/10) and low life satisfaction (mean 2.52/5) among participants from these conflicts. I also discovered that teachers who involved in conflicts with a final resolution like student apology or administrative intervention had lower satisfaction than if involved in open-ended conflicts which is counterintuitive. My results also showed no evidence that value-based conflicts would lead to different emotional status than interpersonal conflicts and life-satisfaction after the event is independent of the emotional responses at the conflicts. My findings also suggest conflicts are better dealt with earlier solutions rather than later and teachers need continuous support after a serious conflict. Overall, my study provided evidence and advice to support conflict management in Chinese secondary schools.

Keywords: teacher–student conflict, teacher well-being, life satisfaction, Chinese secondary education, conflict resolution

1. Introduction

As is widely acknowledged that teacher-student relationship is a very important topic as it links to teachers' job satisfaction and students' learning results. If a teacher has conflict with the students, the learning environment would worsen, and students' learning might be disrupted. Teachers may have a bad emotional experience at the teaching. Those issues are commonly seen in Chinese secondary schools as in Chinese culture people emphasize on best examination outcome, high academic achievements, and strong teacher responsibilities. A lot of these requirements would create a teacher–student conflict. While studying this topic matters to practical use of solving classroom conflict in China, relatively few research has examined thoroughly about the whole process in Chinese teacher-student conflicts and the long-term impact to each other's well-being. In this paper, I worked with Chinese secondary school teachers and researched deeply on this issue. Especially I tried to classify different conflict types in the school, how they resolute them and what emotional reactions have been returned and students' emotional status after the event. I provided evidence and suggestions to support conflict management in Chinese secondary schools.

© 2026 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.LD35874

2. Literature review

There are some previous research that also talked about how teacher-student relationships would impact the teachers' well-being and student's performances. For example, when the classroom generates a supportive atmosphere and minimum levels of teacher stress and burnout, it leads to better student engagement and learning outcomes [1, 2]. Some researchers studied why teacher-student conflict would happen and they noticed that the reason might relate to teachers' emotional well-being [1]. They find punitive teaching strategies may intensify students' negative performances [3] but benevolent communication can resolve the conflict in the meantime strengthen the positive relationships between teacher and the student [4]. While a lot of evidence are shown in the Western educational settings, some researchers surveyed Chinese secondary education and discovered more severe issue on conflicts and authority. The explanation lies in examination-oriented learning, strong academic competition and classroom culture [5, 6]. However, very few empirical studies have emerged to explore the characteristics of teachers' emotional responses to student's well-being in China. To address this gap, this paper looks into teacher–student conflict among Chinese secondary schools and examines the conflict type, resolution, responses and performances.

3. Method

3.1. Participant

A total of 246 Chinese teachers completed the online questionnaire (ages ranging from 22 to 48 years; M = 36.00, SD = 6.94). The sample comprised 168 females (68.29%) and 78 males (31.71%). Teachers represented 14 subject areas, with the largest proportion teaching Chinese. Approximately 51.22% of teachers held administrative positions (e.g., principal, grade coordinator, or department head).

3.2. Measure

The questionnaire consisted of 22 items assessing demographics, conflict characteristics, emotional responses, and life satisfaction. All items were presented in Chinese. Key measures were as follows:

Items 1–3 addressed personal information. Item 1 asked participants for consent to participate; Item 2 asked for gender; Item 3 asked for age. Age and gender were collected to analyze potential differences in perceptions across groups.

Item 4 asked about the participant's teaching subject to identify which subjects might be more prone to conflict. Items 5 and 6 asked about class size and course type, respectively, to describe teaching conditions. Item 7 asked about the participant's position at school to examine its relevance to teacher–student conflict. Items 8 and 9 concerned specific teacher–student conflicts: Item 8 asked about the type of conflict, and Item 9 asked about the specific circumstances of the conflict. These questions helped reconstruct the context and identify common conflict types in Chinese teacher–student relationships. Items 10–12 collected participants' reflections on the conflict to support objective analysis. Item 13 asked about the participant's emotional feelings after the conflict to explore the relationship between negative emotions and conflict types. Items 14 and 15 focused on conflict resolution: Item 14 asked whether the conflict had been resolved, and Item 15 asked about the strategies employed, aiming to summarize common coping methods and propose strategies suitable for the Chinese context.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.LD35874

Items 16–19 focused on the impact of conflict on life, aiming to determine whether conflict reduced participants' satisfaction. Items 20–22 involved satisfaction with working conditions, aiming to examine whether working conditions could predict teacher–student conflict.

3.3. Conflict type

Teachers selected one of two conflict types they had previously experienced with students: value conflict (defined as differences in values, moral standards, or lifestyles) or interpersonal conflict (defined as differences in personality or communication styles). This variable served as the independent variable for Research Question 1.

3.4. Conflict circumstance

Teachers indicated which of seven situational features characterized the conflict (multiple selections allowed): classroom discipline issues, unfinished homework, grade disputes, dress or behavior violations, communication misunderstandings, differing opinions, or other. Each circumstance was coded as 1 (selected) or 0 (not selected).

3.5. Emotion response

Teachers selected all emotions experienced during the conflict from a list of 14. Based on the measurement protocol, these emotions were categorized into the Negative Emotion Index (10 items: nervousness, worry, confusion, fatigue, disappointment, sadness, depression, anger, frustration, embarrassment) and the Positive Emotion Index (3 items: excitement, relaxation, happiness). Each index was calculated as the sum of selected items, yielding scores ranging from 0 to 10 for negative emotion and 0 to 3 for positive emotion. Internal consistency was $\alpha = 0.79$ for the Negative Emotion Index and $\alpha = 0.67$ for the Positive Emotion Index.

3.6. Conflict resolution

Teachers indicated whether the conflict had been finally resolved (e.g., student apology, written reflection, or acknowledgment of misunderstanding). Responses were coded as 1 (resolved) or 0 (unresolved). This variable served as the independent variable for Research Question 2.

3.7. Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction was assessed via two single-item ratings on a 5-point scale (1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied): short-term satisfaction (immediately after the conflict) and long-term satisfaction. Given the moderate correlation between the two items ($r = 0.68$), the average score was calculated as the satisfaction composite for primary analyses, while separate scores are also reported. Note that single-item satisfaction measures have limitations; future research should use validated multi-item scales such as the Satisfaction With Life Scale [7].

3.8. Procedure

Participants were recruited via WeChat and completed the survey online through the Wenjuanxing platform. Informed consent was obtained prior to accessing the survey items; only consenting

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.LD35874

participants were included in the analytic sample. Completion took approximately 10 to 15 minutes. All data were anonymous, and no identifying information was collected.

3.9. Analytic strategy

All analyses were conducted in R Version 4.4.1 [8] using the readxl, dplyr, ggplot2, psych, and effsize packages. Prior to analysis, the dataset was screened for missing values, and categorical variables were recoded into labeled factors. Negative Emotion Index and Positive Emotion Index composites were computed as described above.

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and response rates) were computed for all demographic, conflict, emotion, and satisfaction variables. Three preregistered research questions were tested.

Research Question 1 examined whether conflict type (value vs. interpersonal) predicted the magnitude of negative emotional response. A Welch's independent-samples t-test compared mean scores on the Negative Emotion Index between the two conflict types. Cohen's d was computed as the effect size.

Research Question 2 examined whether conflict resolution status predicted life satisfaction. Welch's independent-samples t-tests compared the satisfaction composite, as well as the short-term and long-term satisfaction items, between teachers who had resolved the conflict and those who had not. Cohen's d was reported for each comparison.

Research Question 3 examined whether emotional response during the conflict predicted subsequent life satisfaction. Linear regression models were fit with the Negative and Positive Emotion Indices as simultaneous predictors of the satisfaction composite. A secondary model included demographic and conflict-level covariates (gender, age, conflict type, and resolution status) to test whether emotion effects held above and beyond these variables.

Because Shapiro–Wilk tests indicated non-normal distributions for the key dependent variables (all ps < 0.001), Mann–Whitney U tests were conducted as nonparametric sensitivity checks for Research Questions 1 and 2. Results from parametric and nonparametric tests were consistent; parametric results are reported below, with nonparametric results noted where they diverged. Welch's t-tests were selected to accommodate unequal variances, which were indicated by Levene's test for some comparisons. Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed). Effect sizes are reported alongside all inferential tests to aid interpretation independent of sample size.

4. Result

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics for the full sample (N = 246) are presented in Table 1. Teachers ranged in age from 22 to 48 years (M = 36.25, SD = 6.94). Of the 246 respondents, 140 (56.91%) reported experiencing a value-based conflict, and 106 (43.09%) reported an interpersonal conflict. Roughly half of the conflicts were ultimately resolved (51.22%).

The Negative Emotion Index showed moderate endorsement (M = 4.42, SD = 2.88, range = 0–10), and the Positive Emotion Index was somewhat lower on its shorter scale (M = 1.86, SD = 1.13, range = 0–3). Both short-term life satisfaction (M = 2.50, SD = 1.37) and long-term life satisfaction (M = 2.54, SD = 1.35) clustered toward the lower end of the 5-point scale.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.LD35874

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for key study variables

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
Age	245	36.25	6.94	22	48
Negative Emotion Index	246	4.42	2.88	0	10
Positive Emotion Index	246	1.86	1.13	0	3
Short-term satisfaction	246	2.50	1.37	1	5
Long-term satisfaction	246	2.54	1.35	1	5
Satisfaction composite	246	2.52	1.25	1	5

Note: N = 246. One case is missing for age. Emotion indices are counts of endorsed items; satisfaction items are rated on 5-point scales (1 = *very dissatisfied*, 5 = *very satisfied*).

4.2. Research question 1: conflict type and negative emotion

A Welch's independent-samples t-test compared negative emotion between teachers reporting value conflicts and those reporting interpersonal conflicts. The two groups did not differ significantly on the Negative Emotion Index, $t(226.15) = -0.61$, $p = 0.544$, Cohen's $d = -0.08$. Teachers in the value conflict group and the interpersonal conflict group reported similar levels of negative emotion. The effect size was negligible, suggesting that the type of conflict experienced was not meaningfully associated with the intensity of negative emotional response.

4.3. Research question 2: conflict resolution and life satisfaction

Welch's t-tests examined whether life satisfaction differed between teachers whose conflicts were resolved and those whose conflicts remained unresolved. Contrary to the initial hypothesis, teachers whose conflicts were resolved reported lower satisfaction than those whose conflicts remained unresolved. This pattern was observed across all three satisfaction measures.

For short-term satisfaction, the difference approached but did not reach significance, $t(234) = 1.96$, $p = 0.052$, $d = 0.25$ (unresolved M = 2.68 vs. resolved M = 2.33). For long-term satisfaction, the difference was significant, $t(240) = 2.25$, $p = 0.025$, $d = 0.29$ (unresolved M = 2.74 vs. resolved M = 2.36). Using the two-item satisfaction composite, the effect remained significant, $t(234) = 2.30$, $p = 0.023$, $d = 0.27$. All three tests pointed in the same direction with small effect sizes, and nonparametric tests confirmed the same pattern.

4.4. Research question 3: emotional response and life satisfaction

Two linear regression models examined whether the Negative and Positive Emotion Indices predicted life satisfaction. Neither emotion index was a significant predictor in the short-term satisfaction model, $F(2, 243) = 0.70$, $p= 0.495$, $R^2 = 0.006$, or the long-term satisfaction model, $F(2, 243) = 1.06$, $p = 0.350$, $R^2 = 0.009$. Results were consistent using the composite satisfaction measure, $F(2, 243) = 0.95$, $p = 0.387$, $R^2 = 0.008$.

A secondary model added gender, age, conflict type, and resolution status as covariates. The full model was also nonsignificant overall, $F(6, 238) = 1.70$, $p = 0.122$, $R^2 = 0.041$. Within this model, only conflict resolution emerged as a significant individual predictor, $\beta = -0.40$, $SE = 0.18$, $t(238) = -2.26$, $p = 0.024$, mirroring the pattern observed in Research Question 2. Emotional response during

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.LD35874

the conflict did not predict subsequent life satisfaction, regardless of whether demographic and conflict-level covariates were included.

5. Discussion

The above section showed the results of our study focused on three different aspects including conflict type, conflict solution, and teacher's mental health status. Overall we see one of the test results supported our common intuition and the other two do not. There is no statistical significance to support the difference we see in teachers' negative emotion responses caused by different conflict types. Meanwhile, even if teachers had bad emotion experience in the conflict, it does not lead to life dissatisfaction. Whether the conflict can be solved does depend on the teachers' s satisfaction even if the relationship is reversed and went down as not expected. Interestingly, teachers who thought their conflict with the students had been resolved tend to be unhappier than those cases where the conflicts are not resolved. This finding needs further investigation and potentially add new insights to how we understand the current teacher-student relationship in Chinese secondary school.

5.1. Conflict resolution and life satisfaction

The most prominent finding—that resolved conflicts were associated with lower life satisfaction than unresolved ones—challenges the intuitive assumption that closure is inherently restorative. Several explanations are plausible.

First, resolution may serve as a proxy for conflict severity rather than an indicator of successful management. Conflicts that escalate to the point of requiring formal closure (e.g., a written apology, administrative involvement, parental contact) are likely those that were more serious to begin with. Teachers may not initiate or pursue formal resolution unless the conflict has become consequential enough to demand it. The same underlying severity that drove the need for resolution may also drive lower satisfaction, producing a spurious negative association between resolution and well-being.

A second interpretation involves the emotional aftermath of resolution. Reaching a formal endpoint does not guarantee emotional closure. Teachers who participated in apologies, written reflections, or parent conferences may continue to process the encounter long after it is officially resolved, whereas teachers whose conflicts faded informally may have moved on psychologically more quickly.

A third possibility is that the resolution itself was experienced as unjust by some teachers (for instance, when administrators imposed an outcome the teacher disagreed with), in which case the resolved-conflict group includes teachers whose dissatisfaction stems precisely from how the resolution was handled.

Teachers in China typically hold a dominant position in the classroom. Under high power distance, teachers may be especially sensitive to whether a conflict's outcome is fair, because they tend to regard themselves as the sole authority in the class.

5.2. Null findings for conflict type and emotional response

The absence of a difference in negative emotion between value and interpersonal conflicts (RQ1) suggests that the intensity of emotional response may be relatively invariant across conflict categories, even when the substantive content differs. Teachers in the present sample reported moderate levels of negative emotion regardless of whether the conflict centered on values or interpersonal dynamics. One possibility is that the distinction between value and interpersonal

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.LD35874

conflict is more theoretically useful than experientially distinct—teachers may not parse their conflicts along this dimension in real time. Another is that the broad emotional-intensity measure used here (a count of endorsed emotions) masks qualitatively distinct emotional textures that the two conflict types might evoke.

The null result for RQ3—that neither negative nor positive emotion during conflict predicted later life satisfaction—offers a complementary interpretation. It suggests that teachers in this sample may possess sufficient emotional resilience or professional habituation to compartmentalize in-conflict emotions from broader wellbeing assessments. Veteran teachers in particular may have developed routines for regulating affect after difficult classroom encounters. Combined with the reversed RQ2 finding, the pattern suggests that what differentiates teacher satisfaction is not the emotion experienced during conflict but the structural features of the conflict itself—particularly its severity, as proxied by whether formal resolution was required.

5.3. Limitations

I also would like to mention several limitations while interpreting our experiment results. First, we measure life satisfaction was measured using two single-item scales instead of multi-item that is often recognized in other work. As is mentioned in Diener et al [7], using single-item scale to measure life-satisfaction may risk the reliability of the results. Also the inter-item correlation is $r = 0.68$, which suggests the two items captured in the measurement is only moderated correlated. Future research is welcomed to revisit our results with multi-item satisfaction scales.

Second, this paper does not measure how severe the observed conflicts are. Currently we did not differentiate the observed conflicts by their severity but from resolutions of these conflicts we can tell indirectly how severe they are. Future studies could try to adopt common severity measures to rate these teacher-student conflicts—for example, duration of the conflict, measurable impact on the relationship, or whether school administrators were involved.

Third, the reports collected from the teachers may not reflect the actual emotion they had at the conflicts as this is backward looking. We have tried our best to validate the emotion reports, but teachers do have to recall their emotional responses according to how the conflicts were played out.

Fourth, most of the sample in this paper was female (approximately 68%), and the questionnaires were collected online rather than in person. In the meantime, the respondents were those taught or studied at the Chinese secondary schools at specific regions. Therefore our data may not fully represent the broader population of Chinese secondary school teachers.

5.4. Implications and future directions

Despite these limitations, the findings carry several implications.

For teacher training and school policy, the results suggest that the conventional emphasis on conflict resolution may need to be reconsidered. If formal resolution flags the most severe cases rather than producing the best outcomes, then institutional efforts may be better directed at early de-escalation and at supporting teachers through the emotional aftermath of serious conflicts, rather than at maximizing the number of conflicts that reach a formal endpoint. Schools could consider routine follow-up check-ins with teachers in the weeks following any formally resolved incident.

For future research, three priorities emerge. First, measure conflict severity independently of resolution status, and test whether severity mediates the resolution–satisfaction association observed here. Second, employ longitudinal designs that capture in-the-moment emotion during

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.LD35874

conflict and then track satisfaction over weeks or months, rather than relying on retrospective single-time-point reports. Third, examine cultural and institutional moderators specific to the Chinese educational context—such as the role of face (mianzi), the hierarchical structure of school administration, and the high-stakes nature of academic performance—that may shape both how conflicts unfold and how teachers experience their resolution.

6. Conclusion

Among 246 Chinese teachers, the type of conflict experienced and the emotions felt during it did not predict subsequent life satisfaction. What did predict satisfaction was whether the conflict had been formally resolved—and the direction of that effect ran counter to common assumptions, with resolved conflicts associated with lower satisfaction than unresolved ones.

The most parsimonious interpretation is that formal resolution serves as a marker of conflict severity rather than as a path to well-being. Future work should test this interpretation directly by measuring severity, tracking outcomes longitudinally, and attending to the cultural context in which Chinese teacher–student conflicts unfold.

References

[1] Spilt, J. L., Koomen, H. M. Y., & Thijs, J. T. (2011). Teacher wellbeing: The importance of teacher–student relationships. *Educational Psychology Review, 23*(4), 457–477. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-011-9170-y

[2] Wubbels, T., & Brekelmans, M. (2005). Two decades of research on teacher–student relationships in class. *International Journal of Educational Research, 43*(1–2), 6–24. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2006.03.003

[3] Mahvar, T., Ashghali Farahani, M., & Aryankhesal, A. (2018). Conflict management strategies in coping with students' disruptive behaviors in the classroom: Systematized review. *Journal of Advances in Medical Education & Professionalism, 6*(3), 102–114.

[4] Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1996). Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in elementary and secondary schools: A review of the research. *Review of Educational Research, 66*(4), 459–506. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543066004459

[5] Niu, W. (2007). Western influences on Chinese educational testing. *Comparative Education, 43*(1), 71–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050060601162412

[6] Li, J. (2005). Mind or virtue: Western and Chinese beliefs about learning. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 14*(4), 190–194. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0963-7214.2005.00362.x

[7] Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 49*(1), 71–75. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa4901_13

[8] R Core Team. (2024). *R: A language and environment for statistical computing* (Version 4.4.1) [Computer software]. R Foundation for Statistical Computing. https://www.R-project.org/.