



Conflict Management Strategies for Character Building in Outstanding Wetland-Based Schools: A Case Study of Elementary Schools in North Banjarmasin

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the conflict management strategies employed by teachers in shaping students' character at a high-performing elementary school located in a wetland area, specifically at a public elementary school in North Banjarmasin District. The research adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, and were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal three main strategies used by teachers in managing classroom conflicts: collaborative, compromising, and avoidance strategies. The collaborative strategy emerged as the dominant approach, as it fosters open communication and participatory problem-solving, which positively contributes to character development, particularly in the areas of responsibility, tolerance, and discipline. The compromising strategy is applied in addressing minor conflicts as a way to reach mutual agreements, while the avoidance strategy is used in certain situations to maintain classroom stability. These findings highlight that teachers' skills in selecting and implementing appropriate conflict management strategies play a crucial role in supporting the success of character education, especially within the unique geographical and social challenges of wetland-based schools.

Keywords: Character development; Conflict management; Primary education; Teacher strategies; Wetlands

Introduction

Character education is a crucial component of 21st-century education systems, which emphasize not only the cognitive aspects of students, but also their affective and psychomotor domains. Amid globalization, technological advancement, and increasing social complexity, character traits such as responsibility, tolerance, cooperation, and discipline serve as foundational elements in shaping a competitive and high-quality generation (Lickona, 1991; Sulaiman et al., 2020). In this context, schools play a strategic role as social spaces for the habituation of virtues through

structured learning and the fostering of positive social interactions (Rahmatullah et al., 2023).

However, in practice, various conflicts among students still frequently occur, both verbal and physical. These conflicts are often triggered by differences in background, lack of social skills, and poor emotional regulation (Fitriani et al., 2021). If not handled properly, such conflicts can damage the learning climate, reduce student motivation, and hinder the internalization of character values (Wahyuni, 2019). Robbins (2003) argues that conflict is inherently ambivalent: it can have negative consequences if left unmanaged, but also holds positive potential when properly addressed—for

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example, in fostering creativity, empathy, and problem-solving skills.

In the context of primary education in wetland areas such as North Banjarmasin District, these challenges become even more complex. The unique geographical conditions, high community mobility, and socio-economic diversity among students create a dynamic interaction landscape that is prone to social friction (Nugraha & Wulandari, 2020). High performing schools in such settings require conflict management approaches that are not only generally effective but also sensitive to local conditions. This aligns with Asrori et al. (2022) view that effective character education strategies must be rooted in the learners' sociocultural context.

The theoretical foundation of this research draws from the conflict management theory of Johnson et al. (2000), which states that conflict resolution strategies in schools should emphasize cooperative solutions and focus on long-term interpersonal relationships. These strategies include five main approaches: competition, compromise, accommodation, avoidance, and collaboration. Among these, the collaborative approach is considered the most supportive of character development, as it involves open communication, empathy, and shared responsibility (Deutsch, 2000).

In line with this, Lickona (1991) emphasizes the importance of teachers serving as role models in conflict resolution, since teachers are not only responsible for students' academic development but also for guiding character formation through daily interactions. Research by Siregar et al. (2021) shows that training teachers in conflict management strategies significantly improves classroom climate and strengthens students' character values.

The urgency of this study lies in the lack of empirical research focusing on context-based conflict management practices in high-performing schools located in wetland areas. Yet, the success of character education is highly influenced by a school's ability to adaptively respond to social dynamics. Furthermore, there is no specific conflict management model that has been developed based on the unique conditions of elementary schools in wetland areas, such as North Banjarmasin.

Based on this background and theoretical foundation, this study aims to identify the forms and sources of student conflicts in a high-performing elementary school located in the wetland area of North Banjarmasin District. Additionally, it seeks to analyze the conflict management strategies implemented by the school, evaluate the contribution of these strategies to students' character development, and formulate an effective and contextual conflict management model that

can be applied in other high-performing schools with similar characteristics.

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data collection techniques include field observation, in-depth interviews with teachers, principals, and students, as well as document analysis. Data were analyzed thematically to reveal patterns in conflict management strategies and their relevance to character development.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of conflict management strategies in shaping students' character at a high-performing school in a wetland area. This approach allows the researcher to explore the meaning, processes, and social context that naturally occur within the school environment (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2018). The research design is descriptive-exploratory, aiming to explain the phenomenon of conflict management and its relationship to character development based on empirical field data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research implementation flow is presented in Figure 1.

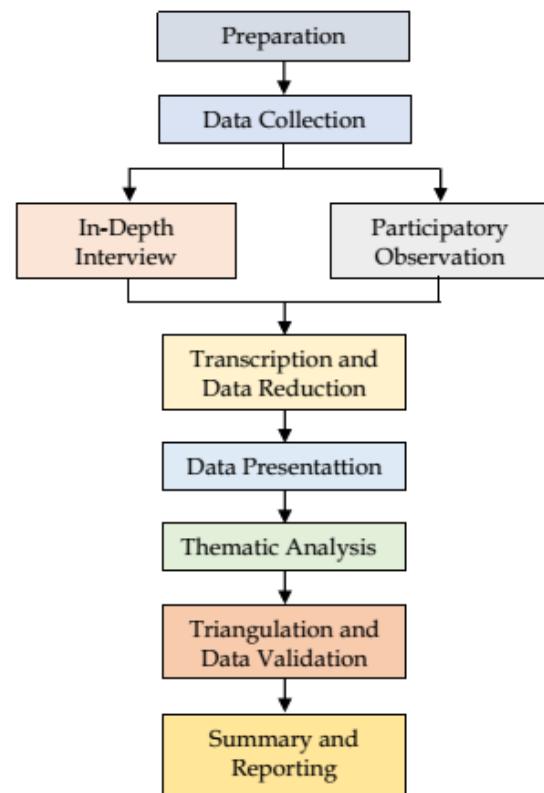


Figure 1. Stages of research implementation

The research site is a high-performing public elementary school located in North Banjarmasin District,

South Kalimantan. The location was selected purposively based on its unique geographical and socio-economic characteristics, which influence the dynamics of student-teacher interactions. The research subjects include the school principal, teachers, and students who are directly involved in conflict management and character development.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document

analysis, using interview guides, observation sheets, voice recorders, documentation cameras, and field notes as supporting instruments. Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking to confirm the credibility of the findings (Patton, 2015).

Table 1. Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

Type of Data	Data Collection Technique	Instruments & Tools	Data Sources
Conflict management strategies	In-depth interviews	Interview guidelines, voice recorder	Principal, teachers, students
Student interactions and conflicts	Participant observation	Observation sheets, field notes, camera	Classroom and school environment
School policies and programs	Document analysis	School regulations, character education program files	School archives

Result and Discussion

Types of Conflicts Occurring in Schools

Based on observations and interviews with 25 teachers at a high-performing public elementary school in North Banjarmasin District, the most dominant form of conflict occurring is student-to-student conflict. These conflicts vary, ranging from verbal bullying, minor physical clashes, group conflicts due to competition, to conflicts triggered by differences in social and cultural backgrounds. In addition, conflicts between students and teachers were also found, although their intensity is relatively lower and usually related to dissatisfaction with school rules or disagreements during the learning process.

These findings align with the theory of Johnson et al. (2000), which states that conflict in school environments is a natural phenomenon arising from intense social interactions within a limited space. When managed well, conflict can serve as a catalyst for developing social skills, problem-solving abilities, and improving the quality of interpersonal relationships (Deutsch, 1973). However, if not properly managed,

conflict can lead to negative impacts such as decreased academic achievement, psychological disturbances, and a decline in the quality of the school environment (Olweus, 1993).

This study involved 25 teachers from a high-performing elementary school in the wetland area of North Banjarmasin. Sixty percent of the respondents were female, aged between 30 and 55 years, with an average teaching experience of 12 years. This profile reflects a representation of experienced teachers who understand the local context and social dynamics within the school environment.

The predominance of female respondents is consistent with educational research findings showing that the elementary teaching profession in Indonesia is largely dominated by female teachers (Suryani et al., 2021). The substantial teaching experience indicates that the data obtained are valid and reflective of real practice, rather than just initial perceptions. The location in a wetland area adds a unique dimension due to its distinctive socio-cultural background, which also influences the forms and sources of conflict in the school.

Table 2. Types and Sources of Student-to-Student Conflicts According to the Perspectives of 25 Teachers

Type of Conflict	Source of Conflict	Frequency (out of 25 teachers)
Minor physical clashes	Competition for seats, light pushing	18
Verbal bullying	Social exclusion, teasing	22
Group conflicts	Academic and sports competition	15
Cultural/local conflict	Differences in family background: farmers vs. non-farmers	12

From the table, it can be concluded that verbal bullying is the most dominant form of conflict, reported by 22 out of 25 teachers. Verbal bullying, in the form of exclusion and teasing among students, indicates serious issues in students' social-emotional development, particularly in terms of empathy and interpersonal

communication skills. A study by Espelage et al. (2003) affirms that verbal bullying significantly impacts students' psychological well-being, reduces learning motivation, and increases the risk of school dropout. Therefore, interventions such as anti-bullying programs,

emotional intelligence training, and character strengthening are urgently needed.

Minor physical clashes, reported by 18 teachers, also warrant significant attention. Although often considered trivial, these clashes suggest difficulties in emotional regulation and impulse control among students (Rigby, 2002). Interventions such as self-regulation learning and conflict management training should be incorporated into the character education curriculum to help students express their emotions constructively.

Group conflicts related to academic and sports competition (reported by 15 teachers) reflect active and complex social dynamics. Healthy competition can drive motivation and personal development, but unmanaged competition can lead to conflict and social segregation (Smith & Smoll, 1997). Thus, the values of sportsmanship and collaboration need to be reinforced to address such conflicts.

Finally, cultural or local conflicts arising from differences in family backgrounds such as farmer versus non-farmer families (noted by 12 teachers) highlight the importance of addressing cultural diversity in the school context. This diversity can be a source of social and cultural richness if managed inclusively but may also lead to segregation and discrimination if not properly understood (Banks, 2015). Therefore, schools in wetland areas must develop learning approaches that respect and celebrate cultural diversity, and integrate local values into the learning process (Gay, 2010).

Implications of the Research Findings

Overall, student conflicts at the high-performing public elementary school in the wetland area of North Banjarmasin reflect the complex social dynamics within the school environment, influenced by interpersonal, group, and cultural factors. These findings highlight the need for a multidimensional approach to conflict resolution—one that not only focuses on behavior control but also on the development of social awareness, empathy, and appreciation for diversity.

Character-strengthening programs, emotional intelligence education, anti-bullying training, and inclusive learning grounded in local wisdom are essential strategies that must be integrated to create a conducive school climate. In addition, enhancing teachers' capacity in classroom management and conflict resolution is crucial to ensure that interventions are implemented effectively (Thapa et al., 2013).

Conflict Management Strategies Implemented in the School

Based on reports from 25 teachers at a high-performing public elementary school in North Banjarmasin District, several conflict management

strategies are consistently implemented by the school to handle various forms of student conflict, namely:

1) Formal mediation and teacher counselling

A total of 23 teachers reported the use of formal mediation and counselling as the initial step in handling both minor and serious conflicts. This mediation serves as a platform for direct dialogue between disputing parties, with the teacher acting as a neutral facilitator. This aligns with the mediation approach to conflict resolution, which emphasizes open communication and mutual understanding (Wall & Callister, 1995). Formal mediation has proven effective in de-escalating conflict and encouraging peaceful resolution.

2) Restorative practice

Twenty teachers stated that they apply restorative practices, in which students involved in conflict are invited to reflect on their actions and make open apologies. This approach focuses on restoring relationships and fostering students' social responsibility, rather than simply imposing punishment. Restorative justice theory in educational contexts asserts that such methods enhance moral accountability and support sustainable conflict resolution (Morrison, 2007).

3) Integrated character education

All 25 teachers reported that character education incorporating values such as empathy, tolerance, and conflict resolution is integrated into the civics (PPKn) curriculum and character-building activities. This integrated approach enables the systematic and continuous development of social values, in line with the principles of character education aimed at shaping positively-minded citizens (Lickona, 1991).

4) Eco-social activities (inter-class wetland clean-up program)

Seventeen teachers implemented cooperative activities such as a shared inter-class wetland environment clean-up program. This not only fosters ecological awareness but also helps reduce the potential for group conflict. Such cooperative activities support social learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of positive interaction in building a sense of community and social responsibility (Vygotsky, 1978; Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

The analysis of the table shows that the implemented strategies have had a significant positive impact on students' character development, particularly in the following aspects:

1) Empathy and tolerance

A total of 21 teachers noted a marked improvement in students' ability to share and accept differences. This

improvement fosters a more inclusive and harmonious social climate within the school, which is crucial in the socially and culturally diverse context of wetland areas (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). The development of empathy

also supports social learning theory, which asserts that empathy contributes to reduced aggression and promotes prosocial behavior (Bandura, 1986).

Table 3. Contribution of Conflict Management Strategies to Student Character Development

Character Aspect	Observed Changes	Teacher Indicators
Empathy and tolerance	Students are more willing to share and accept their peers	21 teachers observed significant improvement
Conflict resolution skills	Students are accustomed to resolving problems through dialogue	19 teachers reported improved conflict resolution patterns
Sense of social responsibility	Evident in their concern for the wetland environment	23 teachers reported noticeable improvement

2) *Conflict resolution skills*

Nineteen teachers reported that students are now more likely to use dialogue as a means of resolving conflict, indicating a shift from reactive to more responsive and reflective behavior. This aligns with the findings of Johnson et al. (1995), who state that conflict resolution education can enhance students' ability to manage differences constructively.

3) *Sense of social responsibility*

This aspect received the highest recognition, with 23 teachers reporting an increased awareness among students regarding the wetland environment. Integrating environmental values into character education enhances students' emotional connection to their local ecosystem, which aligns with the concept of education for sustainable development (Tilbury, 1995). This reflects the success of contextualized learning, making character values more relevant and accessible to students.

Analysis of the School Conflict Management Model

The model in Figure 2 represents a systematic process of conflict management within the school environment that is both practical and value-based. Each stage reflects a structured strategic approach to fostering healthy social relationships and strengthening student character education in a relevant context.

1) *Conflict identification – early detection stage*

This initial stage is crucial because not all conflicts are overtly visible. Teachers' sensitivity to recognizing signs of conflict—such as changes in student behavior, nonverbal expressions, or strained interactions—is the first step to preventing escalation. Emphasizing this stage aligns with the concept of "conflict surveillance" (Misra & Mahapatra, 2020), which involves active monitoring of potential conflicts within classrooms and school settings.

2) *Early intervention: Mediation & counselling – restorative and humanistic approach*

Formal mediation and counseling conducted by teachers or school counselors act as preventive and responsive measures. In this study, 23 teachers reported the effectiveness of this approach in managing conflicts without resorting to punitive measures. This corresponds with Galtung's theory (1996), which states that direct mediation can prevent conflicts from escalating by promoting dialogue and mutual agreement. Furthermore, counseling provides a safe space for students to reflect on their actions, reinforcing emotional and psychological aspects of character development.

3) *Character education + restorative approach – transformative, not just corrective*

This stage reflects efforts to integrate character values such as empathy, tolerance, and social responsibility into the learning process, especially through civics education (PPKn). Teachers consciously embed conflict resolution and community life values, making character education an inherent part of the curriculum. Lickona (1991) emphasizes that moral values should not only be taught but also internalized through real experiences. The restorative approach focuses on relationship repair rather than punishment, resulting in more sustainable behavioral change (Payne, 2010).

4) *Cooperative activities (eco-social) – socio-ecological contextualization*

Programs such as environmental cleanliness and social activities like caring for wetlands not only build cooperation among students but also enhance empathy toward their social and ecological environment. This aligns with service learning approaches that combine community engagement with value-based education (Santrock, 2018). These activities also provide opportunities to ease group conflicts through real

cooperative experiences, where students from diverse backgrounds work together on meaningful tasks.

5) *Evaluation and follow-up – the key to sustainability*

This stage underscores that conflict management is not a one-time process. Evaluation is conducted to assess the effectiveness of implemented strategies and to follow up on changes in student behavior. This is critical to ensuring conflicts do not recur and that the social learning achieved is maintained. Johnson et al. (2018) stress the importance of follow-up monitoring as part of a comprehensive restorative process with long-term impact.

Effectiveness of Strategies and Their Impact on Character

The conflict management strategies implemented have shown effectiveness in developing three key aspects of student character:

1) *Empathy and tolerance*

The increase in prosocial behaviors such as helping one another, accepting differences, and sharing indicates that this approach successfully nurtures social sensitivity. This aligns with the findings of Eisenberg et al. (1987), who identified empathy as a strong predictor of cooperative behavior.

2) *Conflict resolution skills*

Teachers observed that students prefer dialogue over confrontation when resolving problems. This demonstrates the success of conflict resolution education in shaping communication and reflective abilities (Johnson & Johnson, 1995).

3) *Social responsibility*

Active student participation in maintaining the wetland environment shows moral engagement and concern for the community. This concept is reinforced by Tilbury (1995) within the context of education for sustainable development, emphasizing the importance of developing environmental awareness from an early age.

Unique Value: Wetland Context as the Basis for Approach and Implementation Challenges

The discovery of cultural conflicts arising from differences in student backgrounds (farmer vs. non-farmer families) reflects the distinct socio-ecological reality of the wetland area. Differences between students accustomed to outdoor activities and those more engaged in indoor learning patterns trigger certain forms of social exclusion. Therefore, a contextual approach that integrates local values and students' real experiences is the right and adaptive choice for local needs.

Although this strategy proves effective in managing conflicts in the school environment, its implementation still faces several challenges. Among them are the limited training teachers have in conflict management and restorative approaches, meaning not all teachers are able to handle conflicts constructively. Additionally, a substantial administrative workload acts as a barrier, reducing the time teachers can dedicate to social guidance for students. Another challenge is the diversity of students' family backgrounds, which influences communication patterns and how they respond to conflicts, requiring a more sensitive and adaptive approach from the school.

Therefore, ongoing training for teachers and close collaboration between schools, parents, and the community are essential to maintaining and consistently applying the success of this model.

Conclusion

The school conflict management model developed in this study demonstrates high effectiveness in resolving conflicts educationally while also shaping student character. This approach not only addresses conflicts technically but also educates students morally, socially, and emotionally. By integrating character values, restorative principles, and the local wetland context, the model is relevant for application in schools with similar social complexities. Besides serving as a conflict resolution tool, this model can function as a context-based character education framework that is worthy of replication and further research.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this research.

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