

# Enhancing Student Well-being: Child-Friendly School Management in Conflict-Affected Areas

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## Abstract:

A safe, comfortable and conducive learning environment is the hope of all parties in a conflict-prone environment. This study aims to analyze how child-friendly school management is implemented in conflict-prone schools in Malang Regency. This study uses a qualitative case study approach in which researchers conduct interviews with several informants, participant observation and documentation. Data analysis techniques in this study include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The study results indicate that inclusive policies, psychosocial support through counselling and extracurricular activities, and teacher training in inclusive teaching methods effectively create a safe and supportive learning environment for students. In addition, empowering local communities and cultivating positive behaviour is essential in supporting student welfare. This study provides implications for the importance of a holistic approach to school management in improving the quality of education and the welfare of children in conflict-prone areas and providing practical recommendations for other schools facing similar situations.

**Keywords:** *School Management, Conflict Prosecute, Inclusive, Psychosocial, Child-Friendly Education*

## Abstrak:

Lingkungan belajar yang aman, nyaman dan kondusif, merupakan harapan semua pihak ketika berada lingkungan rawan konflik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tentang bagaimana manajemen sekolah ramah anak dilaksanakan di sekolah-sekolah yang rawan konflik di Kabupaten Malang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif jenis studi kasus di mana peneliti melakukan wawancara terhadap beberapa informan, observasi partisipatif dan dokumentasi. Teknik analisis data dalam penelitian ini meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data dan penarikan Kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan inklusif, dukungan psikososial melalui kegiatan konseling dan ekstrakurikuler, serta pelatihan guru dalam metode pengajaran inklusif sangat efektif dalam menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang aman dan suportif bagi siswa. Selain itu, pemberdayaan masyarakat lokal dan membiasakan perilaku positif juga berperan penting dalam mendukung kesejahteraan mahasiswa. Penelitian ini memberikan implikasi tentang pentingnya pendekatan holistik terhadap manajemen sekolah dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan dan kesejahteraan anak-anak di daerah rawan konflik, serta memberikan rekomendasi praktis untuk sekolah lain yang menghadapi situasi serupa.

**Kata Kunci:** *Manajemen Sekolah, Rawan Konflik, Inklusif, Psikososial, Pendidikan Ramah Anak*

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## INTRODUCTION

Creating a safe, comfortable and inclusive learning environment for students is undoubtedly a challenge for managers of educational institutions in conflict-prone areas (Maglio & Pherali, 2020; Singh et al., 2021). The issue of child-friendly school management in conflict-prone areas is exciting to study so that early childhood education institutions are free from discrimination, intimidation and violence, both physical and verbal (Benevene et al., 2020; Calp, 2020; Arakelyan & Ager, 2021). UNICEF data (2020) shows that many children do not have the fundamental right to live comfortably and safely in conflict areas. They often get unpleasant treatment, violence and intimidation, which disrupts the teaching and learning process in the classroom, which has an impact on their psyche and the failure to achieve learning goals (Walker & Zuberi, 2020; González et al., 2021; Klencakova et al., 2023). Through this child-friendly school management, it is hoped that children will learn comfortably, be protected, be appreciated, and develop their knowledge and personality optimally.

Through child-friendly school management, especially in conflict areas, it can be ensured that the learning environment will be safe, comfortable and more conducive. Theoretically, this concept is part of the theory of inclusive education, which states that a child-friendly, comfortable and anti-discriminatory learning environment can optimize the potential possessed by children (Haydon, 2020; Hasanah & Hefniy, 2023; Norman & Paramansyah, 2024). This is reinforced by the opinion that in a systemic context, children can develop optimally by involving themselves with their surroundings. Schools in this context become a significant microsystem in supporting children's growth and development (Iruka et al., 2020; Campos-Gil et al., 2020; El et al., 2022).

The main problem often faced by schools in conflict-prone areas, especially early childhood education institutions, is how to create child-friendly, comfortable and inclusive schools for all to achieve learning targets optimally. They have to work extra hard to minimize violence, intimidation and trauma experienced by students. The study results show that inclusive school policies that include anti-discrimination policies, especially in conflict areas, can improve students' psychosocial well-being (Chan et al., 2022). Policies supporting inclusive education can make students more comfortable, safe, and calm when learning in class to optimize their abilities. Furthermore, Boca et al. (2020) said that extracurricular activities carried out by schools through various activities can improve children's competence and skills, thereby reducing children's stress levels in conflict-prone areas. Larios and Zetlin (2023) said that education and training carried out by schools and the government for teachers in developing inclusive learning is beneficial in creating a conducive and meaningful learning climate and environment.

Although many research results examine the importance of inclusive learning applied in schools, psychosocial support and education and training for teachers, there are still very few researchers who examine how these elements synergize and can produce something new when applied in managerial activities in Early Childhood Education Institutions, especially in conflict-prone areas. This research will fill the gap in several existing studies by implementing a holistic approach to inclusive policies, psychological support, teacher empowerment and

the community.

The novelty of this research lies in the approach used to integrate child-friendly school management and conflict-prone areas, considering that similar research is still rarely found related to the integration of the two concepts. Integrating the two concepts includes elements that support each other, such as creating a conducive and inclusive learning environment, psychological approaches, and support and involvement of the surrounding community. In addition, this research was conducted in a conflict-prone area, providing a new concept and background for developing adaptive educational management science.

This paper analyses how Early Childhood Education Institutions implement child-friendly school management in Conflict-prone areas in Malang Regency. This research is fundamental, considering that adaptive policies and strategies are needed to create a safe, comfortable, and conducive learning environment to optimize children's learning potential. This research is expected to produce effective strategies that conflict-prone schools can apply to improve the quality of education and the welfare of all school residents. The integrative approach used in this research is expected to provide practical input and recommendations for schools in conflict-prone areas to develop inclusive policies and practices that can optimize child development and support the welfare of all school residents. In addition, the results of this research can provide new insights into how child-friendly school management can contribute to creating peace and environmental stability in conflict-prone areas.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The study of the dynamics that occur in the field is certainly more appropriate if using qualitative research methods (Stahl & King, 2020). This concept is in accordance with this study which uses qualitative research methods with a multi-site approach by examining several schools in the Bantur Malang sub-district. The unique strategy implemented in several schools as data findings is expected to provide scientific insights and practical recommendations that may be adopted by other schools. Practical management practices from child-friendly schools in PAUD Institutions throughout the Bantur, Malang, East Java, Indonesia which are the subjects of the study provide an overview of school experiences from various perspectives.

**Table 1. Paud Institution in Bantur District**

No	Name of institution unit	Address	Status
1	RA/BA/TA Al-Azhar	Jl. Raya Balewarti	Private School
2	Pembina Bantur State Kindergarten	Jl. Raya Bantur RT.01 RW.01	Public School
3	KB Tunas Bangsa	RT. 50 RW. 11 Jubel Hamlet	Private School
4	RA/BA/TA Raudlatul Ulum	JL. Imam Banjal No. 6 Krajan	Private School

Schools with conflict-proneness with good school management as subjects were selected with data collected based on the study approach. Data collected by Table 1, through approximately twenty participants through interviews with principals, teachers, and parents of students and data collected through

observation and documentation of school management and child-friendly policies as the research method approach (Rutakumwa et al., 2020). Activities in schools that are implemented become data material obtained through observation studies. While school policy and program documents and school bulletins that are relevant to the paper. The data results are then collected and compiled and identified to be continued to the analysis stage.

The data analysis uses the Miles and Huberman approach which includes data reduction and data presentation and ends with verification or drawing conclusions. Reduction focuses on collecting data findings on child-friendly school management practices with the strategies used. The data is presented as display data to be identified according to the existing findings to be used as a theme for findings in the sub-chapter paper study. The analysis process ends with drawing conclusions or data verification that allows researchers to understand more deeply the effectiveness of the inclusive approach in creating a safe and supportive learning environment for all students even in an environment that is vulnerable to conflict. The concept of analysis is considered capable of providing interpretation results for the findings of the paper study so as to contribute to other and future research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study aims to examine how child-friendly school management is implemented in conflict-prone schools. The main focus of this research is to understand the implementation of management policies and strategies that support the creation of an inclusive, psychosocial, and participatory learning environment. This research was conducted in PAUD institutions in Bantur District, Malang, with a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews with teachers, parents, and school managers. The findings of the study cover five main aspects, namely inclusive policy development, psychosocial approaches, teacher capacity improvement, community empowerment, and the habit of positive behavior.



**Figure 1. Five Key Aspects of Child-Friendly Schools**

### Inclusive Policy Development

Anti-discrimination policies and the implementation of inclusive curricula are some of the paper's findings as a form of school policy. Every school tries to create an inclusive school without distinguishing social status, ability, reason, and economy as a form of support and accepting students without discrimination. The

results of an interview with one of the teachers stated that his school had implemented an anti-discrimination policy. They conveyed to students and teachers to accept each other's status. He stated, "anti-discrimination policies have been implemented in our school, this is felt to be one of the efforts to ensure that every child feels accepted and appreciated, we as school administrators strive to create an inclusive school environment, because this is important for the psychosocial development of children, all students receive fair treatment regardless of status and special needs, school policies also train teachers and staff to respect diversity and overcome discrimination, through this, the school hopes to create a comfortable and supportive learning atmosphere for students (I\_GR\_2024)."

Another finding based on the results of teacher interviews confirmed that children with special needs get different facilities from other students by adjusting their needs. He said, "Schools adjust the learning process to those with special needs to suit the needs of children in general, the individual needs of children in the learning process and treatment are adjusted to each child, school administrators ensure that all learning materials can be accessed and understood by students, to be more inclusive schools advise teachers to adapt current and more sophisticated teaching methods, the concept is expected to provide adequate and more inclusive learning support for all children (I\_Gr\_2024)."

Learning that suits children's needs is a good step in implementing an inclusive curriculum. Implementing this inclusive curriculum is essential in ensuring that all children receive an education that suits their needs. The principal of one agency stated, "As an effort to address and identify discrimination against children, a policy is needed that includes training for teachers to assess the signs. Teachers in schools are specially trained to recognize various forms of discrimination that may occur both directly and indirectly. The concept is expected to provide teachers with skills in assessing and handling discriminatory situations effectively" (I\_KS\_2024).

Interpretation of the findings can be concluded that schools in the area have implemented anti-discrimination policies in education, students with special needs and minority status groups are ensured to receive treatment according to their needs. Support based on student needs becomes the school's bargaining power in building an inclusive school environment, so that it can support children's development and growth. The form of guarantee from the curriculum modification concept is that all students can access learning very easily. Teaching techniques in an inclusive curriculum can be achieved with improved teacher competency through training and development. Various types of discrimination in the overview can be handled through effective teacher intervention strategies and ensuring that a safe and comfortable environment can be built with curriculum modifications implemented through school personnel. All school communities become pioneers for the implementation of inclusive schools.

The results of the study show that inclusive policies in schools throughout Bantur sub-district have implemented anti-discrimination policies and inclusive curriculum and have succeeded in creating a fair and supportive environment for

all students, especially students with special needs and minority status groups. The guarantee of ensuring that children can receive learning comfortably and safely and can be accepted without discrimination is the result of increasing teacher capacity. The study by Morales-Rodríguez et al. (2020) also strengthens the findings which state that inclusive policies can improve students' psychosocial well-being, reduce anxiety and stress, and can improve academic grades which are also through teacher capacity training. The implementation of a curriculum that is tailored to individual needs also supports children's psychosocial development. Thus, this approach can create a child-friendly learning environment in conflict-prone schools as an effective method.

### **Psychosocial Approach**

Conflict-prone school environments must be managed well so that they can become child-friendly schools through a psychosocial approach. By providing mental reinforcement and social support as a form of approach because facing very strong mental and psychological challenges in students is the main focus of the discussion of the findings. Various schools strive to create activities and programs that support student welfare in the form of a comfortable school environment that can support child growth and development. This chapter will discuss student welfare and development through a psychosocial approach as an implication of the program. Considering that a conducive and comfortable learning environment affects student growth through steps taken as a form of program support.

Schools with conflict-prone environments are not good for children's growth and development, this must of course be overcome with child-friendly school management. The psychological challenges faced are based on difficult social conditions, of course, must be resolved with emotional support and mental strengthening for students, which is the main focus of this sub-chapter. Various schools strive to create programs and activities that can create a comfortable and safe school environment to support children's growth and development. The discussion in this sub-chapter examines student development based on the implications of school activities based on a psychosocial approach. Psychosocial support is implemented based on the school's steps in creating a comfortable learning environment for all students.

The results of interviews with the school committee stated that student counseling can overcome trauma and stress in students. He stated, "schools hold routine counseling for students as a form of effort to overcome stress and trauma, these activities are carried out by a professional by providing space for counseling activities, on the other hand there are also unique creative activities that can be an escape for students when stressed as a form of school support to become a child-friendly school (I\_SC\_2024)".

The argument is also supported by the findings of an interview with another teacher at a different school who stated that the school also held fun learning activities in an effort to educate students. He said, "efforts to increase self-confidence and improve students' social skills involve children in group activities, these activities teach students to communicate, take initiative in decisions, work

together in teams, and a sense of leadership can foster a supportive environment where they feel accepted and appreciated so that children's growth and development can be optimal (I\_T\_2024)". This argument illustrates that children's growth and development and student welfare can be achieved through a comprehensive approach.

Efforts to overcome stress and trauma for students are handled through routine counseling efforts by trained counselors as a form of support for students' mental health. Schools with a positive environment can provide students with emotional power to be creative in creative activities. Children's involvement in various activities can be one effort to teach them important values in life such as teamwork, leadership attitudes and being able to take initiative in various things. The guarantee of students to be accepted and appreciated in schools is a strategy to improve student development and provide a child-friendly school environment. The findings interpret that the psychosocial approach in managing schools has an important role for children. The data presented above shows that a psychosocial approach is very important in the management of child-friendly schools in conflict-prone schools.

Counseling support and extracurricular activities are effective in creating an environment that supports students' psychosocial well-being. School counselors provide regular counseling sessions that help children cope with trauma or stress, creating a safe and comfortable environment. The concept that shows that counseling can provide comfort for students and can improve students' mental health is in line with a study by Kivlighan et al. (2021), in their study showed that psychosocial support can reduce students' stress and trauma. Out of school activities such as arts and sports help students express themselves, develop social skills, and boost self-confidence. Children's social development through out-of-school activities designed to support efforts to increase self-confidence and communication skills. The well-being and development of students in conflict-prone schools can be addressed with psychosocial support in school management in the form of a positive and inclusive environment and is important for the well-being and development of students.

The emotional support provided by schools, the environment and teachers to children can minimize stress and anxiety in early childhood in conflict-prone areas. If this activity is carried out correctly, students will be able to feel the warmth of attention from all parties towards their mental development, feel safe and comfortable with the support of all parties, and they can even develop aspects of healthy coping mechanisms.

### **Improving Teachers' Abilities**

The results of the study show that increasing the capacity of teachers in Malang Regency is not only done through strengthening competencies per se but also related to psychological aspects. Teachers are taught about how they understand students' learning styles, their readiness to learn, problems faced by children and other aspects related to students' psyche. This activity is expected to change teachers' mindsets and make them more professional in teaching,

especially in early childhood education institutions in conflict-prone areas. One of the teachers conveyed, "The education and training activities that I participated in helped me develop my competence and skills in teaching. In addition, I also got many strategies in overcoming student learning problems, especially for those who experience problems in their learning" (I\_T\_2024)." One of the principals explained that "we carry out education and training activities, workshops related to learning models and strategies for managing classes properly and correctly. This activity is intended to provide insight to teachers in improving the quality of their learning so that children do not get bored in class. Through this activity, teacher competence and skills increase and provide the best in their learning activities (I\_SP\_2024)."

The informant's statement shows that efforts to transform education at early childhood education institutions in the Bantur sub-district, Malang Regency, through strengthening teacher competence, have been carried out in a planned and systematic manner so as to create a conducive and inclusive learning environment. Accompanying activities for children through special counselling are also carried out in order to overcome and reduce trauma and stress experienced by children. In addition, to express themselves and develop children's interests and talents, schools also develop various extracurricular activities according to their needs.

Of course, this can be realized with the support and strong cooperation between schools, teachers, and the community. This active support provides convenience for schools in realizing the direction and goals of developing their institutions in conflict-prone areas, considering that the community is a school partner who must be fostered and cared for properly in order to produce students who are by what is expected.

Theoretically, the research findings show the importance of education and training for teachers in developing their professional aspects towards forming child-friendly schools and inclusive education for all. Training activities as a means of revealing teacher capacity will help various needs of teachers in serving various student needs. Artacho et al. (2020) said that education and training to improve teacher capacity can improve teacher competence and skills in teaching and educating children. In addition to increasing insight, skills and abilities that teachers have never had before, through this activity, teachers can also explore themselves further to develop the outside world. New abilities will continue to develop when they always follow the training that is carried out.

### **Community Empowerment**

Community involvement is a strategic step taken by the institution's leadership to realize child-friendly schools in conflict-prone areas to realize child-friendly schools in conflict-prone areas. Community involvement refers to the optimization of active community involvement in school activities in order to create a comfortable and safe environment in realizing child growth and development in practice. This involvement is not just participation per se, but also the provision and delegation of proportional authority to them to participate in



planning, implementing and continuously evaluating child-friendly school programs in conflict-prone areas.

One of the student's parents said in his statement, "The school often invites me to several activities, such as attending meetings at school, attending national and Islamic holiday commemorations, and learning activities when needed. This shows that the school respects us as guardians and residents around the school" (I\_F\_2024).

One of the principals' statements reinforces the data: "The community here is very supportive of the school program. They continue to monitor the condition of the school and help with various school needs. For example, when there is a traffic jam due to many guardians taking their children to school, they help regulate traffic. In addition, they also maintain the safety and comfort of children in the school environment (I\_SP\_2024)."

The data shows that parents' and the community's active involvement in various school activities is vital, especially in creating child-friendly schools in conflict-prone areas. Their involvement is essential for the school's success in building a child-friendly school environment. Such environmental conditions are the school's responsibility and the joint responsibility of all components of the community around the school.

From the above, it can be concluded that parents and the community, as school residents, must play an active role in various activities carried out by the school, especially in creating a safe, comfortable, and non-discriminatory school environment. Second, the promoted child-friendly school is not just a symbol or label but an environment supporting the growth and development of children's potential. Third, in a child-friendly school, all lines and components must move together to achieve the common goal.

### **Positive Behavior Habituation**

Positive behavioural habits instilled by the management of Early Childhood Education Institutions in Bantur show that the school wants to create a comfortable, safe, calm, non-discriminatory environment that supports student potential development. This habituation activity is not only about teaching school residents about existing values but more than that; this activity has become part of a positive school culture that supports the creation of child-friendly schools. One of the PAUD. teachers in the Bantur sub-district said, "Habituation activities always to behave well, politely and courteously have been taught to children and have even become a culture in this school. We usually do this when greeting children when they arrive, when they are about to enter school, when studying in class, and so on. In essence, this program is a medium to create students who can respect and honour others" (I\_Gr\_2024)."

This statement also matches the results of researchers' observations in the field, which show that teachers are very friendly to their students and vice versa. Students really respect and appreciate their teachers. Not only that, but all students respect and love each other, which is proven by helping each other, working together, and respecting each other (O\_2024).

The data shows that Bantur District, Malang Regency's early childhood education institutions have actively carried out positive behavioural activities. Through this activity, religious values such as mutual respect, mutual appreciation, and cooperation are deeply instilled in students and practised totally in schools. Teachers become *uswatun Hashanah* or role models in creating this positive environment, especially in child-friendly schools in conflict-prone areas. Positive habits and adult examples will likely contribute positively (Shunhaji, 2021). The process of emulating and getting used to positive behaviour aligns with the stages of character formation: introduction, understanding, application, repetition or habituation, acculturation, and internalization. A learning strategy that emphasizes the aspects of habituation and exemplary behaviour in order to develop children's character. According to Kivlighan et al. (2021), this habituation activity can create a comfortable and conducive learning environment and increase student involvement.

**Table 2. Child-Friendly School Management Aspects**

<b>Management Aspects</b>	<b>Implementation</b>	<b>Result</b>
Inclusive Policy	Anti-discrimination policy, inclusive curriculum	An all-child school environment
Psychosocial Approach	Counselling support, extracurricular activities	Children's psychosocial well-being increases
Improving Teachers' Abilities	Inclusive methods training, classroom management	Teachers' competence in managing the classroom has increased
Community Empowerment	Community engagement, additional learning programs	Support for children's learning from the community
Positive Behavior Habituation	Teaching positive values, rewarding good behavior	Positive and inclusive school culture

Table 2 shows that managing child-friendly schools in Malang Regency can create a conducive, inclusive and supportive learning climate and environment for achieving school programs and targets. This is because the inclusive education policy, psychosocial approach, positive behavioural learning, community involvement, and empowerment are planned, systematic, and continuous in Malang Regency, especially in early childhood education institutions. Several elements mentioned above are implemented according to plan, programmed, and evaluated gradually.

In addition, the results of this study provide an overview of the importance of integrating local wisdom that has developed in the area, considering that the community at the research location is a "guyub" community, where the community is compact, helping each other. By understanding this local wisdom, all parties, directly and indirectly, will be involved in creating child-friendly schools to create a conducive, quality and competitive environment.

The contribution of the research provided in this research is related to the policy of inclusive education that is adaptive to the needs of the community and the dynamics of existing developments to stimulate the community to participate in building and creating children's schools. This study also provides objective evidence that a collaborative and integrative approach can create a learning

environment conducive to students' academic development. The results of this study are not only focused on strengthening existing findings per se. However, they are expected to be a reference for managers of educational institutions, policymakers, and teachers to design their institutions through precise and adaptive strategies to produce quality and competitive education through the involvement of all school residents, both directly and indirectly.

## CONCLUSION

Many efforts in creating child-friendly schools are based on school management as an effort to create conducive and comfortable schools for students. The implementation of anti-discrimination activities and counseling efforts for children are included in school management. Another concept in school management is improving the quality of teachers who are at the forefront in presenting a child-friendly and inclusive school environment. This paper has findings presented with the argument that an approach with school management can provide support for child growth. This study provides important insights that a holistic management approach, including inclusive policy development, psychosocial approaches, teacher capacity building, community empowerment, and positive behavioral habits, can create a supportive and inclusive environment for all students. An important lesson from this study is the importance of collaboration between teachers, parents, and communities in creating a child-friendly school environment.

The scientific contribution that is the strength of this paper is the child-friendly school management strategy in supporting student growth and development in conflict-prone school areas. The form of inclusive-based school policies and management in developing sustainable strategies in conflict-prone schools can be strengthened by this paper. Although the results of this study can provide contributions that can be implemented in schools in the Bantur Malang sub-district area, this paper has limitations if implemented in a different environment. On the other hand, this study method is limited to only the results of interviews as research findings that do not provide explanations of various aspects of the findings. So there needs to be further study of the development and modification of research that can accommodate the limitations of the study and finally the education policies implemented are more focused on improving the quality of education and student welfare in conflict areas.

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