Conflict Management Strategies for Early Childhood Educators: An Empirical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Conflict management is an important skill that needs to be introduced from an early age to support children's social-emotional development. Early childhood is in a critical stage of character formation and interpersonal skills, so mastering conflict management can help them understand emotions, empathize and solve problems constructively. The family environment and formal education play a central role in forming this ability through support, guidance, and strengthening values such as tolerance, cooperation, and communication. This research uses a literature study method to explore the importance of introducing conflict management for young children, as well as effective methods for teaching it. The findings show that methods such as role-play, simple conflict-based stories, and visual media are effective approaches in helping children understand and practice conflict management. This strategy not only supports children's social skills but also forms emotional control and strong moral values. The implications of this research include theoretical contributions in the form of a scientific basis regarding the importance of introducing conflict management, as well as practical benefits in the form of guidance for educators and parents in accompanying children. The research conclusion confirms that the introduction of conflict management from an early age contributes significantly to the formation of children's character who is empathetic, independent, and able to face interpersonal challenges in the future. Therefore, collaboration between families, educators and the child's social environment is the key to success in instilling these skills.

Keywords: *Conflict; Management; childhood*

INTRODUCTION

Conflict management is an important skill that every individual, including young children, must have (Munger, 1976). Conflict often arises naturally in everyday life, especially when children begin to interact with peers, family and other social environments. The ability to manage conflict well can help children build healthy and respectful relationships. Therefore, introducing conflict management from an early age is an important aspect in forming children's character and social skills. In early childhood, children are in a significant stage of social and emotional development. They begin to understand their own emotions and learn how to express them.

However, they often do not have sufficient skills to deal with conflict situations. Without proper guidance, children may respond to conflict in less constructive ways, such as crying, getting angry, or avoiding. An introduction to conflict management gives children the tools to deal with these situations more effectively and positively (Hakvoort, 2010).

Conflict management skills also have a direct impact on the formation of empathy and self-control (Gilang, 2023). When children are taught to understand other people's perspectives and seek solutions together, they learn to be more sensitive to other people's feelings (Kwaśniewska-Paszta, 2021). This helps them develop empathy, which is the basis of good social relationships. Children who are able to manage conflict well tend to have better self-control abilities, because they are trained to think before acting. Effective conflict management also supports the formation of confident and independent children's character. Children who are able to resolve conflict well will feel more confident in their ability to face social challenges (Hakvoort, 2010). They learn that problems can be solved through good communication and wise decision making. This self-confidence is not only important for their social relationships, but also for their success in many other aspects of life.

The long-term impact of introducing conflict management from an early age cannot be ignored. Children who have these skills tend to grow into mature individuals who are able to establish healthy interpersonal relationships, both in the workplace, family and community (Johansson & Emilson, 2016). They are also better able to face life's pressures and challenges with a cool head, thereby reducing the risk of uncontrollable conflict in adulthood. Therefore, the role of parents, educators and the surrounding environment is very important in introducing conflict management to children from an early age. With the right approach, such as role-playing, telling stories, or using visual aids, children can learn how to manage conflict in a way that is fun and easy to understand (Abid et al., 2022). This introduction not only provides direct benefits, but is also a valuable investment in their future as individuals who are mature, empathetic, and able to contribute positively to society.

The family environment plays a major role in forming children's conflict management abilities from an early age (Feldkötter et al., 2019). As the first environment a child knows, the family provides a direct example of how conflict is resolved. When parents or other family members resolve differences of opinion in a peaceful and constructive way, children tend to imitate that pattern of behavior (Barthassat, 2014). Conversely, if conflict in the family is often characterized by anger or violence, children may internalize these methods as a normal response to conflict. Therefore, families have a big responsibility to set a good example in managing conflict. In a family context, open and warm communication is key. Parents who involve children in discussions or the process of solving small problems help children understand the importance of listening, discussing and finding solutions together (NCT03367845, 2017). For example, when a dispute occurs between siblings, parents can help them understand each other's feelings and find a mutually beneficial solution.

This approach not only teaches children how to resolve conflicts but also builds a sense of empathy and emotional control. Apart from family, formal education at school also plays an important role in shaping children's conflict management skills. School is a place where children begin to interact with peers in larger groups

(Steenberghs et al., 2021). This interaction often gives rise to conflict, both in the form of small disputes and more complex problems. Teachers as educational facilitators have a strategic role in guiding children to resolve conflicts in a positive way. Through approaches such as group discussions or role playing, children can learn to recognize conflict and find appropriate solutions (Tsou et al., 2024). Formal education programs may also be designed to explicitly teach conflict management skills. For example, subjects or extracurricular activities that involve teamwork can be used to hone communication, self-control and problem-solving skills. Apart from that, values such as tolerance, respect for differences, and cooperation can be instilled through various learning activities.

This kind of education helps children understand that conflict is a part of life, but can be resolved in a good way. Collaboration between families and schools is very important to ensure children gain a consistent understanding of how to manage conflict (Albright & Weissberg, 2010). If the values taught at home are in line with those taught at school, children tend to more easily apply conflict management skills in everyday life. Parents and teachers can work together through regular communication, such as parent meetings or child development discussions, to discuss the best approach to guiding children to deal with conflict. With synergy between the family environment and formal education, children have greater opportunities to develop good conflict management skills . Both provide a strong foundation for children to understand differences, respect others, and solve problems effectively(Madsen & Madsen, 2022). In the long term, this ability not only helps children in childhood but also becomes a valuable provision for facing the challenges of adult life in a constructive and peaceful way.

Conflict management skills have an important role in children's social and emotional development (Hanish, 2023). Children who are able to manage conflict well tend to find it easier to establish harmonious relationships with their peers, family and the surrounding environment. With this skill, they learn to understand that differences of opinion are normal, so they are more open to other people's views. This creates a more positive social atmosphere, where children can feel accepted and able to interact without fear or pressure. In terms of emotional development, mastering conflict management helps children better recognize and control their emotions. When facing conflict, children often feel intense emotions, such as anger, frustration, or sadness. By learning appropriate ways to manage these situations, they can calm themselves, analyze problems, and find solutions without being overwhelmed by negative emotions. This is crucial for building emotional stability, which is the foundation of good mental health.

Children who are skilled at conflict management also show increased empathy for others. In the process of resolving conflict, they are taught to see the other person's perspective and understand how the other party's feelings are affected (Vinokur et al., 2024). These skills help them become more caring, tolerant individuals and able to appreciate diversity. Well-developed empathy not only strengthens children's social relationships but also becomes an important provision for future social life. Self-confidence is also one of the positive impacts of mastering conflict management. Children who are able to resolve conflicts independently feel more confident in their ability to face social challenges. They understand that conflict is not something to be

avoided, but rather an opportunity to learn and grow (Albright & Weissberg, 2010). This self-confidence encourages them to be more active in interacting, participating in groups, and facing new situations without fear. In addition, mastering conflict management helps children build good communication skills. In resolving conflicts, children are trained to convey their opinions in a way that is clear and not hurtful to others. They also learn the importance of listening and responding appropriately. These communication skills are not only useful in resolving conflicts, but also in various other aspects of life, such as learning to work together in teams and building healthy interpersonal relationships.

Over long periods of time children who have good conflict management skills tend to be more successful in their social and professional lives. They are able to maintain positive relationships with others, deal with pressure calmly, and solve problems effectively. This makes them more adaptive in various situations, both at school, at work and in family life. The positive impact of mastering conflict management on children's social and emotional development is not only felt in the short term but also becomes an important investment for their lives in the future. Parents, educators and society have a big role in supporting the development of this ability so that children grow into individuals who are empathetic, confident and ready to face the dynamics of life.

METHOD

As a qualitative research method, literature study emphasizes an in-depth understanding of the concepts, themes and patterns contained in secondary data (Ruggiano & Perry, 2019). Literature study is a qualitative research method that aims to understand a phenomenon through analysis of existing data. This method is carried out by collecting, reviewing and analyzing information from various sources, such as scientific journals, books, articles and other documents relevant to the research topic. Literature studies not only help researchers understand the theory underlying a problem, but also provide a basis for identifying gaps or deficiencies in previous research, so that they can become a basis for further research. This research focuses on content analysis to explore hidden meanings, relationships between concepts, or new perspectives that may not have been explored. This process does not just rely on random data collection, but requires critical selection of information sources to ensure that the data used is valid, relevant and credible.

Secondary data analysis is at the heart of this approach. Researchers process information that is already available, such as the results of previous research, theoretical reviews, or statistics, to answer research questions. This process involves several steps, such as reading, taking notes, grouping data, and compiling interpretations. Thus, literature studies allow researchers to utilize existing knowledge without having to collect primary data, such as surveys or interviews, which require more time and resources. The advantage of literature study as a qualitative method lies in its flexibility and efficiency (Coy, 2019). Researchers can access various sources of information through libraries, digital databases, or online scientific publications. In addition, this method is very useful in exploratory research which aims to identify initial concepts before field research is carried out. Literature studies are also the right

choice when researchers are faced with limited access to collect primary data, such as when researching certain groups that are difficult to reach.

The challenges that arise from applying this method are mainly related to the limited data available. Not all literature includes specific or up-to-date information according to research needs. Therefore, evaluate the quality and relevance of the sources used critically. With a systematic approach and in-depth analysis, literature studies can produce significant findings and provide valuable contributions to the development of science.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Main Concepts Related to Conflict Management for Early Childhood.

Conflict management which is introduced from an early age through various methods in early childhood involves several main concepts which aim to help children understand, face and resolve conflict in a positive way. One of the basic concepts is emotional management (Blewitt et al., 2018). Young children often have difficulty identifying and controlling their emotions, especially when facing conflict. Therefore, it is important to teach them to recognize emotions such as anger, sadness, or frustration. For example, a child who feels angry because his toy was taken by a friend can be invited to identify his emotions first before responding. This approach helps children learn not to react impulsively. The second concept is the role-taking perspective. Children need to be taught to understand other people's points of view in conflict situations. Through this perspective, they can see that other people's actions or words may have a specific reason. For example, if a friend takes a toy without permission, the child can be led to think that perhaps the friend wants to play together but doesn't know how to ask permission properly. This approach fosters empathy and helps children develop better ways of communicating.

Assertive communication is another important concept in conflict management with a more pleasant approach (Marici et al., 2024). Children are taught to convey their feelings and needs clearly but politely. Assertive communication involves using the phrase "I feel..." to explain what is felt without blaming the other party. For example, a child who is bothered by having his seat taken may say, "I feel uncomfortable because I want to sit there," rather than immediately reacting by pushing or crying. The fourth concept is cooperation in finding solutions. Conflicts can often be resolved through a collaborative approach, where both parties work together to find a mutually beneficial solution. Children can be taught to discuss disagreements with friends and find ways to share or share turns. For example, in a situation of fighting over a toy, children can be encouraged to agree to use the toy in turns at a certain time. This teaches the importance of compromise and fair solutions between people. Then self-control is an element that is no less important (Gilang, 2016). Children need to be trained to calm themselves before facing conflict situations. Techniques such as taking deep breaths or counting to ten can help them calm down before speaking or acting. For example, a child who is angry because he lost a game can be encouraged to take a breath and think about positive things rather than

immediately blaming his friends. This exercise helps children develop emotional resilience.

Understanding social rules is also an important concept in conflict management. Children need to understand the basic rules that apply in their social environment, such as respecting other people's rights, speaking politely, and not using violence. Teachers or parents can teach these rules through stories or interactive games. For example, a story about two children who solve problems by talking can be an inspiration for children to apply similar behavior in their lives. Then being expressive by giving rewards for good conflict resolution can strengthen positive behavior. When children succeed in resolving conflicts in a constructive way, parents or teachers can give praise or symbolic rewards. For example, a child who chooses to talk to a friend instead of getting angry can be given praise such as, "You are great at solving problems well!" This reward encourages children to continue using positive conflict management strategies in the future. By understanding and applying these key concepts, young children can learn to manage conflict in healthy ways and build social and emotional skills that will be useful throughout their lives.

Introduction to Effective Conflict Management Strategies

The introduction of conflict management from an early age requires an effective approach that is appropriate to the child's developmental stages. One strategy that can be applied is role-playing (Meilina et al., 2021). In role playing, children are given simple scenarios that depict conflict, such as fighting over toys or differences of opinion while playing. Through this activity, children are invited to practice how to resolve conflicts in a good way, such as speaking honestly, apologizing, or finding solutions together. For example, children who play the role of apologizing learn the importance of responsibility in solving problems. The second strategy is to use simple conflict-based stories or narratives. Reading stories that involve conflict situations and their resolution can help children understand various ways to resolve conflict. This story can be a fairy tale or a true story that is relevant to children's everyday experiences. After the story is read, children can be invited to discuss the actions of the characters in the story and what other ways might be better to solve the problem. This activity develops children's understanding of the importance of communication and empathy.

Visual approaches are also very effective, such as using animated images or videos. Visual media helps children understand conflict situations in an interesting and easy to understand way (Liu & Elms, 2019). Animated videos, for example, can show how cartoon characters resolve conflicts by talking nicely or sharing with friends. After watching, children can be invited to reflect on and imitate the positive behavior shown in the video. This approach helps children learn more easily through observation rather than verbal explanation. On the other hand, it is also important to involve group activities as part of the introduction to conflict management. Through group play, children can practice interacting with peers in situations that require cooperation and tolerance. Games such as "human bridge" or "putting blocks together" teach children to negotiate and resolve differences of opinion. When conflict arises during play, the teacher or facilitator can provide direct guidance to help children resolve the problem peacefully.

Reflective dialogue is also an effective strategy in introducing children to managing simple conflicts from an early age (Martínez-Valdivia et al., 2021). After children experience conflict, either at home or at school, adults can engage them in dialogue to reflect on this experience. Questions like "How did you feel?" or "What can we do to prevent problems like this from happening again?" helps children understand what has happened and how to better deal with it in the future. This dialogue strengthens children's understanding of the importance of introspection and learning from experience. Using positive reinforcement is an important step in introducing conflict management. Giving praise or rewards to children who successfully resolve conflicts well can motivate them to continue to behave positively. For example, a child who shares toys with a friend can be given praise such as, "You are great at sharing and solving problems with your friends!" This reinforcement builds good habits that will continue to develop over time.

Another strategy that is no less important for children is to create a supportive environment. Parents and educators need to create an environment where children feel safe to talk about their feelings and try various ways to resolve conflicts (Albright & Weissberg, 2010). When children know that they will not be scolded or punished if they make a mistake, they will have more confidence to practice conflict management. A supportive environment also includes having clear rules about acceptable behavior, such as "no hitting" or "speaking politely." It is important to involve parents in the process of introducing conflict management. Parents are children's main role models in learning how to manage emotions and conflict. Training or sharing sessions for parents can help them understand effective conflict management strategies and implement them at home. With cooperation between parents and educators, children get a consistent and integrated approach in learning to manage conflict, so that this skill can be well ingrained in them. By adopting strategies introducing conflict management can be a fun and rewarding process for children. This not only helps them deal with conflict situations in childhood but also equips them with social and emotional skills that are useful throughout life.

Implications for Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education has an important role in forming the basis of children's social, emotional and intellectual skills. One aspect of concern is how this education can teach conflict management effectively. The main implication of developing conflict management skills in early childhood education is the creation of a harmonious learning environment. When children are taught to manage conflict well, they tend to have more positive interactions with peers, creating a conducive learning atmosphere. Conflict management helps develop communication skills in early childhood. In education, children are taught to convey their opinions and feelings in a clear and polite manner. This is not only important for resolving conflicts, but also lays the foundation for future public speaking and discussion skills. Teachers can provide direction through activities such as small group discussions or role playing to practice these communication skills.

Another implication is increased empathy among children. Through learning about conflict management, children are taught to understand other people's points of view. Early childhood education can include activities such as stories or conflict

simulations that encourage children to see situations from different perspectives. Empathy that develops early helps children build better relationships with their friends and appreciate differences. Conflict management also has a positive impact on children's emotional control. In the learning process, children often encounter situations that trigger frustration or displeasure, such as sharing toys or waiting their turn. Preschool teachers can teach simple techniques such as deep breathing or counting numbers to help children manage their emotions. Good emotional control not only supports academic success but also builds strong emotional resilience.

From an educational perspective, the learning phase in teaching the application of conflict management also supports the development of moral values in children. Children are taught the importance of honesty, responsibility and respect for others. These values can be instilled through collaborative games, classroom rules, or relevant moral stories. Thus, early childhood education does not only focus on intellectual development but also the formation of children's character. Another implication that often arises is how conflict management encourages children to learn to solve problems. When children are invited to find solutions to the conflicts they face, they are trained to think critically and creatively. Teachers can help by providing guidance, such as asking questions that trigger thinking or providing several alternative solutions. This ability is not only useful in resolving conflicts but also forms the basis of logical thinking skills in the future. Conflict management education also has an impact on strengthening the relationship between children and teachers. Children who feel supported and well guided in solving their problems tend to have more positive relationships with educators. This relationship creates confidence in children to learn better and explore their world without fear. Teachers also have a role as models in showing good ways of resolving conflicts.

An even broader implication is the impact on the relationship between school and family. Early childhood education that teaches conflict management often involves parents in the learning process. Teachers can provide information or training to parents about how to support their children in managing conflict at home. Collaboration between schools and families creates a consistent approach, so that children gain a complete understanding of how to deal with conflict. On the other hand, teaching conflict management also supports inclusivity in early childhood education. When children are taught to respect differences and cooperate with others, they more easily accept friends from different backgrounds. This approach creates an inclusive environment, where every child feels welcome and valued. This inclusivity strengthens the sense of unity among children from an early age.

The implications of teaching conflict management in early childhood education are broad and profound. From developing social and emotional skills to forming moral values and increasing inclusiveness, this education provides a strong foundation for a child's future life. Therefore, it is important for educators, parents, and policy makers to support the integration of conflict management in early childhood education curricula. Educators and parents play a strategic role in helping children develop conflict management skills from an early age. One of the main recommendations is to provide direct examples in resolving conflicts. Children learn by observing, so it is important for the adults around them to show them how to resolve conflict in a calm, communicative and constructive manner. For example, parents can demonstrate how

to speak politely when faced with disagreements at home, while educators can demonstrate problem solving in the classroom.

Both educators and parents need to create a safe and supportive environment. Children should feel that they can express their feelings or problems without fear of being punished or ignored. This environment allows children to learn to face conflict with confidence and be open to guidance. Educators can create an inclusive classroom atmosphere, while parents can encourage children to talk about their feelings at home. Using creative learning media is also an important recommendation. Educators can utilize stories, games, or videos that depict conflict situations and how to resolve them. Parents at home can also read story books with their children that teach values such as cooperation, empathy and tolerance. This media makes it easier for children to understand abstract concepts such as justice and mutual respect. On the other hand, it is important for educators and parents to provide positive reinforcement when children show good behavior in dealing with conflict. For example, when a child chooses to talk rather than scream when there is a problem, offer praise such as, "You are so great for speaking calmly." This helps children internalize positive behavior as a beneficial habit.

Recommendations that often appear as references for educators and parents include involving children in group activities that encourage cooperation and problem solving. Educators can design activities such as games that require coordination between group members, while parents can encourage children to play with their friends. In this activity, children learn how to share, take turns, and find solutions together when facing challenges. Parents and educators also need to work together to support the development of children's conflict management. Good communication between the two ensures a consistent approach at home and school. Parents can discuss with educators about how children deal with conflict at school, while educators can provide suggestions to support these skills at home. This collaboration creates a holistic approach that strengthens children's learning. It is very important to apply patience and tolerance in guiding children. Teaching conflict management is a process that takes time and getting used to. Children may need a lot of practice to understand concepts such as empathy and emotional control. By providing consistent support, both educators and parents help children develop skills they will use throughout life.

CONCLUSION

Conflict management is a very important skill to introduce to children from an early age, considering its significant role in supporting social and emotional development. Children at this stage are in a critical period of character formation and interpersonal skills. By introducing conflict management, they can learn to understand emotions, recognize other people's feelings, and develop positive ways to deal with differences. This not only helps children solve problems in the surrounding environment but also becomes an important foundation for their social life in the future. The introduction of conflict management in early childhood supports the development of effective communication skills. Children learn how to express their feelings politely, listen to others, and work together to find solutions. This ability helps

them build healthy relationships with peers, teachers, and family. Furthermore, these skills are also important provisions when they enter a more complex environment, such as elementary school and the wider community.

The role-play method has been proven effective in teaching conflict management to young children. In role playing, children are invited to act out simple conflict situations, such as fighting over toys or differences of opinion, and then find ways to resolve them. This method gives children direct experience in dealing with conflict in a safe and controlled environment. For example, a child can act as the apologizer, while a friend plays the apologist. Through this activity, children not only understand how to communicate well, but also learn to feel empathy for other people's feelings. Visual media such as pictures, animated videos, or interactive illustrations are also very effective learning tools. Children at an early age find it easier to understand abstract concepts through attractive visual representations. For example, an animated video depicting two characters resolving a conflict by speaking politely can provide a direct example that is easy for children to imitate. This visual media can also be used to show various ways of resolving conflict, so that children have various options that they can use in real life.

The combination of role-playing and visual media provides a more holistic approach. Role playing allows children to practice skills practically, while visual media helps them understand concepts through observation. These two methods are also interactive, so children feel more involved in the learning process. When role-playing or watching videos, children often feel that they are playing, not learning, so they are more motivated and eager to engage. The effectiveness of this method is further strengthened by guidance from educators or parents. They can provide direction during role play or explain the context of the visual media used. Thus, role-playing methods and visual media not only teach theoretical conflict management but also provide practical experience that supports the overall development of children's social and emotional skills.

Mastery of conflict management has a direct impact on the formation of children's emotional control. Children who are able to manage their emotions well tend to adapt more easily to various social situations. They are also more resilient to stress and challenges that arise in daily interactions. With the help of parents and educators, children can learn to deal with conflict without resorting to violence or destructive behavior, thereby creating a more peaceful environment at home and at school.

Conflict management also plays a role in instilling moral and ethical values in children. When children learn to solve problems fairly and respect other people's feelings, they indirectly develop empathy, tolerance and a sense of responsibility. These values are not only important for interpersonal relationships, but also for forming positive character traits that will guide them throughout life. Introducing conflict management from an early age is not just a choice, but a necessity. This education has a significant long-term impact, both in supporting children's social-emotional development and in forming individuals who are able to contribute positively to society. Therefore, collaboration between parents, educators, and the environment is

essential to ensure children have adequate opportunities to learn and practice conflict management skills effectively.

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