

## **Interpersonal and Organizational Conflict Management in Schools: Enhancing the Effectiveness of Educational Human Resources in the Context of Educational Transformation**

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### **Abstract**

The ongoing transformation of education, which demands collaboration, innovation, and rapid adaptation, presents significant challenges to the effectiveness of educational human resources, particularly when interpersonal and organizational conflicts emerge as structural and psychological barriers within school environments. This study is a literature review using a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to analyze the dynamics of conflict management in schools and its contribution to strengthening human resources in the context of educational transformation. Data were collected from 40 scholarly articles published between 1967 and 2025 via Google Scholar and other credible academic sources, then strictly selected down to 22 relevant articles. The review findings indicate that conflict management based on collaborative approaches, transformative leadership, and organizational culture reinforcement plays a crucial role in improving the performance effectiveness of educators and school staff. Analyzed case studies show that schools successfully managing conflicts constructively are able to create a more productive, adaptive work environment that supports the success of school-based community engagement programs. These findings affirm that conflict management must become an integral part of educational human resource development strategies to fully support the national education reform agenda.

**Keywords:** Conflict Management, Educational Human Resources, Schools, Educational Transformation, Interpersonal Conflict

## **Manajemen Konflik Interpersonal dan Organisasi di Sekolah: Upaya Peningkatan Efektivitas SDM Pendidikan dalam Konteks Transformasi Pendidikan**

### **Abstrak**

Transformasi pendidikan yang menuntut kolaborasi, inovasi, dan adaptasi cepat menghadirkan tantangan besar bagi efektivitas sumber daya manusia (SDM) pendidikan, terutama ketika konflik interpersonal dan organisasi muncul sebagai hambatan struktural maupun psikologis di lingkungan sekolah. Penelitian ini merupakan studi tinjauan pustaka dengan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif yang bertujuan untuk menganalisis dinamika manajemen konflik di sekolah dan kontribusinya terhadap penguatan SDM dalam konteks transformasi pendidikan. Data dikumpulkan dari 40 artikel ilmiah yang dipublikasikan dalam rentang tahun 1967–2025 melalui Google Scholar dan situs akademik kredibel lainnya, kemudian diseleksi secara ketat hingga tersisa 22 artikel yang relevan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pengelolaan konflik berbasis pendekatan kolaboratif, kepemimpinan transformatif, dan penguatan budaya organisasi berperan penting dalam meningkatkan efektivitas kinerja pendidik dan tenaga kependidikan. Studi kasus yang dianalisis memperlihatkan bahwa sekolah yang berhasil mengelola konflik secara konstruktif mampu menciptakan suasana kerja yang lebih produktif, adaptif, dan mendukung keberhasilan program pengabdian masyarakat berbasis sekolah.

**Kata kunci:** Manajemen Konflik, SDM Pendidikan, Sekolah, Transformasi Pendidikan, Konflik Interpersonal

## INTRODUCTION

The ongoing transformation across various levels of educational institutions, particularly in schools, demands that all organizational elements operate adaptively and responsively. In this context, the role of educational human resources becomes critical, as their quality and effectiveness significantly determine the success of policy implementation, pedagogical innovation, and quality-oriented school governance. However, the dynamics of educational transformation are not free from interpersonal friction, which often leads to workplace conflict. Interpersonal conflicts between educators, between teachers and school principals, or among other school staff are often left unresolved systematically. This, in turn, leads to performance degradation, diminished team collaboration, and weakened collective enthusiasm for change. Therefore, managing interpersonal conflict becomes a key element in building the effectiveness of educational human resources amid the systemic demands of national education transformation.

Theoretically, conflict within educational organizations is not something to be entirely avoided, but rather should be managed as a potential source of institutional growth and performance improvement. Constructive conflict theory emphasizes that conflict, when managed healthily, can foster innovation, enhance mutual understanding, and improve operational efficiency (Deutsch, 1973). However, in school practice, conflict more frequently results in polarization, division, or the formation of cliques that damage institutional cohesion. This issue is exacerbated by hierarchical educational bureaucracies, a lack of leadership training for school principals, and the absence of an integrated conflict management system within HR policies. In this regard, conflict management is not merely an additional skill but a core competency that school leaders and educators must possess.

In Indonesia, the phenomenon of interpersonal conflict in school environments often manifests latently or overtly, ranging from value conflicts and role conflicts to communication breakdowns. Many school principals focus more on administrative duties than on cultivating healthy interpersonal relationships among teachers. Similarly, teachers often find themselves trapped in role conflicts and unbalanced workloads, leading to horizontal friction that hampers collaboration and mutual trust. Field studies reveal that poor assertive communication skills and unpreparedness in dealing with differences are the primary causes of unresolved conflicts (Tsamoroh, 2020; Wibowo, 2023). In the long run, this situation creates an unproductive work atmosphere, high educator turnover rates, and resistance to the educational reforms being promoted.

Effective conflict management in educational organizations requires a systemic approach that not only focuses on individual issues but also addresses organizational policies, school culture, and leadership patterns. Conflict management theory identifies five conflict-handling styles: competing, avoiding, accommodating, collaborating, and compromising, each with different implications for organizational stability (Thomas & Kilmann, 2012). In the school context, the collaborative approach is most recommended, as it encourages joint engagement in conflict resolution without sacrificing working relationships. Unfortunately, this approach has yet to be fully internalized in school cultures that often emphasize obedience and subordination to superiors. Power

imbalances in workplace relationships further worsen conflict situations, especially when school principals fail to act as fair and empathetic mediators.

Failure in conflict management adversely affects interpersonal relationships and directly diminishes the overall effectiveness of educational organizations (Ariatpi & Marlina, 2024). The effectiveness of educational human resources is reflected in their ability to work in teams, adapt to curriculum changes, and respond adaptively to student needs. When conflicts are ignored or resolved repressively, individual morale deteriorates, and team productivity declines collectively. In the context of educational transformation—which demands collaborative work, an innovative culture, and participatory leadership—a school's ability to manage conflict becomes a critical indicator of institutional success. Therefore, conflict management strategies must be embedded as an integral component of educational human resource capacity building.

Furthermore, the challenges schools face in managing conflict cannot be separated from the complexity of public expectations, bureaucratic pressures, and rapid social changes (Rojuli, 2019). Teachers and principals are expected to serve as agents of change, yet they simultaneously confront resource limitations, role ambiguity, and intense emotional pressures. In this context, the existence of conflict management training programs becomes an urgent necessity. These programs must offer both theoretical understanding and practical skills such as negotiation, mediation, and collective decision-making. Moreover, policy interventions are needed to foster a school culture that is inclusive, open to dialogue, and appreciative of diverse perspectives among educational stakeholders.

Previous studies have predominantly focused on cognitive and pedagogical aspects in improving the quality of educational human resources, but they have inadequately explored the psychosocial dimension related to conflict management and its impact on institutional effectiveness. In fact, interpersonal conflict in schools often serves as the root cause of professional stagnation, low innovation, and weak participation in educational reform. Therefore, a more comprehensive literature-based approach is required to explore conflict management strategies that are contextual, applicable, and aligned with the dynamics of educational institutions in Indonesia. This approach will provide a conceptual and reflective framework for stakeholders to manage human resources more effectively and humanely.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine various theories, approaches, and practices of interpersonal and organizational conflict management in schools to enhance the effectiveness of educational human resources, particularly in addressing the increasingly complex challenges of educational transformation. Using a literature review approach, this research seeks to present a deep synthesis of knowledge and evidence-based recommendations that can be implemented by school leaders, educational policymakers, and learning practitioners to build more resilient, collaborative, and adaptive educational organizations.

### **Conflict Management**

Conflict management refers to a systematic process of identifying, analyzing, and resolving differences in interests, values, or perceptions between individuals or groups within an organization, with the aim of maintaining stability, enhancing work effectiveness, and fostering healthy relationships (Overton & Lowry, 2013; Valente et al., 2022). In the context of educational organizations such as schools, conflict management helps to resolve disputes, create spaces for dialogue, mediation, and collaboration so that conflicts can be transformed into a source of constructive change. Various approaches can be employed, including compromising, collaborative styles, or third-party mediation, depending on the context and nature of the conflict.

### **Educational Human Resources**

Educational human resources refer to all individuals involved in the delivery of education, including those directly engaged such as teachers, school principals, and education staff, as well as indirectly involved personnel like school managers and administrative staff (Tanjung, 2020). The effectiveness of educational HR is reflected in their level of professionalism, pedagogical competence, socio-emotional skills, and adaptive capacity in responding to change. In the era of educational transformation, strengthening HR focuses on enhancing technical competencies, teamwork ability, conflict management skills, and strategic, human-centered responsiveness to evolving learning environments.

### **School**

A school is a formal institution that serves as the core setting for educational delivery, where learning processes, character development, and competency building take place within both national and local curricular frameworks (Abdullah et al., 2019). Beyond being an academic space, a school functions as a complex social organization that involves interactions among diverse actors with varying backgrounds, roles, and objectives. Therefore, schools must be managed not only from an administrative standpoint but also in terms of relationships and organizational culture, including how to manage conflicts, foster collaboration, and create a work environment that supports the effectiveness of educational transformation.

### **Educational Transformation**

Educational transformation refers to systemic and continuous changes in the way education is designed, managed, and implemented to be more aligned with the demands of the times, global expectations, and local challenges (Burbules et al., 2020). This process encompasses curriculum innovation, learning digitalization, competency-based approaches, character strengthening, and participatory school governance. Educational transformation requires both structural and cultural readiness across the educational ecosystem, particularly at the school level, where its implementation is significantly influenced by the effectiveness of human resources, organizational management, and the ability to respond to internal dynamics such as interpersonal conflict.

## **Interpersonal Conflict**

Interpersonal conflict is the tension or disagreement that arises between two or more individuals due to differences in perceptions, values, interests, or misaligned communication (Beheshtifar & Zare, 2013). In school environments, such conflict frequently occurs among teachers, between teachers and principals, or between teachers and other education staff, and if left unmanaged, it can disrupt the workplace climate and reduce productivity. Although often viewed negatively, interpersonal conflict has positive potential if managed constructively, as it can serve as an opportunity to improve relationships, align perspectives, and strengthen collaboration in support of a more transformative educational mission.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review research design, aiming to broaden references and enrich academic understanding related to the theme of community service in the context of interpersonal and organizational conflict management in schools. This approach was selected to explore in depth various concepts, theories, findings, and recommendations discussed across diverse scholarly sources, enabling a comprehensive and reflective analysis. The analytical technique applied is descriptive analysis, in which the collected data is reviewed and synthesized to generate a holistic theoretical and conceptual understanding of the subject matter.

The data sources for this study were obtained from a wide range of scientific articles and academic publications available through Google Scholar, as well as other credible and reputable platforms such as ResearchGate, SINTA, DOAJ, and both national and international peer-reviewed journals published between 1967 and 2025. Literature searches were conducted using keywords such as interpersonal conflict in school, organizational conflict management, educational human resource effectiveness, and school-based conflict resolution. The initial search yielded 40 relevant articles. However, after a rigorous selection process based on criteria such as content relevance, methodological quality, journal reputation, and contribution to the development of knowledge in education and community engagement, only 22 articles were deemed appropriate for further analysis in this study.

The selection process was carried out systematically by thoroughly reading each article identified in the initial stage, followed by classification based on topic alignment, research objectives, theoretical frameworks used, and practical implications for the effectiveness of educational human resources in the context of school transformation. The selected articles include both empirical studies and theoretical reviews that directly examine the relationship between conflict management and the enhancement of human resource performance within formal educational settings. The data from these articles were then analyzed thematically to identify key patterns, differences in approaches, and their potential contributions to enriching community service models grounded in transformative education.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Ongoing educational transformation, propelled by policies such as the Merdeka Curriculum, digitalization of learning, and school autonomy, demands synergistic collaboration among all school components. However, the reality on the ground reveals that interpersonal conflicts among educators and organizational conflicts between principals and teachers have become latent obstacles that reduce the effectiveness of these transformation efforts. In this context, Pondy's (1967) Organizational Conflict Theory explains that conflict is a dynamic process that begins with communication tensions and perceptual differences, which can escalate into disputes that threaten organizational stability if not properly managed. As a social educational organization, schools are not immune to structural and psychological conflicts. When role ambiguity, workload pressure, communication gaps, and interpersonal rivalries are not addressed constructively, conflict accumulates and hinders the achievement of transformative educational goals. This situation is exacerbated by the weak managerial capacity of school principals to foster a collaborative work climate and the lack of contextually relevant conflict management training aligned with school culture. Therefore, conflict management should not be treated merely as a problem-solving mechanism, but as a strategic instrument in the sustainable, participatory, and reflective management of educational human resources. This includes the ability to recognize early signs of conflict, build open two-way communication systems, create participatory dialogue spaces, and develop resolution mechanisms based on win-win solutions that strengthen teaching team cohesion. Without a systematic and adaptive conflict governance model, educational transformation efforts will continue to be hindered by internal resistance that undermines integration among educational actors.

A study by Apriliana et al. (2025) in a junior high school in Depok, West Java, shows that interpersonal conflict among teachers is often triggered by perceived unfairness in workload distribution and insufficient supervisory roles by the principal. When task allocation is uneven, teachers feel disproportionately burdened, leading to jealousy, frustration, and a lack of teamwork. These findings support the principles of Transformational Leadership Theory by Avolio et al. (1999), which asserts that transformational leaders do not merely focus on administrative goals but also foster healthy working relationships and cultivate an environment adaptable to change. In education, transformational leadership is foundational for creating a school ecosystem resilient to structural and cultural pressures that trigger conflict. When school principals internalize the values of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, the processes of mediation and reconciliation among educators become more effective and productive. In contrast, the absence of transformational leadership perpetuates rigid, distrustful, and uncooperative working relationships, ultimately eroding collective teacher commitment and performance. Addressing interpersonal conflict in schools cannot rely solely on administrative policies; it must be supported by leadership styles that build trust, listen to aspirations, and align shared visions to achieve sustainable educational change.

A doctoral study by Jaiyaroh (2013) on conflict management in three inclusive schools in Surabaya found that differences in pedagogical and ideological backgrounds among teachers often triggered internal conflicts that hindered the effectiveness of inclusive education. To address this, the principals initiated assertive communication training and held regular dialogue forums as open mediation platforms. These efforts successfully defused destructive conflicts and transformed them into opportunities for reflection and collective innovation, leading teachers to better understand each other's perspectives, collaborate on more effective inclusive teaching strategies, and strengthen the collaborative culture within the teaching team. This study confirms that conflict resolution strategies based on the collaborative approach of Thomas & Kilmann (2012) enhance social cohesion in the workplace while also improving individual and team performance in managing classrooms, curricula, and extracurricular activities. The collaborative approach—demanding the courage to listen and openness to diverse perspectives—has proven effective in fostering a more dialogic, egalitarian, and solution-oriented work culture. In inclusive school settings, diversity of backgrounds becomes a pedagogical asset when managed through empowering communication mechanisms. The success of these schools illustrates that educational leaders who can create reflective interaction spaces help prevent conflict escalation and activate the collective potential of teachers as innovation agents. This aligns with the spirit of inclusivity aimed at students with special needs, while also encompassing the acceptance and management of differences among educators as part of a productive professional dynamic. Thus, collaborative conflict management models are highly relevant for reducing workplace tension and are crucial for shaping school cultures that are resilient, adaptive, and creative in addressing the complexities of contemporary educational challenges.

Moreover, a school's organizational culture significantly shapes how interpersonal conflicts are addressed and resolved. Schein (2004), in *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, emphasizes that the values, norms, and everyday practices within an organization determine how its members perceive and respond to differences and conflict. Schools that foster a culture of dialogue, openness, and egalitarianism are generally more capable of diffusing conflicts before they escalate. Unfortunately, many schools in Indonesia remain entrenched in rigid, hierarchical bureaucratic cultures, where teachers or staff feel discouraged from voicing discomfort. This imbalance of power dynamics creates latent organizational conflict—often invisible, yet deeply corrosive to morale and institutional loyalty. A rigid organizational culture frequently hinders early conflict resolution by prioritizing structural compliance over mutual understanding (Omodan, 2023). In such contexts, conflict often centers on who holds access to voice and influence within the organizational system. When school structures do not provide safe spaces for horizontal expression, tensions accumulate in the form of passive resistance, subtle sabotage, or apathy toward school programs. This highlights that building a healthy organizational culture cannot be separated from visionary and participatory leadership—one that reshapes power structures to become more inclusive and encourages the internalization of collective values rooted in mutual respect. As learning organizations,

schools must have the courage to reflect on their internal cultures and recognize that emerging conflicts are not merely deviant behaviors but reflections of dominant cultures in need of transformation.

A study by Nugroho (2020) on elementary school teachers in Mlati Subdistrict, Sleman (Yogyakarta), revealed that open communication from principals and conflict management skills significantly influenced teachers' professional performance—with communication contributing 64.9%, conflict management skills 80.6%, and both combined yielding an 85.8% improvement in teacher performance. Effective conflict management—through two-way dialogue and structured resolution—was found to enhance teacher motivation, reduce resistance to training programs, and foster a more productive team culture. These findings reinforce the principles of the Human Relations Movement, which argue that workplace productivity is deeply influenced by the quality of interpersonal relationships, not just technical or structural factors (Seyi-Oderinde, 2021). Within this framework, healthy interpersonal dynamics act as catalysts for a conducive work environment, where teachers feel heard, valued, and involved in decision-making processes. When work relationships are managed as organizational assets rather than threats to be controlled, teacher participation increases significantly, opening space for innovative and contextual teaching initiatives. Conversely, systems that deprioritize relational aspects tend to foster passivity, defensiveness, and alienation among teachers from the school's institutional vision. In this light, effective conflict management not only promotes operational stability but also directly shapes learning dynamics and enhances the school's competitiveness. Investing in the development of social relations in education—through empathy training, critical dialogue facilitation, and inclusive evaluative structures—is a strategic necessity for improving institutional performance sustainably.

The strategic importance of conflict management in educational transformation is also evident in school-based community service initiatives. When teachers and principals possess the skills to manage conflict constructively, they can collaborate effectively in designing programs that engage local communities—such as literacy training, character education development, and psychosocial services for students and parents. In contrast, unresolved conflict leads to dysfunctional coordination that isolates the school from its surrounding community. This is reinforced by a study by Safitri & Nasiwan (2025) in Sleman Regency, which found that collaboration between schools and communities—particularly through Marginal School Communities (KSM)—was only successful in schools with structured internal communication and inclusive school leadership. With clear information systems and leadership that encouraged active participation from teachers, volunteers, and families, programs such as non-formal learning spaces and mentoring for marginalized children were effectively implemented. Conversely, schools with weak internal communication or top-down leadership styles exhibited unsustainable and ineffective collaborative efforts. When school leadership succeeds in building trust among educators and fostering equitable participatory spaces, synergy with the community grows organically through shared vision, clearly defined roles, and emotional engagement with common goals. Such conditions create an educational social ecosystem

that is responsive to local needs and reinforces the school's legitimacy as a center for community empowerment. On the other hand, when internal conflicts are left unresolved, schools not only fail to innovate internally but also lose social relevance due to their inability to form meaningful collaborative links with their communities. Within this framework, conflict management emerges as a strategic foundation for cultivating impactful external relations. Thus, strengthening school leadership and human resource capacities in managing conflict through dialogic and reflective means becomes a key prerequisite for positioning community service as an integral part of inclusive, participatory, and sustainable educational transformation.

From a human resource development perspective, conflict management should be viewed not merely as a problem-solving technique but as a process of cultivating educators' social-emotional competencies. Teachers who can navigate differences with maturity are better prepared to handle the challenges of differentiated instruction, student multiculturalism, and performance pressures. This aligns with Goleman's (1995) concept of Emotional Intelligence, which asserts that the ability to recognize and regulate one's own emotions—and those of others—is foundational to building productive professional relationships. Consequently, conflict management training must become an integral component of ongoing professional development programs for teachers and education personnel. Applying emotional intelligence in conflict contexts allows educators to respond to differences in a reactive, reflective, and empathetic manner, ultimately fostering a more supportive and resilient work environment. Skills such as self-regulation, social awareness, empathy, and the ability to maintain harmonious relationships should be regarded as core components of teacher professionalism, equal in importance to pedagogical mastery and subject knowledge. Furthermore, emotionally intelligent teachers are more capable of establishing positive classroom climates, de-escalating conflicts with students and parents, and cultivating a culture of mutual respect among colleagues. Thus, investing in emotional dimensions within conflict management training is a key strategy in preparing educators who are adaptive, collaborative, and capable of contributing to the sustainability of educational transformation through the management of healthy and constructive interpersonal relationships.

From the overall discussion, it can be concluded that interpersonal and organizational conflict management in schools is not only essential for internal relational dynamics but also pivotal in ensuring the success of ongoing educational transformation. By integrating relevant theories, empirical findings, and real-world practices from various school case studies, it becomes clear that the effectiveness of educational human resources cannot be separated from the organization's ability to manage conflict constructively, collaboratively, and developmentally. Therefore, schools must formulate policies, training programs, and work culture enhancement systems that position conflict resolution as a fundamental strategy for improving overall education quality. In this context, conflict management should be understood as an ecosystem involving interconnected structural, cultural, emotional, and leadership dimensions. Reactive conflict handling only delays deeper organizational issues, whereas strategic approaches—emphasizing prevention,

open dialogue, and inclusive participation—lay the foundation for resilient and transformative institutions. The success of educational transformation hinges on schools' capacity to establish healthy working relationships that can bridge differences productively and turn them into sources of institutional innovation. Thus, conflict resolution must not merely serve as a response to dysfunction but be transformed into a tool for cultivating an organizational culture that prioritizes teacher well-being, leadership effectiveness, and team cohesion in advancing sustainable educational change.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that interpersonal and organizational conflict management plays a strategic role in enhancing the effectiveness of human resources (HR) in education amid the complex and dynamic process of educational transformation. When left unaddressed, conflict can undermine collaboration, reduce productivity, and create tensions that hinder innovation in schools. Conversely, when managed constructively through collaborative approaches, transformational leadership, and assertive communication, conflict can become a powerful catalyst for organizational improvement. The findings highlight that understanding conflict management theories—such as the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode, Emotional Intelligence, and Transformational Leadership—is highly relevant for schools to adopt as a foundation for cultivating a healthy, adaptive, and participatory work culture.

The theoretical implication of this study is the importance of integrating conflict management concepts into the framework for developing educator professionalism and strengthening school organizational culture. Practically, the study encourages educational stakeholders—particularly principals, supervisors, and policymakers—to incorporate conflict management training as a key strategy in improving the quality of educational human resources. Socially, schools that achieve internal cohesion through effective conflict resolution are more likely to sustain optimal collaboration with communities in service-based educational programs. In other words, strong conflict management contributes to broader and more impactful educational partnerships.

This research recommends that schools begin developing conflict management systems grounded in data and collective values, rather than relying solely on reactive responses to incidents. School principals should be trained to act as fair mediators, not merely bureaucratic administrators. Furthermore, higher education institutions that prepare future teachers and school leaders should embed conflict management training into their curricula in a practical and contextualized manner. Government bodies and local education authorities are also advised to provide standardized, context-based, and practice-oriented conflict management training modules. In addition, schools should establish regular open communication forums to prevent the buildup of latent conflicts that could disrupt institutional performance.

This study has several limitations. First, as a literature review, the research relies solely on secondary data drawn from selected articles published between 1967 and 2025, making its outcomes highly dependent on the availability and quality of those sources. Second,

while the descriptive qualitative approach offers in-depth insight into conflict dynamics within schools, it does not directly represent empirical variations across different educational settings. Third, the diverse organizational cultures of Indonesian schools are not fully captured within the scope of the analyzed literature. Therefore, future research employing case study or mixed-methods approaches is strongly recommended to explore more specific, contextual, and interactive dimensions of conflict among education stakeholders across different regions and school levels.

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