



Interactive Debate Model as an Effort to Develop Conflict Resolution Skills in Students

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Abstract

Conflicts can occur in various aspects of life, including in formal educational settings such as schools. Therefore, a strategic approach is needed to accustom students to resolving conflicts constructively. This study aims to describe the importance of the interactive debate model as a habit-forming effort in building conflict resolution in elementary school students. The method used was descriptive qualitative, with data collection techniques through literature studies from various relevant scientific journals, articles, and books. Data analysis techniques included data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results showed that students' conflict resolution skills were generally facilitated by teachers as the primary mediator and facilitator. The application of the interactive debate model, particularly with the pro and con group format, has been proven to train students in critical thinking, constructing logical arguments, and accepting and synthesizing various points of view. The debate process, which includes five stages ranging from position preparation, argument delivery, open discussion, perspective reversal, and synthesis, provides space for students to develop democratic conflict resolution skills. Thus, the interactive debate model can be an effective strategy in character and social-emotional learning in elementary schools, provided it is supported by the active role of teachers and a constructive school culture.



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INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a common problem in education, from elementary to higher education. Hidayatulloh and Sutrimo (2024) state that conflict is unavoidable because interactions between students often lead to friction. School-age children are in a developmental stage with varying characteristics. Kirschner et al. (2006) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2019) revealed that the desire to compete, feel unappreciated, or reject others' opinions often trigger conflict. Anderson and Elms (2022) added that differences in character often lead to clashes in social interactions. Laursen and Hafen (2010) define conflict as a long-standing disagreement, while in the Indonesian context, it is defined as a dispute. Sintapertiwi et al. (2023) explain that conflict in schools can originate from individuals, organizational structures, or communication, so its resolution requires collaboration, accommodation, and compromise. Maftuh (2004) shows that conflict resolution learning models are effective in improving students' knowledge and attitudes. Ritiauw, Maftuh, and Malihah (2017) also demonstrated that Pela cultural values can improve students' conflict resolution competencies. Therefore, understanding conflict is important as a basis for building students' character.

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Various previous studies have discussed the effectiveness of interactive debate models in developing conflict resolution habits in students. Graves et al. (2007) found that middle and high school students experienced a decrease in aggression and an increase in knowledge and skills in conflict resolution. Malloy et al. (2020) showed that integrating debate into social studies learning can improve students' oral and written argumentation skills and encourage critical participatory literacy. Research by Dewi et al. (2023) highlighted the need for a specific conflict-handling learning model that teachers can use as an alternative in the learning process to help students understand the importance of conflict avoidance. Kuki et al. (2023) strengthened the findings regarding the effectiveness of the Argument-Driven Inquiry (ADI) model in improving argumentation skills and conceptual understanding. Meanwhile, Schaller and Gatesman-Ammer (2022) emphasized the importance of conflict resolution and negotiation training in postgraduate education using a blended lecture and interactive approach. Different from previous studies, this research focuses on developing an Interactive Debate Model as a strategy for developing conflict resolution habits among high school students.

This study aims to analyze in depth: (1) the effectiveness of using the pro and contra debate method in increasing student activeness and understanding during the learning process, (2) the strategic role of teachers in developing conflict resolution skills in elementary school students, and (3) the urgency of implementing constructive conflict management in creating a harmonious, participatory elementary school environment that supports the development of student character. This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions in the field of education, especially in the realm of active participation-based learning and conflict management. Theoretically, this study enriches the study of learning strategies that can develop critical thinking skills, communication skills, and students' understanding of social dynamics. Meanwhile, practically, the results of this study can be a reference for educators and elementary education policy makers in designing learning that encourages active student involvement and strengthens conflict resolution skills from an early age. Thus, it is hoped that a democratic, inclusive school culture will be created that is conducive to the formation of resilient and tolerant student character.

Based on the formulated research objectives, this research hypothesis was designed to examine the relationship between the application of the pro-contra debate method, the role of teachers in developing conflict resolution, and conflict management in elementary schools with increased learning activity and student character development. The main hypothesis in this study is that the application of the pro-contra debate method significantly increases students' active participation in learning and their ability to express and defend opinions constructively. In addition, teacher involvement in facilitating the conflict resolution process in a neutral and solution-oriented manner is believed to influence the development of students' conflict resolution skills. The further hypothesis states that conflict management implemented systematically in elementary schools can create a harmonious, democratic learning environment and support the achievement of character education goals. Thus, these three factors are expected to have a positive correlation with each other on the quality of learning and school climate.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to deeply understand how the interactive debate model can be used as a habit-forming effort to build conflict resolution in elementary school students. This approach is considered appropriate for examining the meaning and social context in educational practices, as emphasized by Lam, Cheng, and Ma (2019), who argue that a qualitative approach can uncover the dimensions of subjective experiences in educational contexts. Similarly, Naeem, Arif, and Mahmood (2023) state that a qualitative approach is important in exploring complex social interaction processes that cannot be explained solely by numerical data. Meanwhile, according to Zamiri and Esmaeili (2024), qualitative research is effective in uncovering learning dynamics in depth because it focuses on the exploration of meaning. Furthermore, Dunwoodie, Lowe, and Wilkinson (2023) emphasize that a qualitative descriptive approach allows researchers to understand

educational phenomena in a natural and holistic manner. Through this framework, the study seeks to describe debate practices and their impact on students' ability to resolve conflicts constructively.

Data collection in this study was conducted through a literature review sourced from various relevant scientific journals, articles, and books. According to Friedemann, Andrews, and Armstrong (2011), a literature review is a systematic approach that allows researchers to collect conceptual data to build a strong theoretical framework. The literature used in this study focused on the themes of peace education, conflict resolution, and the application of debate as an active learning method. The literature selection was carried out purposively, namely by considering the appropriateness of the theme and its relevance to the research objectives. This aligns with the opinion of Chigbu, Nnadi, and Mbazor (2023), who stated that a purposive approach in literature review aims to ensure a direct link between the reading sources and the focus of the study. Furthermore, Snyder (2019) emphasized the importance of literature sourced from trusted scientific publications as a basis for gaining in-depth and valid understanding in literature-based research.

The data analysis technique in this study uses a content analysis approach, as explained by Nicmanis (2024), that content analysis is an effective method for exploring hidden meanings in written texts and symbolic communication. This approach is highly relevant for research in the social sciences and humanities because it allows researchers to examine in depth various types of data such as documents, artifacts, images, and recordings. McMillan (2012) states that content analysis can help researchers understand the structure and patterns in qualitative data through a systematic interpretation process. In the context of this study, a content analysis approach is used to evaluate literature related to the effectiveness of interactive debate in developing resolute attitudes in students. Kohlbacher (2005) asserts that this technique facilitates the identification of key concepts, the development of thematic categories, and mapping the relationship between debate activities, the role of teachers, and the formation of student character in constructive conflict resolution.

The data analysis stages in this study followed three main steps: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Popenoe et al. (2021) suggested that the analysis process in a literature review should begin with data reduction, namely selecting the most relevant information from various sources, filtering the data according to the study's focus, and grouping it based on specific themes. Mihas (2023) added that this reduction process is important for simplifying the complexity of qualitative data, so that the information obtained is more focused and meaningful. Furthermore, Cheong et al. (2023) stated that presenting data in the form of a thematic narrative will facilitate researchers in interpreting and establishing connections between findings. The final stage is conclusion drawing, as explained by Higginbottom (2015), who emphasized that conclusions must be constructed reflectively from all analyzed findings to produce significant conceptual contributions to the development of conflict resolution-based learning strategies and character education through constructive debate methods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Using the Pros and Cons Debate Method Increases Student Engagement and Understanding

The pro-con debate method is an effective learning strategy for encouraging active student participation and developing critical thinking. In this process, students are encouraged to express their opinions openly, develop arguments based on data, and hone their listening skills and respond constructively to differing perspectives. Furthermore, this method also teaches students to think logically and be open to differences, thus creating a dynamic learning environment that supports character development and higher-order thinking skills.

Table 1. Effectiveness in Learning

| Aspect | Findings |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Student Activeness | The pro-contra debate method increased student participation in learning and fostered the courage to express opinions. |
| Ability to Express Opinions | Students began to express and defend their opinions with confidence, although their skills still needed improvement. |

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Understanding of the Material | Most students had not fully mastered the material before the debate, indicating the need for in-depth review. |
| Teacher's Role | Teachers began actively encouraging students to become more involved in the learning process by facilitating debates. |
| Student Emotional Responses | Debates increased students' emotional engagement and encouraged them to view issues from different perspectives (constructive controversy). |

Critically, although the debate method has been shown to stimulate students' cognitive and emotional engagement, its effectiveness depends heavily on students' readiness to master the material and develop argumentative skills. Such unpreparedness can result in debates becoming merely superficial verbal exchanges without producing in-depth understanding. In this context, the teacher's role becomes crucial, not only as a facilitator but also as a guide in building a strong foundation of knowledge. Teachers must be able to create a dialogic atmosphere that supports students' courage to express their opinions logically and respect differing perspectives. In this way, the debate method will be more than just a speaking activity, but also an effective and meaningful means of critical learning.

The Role of Teachers in Developing Conflict Resolution Skills in Students

Conflict resolution skills in elementary school students do not emerge instantly, but rather through a social learning process influenced by interactions, familiarization, and the strategic role of teachers. Teachers function not only as academic educators but also as emotional facilitators and mediators capable of fostering students' understanding of the dynamics of interpersonal conflict.

Table 2. Stages of the Teacher's Role in Elementary School Student Conflict Resolution

| Stages | Description |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Teacher Involvement | Teachers act as neutral mediators, helping clarify interpersonal conflicts and de-escalate situations without taking sides. |
| Strengthening Positive Attitudes | Teachers reinforce values and help students understand others' perspectives in conflicts. |
| Student Responsibility | Students' conflict resolution skills develop as they begin to take responsibility for their own conflicts (the reflective stage). |
| Democratic Attitude Development | Through teacher guidance, students learn to respect the opinions of others and resolve conflicts peacefully and openly. |

The critical conclusions from these findings indicate that teachers play a central role in shaping students' conflict resolution skills, particularly through an empathetic, open, and non-judgmental approach. Teachers act as mediators, active listeners, and facilitators of dialogue among students experiencing conflict. However, this crucial role cannot be optimally fulfilled if teachers are not equipped with adequate conflict management skills. Without proper training, teachers' approaches tend to be reactive, sporadic, and rely on personal intuition, rather than structured and effective. This can hinder the creation of a consistently peaceful and supportive learning environment. Therefore, systematic training is needed for teachers, both in technical and emotional aspects, so that they have the capacity and sensitivity to foster the habit of constructive conflict resolution in elementary school settings.

The Urgency of Constructive Conflict Management in Elementary School Environments

Conflict management in elementary schools plays a crucial role in fostering a healthy, inclusive, and democratic learning culture. Conflicts, whether between students or other members of the school community, do not always have negative consequences if managed appropriately. Instead, conflict can be used as an educational tool to foster empathy, communication skills, and problem-solving. With a constructive, systematic approach based on the values of togetherness, tolerance, and justice, conflict management becomes an integral part of the educational process, shaping students' character and creating a harmonious and supportive learning environment.

Table 3. Conflict Management Strategies and Urgency in Elementary Schools

| Aspect | Findings |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| The Role of Schools | Schools are not only places for academic learning, but also spaces for shaping students' values, attitudes, and character through conflict management. |
| Sources of Conflict | Conflict in schools can stem from individual differences, cultural differences, poor communication, and even changes in societal values (Santoso). |
| Conflict Management Strategies | The proposed approach includes a peace curriculum, mediation, teacher training, and the establishment of a school culture that supports peaceful resolution. |
| The Role of the Principal | The principal plays a role in creating an effective and harmonious school climate by encouraging inclusive and preventative conflict management. |
| Character Education and Democracy | Constructive conflict management is the foundation for developing religious, open, and democratic individuals from an early age in elementary school. |

Critically, the importance of constructive conflict management is not only focused on maintaining a stable learning environment, but also holds strategic value in developing students' character and social skills. Through appropriate conflict management, students can learn to resolve differences peacefully, build empathy, and improve interpersonal communication skills. However, the success of these efforts depends heavily on strong structural support from the school. Without a comprehensive and integrated policy and active collaboration between the principal, teachers, and all elements of the educational community, the implementation of conflict management will be limited and inconsistent. In other words, without the support of systems and institutional synergy, the habituation of conflict resolution will struggle to achieve its long-term goal of establishing a peaceful, democratic school culture that supports students' comprehensive social-emotional growth.

Discussion

Debate as a Strategy to Increase Student Participation and Cognitive Understanding

The pro-con debate method in learning not only serves as a means of expressing opinions but also as an effective instrument for honing critical thinking skills. According to Dewangga and colleagues (2024), debates encourage students to think clearly, develop strong arguments, and express their opinions in a structured manner. Tilaar (2013) adds that through debate, students learn to construct arguments logically and defend their opinions with intellectual responsibility. This strategy places students at the center of learning activities; they are encouraged to actively discuss, critique ideas, and enrich their understanding through a dialogic process (Cuong, 2023). Akinyemi et al. (2019) emphasize that engagement in debates creates a participatory space that encourages a dynamic and reflective exchange of knowledge, while fostering mutual respect among participants. This approach aligns with the active learning paradigm, which emphasizes independent and meaningful knowledge construction through social interaction and intellectual exploration of learning materials.

Although the debate method has great potential to improve students' participation and critical thinking skills, its implementation in the classroom is not always ideal. Demircioglu et al. (2022) noted that in practice, many challenges remain, one of which is the low level of active engagement among some students. Grieve et al. (2021) added that these obstacles are often caused by a lack of confidence in public speaking and an immature understanding of the material. As a result, debate activities are often dominated by certain groups of students, while others tend to be passive listeners. In situations like this, the teacher's role as a facilitator becomes crucial. According to Moeller et al. (2022), teachers must be able to guide students to prepare them both in terms of knowledge and skills for arguing. Cariñanos-Ayala and colleagues (2021) emphasized the importance of structured initial guidance, such as an introduction to the debate format, practice constructing arguments, and understanding discussion ethics. With this approach, every student can have an equal opportunity to actively participate and reap the optimal benefits from debate-based learning.

Constructive controversy arising through debate provides ample opportunities for students to develop creativity, broaden their horizons, and enhance their collaborative problem-solving skills.

Johnson et al., (2006) argue that the dynamics of differing opinions in debate can stimulate critical thinking and productive collaboration among students. In this context, Karuru et al. (2023) emphasize that students not only act as argumentators but also as critical listeners, required to understand and respond to the views of their opponents wisely and constructively. This process indirectly trains higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information. Furthermore, Jerome and Elwick (2017) highlight that debate activities are also an effective means of instilling democratic values, such as tolerance, respect for differences, and shared decision-making. Broom (2015) adds that students' active involvement in debate helps them build healthy dialogue, take responsibility for their opinions, and understand the importance of cooperation in solving problems. Thus, debate is not just an academic activity but also a medium for developing students' overall social character.

Optimizing the Role of Teachers in Developing Students' Conflict Resolution Skills

The role of teachers in resolving conflicts in elementary schools is not limited to mediation, but rather as facilitators capable of guiding the problem-solving process in a constructive and educational manner. Marwanto (2021) argues that teachers have a responsibility to create a dialogic space that guides students toward peaceful, learning-oriented resolutions. In the context of social and emotional learning, teachers are also required to instill core values such as empathy, mutual respect, and ways to resolve conflicts without violence. Hidayah et al., (2019) emphasize that teachers ideally help students understand the roots of conflicts, recognize differing perspectives between parties, and find fair solutions without domination. This is crucial because elementary school students are still at an unstable stage of emotional development. Kholifah et al. (2024) state that teachers' skills in facilitating clarification and mediation are crucial elements in fostering positive social learning experiences. Through appropriate guidance, students not only resolve conflicts but also acquire life skills useful in establishing healthy, just, and sustainable social relationships.

A teacher's ability to maintain neutrality in dealing with conflicts between students is a determining factor in the direction and quality of conflict resolution. Truong (2024) states that teachers who are able to maintain neutrality tend to be objective and provide positive reinforcement in a balanced manner to all parties involved, thereby fostering a sense of justice among students. This approach not only resolves short-term problems but also contributes to shaping students' understanding of their social responsibilities. Hidayah et al. (2019) emphasize that when teachers encourage students to reflect on their actions and encourage them to take responsibility for conflicts, they are building a deeper moral awareness. In this regard, Antonopoulou (2024) underscores the importance of learning values such as tolerance, empathy, and responsibility as the primary foundation for students' social development. The experience of resolving conflicts through peaceful, dialogical, and respectful means will make students more emotionally mature and wiser in addressing differences, both within the school environment and in society.

Although teachers play a vital role in guiding conflict resolution among students, not all teachers possess adequate conflict management skills. Emynorane et al. (2024) revealed that many teachers lack the specific knowledge and skills to handle the dynamics of interpersonal conflict in the school environment. Similarly, Valente et al. (2022) highlighted that a lack of formal training often leads teachers to rely on intuition or personal experience, which may not align with the principles of constructive conflict resolution. Kozlowski and Ilgen (2006) added that an unstructured and inconsistent approach to conflict management risks worsening the situation. Therefore, Usmanova et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of providing systematic and ongoing training in mediation and conflict management as an integral part of teacher professional development. With strong institutional support, teachers will be better prepared to effectively handle various conflict situations. In the long term, this will enable the development of students' social skills to be sustainable and focused (Aggrawal & Magana, 2024).

Constructive Conflict Management as a Strategy Towards a Democratic Learning Environment

Schools, as formal educational institutions, have a strategic responsibility to foster a culture of constructive conflict resolution. Morris et al. (2019) emphasize that schools need to actively create an environment that encourages positive conflict resolution, given that the complex social dynamics within them make conflict an inevitable part of interpersonal interactions. Sylva (1994) argues that conflict is not always negative; in fact, if managed well, it can be a vehicle for developing important skills such as critical thinking, assertive communication, and collaborative solution-making. In Jeyaraj and Harland's (2014) view, schools should adopt a transformative, rather than repressive, pedagogical approach, embracing differences as meaningful learning opportunities. This approach allows conflict to be used as a tool for educating democratic values, such as respect for differences, shared decision-making, and consensus-building. Therefore, when schools incorporate conflict into the educational process, they actively contribute to the development of emotionally resilient students, open to others' perspectives, and capable of resolving issues peacefully and rationally.

School-Based Conflict Management (SBM) is a systemic approach that makes conflict resolution an integral part of the educational structure and school culture. Rasyid et al., (2022) stated that SBM encompasses various integrated strategies, such as developing a peace education curriculum, peer mediation training, and creating a school culture that supports peaceful and constructive conflict resolution. This approach not only aims to address conflicts that have already occurred but also emphasizes prevention through character education and strengthening students' social skills. In the context of implementation, Rahayu and Dong (2023) emphasize the strategic role of the principal as the primary driver in building a school system and climate based on peace values. Meanwhile, Virgana and Suradika (2022) add that the success of SBM depends heavily on managerial commitment and the active participation of all school elements, from teachers to students. When implemented comprehensively, SBM enables schools to create a safe, inclusive, and participatory learning environment, conducive to the holistic development of students' social and emotional skills.

The success of conflict management in elementary schools depends heavily on the synergy between institutional policies, human resource capacity, and the active participation of the entire school community. Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) emphasize that effective conflict management cannot stand alone but must be supported by a strong policy framework and the involvement of all parties within the school environment. If schools lack a clear vision for building a culture of conflict resolution, learning spaces become vulnerable to verbal and emotional abuse, as Siegel et al. (2018) warns. MacNeil et al. (2009) argue that conflict management strategies need to be integrated comprehensively into long-term planning and the school's organizational culture, rather than simply being used as a response to specific incidents.

This includes developing inclusive policies, providing training for teachers and education staff, and actively involving parents and the community in supporting the educational process. McManus and Paul (2019) emphasize that collective participation is a key prerequisite for creating a harmonious school environment. Conversely, Posey-Maddox and Haley-Lock (2016) caution that without systemic and sustained support, conflict resolution efforts in schools will be temporary and lack long-term impact. Therefore, a culture of constructive conflict management needs to be an integral part of the school's mission to shape students into individuals who are religious, democratic, and competent in establishing healthy social relationships.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the interactive debate model has great potential to increase students' active participation, critical thinking skills, and cognitive understanding. However, the effectiveness of this strategy is greatly influenced by student readiness and teacher guidance. The teacher's role is central not only as a debate facilitator but also as a builder of conflict resolution skills through an empathetic and reflective approach. Furthermore, implementing constructive conflict management in elementary schools is a crucial strategy for

creating a democratic and safe learning culture. This approach must involve comprehensive school policies, teacher training, and collaboration among school members. Without systemic support, character-building efforts through debate and conflict resolution will be sporadic. Therefore, integrating debate and conflict management strategies into the elementary school curriculum is a strategic step in shaping a generation with character, tolerance, and democracy.

The theoretical implications of these conclusions emphasize the importance of a constructivist approach to learning, where students are not merely recipients of information but also active actors in constructing knowledge and social skills through interactive debate and conflict resolution. This supports social learning theory and constructive conflict theory, which emphasize collaboration, dialogue, and perspective-taking in the educational process. Practically, these findings encourage the development of teacher training programs focused on facilitating debate and managing conflict. Schools should also adopt learning policies based on democratic values and peaceful resolution, including through a supportive curriculum and school culture. Consistent implementation of these strategies can strengthen students' social competence and create an inclusive, safe, and participatory learning climate.

This study has limitations because it only used literature without field verification, thus not being able to empirically describe the effectiveness of the debate method in a real-life elementary school context. Furthermore, the analysis focused on specific sources that may not have covered all approaches and variables that influence students' conflict resolution abilities. For further research, it is recommended to conduct empirical studies using both qualitative and quantitative approaches through direct observation, interviews with teachers and students, and case studies of schools that have implemented the debate method. Experimental research is also recommended to measurably test the effect of debate on students' conflict resolution abilities and character development. Thus, the research results can enrich the theoretical foundation and provide stronger practical recommendations for the world of education.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

SMH was responsible for the conceptualization, analysis, and writing. MANF was responsible for data analysis and interpreting the research findings.

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