

Strengthening teachers' crisis response: effects of psychological first aid training in elementary schools

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(Received: 20-08-2025; revised: 30-01-2026; accepted: 25-08-2025; published: 05-06-2026)

Abstract: This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of Psychological First Aid (PFA) training in strengthening elementary school teachers' crisis response to support students' psychological well-being. A quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design was conducted. The sample comprised 40 Islamic elementary school teachers in Sidoarjo Regency, recruited using purposive sampling. Data were collected using demographic questionnaires, a PFA knowledge test, and post-training evaluations of perceived effectiveness and affective experiences. Knowledge scores were analyzed using a paired-samples *t*-test in JAMOV, and open-ended responses were thematically reviewed. The findings indicated a significant increase in teachers' knowledge after training ($M_{pre}=55,5$; $M_{post}=73,5$; $t(39)=4,90$; $p<001$; Cohen's $d=0,77$). Participants also reported enhanced self-confidence and practical skills in delivering PFA to their students, with positive affective experiences emphasizing increased awareness and applicability of PFA. Results demonstrate that PFA training effectively enhances teachers' preparedness to support students during crises. Future research should employ randomized controlled trials with larger, diverse teacher populations and incorporate follow-up assessments alongside observational measures of teacher practice and student outcomes to comprehensively evaluate PFA training's impact.

Keywords: psychological first aid; children's mental health; elementary school teacher; crisis situation preparedness.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji efektivitas pelatihan Pertolongan Pertama Psikologis (PFA) dalam memperkuat respons krisis guru sekolah dasar untuk mendukung kesejahteraan psikologis siswa. Desain kuasi-eksperimental satu kelompok pretest-posttest dilakukan. Sampel terdiri dari 40 guru sekolah dasar Islam di Kabupaten Sidoarjo yang direkrut melalui purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan kuesioner demografi, tes pengetahuan PFA, dan evaluasi pasca-pelatihan terhadap efektivitas yang dirasakan dan

pengalaman afektif. Skor pengetahuan dianalisis menggunakan uji t sampel berpasangan menggunakan JAMOV, sementara tanggapan terbuka ditinjau secara tematis. Temuan menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam pengetahuan guru setelah pelatihan ($M_{pra} = 55,5$; $M_{pasca} = 73,5$; $t(39) = -4,90$; $p < 0,001$; Cohen's $d = 0,77$). Peserta juga melaporkan peningkatan kepercayaan diri dan keterampilan praktis dalam menyampaikan PFA kepada siswa mereka, dengan pengalaman afektif positif yang menekankan peningkatan kesadaran dan penerapan PFA. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pelatihan PFA secara efektif meningkatkan kesiapan guru untuk mendukung siswa selama krisis. Penelitian selanjutnya sebaiknya menggunakan metode randomized controlled trials dengan populasi guru yang lebih besar dan beragam, serta mengintegrasikan penilaian tindak lanjut dan observasi langsung terhadap praktik mengajar dan hasil belajar siswa untuk mengevaluasi dampak pelatihan PFA secara komprehensif.

Kata kunci: pertolongan pertama psikologis; kesehatan mental anak; guru sekolah dasar; kesiapsiagaan situasi krisis.

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INTRODUCTION

Children face many challenges in school daily. These may include learning difficulties, overload and burnout, as well as long school hours to achieve certain academic targets. In addition, children often experience other problems, such as violence. Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia (KPAI) reported that out of 2,355 cases of violence towards children in 2023, 861 cases happened in the school environment (Fahham, 2024). Other problems that schoolchildren in Indonesia may face include the risk of natural disasters. Indonesia is a country with a high risk of natural disasters, including earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and floods. Based on data from Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana (BNPB), a total of 1,478 natural disasters occurred in 2024 (BNPB Indonesia, 2023). Furthermore, data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) shows that more than 57% of schools in Indonesia are at risk of exposure to natural disasters (VOI, 2024).

All the problems children encounter at school can directly disrupt their daily lives and, as a consequence, put their psychological well-being at risk. After a disaster, many teachers continue to feel a widespread sense of helplessness, anxiety, and uncertainty when faced with student mental health crises due to the persistent inadequacy of their professional

preparation. This lack of practical training has left educators feeling frustrated and ill-equipped to provide appropriate support or navigate available resources during a psychological well-being emergency (Gunawardena et al., 2024; Shelemy et al., 2019).

Therefore, an intervention is crucial in order to aid and protect children's mental health. One way to achieve this is to provide psychological support through Psychological First Aid (PFA). Psychological First Aid (PFA) is a manualized method of providing psychosocial support in the immediate aftermath of stressful events, intended to ease acute distress and reduce the risk of subsequent psychopathology (Hermosilla et al., 2023).

According to the Minnesota Department of Health, psychological first aid is an evidence-informed approach grounded in principles of human resilience that aims to alleviate stress reactions, support adaptive recovery following traumatic experiences, including natural disasters, public health emergencies, and personal crises (*Psychological First Aid (PFA) - MN Dept. of Health*, 2022). As authority figures, teachers and school staff play a crucial role in ensuring children's psychological well-being. Hence, teachers must be equipped with knowledge of PFA to better support children.

Currently, few studies have examined the use of psychological first aid among younger age groups in school settings in Indonesia. While previous studies Abu Sabra et al., (2023); Barde et al., (2023); Hakim et al., (2022); Kurniawan et al., (2021); Kurniawan, Wulandari, et al., (2022) have analysed an increase in knowledge about PFA in teachers and academic staff, it has only been inclined to target older children and adolescents as the receiving end of the aid, most of whom represent high school to university students. Additionally, students in schools and universities were another popular choice of sample who also showed an enhanced understanding of PFA after training-based experiments were conducted (Hartanto et al., 2024; Mamand Akhagbaker et al., 2024; Tanto et al., 2025), particularly to promote the importance of supporting their peers in distress, where receiving attention from professional psychological help is limited in their environment.

The research findings in Indonesia also reveal a lack of in-depth mental health knowledge among teachers, as many still hold the misconception that various mental disorders stem from personal weaknesses. Furthermore, only about half of the participants feel confident in their ability to appropriately assist students or teach mental health topics (Putri & Novianty, 2024).

Increasing knowledge of PFA among teachers and peer support behavior for middle-to late-adolescent age groups were considered, yet the scope of the student population in the early-adolescence category remains overlooked. Additionally, teachers are currently limited in their ability to provide PFA by relying on existing booklets and online modules. This presents significant drawbacks to handling students hands-on in events of school violence and natural disasters.

Whereas, PFA provides positive benefits to the psychosocial health of trauma-exposed students in school, according to two pilot studies by Tariq et al., (2023), reduced depressive and posttraumatic stress symptoms, including symptoms of PTSD, increased social support, increased school connectedness, and improved psychosocial health. Furthermore, it

alleviated students' academic deterioration and school absenteeism. Without facilitating teachers, the experience of providing psychological first aid, young school children in Indonesia continue to be at risk of going through natural disasters and school violence at the cost of prolonged and unrecognized psychological distress. This poses a threat to their development and well-being, especially to their ability to perform well in school. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the effectiveness of PFA training for elementary school teachers in supporting students, focusing on changes in knowledge, perceived training effectiveness, and affective experiences during the training.

METHODS

This study applied a quasi-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest approach. Research participants were selected through non-probability purposive sampling, with the criterion of elementary school teachers in Sidoarjo Regency. We designed two questionnaires: one to collect participants' demographic data and another to assess their knowledge of PFA. Questionnaires were administered before and after the training. For demographic data, we collected information on participants' age, education, and gender. We also developed 10 multiple-choice questions to measure participants' knowledge of PFA. This instrument was found to be quite reliable, with a McDonald's Omega of 0,468. Data from this instrument were analyzed using a paired-samples t-test in Jamovi 2.3.28.

In the posttest, participants responded to several items assessing their perceived training effectiveness across three aspects: material usefulness, self-confidence, and practical skills. Each item was rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). In addition, participants were asked to provide brief written responses to an open-ended question to explore their affective experience of the training session.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Psychological First Aid Training Procedure

The Psychological First Aid (PFA) training conducted in this study was designed as a participatory and practice-oriented program to equip elementary school teachers. The training began with participatory activities to identify potential crisis risks and common mental health issues faced by students, thereby enabling teachers to contextualize the relevance of PFA in the school environment. The core principles of the training followed the international PFA framework, namely Look, Listen, and Connect: (1) Look refers to recognizing signs of mental health and stress, urgent needs, and risks in students, (2) Listen involves attentive and empathetic communication to understand students' experiences and emotional states, and

(3) includes connecting students with appropriate support systems, resources, or services. To strengthen practical application, participants engaged in a role-play simulation of the PFA implant. In addition, focus groups were also conducted to design the implementation of PFA in the school environment and to identify accessible sources of mental health support.

Participant's Demographic

Participants' demographics are shown in Table 1. A total of 40 teachers from Islamic elementary schools in Sidoarjo participated in this study. The average age of participants was 35 years, with ages ranging from 29 to 59 years. Most participants held a bachelor's or diploma degree (N=36), while only four had a postgraduate degree. Most of the participants were female (N=30).

Table 1. Participant's Demographic Data

	Counts	% of Total	Mean	Min	Max
Age			35	23	59
Sex					
Female	30	75,0%	-	-	-
Male	10	25,0%	-	-	-
Education					
Bachelor/Diploma	36	90,0%	-	-	-
Postgraduate	4	10,0%	-	-	-

Participant's Knowledge

Table 2 shows an increase in participants' PFA knowledge scores. Average participants' score increased from 55,5 (SD=17.2) to 73,5 (SD=15,9). Minimal and maximal scores also increased from 10 to 40 and 80 to 100, respectively. Before conducting a paired-samples t-test, researchers conducted a normality test to determine whether the residuals were normally distributed. As shown in Table 3, the distribution of residual data between pre- and post-test is normal ($p>0,05$).

Key findings across multiple studies indicate that PFA training enhances teachers'

confidence and competence in addressing students' psychological needs following traumatic events. For instance, a study by Sijbrandij et al., (2020) demonstrated that structured one-day PFA training significantly improved participants' knowledge of psychosocial support principles. Similarly, structured PFA training notably increases professionals' knowledge and ability to deliver PFA effectively (Park & Choi, 2022). This increase in knowledge is expected to result in better student outcomes, as teachers become more adept at recognizing and responding to emotional crisis situations in their students.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for pre-test and post-test

	N	Mean	Median	Min	Max	SD	SE
Pre-test	40	55,5	60,0	10	80	17,2	2,73
Post-test	40	73,5	80,0	40	100	15,9	2,52

Table 3. Result of Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)

		W	P
Total Pre-test	-	0,954	0,108
Total Post Test			

Table 4. Result of Paired Samples T-Test

	Statistic	df	p	Mean Difference	SE difference	Effect Size
T test	4,90	39,0	< ,001,	18,0	3,67	Cohen's d 0,775

Perceived Training Effectiveness

The results of perceived training effectiveness are presented in Table 5. All participants agreed that the training materials were useful (agree: 27,5%; strongly agree: 72,5%), and that the training increased their confidence in providing PFA to students (agree: 37,5%; strongly agree: 62,5%). The majority of participants also agreed that the training could provide practical knowledge and skills that can be applied in crisis situations (strongly agree: 57,5%; agree: 40%; disagree: 2,5%). These results indicate a high level of perceived relevance and applicability of the training content among participants.

Affective Experience of the Training

Each participant was asked an open-ended question to capture their affective experience following the training. The responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, and the emerging themes are summarized in Table 6.

Overall, participants reported positive affective experiences regarding the training. The majority (40%) indicated that the training enhanced their understanding of PFA and their ability to support students. Additionally, 34% of participants reported that the training provided new knowledge about PFA and counseling. A smaller proportion of participants noted that the material was easy to understand (8%), the PFA practice session was particularly impressive (8%), and the training activities were enjoyable (10%).

Enhanced teacher self-efficacy in managing student distress can improve overall school safety and emotional climate, fostering a supportive learning environment (Rantho et al., 2025). In a crisis situation such as a pandemic, a teacher with strong self-efficacy can confidently educate students in school (Davis et al., 2024).

Table 5. Perceived Training Effectiveness

	Counts	% of Total
Material Usefulness		
Agree	11	27,5%
Strongly Agree	29	72,5%
Self-confidence		
Agree	15	37,5%
Strongly Agree	25	62,5%
Practical Skills		
Disagree	1	2,5%
Agree	16	40,0%
Strongly Agree	23	57,5%

Table 6. Participant's Impressions

Themes	N (%)
Training session enhance their knowledge of PFA and to support students	40%
Providing new knowledge related to DPA and counseling	34%
Easy to understand	8%
Impressive PFA practice session	8%
Training activities are enjoyable	10%

Studies suggest that educational staff trained in PFA can greatly contribute to collective resilience within education communities, helping both themselves and their students navigate crisis situations more effectively (Abu Sabra et al., 2023). The study by Kamel et al., (2025) found that the PFA training program effectively improved teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and self-efficacy in providing psychological support during crises. PFA also training significantly increased teachers' self-efficacy in supporting students' psychological needs (Rahmi et al., 2025).

Equipping teachers with PFA training can strengthen school-based mental health support for children in emergency situations. An effective and timely strategy is required to address children's mental health, protection, and psychosocial needs during a crisis, underscoring the need to implement Psychological First Aid (PFA) training in schools (Ashok et al., 2021). Training teachers in PFA equips them to create a supportive and stable classroom environment that helps students regulate their emotions and behavior. This approach empowers children to develop healthier coping strategies and build resilience in response to crises or traumatic events (Fennig et al., 2025).

The quasi-experimental design employed in this study has limitations, including the absence of a control group, a relatively small sample size, and the study's focus on a specific region. Furthermore, biases may arise from the use of the self-report method. This could reduce the generalizability of the findings and introduce response bias. The scale in this study has relatively low reliability, which may affect the consistency of the findings and necessitate cautious interpretation of the results..

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study concluded that Psychological First Aid (PFA) training significantly improved elementary school teachers' knowledge, confidence, and preparedness in providing direct psychological support to students during emergencies. This intervention promoted cognitive and affective improvements, reinforcing the importance of integrating structured PFA programs into school-based mental health strategies.

Future research should utilize randomized controlled trials with larger, more diverse teacher populations from different regions and incorporate follow-up assessments to evaluate the training's effects. Furthermore, future research could integrate observational measures of teacher practice and student learning outcomes to provide more comprehensive evidence of the impact of PFA training in educational settings.

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