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Whose School Feels Safe? Student Voice, Relational Trust, and Everyday Inclusion in Diverse Learning Communities

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ABSTRACT

School safety is often monitored through incidents, rules, and physical security, but these indicators may not capture whether different students feel protected in everyday interactions. This convergent mixed-methods study integrated a survey of 450 students from four Indonesian secondary schools with participatory safety mapping and focus-group evidence. Five scales demonstrated acceptable to strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .82–.91). Physical safety was rated high (M = 4.12, SD = 0.68), whereas emotional safety (M = 3.24, SD = 0.91), relational trust (M = 3.45, SD = 0.82), belonging (M = 3.58, SD = 0.79), and student voice (M = 2.98, SD = 0.95) were weaker. Emotional-safety and teacher-trust scores were significantly lower for girls than boys, students with disabilities than their peers, and low-SES than high-SES students. A regression model explained 54.2% of variance in perceived safety, $F(3, 446) = 175.8$, $p < .001$. Relational trust was the strongest predictor (beta = .412), followed by belonging (beta = .325) and student voice (beta = .148). Participatory maps located insecurity in poorly supervised back areas and toilet corridors, while focus groups showed that dismissive adult responses made formal reporting socially risky. Integration produced a central meta-inference: safety is relational and uneven before it becomes an incident statistic. The article proposes a relational–spatial model of everyday inclusive safety and recommends disaggregated monitoring, credible confidential response, participatory hotspot audits, and documented feedback to students.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A school may record few serious incidents and still feel unsafe to many of its students. Administrative indicators usually privilege events that adults can count: fights, formal complaints, sanctions, damaged property, or visits to counselling services. Students also judge safety through less visible evidence. They notice who is mocked without consequence, which corridor lacks supervision, whether a teacher treats a sexist remark as harmless joking, whether confidentiality survives a report, and whether students with disabilities can move through social and physical spaces without humiliation. These everyday judgements determine whether formal protection is trusted before a serious incident occurs.

The distinction between objective conditions and perceived safety is not a claim that perception is inaccurate. Perception is an educationally consequential reading of the environment. Students who feel unsafe may avoid places, remain silent, disengage, or stay away from school; perceived safety is also associated with mental health, belonging, and academic participation (Mori et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2018). A systematic review found wide variation in the prevalence of feeling unsafe and emphasised the combined importance of victimisation, fair rules, relationships, and social context (Mori et al., 2021). Safety is therefore both a condition and an interpretation shaped through repeated interaction.

School-climate research provides a multidimensional frame. Reviews consistently include safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environment, and improvement processes, while cautioning against collapsing these dimensions into a single undifferentiated score (Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016). This matters because a high average for physical safety can coexist with weaker emotional safety. Cameras, gates, rules, and adult presence can reduce visible disorder without ensuring that students feel respected, included, or able to disclose harm. A school can be orderly but relationally unsafe.

Relational trust helps explain this divergence. Trust involves a willingness to accept vulnerability based on expectations of benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). For students, reporting bullying or exclusion is an act of vulnerability. It exposes the reporter to adult judgement, possible breaches of confidentiality, retaliation, and a reputation for making trouble. Trust is therefore not simply liking a teacher. It is an expectation that an adult will recognise harm, respond fairly, protect the student, and follow through. Research links trusting teacher relationships and relational discipline to cooperation, school identification, and safety (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Lenzi et al., 2017).

Belonging is closely connected but conceptually distinct. It concerns feeling accepted, respected, included, and supported in the school social environment (Goodenow, 1993). A meta-analysis of 51 studies found teacher support among the strongest correlates of school belonging (Allen et al., 2018). Belonging gives students a social location from which to seek help and participate. Yet belonging may be distributed unevenly. Students can attend the same school and inhabit different relational worlds depending on gender, disability, socio-economic position, peer status, or the places they regularly use.

Student voice adds a question of power. Voice is not satisfied by providing a survey box or inviting students to speak. Meaningful participation requires a safe space, facilitated expression, an audience with authority, and evidence that views influence decisions (Cook-Sather, 2006; Lundy, 2007). These conditions are directly relevant to safety. If students believe that adults will minimise their accounts, reporting channels exist only formally. Conversely, when schools explain how student evidence changed supervision, routines, or response protocols, voice becomes part of prevention.

The Indonesian policy context makes these relationships timely. OECD's PISA 2022 country note reported that 25% of girls and 30% of boys in Indonesia experienced bullying acts at least a few times a month. At the time of writing, Ministerial Regulation No. 6 of 2026 on Safe and Comfortable School Culture replaced the 2023 violence-prevention regulation and broadened policy attention to physical protection, psychological wellbeing, sociocultural safety, digital civility, prevention, participation, and collaborative response. The policy direction is significant because it moves beyond incident handling towards culture. Whether students experience that culture, however, must be empirically examined.

This study integrates survey, spatial, and conversational evidence from four diverse schools. It asks: (1) How do students rate physical safety, emotional safety, relational trust, belonging, and voice? (2) How do emotional safety and teacher trust differ by gender, disability status, and socio-economic position? (3) How strongly do relational trust, belonging, and voice predict perceived safety? and (4) How do participatory maps and focus groups explain the quantitative pattern? The contribution is a relational–spatial account of inclusive safety that centres distribution, credibility, and everyday school geography.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Safety as a multidimensional and situated experience

School safety includes protection from physical injury, threats, bullying, sexual harassment, discrimination, and psychological harm. It also includes the predictability of rules and the availability of supportive relationships. Thapa et al. (2013) locate safety within a wider climate that includes norms, relationships, learning, and institutional environment. Wang and Degol (2016) similarly distinguish academic, community, safety, and institutional dimensions. Both frameworks imply that safety cannot be inferred from a single indicator.

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Safety is spatially situated. Astor et al. (2001) showed that students identify specific violence-prone subcontexts such as corridors, cafeterias, and playgrounds, and that perceptions vary with school organisation and developmental stage. Spaces are not inherently safe or unsafe. Adult presence, visibility, lighting, peer clustering, transition routines, and social norms give them meaning. Participatory mapping can therefore reveal patterns that disappear when students answer only a general statement such as 'I feel safe at school.'

2.2. Relational trust as response credibility

Trust becomes especially important when institutional response depends on disclosure. A student must predict whether a teacher will believe the account, distinguish humour from harm, keep information appropriately confidential, and intervene without worsening the student's position. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2000) dimensions of benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness can be translated into response credibility. Benevolence concerns care; reliability concerns follow-through; competence concerns knowing how to act; honesty concerns transparent process; and openness concerns listening without premature dismissal.

Research on authoritative school climate suggests that support and structure are complementary. Clear, consistently enforced expectations can reduce bullying when students also experience adults as caring and available (Gregory et al., 2010). Pure control may produce surveillance without disclosure; pure support without predictable procedures may produce sympathy without protection. Relational credibility links the two by making rules believable in interpersonal encounters.

2.3. Belonging as a relational resource

Belonging captures whether students experience themselves as legitimate members of the school. Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership tradition emphasises acceptance, respect, inclusion, and support. Allen et al. (2018) show that belonging is associated with teacher support, peer support, personal characteristics, academic motivation, and environmental safety. In the present framework, belonging is both an outcome of a trustworthy climate and a resource for interpreting ambiguous events. Students who expect recognition may be more willing to seek assistance; those positioned at the margin may read the same adult silence as confirmation that protection is not meant for them.

2.4. Student voice as an institutional safety mechanism

Student voice is often treated as an engagement strategy, but it is also a safety technology in the social rather than mechanical sense. Students observe micro-locations, peer norms, digital spillover, and barriers to reporting that adults may not see. Cook-Sather (2006) distinguishes the sound, presence, and power of student voice, while Lundy (2007) argues that expression requires space, audience, and influence. A safety system that collects views but does not visibly act on them can reduce rather than increase trust because it demonstrates that disclosure has no consequence.

Voice also requires an equity test. Students with greater status may speak in forums that formally represent everyone, while girls, students with disabilities, lower-SES students, or socially isolated students remain unheard. Disaggregated survey data and purposive participatory methods are therefore necessary. The question is not only whether the school has a student council or reporting channel, but whose knowledge changes practice.

2.5. An intersectional distributional lens

Average climate scores can conceal systematic differences. Disability-focused research finds that students with disabilities often report less favourable school climate than peers, although patterns vary across settings and disability groups (Hunt et al., 2024). Socio-economic position can shape exposure to exclusion, access to adult advocacy, and peer status. Gender can shape the form and interpretation of harm, particularly verbal, relational, and sexualised harassment. An intersectional lens does not reduce students to demographic categories; it asks how institutional conditions distribute vulnerability and credibility (Bowleg, 2012).

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The framework therefore treats inclusive safety as a relational–spatial achievement. Structural conditions create rules and supervision. Relational credibility determines whether students expect those structures to work. Belonging and voice shape participation in protection. Spatial evidence identifies where formal arrangements weaken. Disaggregation tests whether the system works similarly for different groups. These propositions guide the integration of quantitative and qualitative strands.

3. METHODS

3.1. Design

A convergent mixed-methods design was used. Quantitative and qualitative strands examined the same phenomenon during a common study period, were analysed separately, and were then integrated through comparison and joint display. Convergence was selected because no single data form could answer the research questions. Survey data estimated level, difference, and association; participatory maps located safety; and focus groups explained how students interpreted relationships and reporting. Integration followed the principle that mixed-methods value lies in the inferences produced between strands, not in the mere presence of two datasets (Fetters et al., 2013).

3.2. Sites and survey participants

The study involved four secondary schools selected to capture variation in location, governance, resources, socio-economic composition, and inclusion. The survey sample comprised 450 students. Gender reporting included 210 boys, 225 girls, and 15 students recorded as non-binary or no response. Thirty-eight students (8.4%) were identified as having special educational needs or disabilities. The socio-economic comparison focused on 120 high-SES and 115 low-SES students; the remaining 215 students were in the middle category or lacked an extreme-group classification.

Table 1. Survey sample profile (N = 450)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Boys	210	46.7
Gender	Girls	225	50.0
Gender	Non-binary / no response	15	3.3
Disability / special educational needs	Identified	38	8.4
Disability / special educational needs	Not identified	412	91.6
Socio-economic status	High	120	26.7
Socio-economic status	Middle / not in extreme comparison	215	47.8
Socio-economic status	Low	115	25.6

3.3. Survey measures

The analytic dataset contained five Likert-type scales scored from 1 to 5: physical safety, emotional safety, relational trust, school belonging, and student voice and participation. The scales contained five to eight items. Higher scores indicated more favourable perceptions. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. The purpose of the present analysis was construct-level comparison and integration; item wording, translation procedure, response anchors, and any prior validation source should be supplied in an online appendix before submission.

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Table 2. Descriptive statistics and internal consistency of the study scales

Scale	Items	Cronbach 's alpha	Mean	SD	General interpretation
Physical safety	6	.84	4.12	0.68	High
Emotional safety	6	.88	3.24	0.91	Moderate
Relational trust	8	.91	3.45	0.82	Moderate
School belonging	6	.86	3.58	0.79	Moderate
Student voice and participation	5	.82	2.98	0.95	Low to moderate

3.4. Quantitative analysis

Descriptive statistics characterised central tendency, dispersion, and reliability. Independent group comparisons examined emotional safety and trust in teachers by gender, disability status, and socio-economic position. The binary gender comparison used boys and girls; the 15 non-binary or non-responding students were retained in overall descriptive analysis but not forced into a binary contrast. The socio-economic test compared the high and low groups to maximise interpretive clarity. The supplied analytic record reported group means and p values but not test statistics or effect sizes; the manuscript therefore does not invent them.

Multiple linear regression estimated perceived safety from relational trust, student voice, and school belonging. The model was specified as Safety = beta0 + beta1(Relational Trust) + beta2(Student Voice) + beta3(Belonging) + error. Standardised coefficients, model R-squared, the omnibus F statistic, and p values are reported. The design is cross-sectional; coefficients are interpreted as adjusted associations rather than causal effects.

3.5. Participatory safety mapping and focus groups

The qualitative strand used participatory school-safety mapping in the same four schools. Students identified locations they experienced as safer, conditional, ambivalent, or unsafe and annotated reasons related to supervision, visibility, peer interaction, lighting, and reporting. Focus groups then examined why locations carried those meanings and how students decided whether to seek adult help. The qualitative sample was nested within the survey cohort, but participation varied across mapping and discussion activities; the retained dataset identifies activity and participant characteristics through anonymous codes rather than a single consolidated qualitative headcount.

Mapping was treated as more than a visual exercise. Location claims were linked to explanations and affected groups. Focus-group data were coded for forms of harm, adult presence, response credibility, stigma, retaliation, peer norms, and desired change. Quotations were translated from Indonesian for publication. Analysis sought both recurring patterns and divergences, particularly the ambivalent status of counselling services and the contrast between physical order and emotional insecurity.

3.6. Integration and quality

Integration occurred through a joint display aligning statistical results with mapped spaces, focus-group explanations, and policy implications (Guetterman et al., 2015). Findings were classified as convergent when strands supported the same interpretation, complementary when one explained a different aspect, and dissonant when they suggested tension. The principal dissonance—high physical safety alongside only moderate emotional safety—became a central analytic finding rather than an inconsistency to be averaged away.

Quantitative quality was examined through internal consistency and transparent reporting of the supplied model. Qualitative credibility was supported through participatory elicitation, comparison across locations and groups, and retention of ambivalent evidence. Mixed-methods quality was addressed by specifying the point of integration and grounding each meta-inference in both numerical and qualitative evidence. Because only four schools participated, school-level clustering could not be modelled robustly and the results should not be treated as nationally representative.

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3.7. Ethics

School and participant codes protect identity, and quotations omit names and identifying detail. The verified ethics committee, approval number, parental consent or student assent procedures, safeguarding protocol, and data-collection dates were not included in the supplied dataset. These details must be inserted and checked against the original research record before submission; none have been fabricated in this draft.

4. RESULTS

4.1. The overall profile: physically secure, relationally uncertain

The five scales did not describe a uniformly safe environment. Physical safety had the highest mean (M = 4.12, SD = 0.68), suggesting that students generally perceived protection from visible physical threat. Emotional safety was substantially lower (M = 3.24, SD = 0.91) and more dispersed. Relational trust (M = 3.45, SD = 0.82) and belonging (M = 3.58, SD = 0.79) occupied the moderate range. Student voice was the lowest scale (M = 2.98, SD = 0.95), indicating that participation and perceived influence were the weakest parts of the safety ecology.

Reliability coefficients ranged from .82 to .91, supporting use of the scale scores for the reported group and regression analyses. The descriptive gap between physical and emotional safety was substantively important. It indicated that visible control and freedom from physical aggression did not automatically produce confidence that identity-based jokes, exclusion, humiliation, or private concerns would be taken seriously.

4.2. Safety and trust were unequally distributed

Table 3. Group differences in emotional safety and trust in teachers

Comparison	Group	n	Emotional safety M	Teacher trust M	Reported p value	Interpretation
Gender	Boys	210	3.48	3.60	p < .001	Girls reported lower emotional safety and trust.
Gender	Girls	225	3.01	3.31	p < .001	Pattern linked qualitatively to verbal and relational harassment.
Disability status	Non-disabled / non-SEN	412	3.32	3.51	p < .001	Students with disabilities reported the largest disadvantage.
Disability status	Disabled / SEN	38	2.37	2.80	p < .001	Lower safety and trust indicate a systemic inclusion concern.
Socio-economic status	High SES	120	3.65	3.72	p = .004	High-SES students reported greater security.
Socio-economic status	Low SES	115	3.08	3.22	p = .004	Qualitative evidence pointed to exclusion and clique dynamics.

Girls reported lower emotional safety (M = 3.01) than boys (M = 3.48) and lower trust in teachers (3.31 versus 3.60), p < .001. The difference was not mirrored by the overall high physical-safety score. This pattern suggests that the gendered gap concerned relational and verbal experience more than overt physical disorder. Focus-group accounts later identified sexist joking, reputational risk, and the normalisation of verbal harassment as plausible mechanisms.

The disability-status gap was the largest. Students identified as having special educational needs or disabilities reported emotional safety of 2.37 and teacher trust of 2.80, compared with

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3.32 and 3.51 among other students, $p < .001$. The result is unlikely to be explained by a generally unsafe school because the overall physical-safety mean was high. Instead, it points towards unequal access to protection, recognition, peer acceptance, and credible adult response. It is consistent with systematic-review evidence that students with disabilities frequently report less favourable school climate (Hunt et al., 2024).

Low-SES students also reported lower emotional safety (M = 3.08) and trust (M = 3.22) than high-SES students (3.65 and 3.72), $p = .004$. The qualitative strand associated this difference with cliques, ridicule, and social exclusion rather than with an explicitly economic rule. Socio-economic position became visible through everyday symbols, participation in peer activities, and perceptions of whose complaints would carry weight.

4.3. Relational trust was the strongest adjusted predictor

Table 4. Multiple regression predicting perceived school safety

Predictor	Standardised beta	p value	Relative contribution
Relational trust in teachers	.412	$p < .001$	Strongest predictor
School belonging	.325	$p < .001$	Second strongest predictor
Student voice	.148	$p = .002$	Smaller but independent predictor
Model summary	$R^2 = .542$	$F(3, 446) = 175.8$, $p < .001$	54.2% of variance explained

The regression model explained 54.2% of variation in perceived safety, $F(3, 446) = 175.8$, $p < .001$. Relational trust was the strongest predictor (beta = .412, $p < .001$), followed by school belonging (beta = .325, $p < .001$). Student voice contributed a smaller but statistically significant independent association (beta = .148, $p = .002$). The ordering supports a relational account: students felt safer when they expected teachers to handle problems fairly and confidentially, when they experienced membership, and when they perceived some influence over school life.

The voice coefficient should not be dismissed because it was smaller. Voice was also the lowest-rated scale, suggesting restricted opportunities or weak influence. Limited variability in genuinely consequential participation can suppress the observable association. Moreover, voice may partly operate through trust and belonging: students are more likely to speak when they expect an audience, and visible response can strengthen membership. The cross-sectional model cannot establish this sequence, but the qualitative findings clarify its plausibility.

4.4. The safety map revealed conditional and hidden geographies

Table 5. Participatory school-safety map

Location	Perceived safety	Explanatory factors from group discussion	Students primarily affected
Classroom when a teacher is present	Safe	Visible authority, clearer rules, and immediate intervention capacity	All students
Canteen and sports field	Conditionally safe	Open and visible, but vulnerable to verbal mocking, cliques, and exclusion	Shy students and low-SES students
Back area and toilet corridors	Very unsafe	Limited adult supervision, weak lighting, concealment, and recurring emotional or physical bullying	Girls and students with disabilities
Counselling room	Ambivalent	Potential confidential support, but fear of being labelled a problem student	Students experiencing bullying

Classrooms were perceived as safe when teachers were present. The conditional phrasing matters: safety was attached to the active availability of authority rather than to the room itself. Canteens and sports fields were relatively open and therefore not identified as the most dangerous places, but students described mocking and clique formation that could occur in public

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without being recognised as a safety problem. These locations were especially difficult for shy students and peers from lower-SES backgrounds.

Back areas and toilet corridors were identified as very unsafe. Low visibility, weak lighting, and limited adult presence created opportunities for harassment and reduced the likelihood of timely intervention. Girls and students with disabilities were named as particularly affected. The mapping evidence thus gave spatial form to the group differences: lower emotional-safety scores were connected to specific routes and transition spaces rather than to an abstract attitude towards school.

The counselling room was ambivalent. Some students saw it as a potential safe zone; others believed that visiting would mark them as a problem student. This is a critical finding because a formal support service can be functionally inaccessible even when it exists. Stigma transforms help-seeking into a public identity signal. Location, appointment routines, confidentiality, and how teachers refer students can therefore influence whether counselling is experienced as protection.

4.5. Dismissive response converted verbal harm into silence

Focus-group evidence explained why emotional safety and trust remained weaker than physical safety. Students distinguished freedom from being hit from freedom from sexist jokes, ridicule involving parents' names, and relational exclusion. These harms were not invisible to students. They became institutionally invisible when adults framed them as ordinary peer humour. One group in SK-03 described the gap:

> *"If safe only means not being hit, this school is safe. But if it means being safe from sexist jokes or insults using our parents' names, not at all. We are reluctant to report it to teachers." (Student A, girl, Grade 11, FGD-S02-SK03; translated from Indonesian)*

When the facilitator asked why students avoided teachers or homeroom staff, another student described the anticipated consequence of reporting:

> *"Teachers often respond, 'It is only a joke between friends; do not be too sensitive.' If we report it, we are labelled the troublemaker and classmates become even more hostile. It is better to stay quiet." (Student B, boy, non-academic track, FGD-S02-SK03; translated from Indonesian)*

The exchange identifies three mechanisms of silence. First, definitional minimisation recategorises harm as humour. Second, role reversal positions the reporter as overly sensitive or disruptive. Third, retaliation risk increases because the report may become socially visible without changing peer behaviour. Under these conditions, non-reporting is not evidence that harm is absent; it is a rational response to low relational credibility.

4.6. Integrated meta-inferences

Four meta-inferences emerged. First, physical order and emotional safety were empirically separable. The high physical-safety mean converged with student descriptions of classrooms under adult supervision, but diverged from accounts of verbal, relational, and gendered harm. Second, relational trust was not an optional climate benefit. It was the strongest adjusted predictor and the mechanism students invoked when explaining reporting decisions.

Third, safety inequality was spatially organised. Disability, gender, and SES gaps converged with mapped hotspots and peer dynamics. The same campus offered different levels of protection depending on routes, visibility, social position, and the credibility granted to a student's account. Fourth, student voice was both a measured predictor and a missing institutional process. Students possessed actionable knowledge about locations and response failures, yet the low voice mean suggested that schools did not consistently convert that knowledge into visible change.

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Table 6. Mixed-methods joint display and action implications

Quantitative result	Qualitative explanation	Integrated inference	Immediate school action
Physical safety high; emotional safety moderate	Students differentiated physical assault from sexist jokes, ridicule and exclusion.	Incident control does not guarantee emotional protection.	Monitor physical and emotional safety separately; define verbal and relational harm in staff response protocols.
Relational trust strongest predictor	Students anticipated minimisation, labelling and retaliation after reporting.	Safety depends on response credibility before disclosure occurs.	Train staff in non-dismissive first response, confidentiality, documentation and follow-through.
Disabled students reported the lowest safety and trust	Back areas and toilet corridors were particularly unsafe for disabled students and girls.	Inclusion fails when protection varies by identity and route.	Conduct accessibility-and-safety walks with disabled students; redesign supervision, lighting and transitions.
Student voice lowest scale but independently predictive	Students generated precise hotspot and reporting evidence.	Voice becomes protective only when it reaches an audience and produces visible influence.	Publish a student-feedback loop showing what was heard, changed, deferred and why.
Low-SES students reported lower safety and trust	Canteen and sports areas supported cliques, mocking and social exclusion.	Open spaces can be physically visible yet socially exclusionary.	Review peer norms, participation costs and adult presence during unstructured time.

4.7. Four institutional failure modes

Integration also identified four failure modes that can make a formally compliant safety system ineffective. The first is incident reductionism: the school defines safety only through recorded physical events and therefore treats emotional harm as outside the core indicator. The second is response minimisation: an adult recodes targeted conduct as joking before examining repetition, status, identity, or impact. The third is channel stigma: students can technically access counselling or reporting, but the route publicly marks them as problematic. The fourth is feedback absence: schools collect survey or council input without showing how the evidence changed a decision.

The failure modes reinforce one another. Incident reductionism makes minimising language appear reasonable because unrecorded verbal harm does not count as a safety outcome. Minimisation lowers trust and directs students towards silence or private coping. Channel stigma raises the social price of seeking formal help. Feedback absence then deprives students of counter-evidence that reporting can work. The resulting low complaint count may be interpreted as success even though it partly reflects weak disclosure.

Each failure mode has a corresponding repair. Schools can separate physical and emotional indicators, use a brief first-response decision guide, offer multiple confidential access routes, and publish an anonymised response-and-change record. None of these practices guarantees safety, and all require safeguarding judgement. Together, however, they make the institution more observable to students: definitions are clearer, response is less person-dependent, help-seeking carries less stigma, and student evidence leaves a visible trace.

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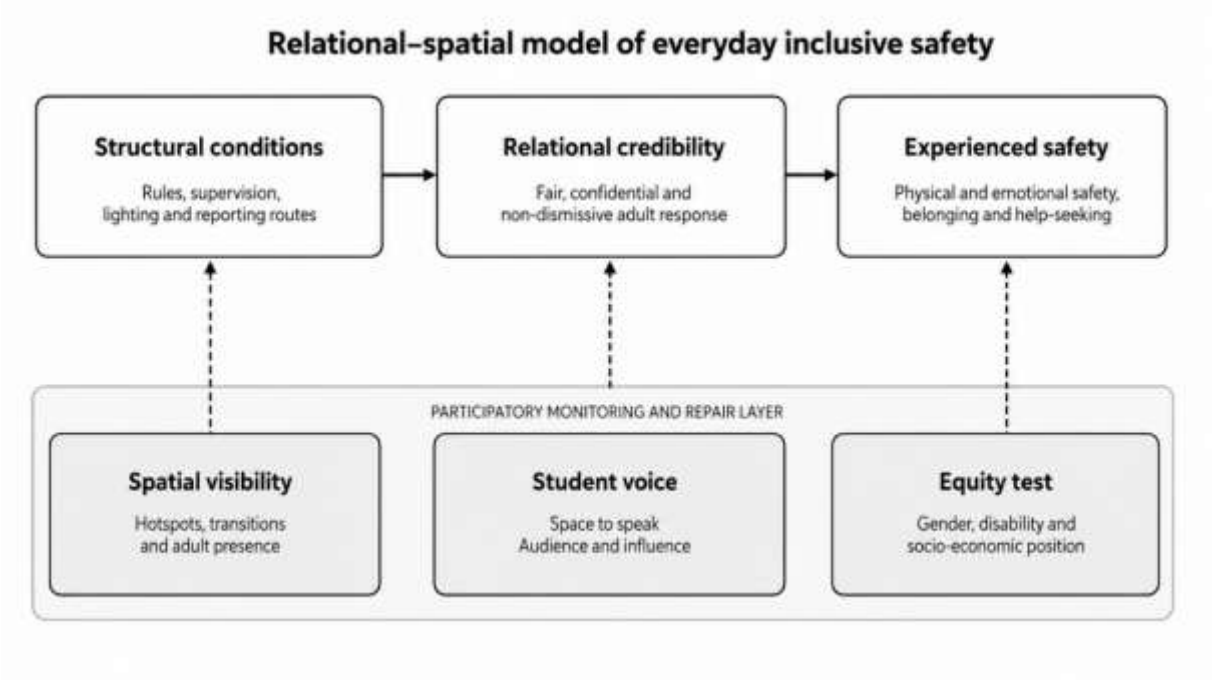


Figure 1. Relational-Spatial model of everyday inclusice safety

5. DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Whose school feels safe?

The title question cannot be answered with a school average. The same schools were experienced as relatively secure by many students and substantially less safe by girls, students with disabilities, and low-SES peers. These differences were not marginal variations around a common experience. The disability gap in emotional safety was nearly a full scale point. An inclusive school-safety claim should therefore be evaluated distributionally: not only whether mean safety is acceptable, but whether protection and trust are shared.

This distributional finding supports an intersectional approach to climate evidence (Bowleg, 2012; Hunt et al., 2024). Categories are not explanations by themselves. The qualitative strand identified processes through which position mattered: exposure to sexist humour, peer-group exclusion, movement through low-visibility areas, stigma attached to counselling, and unequal confidence that adults would respond. These mechanisms are more actionable than demographic differences alone.

5.2. Relational trust is preventive infrastructure

The strongest regression coefficient belonged to relational trust, and focus groups provided a coherent explanation. Students assess response credibility before reporting. When prior adult responses minimise harm, the expected cost of disclosure rises. Trust therefore functions as preventive infrastructure: it makes early information available to the school. Without it, incidents surface only after escalation or remain absent from official records.

This interpretation extends organisational accounts of trust (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) and relational discipline (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). Benevolence without competence may produce concern but ineffective action. Competence without openness may produce procedure without disclosure. Reliability requires follow-through, and honesty requires explaining what can and cannot remain confidential. Staff training should therefore move beyond generic advice to 'listen to students' and develop a common first-response protocol.

5.3. Safety is spatial, temporal, and relational

The maps showed that risk clustered in transition spaces and periods of weak adult presence. This is consistent with research on violence-prone school subcontexts (Astor et al., 2001). Yet

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supervision alone is insufficient. Canteens and sports fields were open but still supported ridicule and exclusion. Effective hotspot work must combine physical design, adult visibility, peer norms, and specific attention to who uses the space and for what purpose.

A participatory audit can be organised as a repeating cycle: students map, staff verify environmental and routine conditions, the school changes a small number of priorities, and students review whether experience changed. The process should include route-based questions for disabled students, gendered experience of toilets and corridors, and social participation during unstructured time. This turns mapping into governance rather than a one-off activity.

5.4. Student voice requires visible influence

Student voice was the lowest-rated scale, yet it independently predicted safety and generated the most precise qualitative evidence. This combination suggests underused capacity. Schools may invite expression without providing audience or influence. Lundy's (2007) framework clarifies the failure: space and voice are incomplete without a responsible audience and evidence that views receive due weight. Cook-Sather's (2006) emphasis on power similarly warns that listening can remain symbolic.

For safety governance, visible influence can be modest but must be credible. Schools can publish a short feedback record: what students identified, what changed, what requires more time, what could not be changed, and why. Such feedback protects against unrealistic promises while demonstrating that participation enters decision-making. It may also improve the survey's voice and trust dimensions over time.

5.5. Implications for Indonesia's safe-school policy

Ministerial Regulation No. 6 of 2026 frames safe and comfortable school culture in physical, psychological, sociocultural, spiritual, and digital terms and emphasises humanistic, participatory, and inclusive prevention. The present findings support that broader orientation. They also show the implementation challenge: policy categories must become observable routines in corridors, counselling referrals, teacher responses, and student feedback. Compliance with structures is necessary but cannot demonstrate experienced protection.

A practical monitoring dashboard should therefore include separate measures of physical and emotional safety, relational trust, belonging, voice, and reporting confidence. Results should be disaggregated by disability, gender, and SES where confidentiality permits. Schools should combine the dashboard with hotspot maps and anonymised response audits. The aim is not to rank vulnerable groups but to identify where institutional arrangements produce unequal experience.

Implementation can begin with a small governance routine. Each term, a mixed student–staff group can review one disaggregated survey pattern, one mapped hotspot, and one sample of anonymised response data. The group should identify a responsible owner, a feasible change, a date for review, and the evidence that would indicate improvement. This structure connects culture to accountability while avoiding an unmanageable list of initiatives. Importantly, students should participate in interpreting the evidence rather than being asked only to endorse an adult explanation.

5.6. Implications for inclusive practice

The disability results require more than anti-bullying messages. Students with disabilities should participate in route audits, supervision design, communication-access review, and evaluation of reporting mechanisms. Schools should examine whether support staff presence inadvertently marks students as different, whether toilets and back corridors are accessible and visible, and whether students can report through multiple modes. Inclusion involves an equal expectation of being believed and protected.

Gender-responsive practice should explicitly address sexist jokes and relational aggression. Staff need a shared language for distinguishing mutual humour from conduct that targets identity, persists after discomfort, exploits status, or creates a hostile environment. Low-SES exclusion may require attention to hidden participation costs, peer-group practices, and the social organisation

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of lunch and extracurricular space. Across groups, universal prevention should be combined with targeted listening.

5.7. Measurement and evaluation implications

The descriptive results demonstrate why a single school-safety item is inadequate. A composite dominated by physical-order items could classify these schools as highly safe while missing the lower emotional-safety and voice scores. Evaluation should retain separable subscales, report dispersion as well as means, and examine group distributions. Reliability is necessary but not sufficient: future validation should test factor structure, measurement invariance, response-process evidence, and whether items use language that students with different communication needs can access.

Schools should also resist turning disaggregation into public ranking of small groups. Disability and non-binary categories can become identifiable in small sites. A defensible dashboard uses minimum-cell rules, combines survey trends with confidential qualitative inquiry, and reports actions rather than exposing individuals. Where subgroup numbers are too small for publication, targeted participatory sessions can still ensure that experience enters decision-making. Equity monitoring is valuable only when it protects the people whose vulnerability it reveals.

Evaluation should follow implementation over time. Baseline mapping can be repeated after changes to supervision, lighting, referral routines, or staff response. A credible improvement claim would combine movement in relevant scales, reduced concentration of hotspot reports, greater confidence in confidentiality, and evidence that students recognise the change. Rising reports immediately after trust-building should not automatically be treated as deterioration; they may indicate that previously hidden harm has become discloseable.

5.8. Limitations and future research

Several limitations qualify the findings. The four schools were purposively selected, so estimates are not nationally representative. Students were nested within schools, but four clusters were insufficient for a stable multilevel model. The design was cross-sectional and cannot establish that trust, belonging, or voice causes safety. The analytic record did not include group-specific standard deviations, test statistics, effect sizes, item wording, or a consolidated qualitative headcount; these details should be recovered from the original files before journal submission.

Future research should use longitudinal and multilevel designs to test whether improvements in response credibility precede changes in reporting, safety, and belonging. Measurement invariance should be evaluated across gender and disability groups before latent-mean comparison. Larger disability samples should distinguish types of access need without compromising confidentiality. Participatory studies should also follow whether mapped changes alter experience, not merely whether schools complete the mapping activity.

The regression model invites mediation and reciprocal hypotheses. Trust may strengthen safety directly, belonging may partly transmit the effect of relationships, and visible student influence may build both trust and belonging. The reverse pathways are also plausible. Repeated measures and intervention studies are needed. The present model should therefore be read as an empirically grounded set of associations and mechanisms, not a proven causal sequence.

6. CONCLUSION

The study shows why the question is not simply whether a school is safe, but whose school feels safe, where, and under what relational conditions. Students reported high physical safety alongside weaker emotional safety, trust, belonging, and voice. Girls, students with disabilities, and low-SES students experienced marked disadvantages. Relational trust was the strongest predictor of safety, while participatory evidence showed that poorly supervised spaces and dismissive adult responses converted vulnerability into silence.

Everyday inclusive safety is produced when structural protection is made credible through fair relationships, meaningful belonging, consequential voice, spatial visibility, and an explicit

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equity test. Schools need incident procedures, but they also need evidence from experiences that have not yet become incidents. Disaggregated surveys, student-led hotspot audits, confidential and non-dismissive response, and visible feedback can make that evidence actionable. Safety becomes a culture when students can see that speaking changes what adults notice and do.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The student-level dataset is not publicly available because it contains sensitive perceptions of safety and potentially identifiable school information. De-identified syntax, scale documentation, and a controlled data-access statement should be supplied subject to the verified ethics and consent conditions.

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