

The Role of Character Education in Reducing Bullying Behaviour in Elementary Schools

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Article Info

Keywords:

Bullying;
Character
Education;
Elementary
School;
Empathy
Value;
Case Study.

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of bullying in elementary schools is an important issue that affects students' psychological and social development. This study aims to identify the forms of bullying in elementary schools and explore the role of character education in reducing bullying behaviour. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation involving six informants, namely three teachers, two students and one parent. The results showed that bullying that occurs in elementary schools is more often in the form of verbal and social bullying, with a significant impact on the victim's self-confidence and academic achievement. Character education that includes the values of empathy, tolerance and mutual respect is implemented in the school curriculum and extracurricular activities as a preventive effort. However, the implementation of character education is still faced with challenges, such as the mismatch between the values taught at school and the application at home. This study suggests that character education should be implemented consistently and involve cooperation between teachers, parents and the community to create a bullying-free environment.

Informasi Artikel

Kata Kunci:

Bullying;
Pendidikan
Karakter;
Sekolah Dasar;
Nilai Empati;
Studi Kasus.

ABSTRAK

Fenomena bullying di sekolah dasar merupakan isu penting yang mempengaruhi perkembangan psikologis dan sosial siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi bentuk-bentuk bullying yang terjadi di sekolah dasar dan mengeksplorasi peran pendidikan karakter dalam mengurangi perilaku bullying tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi partisipatif dengan melibatkan enam informan, yaitu tiga guru, dua siswa, dan satu orang tua. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bullying yang terjadi di sekolah dasar lebih sering berupa bullying verbal dan sosial, dengan dampak yang signifikan terhadap kepercayaan diri dan prestasi akademik korban. Pendidikan karakter yang mencakup nilai-nilai empati, toleransi, dan saling menghormati diterapkan dalam kurikulum sekolah dan kegiatan ekstrakurikuler sebagai upaya preventif. Meskipun demikian, implementasi pendidikan karakter masih dihadapkan pada tantangan, seperti ketidaksesuaian antara nilai yang diajarkan di sekolah dengan penerapan di rumah. Penelitian ini menyarankan agar pendidikan karakter diterapkan secara konsisten dan melibatkan kerjasama antara guru, orang tua, dan masyarakat untuk menciptakan lingkungan yang bebas dari bullying.

Article History

Received: 01 Desember 2024

Accepted: 01 Desember 2024

Published: 09 Desember 2024

DOI:

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of bullying in elementary schools is increasingly becoming a serious concern in Indonesia, given its enormous negative impact on children's physical and mental development (Husnunnadia & Slam, 2024; Tambunan et al., 2024). Although often considered part of the social process among children, the reality is that bullying can disrupt children's well-being and affect their quality of life (Khaira, 2023; Wibowo et al., 2021). Violent incidents involving elementary school students are increasingly being exposed in the media, illustrating the magnitude of this problem. One tragic example is a case that occurred in Ternate, where an elementary school student was reported dead after allegedly being the victim of bullying by his classmates. The incident has been in the public spotlight as it shows how harmful bullying can be to children who are developing physically and emotionally. A similar incident also occurred in Indramayu, where an elementary school student was mistreated, stripped naked, and kicked by his friends. The case went viral after a video of the violence was shared on social media, drawing widespread condemnation from the public.

Cases of bullying have also been recorded in various other areas, such as in Subang, where an elementary school student who had long been a victim of bullying finally died after two years of violence. These incidents further confirm that bullying is not just childish behaviour that can be ignored but a severe problem that has an impact on children's mental and emotional health. Children who are victims of bullying often feel isolated and anxious and even experience sleep disturbances, leading to a decrease in their quality of life. (Lotulung & Kasingku, 2024; Yulianti et al., 2024). In addition, the psychological impact of bullying can be long-lasting, undermining children's self-confidence and damaging their relationships with peers.

On the other hand, the perpetrators of bullying are not immune to negative impacts. They often develop more severe aggressive behaviours over time, which can affect their social interactions and even their behaviour in adulthood. These behaviours can affect interpersonal relationships, potentially leading to more extraordinary acts of violence in the future.

One proposed solution to this problem is more intensive character education based on positive moral values. Character education in elementary schools can be vital in shaping better student behaviour, preventing bullying, and creating a more inclusive and supportive environment. Junindra et al. (2022) emphasized that the role of teachers in educating students to respect others is crucial. Teachers are not only in charge of teaching academic lessons but also function as agents of change who can shape children's character through moral values such as empathy, tolerance, and mutual respect.

In this case, instilling character education through teaching that involves all parties - teachers, parents and the community - is very important. This is also in line with the opinion of Jumarnis et al. (2023), which emphasizes that character education must be carried out thoroughly and consistently and must be applied in various aspects of children's lives, both at school and outside school. Usmaedi and Mualimah (2021) also added that civic education, which instills values of tolerance and mutual respect, can play a significant role in reducing bullying.

In addition, several socialization programs conducted in elementary schools, such as "Say No to Bullying" initiated by Syarif et al., (2024) can help raise students' awareness of the adverse effects of bullying. Through these programs, children not only learn to respect their peers more but are also expected to become agents of change in their school environment. The program is also an effort to build a safe and violence-free school where children can grow up feeling safe and comfortable.

However, despite various efforts, the phenomenon of bullying in elementary schools remains a problem that has not been fully resolved. This shows that a more holistic and

sustainable approach to character education is still needed. This is because shaping positive behaviours in children from an early age is crucial to creating a school environment that supports children's physical and mental development. Therefore, it is important to continue exploring more effective ways and strategies for reducing bullying behaviour in primary schools, including in terms of character education.

Through this research, a more appropriate approach can be found in tackling the phenomenon of bullying, as well as providing a clearer picture of the role of character education in shaping positive attitudes among students. This research also aims to provide input for the development of educational policies that are more inclusive and responsive to the problem of violence in elementary schools. This will be crucial for efforts to create a safe, supportive and compassionate learning environment for children.

2. METHOD

This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach to dig deeper into the phenomenon of bullying in elementary schools and how character education can play a role in reducing this behaviour. The researcher collected data through three main methods, namely in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation analysis. Six informants consisting of teachers, students and parents were selected because they have direct experience with the issue of bullying in schools and the implementation of character education.

In-depth interviews were conducted with two teachers to understand how they identify and handle bullying cases at school. Researchers also explored how teachers integrate character education into the teaching and learning process in the classroom. In addition, interviews were conducted with two students who had been victims or witnesses of bullying, as well as two parents. Interviews with students and parents aimed to find out their experiences related to bullying, as well as the extent to which they are aware of or involved in the character education program implemented at school.

In addition to interviews, researchers also conducted direct observations in the classroom to see the interaction between students and teachers. Here, researchers focused on how students interact with each other, whether there are signs of bullying behavior, and how teachers manage the classroom atmosphere and apply character values in learning activities. Observations were also made during extracurricular activities and break times to see the social dynamics between students outside of class hours.

The documentation method was used to analyze school policies related to bullying, as well as character education programs implemented in schools. Researchers analyzed documents containing bullying handling policies, programs designed to instil character values, and evaluation reports that illustrate the extent to which these policies and programs have succeeded in reducing bullying in schools.

The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which allowed researchers to identify specific patterns related to bullying and the implementation of character education. Through this analysis, the researcher hopes to dig deeper into the challenges faced by schools in dealing with bullying and the extent to which character education can be a solution to shape more positive student behaviour.

With this comprehensive method, the researcher hopes to provide a clearer picture of the phenomenon of bullying in elementary schools, as well as the essential role of character education in creating a safer school environment that supports student development. This research is expected to provide valuable insights for the development of more effective policies and programs for reducing bullying in elementary schools.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Bullying Phenomenon and Character Education Implementation in Elementary Schools

The phenomenon of bullying in elementary schools is a social problem that affects many aspects of child development, both in terms of emotional, psychological, and social aspects. Based on the findings of this research, both from in-depth interviews with teachers, students, and parents, as well as observations in the field, bullying is found in various forms and has a significant impact on victims. This research aims to explore the role of character education in addressing bullying and how schools can create a safer and more supportive environment for students. Below, we outline the critical findings gathered during the research.

Bullying that occurs in elementary schools varies significantly, whether in physical, verbal, or social forms. Based on interviews with two parents of students, it was revealed that the phenomenon of verbal bullying is one of the most frequent. As expressed by a mother whose child was a victim, "My child is often bullied because of his different appearance. His friends often mock him with harsh words, and it makes him feel very embarrassed and afraid to go to school." Similarly, a student who had been a victim of physical bullying said, "Some of my friends pushed me and called me words that made me feel bad about myself." These findings reflect the fact that verbal bullying is often more harmful than physical bullying, as the impact can last longer and cause profound psychological trauma (Efianingrum, 2020).

In addition, there are also forms of social bullying that occur in the school environment. In some cases, victims of bullying are often isolated from society and deemed unfit to join a group of classmates. As expressed by a teacher, "We see some children who feel marginalized in their peer group. They are often excluded from games or group discussions, which makes them feel alienated." This suggests that social bullying can affect students' self-confidence and self-esteem, which in turn can have a negative impact on their learning achievements, which is in line with research conducted by Rahmawati (2016), which explains that bullying and learning achievement are related to each other.

The impact of bullying in elementary school not only affects children's social lives but can also impact their academic performance and emotional development. As explained by a student who had been a victim of bullying, "I feel anxious every time I have to go to school. Sometimes, I don't feel like coming to school for fear of being bullied again." As a result, students who are victims of bullying often show a decline in learning spirit and lose interest in participating in class activities. This phenomenon reflects how important it is to take bullying seriously so that children can develop in a positive environment (Widyastika & Anisah, 2023).

In the midst of the rampant phenomenon of bullying, elementary schools view character education as an essential approach to forming positive attitudes and reducing bullying behaviour. From interviews with teachers and parents, as well as direct observation in the field, it was found that character values such as empathy, mutual respect and honesty are integrated into various school activities, both in formal learning and extracurricular activities.

One of the programs implemented by the school is a character education program that aims to instil positive values in students from an early age. For example, in an interview with a teacher, she stated, "We always emphasize the importance of respecting differences in class. Every week, we insert sessions on character values, such as the importance of working together and helping each other." Programs like this aim to build an understanding among students that each individual is unique and valuable so that they can learn to respect each other and prevent bullying behaviour (Nurhidayat et al., 2020).

In addition to classroom learning, schools also involve extracurricular activities as a means of instilling character valuee (Kurniawan, 2023). One of the activities held is the "Empathy Learning Program," where students are invited to discuss and share experiences related to how to be empathetic towards their friends. As stated by a student, "We have been invited to discuss how we can be a good friend, and what we should do if we see a friend who is struggling or being bullied." This kind of activity provides an opportunity for students to learn first-hand about how to build healthy relationships and avoid conflicts that can lead to bullying.

However, despite the many efforts made to integrate character education, the biggest challenge remains in the consistency of applying these values in students' daily lives. One parent revealed, "Although I support this character education program, sometimes my child reveals that the values taught at school have not been fully implemented at home. We as parents also need to pay more attention to this." Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of close cooperation between the school and parents to ensure that the character values applied at school can be carried over at home so that consistent attitudes are formed in children (Nurdini, 2023).

In addition to the implementation of character education, school policies related to bullying also play an essential role in creating a safe and supportive environment. In an interview with one of the teachers, she explained, "Our school implements a zero tolerance policy towards bullying, which means that any act of bullying will be dealt with immediately in accordance with the applicable procedures. We also have a reporting system that makes it easy for students to report bullying without fear." This shows that a firm and clear policy can create a sense of security for students so they feel protected and heard.

However, in its implementation, there are still some obstacles, especially in terms of handling bullying cases that are not directly visible, such as verbal or social bullying. For example, a teacher stated, "We often have difficulty detecting bullying that occurs indirectly, such as when students are ignored or bullied with words that are not obvious. We need to be more sensitive and explore every interaction between students." This suggests that in addition to existing policies, schools also need to improve the skills of teachers and staff in identifying and dealing with all forms of bullying, both visible and hidden (Efianingrum, 2020).

Based on the above, bullying in primary schools is a complex problem which affects many aspects of students' lives. Although character education has been implemented as one of the approaches to address this issue, the biggest challenge is consistency in its application, both at school and at home. Therefore, close cooperation between the school and parents is needed to create a supportive environment for positive character development.

b. The Role of Character Education in Reducing Bullying and its Implementation Challenges

The phenomenon of bullying in elementary schools continues to be one of the problems that requires serious attention from all parties, especially in the educational environment. Character education is expected to be one of the practical solutions to overcome this problem by shaping students' positive behaviour, which not only reduces acts of violence such as bullying but also creates a safer and more supportive learning environment. In this study, the researcher delves deeper into how character education is implemented in elementary schools, its impact on student behaviour, and the challenges faced in implementing the program.

Character education in primary schools has an obvious goal, which is to form students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also have good attitudes, such as

empathy, responsibility, and respect for others. Based on interviews with teachers, one grade V teacher revealed, "We always try to integrate character values in every opportunity, both in the classroom and outside the classroom. We want children to learn not only about math or language, but also about how to be a good human being." This illustrates the educators' commitment to teaching values that can prevent bullying behaviour and increase students' awareness to respect each other (Ramli et al., 2023).

The researchers also found that through various activities such as group learning, discussions and collaborative projects, character values such as mutual respect, tolerance and empathy are actively taught. This was also evident in an interview with one of the students who participated in the character education program. The student said, "I used to fight with my friends because we disagreed, but after we were taught how to communicate well, I became more patient and less angry." This shows that character education not only teaches theory but also provides opportunities for students to apply the values in their daily lives at school (Nofianti, 2023).

Not only that, but a consistently implemented character education program has also been shown to contribute to reducing bullying behaviour among students. Observations made in several classes showed that interactions between students who previously tended to be aggressive towards their friends now began to show positive changes after they were given lessons on empathy and mutual respect. As expressed by a student who was active in the program, "I now better understand the feelings of my friends who are often bullied. I try not to take part in bullying them." This change in students' attitudes reflects the effectiveness of character education in instilling a sense of empathy that can ultimately reduce bullying.

In addition, the results of interviews with some parents also show that character education taught at school has an impact on children's attitudes at home. One mother of a student who participated in the character education program said, "My child is easier to talk to and more patient. We also talk more intensely at home about the importance of behaving well to others, which of course relates to what is taught at school." This shows that character education implemented at school can reinforce positive values that are also taught at home, which in turn helps to reduce bullying behaviour.

Although character education can have a significant impact in reducing bullying, its implementation in the field is not without challenges. Some of the obstacles found in this study include the lack of adequate training for teachers, limited resources to support the character education program, and negative influences from the environment outside the school that can affect students' attitudes.

One of the biggest challenges faced by schools is the limited training for teachers in implementing character education. As expressed by a grade III teacher, "We were given a brief training on character education but there were no follow-up sessions that taught us concrete ways to deal with problem students or how to handle conflicts between students that arise. Without further training, we find it difficult to manage the situation in the classroom." This shows that while many teachers understand the importance of character education, they feel inadequately prepared to apply it effectively in more complex situations in the classroom. More in-depth and continuous training is needed so that teachers can handle the various issues that come with implementing character education.

In addition, limited resources to support the implementation of character education are also a considerable obstacle. One principal revealed, "We want to hold more activities that involve students in the character program but we are limited by the budget. We also don't have enough materials or books that can help in teaching character education." The limited budget and resources certainly hinder schools in developing and implementing character education programs more optimally. The limited resources also have an impact on

the limited extracurricular activities that can support students' character education outside of class hours.

In addition, environmental factors outside the school also play a significant role in the success of character education. Interviews with parents showed that the family and community environment greatly influences the formation of children's attitudes and character. One father said, "Although at school my child is taught to respect his friends, at home we are often exposed to news of violence or negative behavior in the neighborhood. This sometimes makes my child confused between the values taught at home and at school." This indicates that while character education at school can provide a good foundation, external factors, such as family and community environment, also need to be considered and worked together in supporting students' character-building.

In addition to environmental factors, the attitude of the students themselves is also a challenge in the implementation of character education. Some students still show less positive attitudes even though they have received character learning at school. A teacher revealed, "There are students whose behavior is difficult to change even though we have taught them about the importance of being kind to friends. They tend to be influenced by their peers or the behavior they see outside of school." This shows that although character education has a good impact, the process of character change cannot be done instantly and requires time and the right approach.

Character education has a vital role in reducing bullying behaviour in elementary schools. Based on the findings from interviews with teachers, students and parents, as well as direct observations, a consistently implemented character education program in schools can help shape empathy, mutual respect and tolerance among students. However, the implementation of the character education program also faces various challenges, such as the lack of training for teachers, limited resources, and the influence of the external environment that can affect students' behaviour. Therefore, to achieve optimal results, schools need to improve the quality of training for teachers, provide more resources to support character education and involve parents and communities in a joint effort to create a supportive environment for positive character development in students.

4. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of bullying in elementary schools is a problem that requires serious attention from various parties, both within the school and family environment. Character education has been proven to be effective in reducing bullying behaviour by instilling values such as empathy, mutual respect and tolerance. However, to ensure its successful implementation, close and consistent cooperation between schools and parents is required, as well as improved teacher skills in dealing with various forms of bullying, both visible and hidden. To this end, several steps need to be taken, including increased cooperation between schools and parents in educating children about the importance of character and moral values, as well as training teachers and staff on more effective ways to detect and handle bullying cases. In addition, schools also need to have clear policies and reporting systems that are easily accessible to students to support faster and more appropriate handling of bullying. A sustainable character education program, whether at school, home, or community, is also very important to ensure that character values can be well developed in all aspects of children's lives. Further research is expected to explore the effectiveness of various character education approaches in reducing bullying, as well as examine the role of technology and social media in exacerbating or helping to overcome bullying problems among students.

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