



Creating a Safe and Inclusive School Culture: Anti-Bullying Program Implementation in a Faith-Based Primary School

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ABSTRACT

Bullying remains a persistent issue in primary education, requiring context-sensitive and value-driven interventions, especially in culturally and religiously grounded school environments. This study explores the implementation of an anti-bullying education program at SD Darud Da'wah War-Irsyad II (DDI II) Palopo, a faith-based Islamic elementary school in Indonesia, to understand its structure, processes, and challenges. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, school observations, and document analysis. The participants included school leaders, Islamic education teachers, and homeroom teachers directly involved in the program's development and execution. The findings revealed that the program was structured across daily, weekly, and annual activities, all of which were infused with Islamic values such as rahmah (compassion), ukhuwah (brotherhood), and adl (justice). Its implementation involved stages of awareness-building, task force coordination, curriculum integration, peer support systems, and parental involvement. Challenges included students' limited awareness of non-physical bullying, teachers' lack of training in handling psychological aggression, underreporting due to social stigma, and the absence of a formal evaluation mechanism. This study contributes to the field by offering a practical and culturally embedded model for anti-bullying education rooted in religious ethics. The model is scalable, cost-effective, and adaptable for other faith-based schools, making it relevant for educators and policymakers seeking sustainable approaches to school safety and character development in religious contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying remains a persistent and harmful issue in educational settings worldwide, affecting students' well-being, academic performance, and psychological development (Arslan et al., 2021). Studies show that school-based bullying, including physical, verbal, and relational forms, often leads to anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and in severe cases, self-harm or suicide (Ahmed et al., 2022; Myklestad & Straiton, 2021). Globally, international assessments such as PISA report that more than 40% of students aged 15 have experienced some form of bullying at school, indicating the scale and severity of the problem (OECD, 2019).

Research has shown that structured anti-bullying programs can significantly reduce the prevalence and impact of bullying in schools. [Gaffney et al. \(2019\)](#), through a meta-analysis of 100+ studies, found that students participating in well-designed school-based anti-bullying interventions had a 24% lower risk of being bullied and a 31% lower risk of bullying others. Key success factors in these programs include consistent implementation, stakeholder involvement, contextual adaptation, and integration into the school's value system.

In recent years, scholars have advocated for integrating moral and religious values into anti-bullying efforts, particularly in faith-based schools. According to [Thornberg \(2023\)](#), moral reasoning rooted in religious teachings can strengthen empathy and prosocial behavior among students. In the Islamic context, verses from the Qur'an and Hadith emphasize respect, compassion, and prohibiting harmful speech and actions. Studies by [Warsah et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Ramatni et al. \(2025\)](#) underscore the potential of Islamic-based character education in shaping students' behavior when supported by a clear moral framework and consistent teacher modelling.

Furthermore, the successful implementation of educational programs in religious schools relies heavily on effective program management. Educational program management includes planning, organizing, leading, and controlling activities to achieve specific learning outcomes ([Mondal, 2024](#)). In Islamic educational institutions, these managerial components must also align with spiritual objectives, requiring school leaders to navigate administrative and moral responsibilities ([Alazmi, 2025](#); [Ruhullah & Ushama, 2025](#)). Previous studies have shown that well-managed character education programs in Islamic schools can foster inclusive and respectful school environments when properly contextualized ([Gano et al., 2024](#); [Rahmania & Hanif, 2025](#)).

Despite these promising insights, empirical research examining how Islamic values are operationalized within anti-bullying programs, especially at the primary school level, remains limited. While previous studies have explored digital interventions, emotional literacy, and teacher training in addressing bullying, few provide an in-depth analysis of how faith-based elementary schools implement anti-bullying initiatives in their day-to-day routines.

This study investigates the implementation of an anti-bullying education program in a faith-based elementary school, SD Darud Da'wah War-Irsyad II (DDI II) Palopo, Indonesia. The research aims to examine (1) the structure of the implemented program, (2) the pedagogical and managerial steps involved, and (3) the challenges encountered during its execution. The findings contribute to educational management literature by offering a practical, value-integrated model that can be adapted by other faith-based schools in Indonesia and beyond.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach ([Elliott & Timulak, 2021](#)) to explore the implementation of an anti-bullying education program at SD Darud Da'wah War-Irsyad II (DDI II) Palopo, a faith-based elementary school in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The qualitative approach was chosen to understand the strategies, practices, and challenges in applying anti-bullying education within a religious school context.

Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted at SD DDI II Palopo. Participants were selected using purposive sampling ([Douglas, 2022](#)), involving individuals directly engaged in the planning and execution of the anti-bullying program. These included the school principal, Islamic education and character development teachers, and homeroom teachers for Grades I and V. Their roles were essential in shaping school policies, daily practices, and student interactions.

Data Collection Techniques

This study utilized three primary data collection techniques: in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis to obtain comprehensive and contextualized data regarding implementing the anti-bullying education program. These methods were chosen to ensure data richness, triangulation, and consistency with the qualitative research design.

The in-depth interviews served as the primary data source, enabling the researcher to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and roles in the anti-bullying program. Interviews were conducted with key school stakeholders, including the principal, Islamic religious education teachers, character development instructors, and Grades I and V homeroom teachers. The semi-structured interview protocol allowed flexibility for probing while maintaining consistency across sessions. The questions focused on the rationale for program implementation, daily and weekly activities, stakeholder involvement, program goals, integration of Islamic values, and perceived challenges. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and was conducted in the school setting to maintain contextual relevance. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed for analysis.

The observation technique complemented the interview data by capturing actual practices and behaviors within the school environment. The researcher conducted non-participant observations during daily classroom activities, weekly assemblies, and school-wide events related to the anti-bullying program. Field notes were taken to document student interactions, teacher responses to bullying-related incidents, and visible materials such as posters, slogans, or displays promoting anti-bullying values. Observations also focused on how Islamic values were communicated and reinforced during these activities, particularly in classroom instruction and character-building sessions.

In addition, document analysis was conducted to verify and enrich data from interviews and observations. The documents reviewed included the school's anti-bullying policy, activity schedules, lesson plans, and reports from the school's Anti-Bullying Task Force (Tim Pencegahan dan Penanganan Kekerasan/TPPK). These documents provided insight into the program's institutional commitment, strategic planning, and operationalization. The analysis focused on how program components—such as rules, educational content, and stakeholder roles—were formalized, and how evaluation or monitoring mechanisms were described.

Data Analysis

The data collected from interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed using three core components: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification ([Miles et al., 2014](#)). These stages were carried out iteratively throughout the research process to ensure depth, coherence, and accuracy in interpreting the data.

The first stage, data condensation, involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data from interview transcripts, observation notes, and school documents. Each transcript was read multiple times to identify recurring statements, concepts, and behaviors related to implementing the anti-bullying program. Meaningful units of text were coded manually using open coding techniques. Codes were then grouped into broader categories representing key themes such as program structure (daily, weekly, annual activities), values integration, stakeholder involvement, implementation challenges, and program monitoring.

In the second stage, data display, the organized data were presented in a structured format to facilitate pattern recognition and cross-case comparison. The researcher developed matrices and thematic charts to visualize relationships between program components and stakeholders' roles. For instance, teacher practices were compared across grade levels, and implementation strategies were mapped against the school's faith-based values. This process allowed the researcher to trace the implementation flow, identify inconsistencies, and highlight emerging patterns that warranted further exploration.

The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification, which involved making sense of the data by interpreting the patterns, meanings, and implications emerging from the previous stages. Tentative conclusions were formed and tested for validity through triangulation of data sources (interview, observation, document) and member checking. Key findings were refined by returning to participants for clarification and confirmation, enhancing the credibility of interpretations. The researcher maintained reflexive notes throughout this process to record insights, biases, and evolving analytical decisions.

Trustworthiness

The study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria to enhance research trustworthiness. Prolonged engagement, member checking, and peer debriefing were utilized

to validate findings, while detailed descriptions of the research setting and participants ensure the applicability of results to similar contexts.

RESULTS

Structure of the Anti-Bullying Program

The SD DDI II Palopo anti-bullying education program was structured around three main temporal components: daily, weekly, and annual activities. This layered structure was intended to consistently reinforce anti-bullying values across school routines while aligning with Islamic teachings.

Daily activities included teacher-led greetings, religious motivation, and short reflections before learning began. These routines were designed to foster emotional connection, respect, and shared values among students. One teacher stated during the interview:

“In the morning, teachers always greet students. We ask how they are feeling before class begins. Sometimes we include short motivational talks and religious stories emphasizing kindness and respect.” (Teacher of Grade V)

This daily routine serves not only as a formality but as a preventive measure for early identification of emotional distress or social withdrawal among students, two signs often linked to either victims or perpetrators of bullying. Incorporating religious stories reflects the school's commitment to building students' moral consciousness through faith-based approaches.

Weekly activities consisted of thematic class discussions and student-led sharing circles. These were integrated into character education and religious classes. Every Friday, the school organizes a short sermon (kultum) delivered by students or teachers that addresses moral themes, including anti-bullying behavior. As explained by one participant:

“Every Friday, we have a short Islamic sermon before class. Sometimes it's the teacher, sometimes a student. Topics like not mocking others, being kind to friends, and respecting differences are frequently discussed.” (Islamic Education Teacher)

The weekly sermons are a platform for reinforcing positive behavior through religious doctrine. The program encourages student participation and ownership of empathy, inclusion, and respect values by involving teachers and students in delivering the sermons. The content of these sermons is intentionally tied to real-life school dynamics, including common forms of bullying observed in class.

Annual activities included awareness campaigns such as “Anti-Bullying Week,” which featured poster competitions, short drama performances, and student-parent seminars. These events aimed to engage the wider school community in reinforcing shared values. According to the school principal:

“Each year, we hold an anti-bullying campaign. Students create posters, some classes perform skits about bullying, and we invite parents to participate in discussions. It's part of our commitment to prevent violence and nurture student character.” (School Principal)

This annual initiative expands the scope of anti-bullying education beyond the classroom by involving parents and encouraging collaborative engagement. It reinforces that preventing bullying is a shared responsibility among students, teachers, and families. Furthermore, creative expression (such as drama and posters) allows students to internalize the anti-bullying message in an interactive and emotionally resonant way.

Steps of Implementation

Implementing the anti-bullying education program at SD DDI II Palopo followed a structured and collaborative process involving several stages, emphasizing integrating Islamic values and school-wide participation. The first step in the implementation was building awareness and understanding among the school's educators regarding bullying, its impact, and the role of Islamic values in prevention. It began with informal training sessions led by school leadership.

"In our teacher meetings, the principal reminded us about the importance of preventing violence among students. He emphasized that teachers should actively educate students about bullying through Islamic teachings." (Homeroom Teacher – Grade V)

This step laid the groundwork for a shared understanding among staff, highlighting the importance of religious values as a foundation for behavioral expectations. Teachers were encouraged to act as instructors and role models who embody compassion and justice in daily school life.

The second step was the formation of an Anti-Bullying Task Force (Tim Pencegahan dan Penanganan Kekerasan/TPPK), consisting of the school principal, selected teachers, and a guidance counselor. This team was responsible for designing the program's framework and monitoring its progress.

"We formed a small team called TPPK. It includes me as the principal, one Islamic education teacher, and the school counselor. We work together to monitor the program and address any cases that arise." (School Principal)

This task force played a strategic role by centralizing program coordination and ensuring classroom consistency. The involvement of religious educators also ensured that the program content aligned with Islamic values and school culture.

The third step involved integrating anti-bullying content into classroom activities and religious instruction. Teachers were encouraged to contextualize discussions using Qur'anic verses, Hadith, and character-building stories. Educational materials such as posters, slogans, and lesson plans were created collaboratively.

"I often use verses from the Qur'an that talk about kindness and avoiding harmful words. This helps students understand that bullying is not only wrong socially, but also religiously." (Islamic Religious Education Teacher)

This integration helped students connect faith and daily behavior, reinforcing the moral consequences of bullying beyond just school rules. It also provided teachers with culturally and spiritually relevant tools to address student conduct.

The fourth step was the establishment of peer-support mechanisms and simple reporting systems. Students were encouraged to report bullying incidents to trusted teachers, who referred the cases to the TPPK team for follow-up action.

"We always tell students that if they feel bullied or see someone being bullied, they can talk to their homeroom teacher or us. We don't make them write reports, just tell us, and we'll handle it." (Homeroom Teacher – Grade I)

This informal but approachable reporting process made it easier for young students to express concerns without fear of retaliation or embarrassment. It reflects the school's effort to build a responsive and safe environment, especially for lower-grade students.

The final step included involving parents and the broader community. The school organized meetings and campaigns to educate families about bullying and encourage reinforcement of positive behavior at home.

"During our regular parent meetings, we explain the importance of teaching children not to bully and to respect others. We also invite parents to join our anti-bullying events." (Vice Principal)

Parental involvement ensured that the values promoted at school were echoed at home, creating a consistent and holistic approach to anti-bullying education. This partnership was seen as essential for sustaining long-term behavioral change among students.

Challenges in Implementation

Although the SD DDI II Palopo anti-bullying education program was generally well-received, several challenges emerged during its implementation. These challenges were mostly related to students' awareness, teacher preparedness, student reporting behavior, and the absence of formal program evaluation. One of the main challenges identified was students' lack of awareness regarding subtle forms of bullying, such as verbal teasing and exclusion. Many students did not recognize their behavior as bullying because it was often framed as joking or playing.

"Some students still don't realize that making fun of their friends, even if it's just joking, can be a form of bullying. They think it's normal as long as it's not physical." (Homeroom Teacher – Grade V)

It illustrates that a cultural normalization of verbal bullying exists among elementary school students. Students may internalize harmful behaviour as benign without clear and consistent reinforcement that even verbal teasing is unacceptable. It underlines the need for educators to reinforce definitions of bullying in both formal instruction and informal interactions, ensuring that the message reaches all developmental levels. Another challenge was the limited pedagogical capacity of some teachers in addressing bullying cases, especially when they involved emotional or psychological harm rather than overt aggression.

"To be honest, not all teachers are ready to deal with bullying, especially when it's not physical. It's easier to handle fights than silent treatment or mocking." (Islamic Education Teacher)

This quote reveals that professional development among educators has not fully addressed the nuanced nature of psychological and relational bullying. Emotional harm often goes unnoticed or underestimated, yet it can lead to long-term trauma. The school would benefit from structured training modules or workshops that equip teachers with practical skills to detect and manage non-physical bullying forms.

A third challenge was students' reluctance to report bullying incidents. Even though a simple reporting system was available through trusted teachers, some students feared being labelled troublemakers or facing social backlash.

"Sometimes the students are afraid to report bullying. They worry that their friends will get angry or won't talk to them anymore." (Homeroom Teacher – Grade I)

This hesitation reflects the social dynamics among children, where peer acceptance often outweighs personal safety. It points to a need for a cultural shift within the school community that frames reporting as a positive and courageous act. Building a sense of safety and trust in reporting mechanisms, perhaps through anonymous tools or peer mediators, could encourage more active student participation in maintaining a respectful environment. Lastly, the school had not yet established a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanism to measure the effectiveness of the anti-bullying program over time.

"We don't have specific tools to evaluate whether the program really reduces bullying. We see changes, yes, but it's not measured formally." (School Principal)

While anecdotal evidence suggests improvement in student behavior, the absence of data-driven evaluation weakens the ability to track progress or justify continuation and expansion of the program. Developing simple instruments such as behavior checklists, reflection journals, or feedback surveys could provide valuable insight into the program's effectiveness and inform necessary adjustments.

DISCUSSION

This study explored implementing an anti-bullying education program in a faith-based elementary school in Indonesia. The findings revealed that the program was systematically structured into daily, weekly, and annual activities infused with Islamic values. The program implementation

followed a clear sequence of awareness-building, task force formation, integration into instruction, establishment of support systems, and parental involvement. However, the program faced several challenges, including limited student awareness of verbal bullying, teacher readiness, reluctance to report incidents, and lack of formal evaluation tools.

The structured integration of Islamic teachings into anti-bullying education aligns with relevant studies' assertion that moral reasoning is vital in shaping prosocial behavior ([Ramatni et al., 2025](#); [Thornberg, 2023](#); [Warsah et al., 2024](#)). By embedding values such as *rahmah* (compassion), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), and *adl* (justice) into everyday school practices, the program positioned bullying not only as a behavioral problem but also a moral transgression. It is consistent with previous studies' findings, which emphasized the effectiveness of character education grounded in religious teachings when systematically applied in school environments ([Bahiyah, 2025](#); [Hasnadi & Santi, 2021](#)).

The daily and weekly components of the program reflect relevant research recommendations that consistency and repetition are key to reducing bullying behavior in schools ([Gaffney et al., 2019](#); [Waseem & Nickerson, 2024](#)). Morning greetings, religious reflections, and sermons were not merely ceremonial but functioned as ongoing reinforcement of respectful behavior. Furthermore, the annual campaigns supported the idea that broader community involvement, especially parental engagement, strengthens the message and sustains behavioral change over time ([Michael et al., 2023](#); [Waasdorp et al., 2021](#)).

However, several gaps remain. The fact that students still failed to recognize verbal teasing as a form of bullying highlights the limitations of moral instruction when not paired with clear behavioral definitions. As relevant studies argue, younger students require explicit social-emotional education that teaches them how to identify and name harmful behaviors ([Bierman & Sanders, 2020](#); [Scheithauer et al., 2022](#)). The absence of such instruction may explain the persistence of low-level verbal bullying despite routine value transmission.

Another issue relates to teacher capacity. Although teachers were committed to the program, many lacked training in identifying emotional and relational bullying. It supports the work of [Rigby \(2024\)](#), who noted that teacher perceptions and competencies significantly influence the success of anti-bullying initiatives. The findings indicate a need for more targeted professional development that goes beyond moral education and includes practical strategies for intervention, mediation, and counseling ([Rigby, 2024](#)).

The reluctance of students to report bullying incidents reflects broader cultural and developmental dynamics in school communities. Peer loyalty, fear of retaliation, and shame are common barriers, especially in collectivist cultures like Indonesia ([Ahmed et al., 2022](#)). It suggests that future iterations of the program should include components on empowering students to speak out, perhaps through anonymous reporting mechanisms, peer mentoring, or school-wide campaigns that normalize help-seeking behavior.

The lack of a structured evaluation mechanism presents a risk to the sustainability and scalability of the program. Without measurable indicators, it is difficult for the school to assess effectiveness or justify allocating resources. As suggested by [Mondal \(2024\)](#), program management in education should include continuous feedback loops and measurable targets. Incorporating simple yet effective tools such as student self-assessments, teacher observation checklists, or parent feedback forms could strengthen the program's accountability.

This study offers a novel contribution to educational management theory and practice, particularly in anti-bullying programs within faith-based schools. Unlike many previous studies that address bullying from a secular or behavioral perspective, this research provides a context-specific, culturally grounded model that demonstrates how Islamic values can be operationalized into a structured and sustainable anti-bullying framework. It moves beyond value transmission as abstract moral instruction and shows how such values can be concretely translated into daily routines, weekly rituals, institutional mechanisms, and community engagement strategies.

Theoretically, this study bridges the gap between moral education and program management by integrating faith-based character development with the managerial dimensions of planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating school-wide interventions. It expands the literature on value-based school culture by offering practical steps for embedding religious values into program structures, an area largely underexplored in empirical studies. From a practical perspective, the model developed in

this study is highly adaptable and scalable for other faith-based educational institutions, especially in multicultural and religiously devout societies. The simplicity and low-cost nature of the program's core components, daily greetings, peer sermons, storytelling, task-force coordination, and parent involvement, make it an accessible template for resource-limited schools seeking to cultivate safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environments without heavy reliance on external resources.

Furthermore, in Indonesia's push for character-based education and violence prevention in schools, this study aligns closely with national educational priorities and offers a prototype that could inform policy at district and national levels. By documenting and analyzing the step-by-step implementation of a program that is both spiritually rooted and pedagogically sound, this research offers more than insight, it offers a replicable model of school transformation grounded in local values and global human rights principles. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its single-site focus and qualitative design. Future research could adopt a comparative or longitudinal approach to explore how similar programs perform across different types of schools or over time. Additionally, involving students as co-researchers may offer richer insight into their experiences and perceptions of bullying.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that a faith-integrated anti-bullying program, when systematically implemented within the structure of a school's daily, weekly, and annual routines, can significantly enhance students' awareness, moral reasoning, and interpersonal behavior. The experience of SD DDI II Palopo illustrates that anti-bullying education does not require expensive interventions or externally imposed models; rather, it can emerge organically by mobilizing existing school values, religious teachings, and community engagement.

By grounding the program in Islamic ethical principles and embedding it into the school's pedagogical and managerial systems, this research offers a practical and contextually relevant alternative to conventional anti-bullying approaches. It also advances the theoretical discourse by connecting character education, religious values, and school-based violence prevention within a unified implementation framework.

The findings directly affect school leaders, policymakers, and educators in similar socio-religious contexts who seek sustainable, culturally responsive strategies for promoting safe and respectful learning environments. Future research should extend this work by testing the model across different educational settings, measuring long-term behavioral outcomes, and refining mechanisms for program evaluation.

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