

Preventing Bullying Through Islamic Religious Education in Indonesian Elementary Schools

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Apr 17, 2026

Revised Apr 20, 2026

Accepted Apr 20, 2026

Online First Apr 21, 2026

Keywords:

Bullying Prevention

Character Education

Elementary School

Islamic Religious Education

Moral Mediator

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study examines how Islamic Religious Education is implemented to prevent bullying in elementary schools. It focuses on value integration in instruction, Islamic habituation, and the role of teachers as moral mediators.

Methodology: A qualitative multi-site case study was conducted in three elementary schools in Tulungagung Regency representing urban, semi-urban, and rural contexts. Data were collected from 3 principals, 6 teachers, and 15 Grade IV–VI students through interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña was used for analysis.

Main Findings: Three findings emerged. First, the integration of *ukhuwah*, *tawadhu'*, and *rahmah* values into instruction built students' anti-violence awareness. Second, Islamic habituation programmes reduced verbal aggression consistently. Third, teachers' competency served as the key determinant of programme success.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study introduces a three-layer implementative model curricular integration, institutional habituation, and teacher mediation that extends the whole-school approach with a spiritual-teacher dimension. It also identifies Islamic-based restorative dialogue as a distinctive mediation technique not previously documented in -based bullying prevention literature.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying in elementary schools must be addressed as a pedagogical concern rather than a disciplinary matter resolvable through punishment. Empirical evidence links bullying to emotional distress, anxiety, depression, social isolation, and academic decline among primary school children [1], [2]. In Indonesia, 10–60 per cent of students experience bullying, with elementary schools accounting for a troubling proportion of cases [3]. The phenomenon extends beyond physical and verbal forms into relational and cyberbullying, each equally destructive to children's social-emotional development [4]. This complexity demands a systemic, values-based, and contextual educational response.

Islamic Religious Education holds untapped potential as a prevention instrument. Its core values *rahmah* (compassion), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), and *tawadhu'* (humility) can be pedagogically operationalised as foundations for anti-violence behaviour [5], [6]. teachers carry the strategic

responsibility of internalising these values in students' character development [7]. Ministerial Regulation No. 82 of 2015 on the prevention of violence in educational settings opens normative space for integrating anti-bullying programmes into character education through [8], [9]. The *Kurikulum Merdeka*, positioning the Pancasila Student Profile as its character education orientation, reinforces this convergence [10], [11].

Globally, the most empirically supported prevention approach is the whole-school approach, which emphasises school climate change over individual intervention [4], [12]. This model requires coherence among curriculum, habituation, teacher capacity, and family involvement [13], [14]. The Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) framework similarly highlights empathy, self-regulation, and social awareness as prerequisites for prosocial behaviour [13], [15]. However, both frameworks were developed in contexts that do not adequately accommodate spirituality as an internal behavioural resource a dimension intrinsic to Islamic educational tradition [5], [16], [17].

The existing literature on -based bullying prevention exhibits three clear gaps. First, scholarly attention remains dominated by psychological and counselling approaches, leaving the spiritual-pedagogical dimension of under-theorised [18], [19]. Second, studies at the elementary level are largely confined to normative prescriptions [10], [20], or single-site investigations within Islamic schools [7], [21]. Third, no comparative study has documented how implementation varies across schools with different social contexts. This study positions itself precisely within these gaps, examining -based bullying prevention across urban, semi-urban, and rural elementary schools simultaneously. Its scientific contribution is twofold: theoretically, it proposes a three-layer implementative model curricular integration, institutional habituation, and teacher mediation that extends the whole-school approach with a spiritual- teacher dimension grounded in *uswah hasanah* and *bi'ah Islamiyyah*; practically, it delivers an evidence-based blueprint for teachers and policymakers and introduces Islamic-based restorative dialogue as an original mediation technique not previously documented in the literature. The implications extend to the development of contextually adaptive anti-bullying modules and the integration of teacher counselling competency into teacher certification policy.

On this basis, this study advances three research questions: (RQ1) How are anti-bullying values integrated into instructional content and processes? (RQ2) How do Islam-based habituation practices contribute to bullying prevention? (RQ3) What is the role of the teacher as moral mediator, and what factors support or impede this role?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Design and Justification

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design under a constructivist interpretivist paradigm [22], [23]. The multi-site design was chosen as an analytical necessity rather than a technical preference: bullying prevention through operates within specific social ecologies whose variations urban, semi-urban, and rural cannot be captured through a single-site study. Comparing three contextually distinct sites enables the identification of implementation patterns that transcend individual schools, thereby strengthening the analytical transferability of the findings. A single-site design, by contrast, would risk reducing findings to idiosyncratic outcomes without cross-contextual validity.

2.2 Research Sites and Participant Selection

Three sites were selected through purposive sampling based on social context representativeness: public elementary school 1 Beji (urban), public elementary school Kendal (semi-urban), and public elementary school 1 Trenggeng (rural) in Tulungagung Regency. Participants totalled 24 individuals with the following selection criteria:

Table 1. Participant Demographics and Selection Criteria for the Study on Islam-Based Anti-Bullying Implementation in Elementary Schools

Participant Group	N	Code	Selection Criteria
Principals	3	KS1– KS3	Currently serving as principal; minimum 2 years of tenure at the site
Teachers	6	GR1– GR6	Minimum 3 years' experience teaching ; two teachers per site
Students (Grade IV–VI)	15	SW1– SW15	Upper-grade students (10–12 years) possessing reflective verbal capacity; balanced gender representation; inclusion of students with diverse social participation histories for perspective diversity

The selection of Grade IV–VI students was based on two grounds: first, upper-grade students possess the cognitive reflective capacity required to discuss bullying experiences; second, this age range is the most vulnerable period for the onset of relational bullying in elementary schools. Recruitment proceeded until

informational sufficiency was reached, indicated by data saturation (no new themes emerging after the 12th student interview).

2.3 Research Instruments and Validation Process

The researcher served as the primary *human-as-instrument*, supported by three supplementary instruments: (1) semi-structured interview guides for principals (18 items), teachers (22 items), and students (12 items); (2) structured observation sheets; and (3) document review sheets [24].

Instrument validation was conducted through a two-stage *expert judgement* process. Validators comprised three academics with PhD qualifications: one in Islamic Religious Education (UIN Maliki Malang), one in Elementary Education and one in Educational Psychology (Universitas Bhinneka PGRI). The validation process encompassed: (a) content validity assessment of each item's alignment with the research objectives and theoretical framework; (b) language clarity review of comprehensibility, particularly for the student instrument; and (c) contextual relevance examination of item suitability to the context of Indonesian elementary schools. Validation results indicated an average Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.89 (principal guide), 0.92 (teacher guide), and 0.85 (student guide) all exceeding the 0.80 threshold. Three items were revised based on validator feedback concerning ambiguous phrasing for student participants. Example of instrument items:

Table 2. Interview Guide Framework for Exploring Islam-Based Anti-Bullying Implementation in Elementary Schools

Participant Group	Selection Criteria
Principal Guide	"What institutional policies support the implementation of Islam-based anti-bullying programmes at this school?"
Teacher Guide	"How do you integrate anti-bullying values into lesson plans? Please cite a specific example of recent material."
Student Guide	"Have you ever felt uncomfortable with a friend's behaviour at school? How did your teacher help?"

2.4 Data collection techniques

Data were collected through triangulation of three techniques: (1) in-depth interviews conducted over two rounds per key participant (45–90 minutes per session) with audio recording; student interviews employed an adaptive conversational technique without audio recording to reduce psychological pressure on young participants and elicit more natural responses; (2) participatory observation of 8–10 sessions per site across three settings classrooms, morning habituation activities, and break periods; (3) documentation study covering syllabi, lesson plans, habituation guidelines, school regulations, and incident records.

2.5 Bias Anticipation and Research Validity

The potential for bias inherent in qualitative research was anticipated through several strategies. First, researcher subjectivity as the primary instrument was managed through structured reflexivity: a reflective journal was maintained throughout data collection to document initial assumptions, emotional reactions, and methodological decisions; peer debriefing was then conducted with two independent academics at the end of each data collection phase. Second, the absence of audio recording in student interviews was mitigated through immediate detailed field notes (within 30 minutes post-interview) and member checking with students the following day to confirm the accuracy of documented statements. Third, the potential for social desirability bias in adult participants was managed through triangulation of techniques: teacher statements were cross-verified with classroom observations and documentary evidence to identify consistency between reported practices and actual implementation.

2.6 Data analysis techniques

Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña [23] through three iterative components: (1) data condensation *open coding* produced approximately 180 initial codes; *axial coding* formed 14 categories; *selective coding* yielded four primary themes; (2) data display in cross-site comparative matrices and thick description with verbatim quotations; (3) drawing and verifying conclusions via member checking and peer debriefing with two independent academics. Example of coding process:

Table 3. Thematic Analysis of Anti-Bullying Implementation through Islamic Religious Education in Elementary Schools

Verbatim Data	Open Code	Axial Category	Selective Theme
"I usually bring in real case examples... Then I ask: if the Prophet were here, what would he say?" (GR1)	Use of Prophetic narrative; contextualisation of contemporary cases	Narrative-based integration strategy	Curricular integration of anti-bullying values
"Since we intensified the 3S every morning, the children are less frequently involved in disturbances during break time." (KS2)	3S as systematic habituation; reduction in break-time conflict	Institutional habituation	Islamic habituation as climate shaper
"I do not immediately punish... I invite them to recite Surah Al-Hujurat verse 11 together." (GR2)	Non-punitive restorative approach; Qur'an as moral authority	Islamic-based restorative dialogue	Competency of teachers
"I have learnt from experience alone there is no formal training." (GR4)	Absence of formal training; reliance on personal experience	teachers competency gap	Implementation challenges

2.7 Research procedures

The study was conducted in four phases over six months:

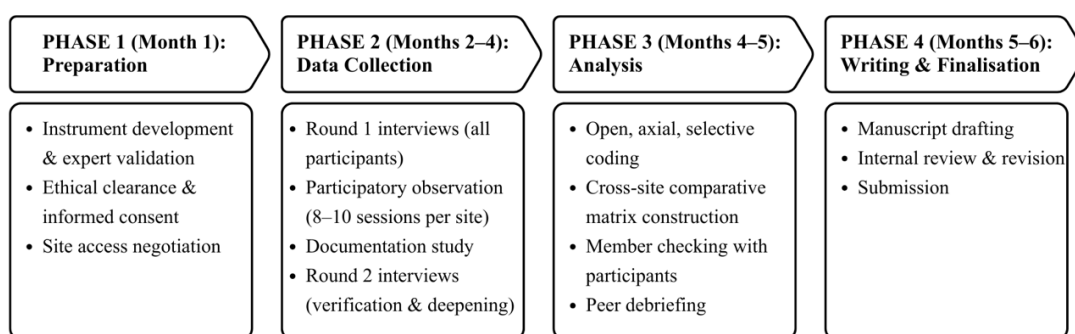


Figure 1. Research procedure flow diagram

Data trustworthiness was ensured through four strategies [24]: source and method triangulation, prolonged engagement (6 months in the field), audit trail (documentation of all analytical decisions), and researcher reflexivity.

2.8 Methodological Limitations

Three methodological limitations are acknowledged from the outset. First, the geographic scope is confined to a single regency, restricting generalisability to other Indonesian regions with different socio-cultural characteristics. Second, the cross-sectional design does not permit measurement of longitudinal behavioural change. Third, the absence of audio recording in student interviews carries potential data loss despite mitigation through detailed field notes. These limitations are considered in interpreting the findings and discussed further in the Implications section.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Integration of Anti-Bullying Values into Instructional Content

Prior to commencing instruction, teachers at all three schools developed Lesson Plans (RPP) serving as the operational reference for Islam-based character education. at public elementary school 1 Beji (urban), lesson plans were developed independently by the teacher under the principal's supervision, with anti-bullying indicators explicitly incorporated. At public elementary school Kendal (semi-urban) and public elementary school 1 Trengeng (rural), integration remained thematic-responsive and incidental. Nevertheless, all three teachers demonstrated consistent pedagogical awareness in embedding anti-violence values within akhlak, fiqh muamalah, and sirah nabawiyyah content.

The values most consistently taught were ukhuwah Islamiyah, tawadhu', and the prohibition of ghibah and namimah. Stories of the Prophet Muhammad SAW emerged as the most effective medium of internalisation.

GR1 public elementary school 1 Beji stated: "I usually bring in real case examples that might be similar to what they experience. Then I ask: if the Prophet were here, what do you think he would say? That reaches their hearts far more than a lecture." GR3 public elementary school Kendal used Surah Al-Hujurat verses 11–12 as an entry point for reflection: "I ask the children: have you ever felt mocked by a friend? Then how does the Qur'an view that?" GR5 public elementary school 1 Trenggeng leveraged community homogeneity: "The children here all know each other they're all from the same village. So when a problem arises, I just remind them that we are all fellow believers."

Table 4. Integration of Anti-Bullying Values into Content Across Sites

Islamic Education Material	Anti-Bullying Values Integrated	Approach	Site
Islamic ethics and prohibition of <i>ghibah/namimah</i>	Anti-verbal violence, respect	Contemporary case narrative	Urban
Surah Al-Hujurat verses 11–12	Tolerance, prohibition of mockery	Reflective Qur'anic text discussion	Semi-urban
Islamic brotherhood (<i>ukhuwah Islamiyah</i>)	Solidarity, anti-social exclusion	Bilateral community approach	Rural
Prophetic biography (<i>sirah nabawiyyah</i>)	Exemplariness, empathy, <i>tawadhu'</i>	Prophetic story-telling	Cross-site
Jurisprudence of social conduct (<i>fiqh muamalah</i>)	Justice, <i>ta'awun</i>	Application of Islamic social law	Cross-site

Of the 15 students interviewed, 11 stated that content helped them understand why mocking or ostracising a peer is morally and religiously wrong, yet only 6 linked that understanding to concrete behavioural change outside the classroom.

This study identifies a three-tier integration pattern *explicit-planned* (urban), *thematic-responsive* (semi-urban), and *incidental-personal* (rural) previously undocumented in the literature. This pattern extends the arguments of Habib and Prabowo [13] and Farid et al. [20], whose accounts of value integration remained normative without contextual categorisation.

Why does this pattern emerge? The contextual variation is theoretically explicable through the interplay between *institutional capacity* and *community social capital*. Urban schools have ample bureaucratic resources (written curriculum documentation, supervision systems) but weaker community cohesion; rural schools possess organic community social capital but lack systematisation. Narrative-based character education theory [25], [26] explains why Prophetic stories constitute the most effective medium: value internalisation occurs through *emotional identification*, not cognitive memorisation.

The gap between cognitive understanding and behavioural change (11 vs. 6 students) raises a critical theoretical question: why does cognitive understanding fail to translate into consistent behaviour? The answer points to the inherent limitations of *inserted integration* [6] single-instance curricular exposure without reinforcing repetition fails to build durable behavioural habituation. This finding becomes the key argument for why curricular integration must be accompanied by institutional habituation, discussed in Section 3.2.

3.2. Islamic Habituation as a Mechanism for Shaping School Climate

All three schools implemented Islam-based habituation programmes. The most consistent programmes were 3S (Salam-Sapa-Senyum) at the school gate each morning, collective supplication and *asmaul husna* recitation before lessons, and scheduled congregational duha prayer. public elementary school 1 Beji additionally included scheduled tahfidz. Programme systematicity correlated with institutional capacity: urban > semi-urban > rural (with the rural context employing organic habituation rooted in pesantren traditions).

Participatory observation across all sites detected a consistent pattern: verbal aggressive behaviour was measurably lower during sessions preceded by congregational duha prayer compared to regular sessions. KS2 reflected: "Since we intensified the 3S every morning, I have noticed that the children are less frequently involved in disturbances during break time." SW3 corroborated: "After duha prayer, the class becomes calmer. Friends don't quarrel like they usually do."

Table 5. Islam-Based Habituation Programmes and Their Observed Effects

Programme	Site	Systematicity	Observed Effect
3S (Salam-Sapa-Senyum)	Cross-site	High	Reduction in verbal aggression during break time
Collective supplication and <i>asmaul husna</i>	Cross-site	High	More conducive classroom atmosphere at lesson start
Congregational <i>duha</i> prayer	Cross-site	Moderate–High	Reduction in inter-student

Programme	Site	Systematicity	Observed Effect
Scheduled <i>tahfidz</i>	Urban (public elementary school 1 Beji)	High	Improved self-discipline and emotional regulation
Community tradition-based habituation	Rural (public elementary school 1 Trenceng)	Organic	Reinforcement of fellowship-in-faith awareness

These findings provide field-based empirical evidence for the argument advanced by Suwarni [27], and Zainuddin [28] that bullying prevention requires systemic intervention. However, the theoretical contribution of this study extends beyond confirmation. The Islam-based habituation programmes identified here operate as a *whole-school approach* [12], [29], [30], but with the addition of a spiritual-transcendental dimension absent from conventional models.

Why is this dimension important? Islam-based habituation does not merely modify social norms (the mechanism of conventional *whole-school approach*) but shapes students' transcendental orientation – the awareness that their social behaviour is evaluated by Allah SWT, not only by the community. How does this work theoretically? Conventional social norms rely on external social control; transcendental orientation builds internal moral control that operates even without observation by authority. Theoretically, this dimension produces deeper and more sustained internalisation than social norms alone.

A critical limitation was identified: the habituation effect weakens outside school hours owing to the absence of structured synergy with families – a limitation particularly pronounced in urban contexts where cross-institutional social cohesion is lower. This finding raises a further theoretical question: can Islamic habituation be effectively extended beyond the school boundary? The answer requires follow-up research involving families as implementation partners.

3.3. The Role of Teachers as Moral Mediators and Teacher Figures

The most distinctive finding of this study is the identification of teacher mediation competency as the key determinant variable of overall programme success. Across all three sites, teachers performed roles that transcended content transmission: trusted figures for student disclosure, conflict mediators, and Islamic values-based guidance agents.

The most scientifically significant mediation technique was identified at public elementary school 1 Beji, where GR2 applied a procedure categorisable as Islamic-based restorative dialogue: "I do not immediately punish the child who mocked another. I invite them to sit together as three, and I ask: if you were the one being mocked, would you want that? Then I invite them to recite Surah Al-Hujurat verse 11 together. It usually ends with mutual forgiveness and an embrace." The strategic position of teachers was confirmed by KS3: "Our teacher is like a 'friend' to the children. Whenever a problem arises, they go to him first – not to the class teacher."

A critical competency gap was identified: of the 6 teachers interviewed, 4 reported never having attended formal training in counselling or conflict mediation. GR4 stated: "I have learnt from experience alone there is no formal training. Sometimes I do not know the best way to handle a child who has repeatedly become a victim of bullying."

Table 6. Competency of Teachers: Practices, Strengths, and Gaps

Role Performed	Technique Employed	Effectiveness	Gap
Inter-student conflict mediator	Islamic-based restorative dialogue	High (reconciliation)	Non-standardised
Trusted figure / informal counsellor	Personal approach, Islam-based guidance	High (voluntary disclosure)	No formal counselling competency
Moral exemplar (<i>uswah hasanah</i>)	Daily behavioural exemplariness	Moderate–High	Dependent on individual character
Victim support provider	Empathy and verbal accompaniment	Moderate	No victim-handling protocol
Coordinator with parents	Informal communication	Low–Moderate	No structured monitoring system

These findings confirm the concept of the teacher as *murabbi* and *murshid* [31] but with a crucial theoretical advancement: this study provides empirical operationalisation of the concept through documentation of actual mediation techniques, rather than merely normative description.

The most significant theoretical contribution is the identification of Islamic-based restorative dialogue a construct not previously documented in the literature. Conventional restorative justice [16] operates within a secular framework relying on procedural logic (dialogue, acknowledgement, restitution). How does the Islamic

version differ? Integration of the Qur'an as moral authority and shared recitation as spiritual recovery ritual produces qualitatively deeper conflict resolution not merely behavioural compliance but spiritual reconciliation. This constitutes an original theoretical proposition: restorative justice gains additional resolution power when its moral authority is transcendental rather than merely procedural.

The training gap identified must be read as systemic policy failure. The educational system places teachers in the role of *de facto* counsellors without equipping them with adequate competencies, thereby creating serious risks in the handling of chronic bullying with complex psychological dimensions [11], [32].

3.4. Cross-Context Analysis: Toward Conceptual Generalisation

Cross-site comparative analysis reveals a systematic pattern of asymmetrical contextual strengths with theoretical implications that extend beyond the specific sites studied.

Table 7. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for Anti-Bullying Implementation Across Contexts

Dimension	Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors	Dominant Context
Curricular	Flexibility of lesson plans; Qur'anic relevance	Limited instructional time; no national module	Cross-site
Teacher	Personal commitment; student trust	Insufficient teacher training (4 of 6 teachers)	Cross-site
Institutional	Principal support; character policies	Weak inter-teacher coordination; absence of monitoring	Urban
Family	Strong Islamic values within families	Low urban parental involvement	Rural > Urban
Community	<i>Pesantren</i> ecosystem	Exposure to provocative social media	Rural > Urban

This asymmetrical pattern can be theorised through a complementary dualism framework. Urban contexts are characterised by institutional-formal strength (systematicity, documentation, capacity) but experience communal-informal weakness (family involvement, community cohesion). Rural contexts exhibit communal-formal strength (social capital, integrated values) but lack institutional-formal systematisation. Semi-urban contexts occupy transitional space where both dimensions operate at medium intensity.

Theoretical implication: the effectiveness of -based bullying prevention depends not on either dimension in isolation, but on the synergy between the two. Urban schools require strengthening of family-community engagement mechanisms; rural schools require programme systematisation without eliminating community organic character. This finding constitutes a direct critique of top-down, uniform bullying prevention policy, and aligns with research affirming that effective strategies integrate religious learning, character education, and teacher-parent collaboration [32]–[34].

3.5. Integrative Conceptual Model

The three findings above – curricular integration, institutional habituation, and teacher mediation together form a synergistic pedagogical ecosystem. Curricular integration builds moral-cognitive awareness; habituation transforms awareness into behavioural disposition through systematic repetition; teacher mediation activates both preceding dimensions in real conflict situations. When these three operate coherently within a school ecology supported by the wider community, what is conceptually termed an *anti-violence bi'ah Islamiyyah* emerges – a social-spiritual environment that actively prevents bullying not through prohibitions and sanctions, but through holistic and sustained character formation.

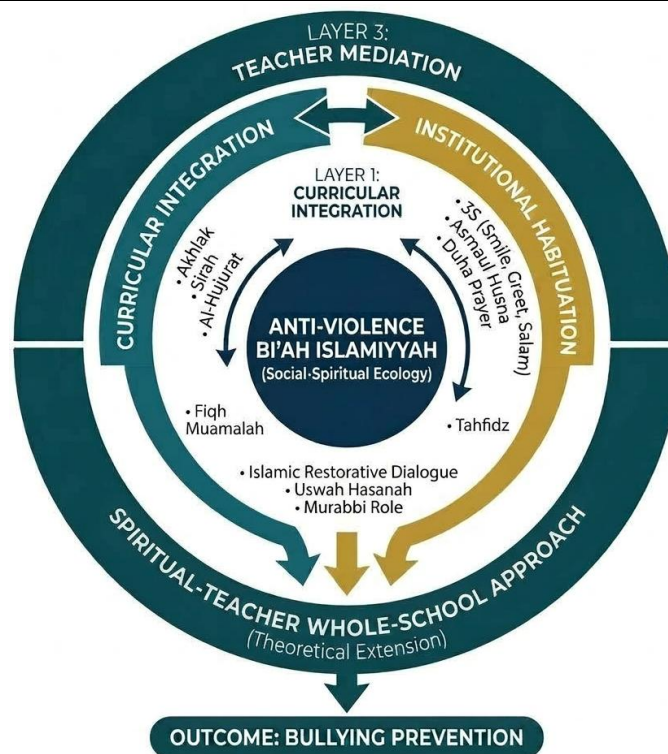


Figure 2. Three-layer -based anti-bullying implementation model within *anti-violence bi'ah Islamiyyah*

This model constitutes an original theoretical contribution in the form of a formally articulable conceptual proposition:

The effectiveness of -based bullying prevention in elementary schools depends on the coherent integration of three pedagogical layers—curricular integration, institutional habituation, and teacher mediation operating within the ecological framework of anti-violence bi'ah Islamiyyah, with variations in intensity across each layer according to the school's social context.

3.6. Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

This study carries theoretical implications through its extension of the *whole-school approach* framework with a spiritual- teacher dimension grounded in *uswah hasanah* and *bi'ah Islamiyyah*, introducing the three-layer model and the proposition of *Islamic-based restorative dialogue*. Practical implications manifest as an evidence-based blueprint for teachers and policymakers in designing systematic anti-bullying programmes. Notwithstanding these contributions, three limitations merit acknowledgement: geographic scope confined to a single regency, a cross-sectional design precluding longitudinal measurement of behavioural change, and the potential for social desirability bias amongst adult participants. Future research is accordingly recommended to encompass the development of a standardised anti-bullying module through action research, longitudinal measurement of student character change, multi-province replication across diverse school types, and the development of a teacher competency assessment instrument as the basis for teacher certification policy.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that anti-bullying education through Islamic Religious Education in elementary schools is effective through three interconnected mechanisms: integrating ukhuwah, tawadhu', and rahmah values into akhlak learning to build anti-violence awareness; implementing Islam-based habituation programmes (3S, congregational prayer, tahfidz) to create a conducive school environment and reduce verbal aggression; and strengthening the teacher's role as a moral mediator through Islamic restorative dialogue, despite limitations in counselling competence. The effectiveness varies by social context—urban schools emphasize formal systems, rural schools rely on strong communal capital, and semi-urban schools show transitional characteristics indicating that implementation must be contextually adaptive rather than uniform. Therefore, it is recommended that the Ministry of Religious Affairs develop adaptive anti-bullying modules and integrate counselling competence into teacher training, while future studies should apply action research, longitudinal approaches, and broader replication to validate the model.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Appreciation is extended to all contributors facilitating the execution and conclusion of this research endeavor.

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