

Exploring the Role of Schools in Early Prevention of Drug Abuse: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Studies in Elementary Education

Andi Sri Wahyuni Mumang¹

¹ Lecturer In Elementary School Teacher Education, Faculty Of Educational Sciences,
Makassar State University, Makassar City, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: andi.sri.wahyuni.mumang@unm.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of schools in early prevention of drug abuse through a systematic review of various qualitative studies in elementary school settings. The method employed was a qualitative narrative study approach, allowing for a deeper understanding of the meanings, experiences, and social dynamics involved in the implementation of school-based prevention programs. Data were collected from scientific articles published between 2020 and 2025 and analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The results indicate that the role of schools in preventing drug abuse is reflected in three main dimensions: educational, preventive, and collaborative. Schools act as agents of value socialization through curriculum integration, character building, and the provision of a supportive social environment. Teachers and counselors play a strategic role as social role models and psychosocial support. However, this study also identified several challenges in implementation, including limited resources, inadequate training for educators, and suboptimal integration of the program into educational policy. Theoretically, these findings strengthen the relevance of social ecology and social learning approaches in understanding children's behavior related to the risk of substance abuse. This research has implications for the development of more contextual, participatory, and sustainable education policies and programs for early prevention efforts.

Keywords: Role of Schools, Drug Abuse Prevention

INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse among elementary school-aged children has become a global issue over the past two decades. Several international reports indicate that exposure to addictive substances

161

IJETER, Volume 04 Issue 02, 2026



Copyright to the author of some rights reserved This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).



is no longer limited to adolescents but is also beginning to reach younger age groups, including elementary school students (Nalugya et al., 2023). This situation reflects changing risk patterns that demand earlier and more structured prevention efforts, particularly through formal educational institutions. Globally, various qualitative studies have revealed that the social, family, and school environments significantly influence the potential for substance abuse in children (Halsall et al., 2023). Schools, as the second social environment after the family, play a crucial role in shaping children's values, attitudes, and behaviors related to drug risks. However, the success of school-based interventions is greatly influenced by the quality of program implementation, the competence of educators, and their appropriateness to the local cultural context.

At the national level, various reports indicate that Indonesia also faces serious challenges related to early childhood drug abuse. A survey by the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) in collaboration with the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) indicates that the prevalence of drug abuse among students is around 1.9%-2.3%, with a trend toward an increasingly younger age of first exposure, around 10-12 years. This finding indicates a potential increase in exposure to addictive substances in elementary schools, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas (Utami et al., 2026). This situation is reinforced by field findings that demonstrate the continued weak integration of prevention programs into the elementary education curriculum. Problems in the field also show that the prevention approach implemented is still predominantly informational, such as one-way counseling without active student involvement.

Data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology show that less than 50% of elementary schools have drug prevention programs integrated into their learning (Kemendikbudristek, 2021). This situation limits opportunities for students to develop a more contextual understanding of the experiences, meanings, and social dynamics they face daily. Muruges & Nor (2025) noted that school-based interventions often fail to consider student and community perspectives, making them less effective in fostering critical awareness of the dangers of drugs.

Furthermore, the role of teachers and school counselors in early prevention efforts also faces various obstacles, such as limited training, limited resources, and a lack of policy support (Nordmyr & Forsman, 2021). This situation impacts the low quality of prevention program implementation, thus hampering its ability to significantly impact student behavior change.

From a social and cultural perspective, the urgency of this research lies in the need to understand how values, norms, and social interactions within the school environment shape students' perceptions of drugs. In this regard, a qualitative approach is crucial because it can





explore the subjective experiences and meanings constructed by students, teachers, and the school community within the context of prevention (Eisman et al., 2022). However, a literature review reveals a research gap, particularly in the in-depth exploration of the role of schools at the primary education level using a qualitative approach. Most previous studies have tended to focus on program evaluation or use quantitative approaches, thus lacking a comprehensive understanding of the social processes or experiences of the actors involved (Gusmões et al., 2022).

Drug abuse prevention in schools can be understood through the perspective of social ecological theory, which emphasizes the interaction between individuals and their social environment (El-Khatib et al., 2021). Within this framework, schools are viewed as microsystems that play a role in shaping children's behavior through interactions with teachers, peers, and the learning environment. Social learning theory, on the other hand, explains that children's behavior develops through observation and imitation of social models around them.

Several previous studies have shown that school-based interventions have significant potential in preventing substance abuse when implemented comprehensively. A study by Muruges & Nor (2025) revealed that an approach involving all elements of the school community as a whole is more effective in raising student awareness. Meanwhile, Utami et al., (2026) emphasized the importance of collaboration between schools and parents in substance abuse prevention efforts. Another study by Nalugya et al., (2023) also showed that family and social environmental factors have a strong influence on children's behavior related to addictive substances.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with a narrative study method. This approach was chosen because it can systematically uncover experiences, meanings, and subjective perspectives from various studies analyzed (Halsall et al., 2023). Through narrative studies, researchers can understand phenomena more deeply and contextually. This method was chosen based on the research objective, which focused on exploring the role of schools in drug abuse prevention through the interpretation of several qualitative studies. Therefore, this approach was deemed appropriate for identifying patterns, themes, and meanings emerging from the reviewed literature.

Research data was collected through a systematic search of scientific articles published between 2020 and 2025. Inclusion criteria included qualitative studies addressing drug





prevention at the elementary school level. The selection process was carried out in stages to ensure the quality and relevance of the sources used.

Data analysis was conducted using narrative thematic analysis techniques, which included coding, categorizing, and interpreting key themes. This approach enabled researchers to identify common patterns and contextual variations across the various studies analyzed (Nordmyr & Forsman, 2021).

Data validity was maintained through source triangulation and critical analysis of the literature used. Furthermore, transparency in the analysis process was a key priority to ensure the credibility of the research findings.

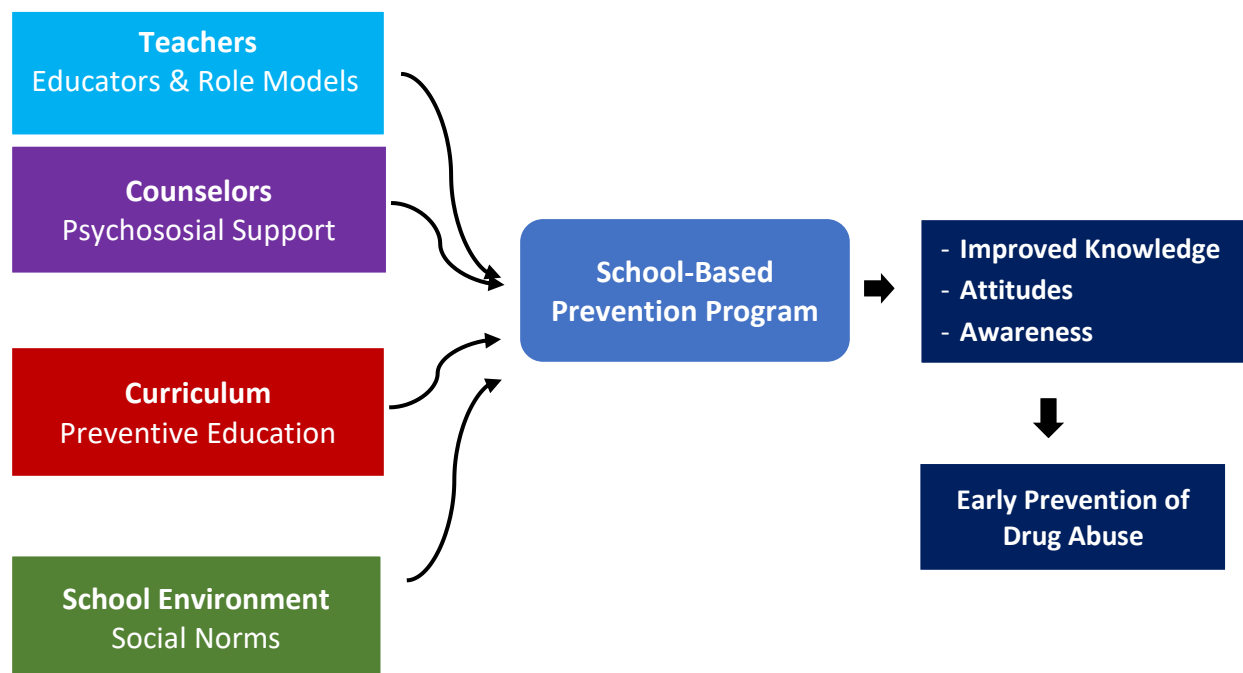
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that the role of schools in preventing drug abuse can be grouped into several main themes: educational, preventive, and collaborative. These three themes emerged consistently across the various studies analyzed. The educational role of schools is reflected in efforts to integrate drug prevention materials into the curriculum. In this case, teachers function not only as conveyors of information but also as shapers of students' attitudes towards the dangers of drugs (Handrianto et al., 2025).

The preventive role is evident in character development activities and the reinforcement of social values. Several studies have shown that a conducive school environment can reduce the risk of deviant behavior in students (Nalugya et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the collaborative role is realized through collaboration between schools, parents, and the community. A study by Utami et al., (2026) confirmed that synergy between these parties is a crucial factor in the success of prevention efforts.

A quote from a participant in one study stated, "School is not just a place to learn, but also a space for children to understand the values of right and wrong" (Muruges & Nor, 2025). These findings align with social ecological theory, which emphasizes the importance of interactions between individuals and their environments in shaping children's behavior. Schools, as one of the primary social environments, play a significant role in drug abuse prevention efforts. Next, we can describe in detail how schools can carry out narcotics prevention efforts through a school-based prevention model:





Figur.1 School-Based Prevention Framework

The figure shows that drug abuse prevention efforts in elementary schools cannot be implemented in isolation but require a comprehensive approach involving various components within the school system. Each element plays a complementary role and together forms an integrated prevention ecosystem.

First, the role of teachers as educators and role models emphasizes that teachers are not only responsible for delivering learning materials but also function as social agents influencing students' perceptions of the risks of deviant behavior. Teachers play a role in shaping students' attitudes and values through daily interactions. Research shows that the success of prevention is greatly influenced by the quality of the relationship between teachers and students and the teacher's ability to integrate preventive values into the learning process (Dai et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers are key actors in building students' early awareness.

Second, the role of counselors as psychosocial facilitators emphasizes the importance of a more personalized approach based on the individual needs of students. Counselors have a



strategic position in early detection of potential risks and providing supportive interventions. Several studies have shown that the involvement of counselors in prevention programs can increase the effectiveness of interventions, particularly in addressing emotional and social aspects that cannot be fully addressed through formal learning (Knight, 2025).

Third, the curriculum, as a means of preventive education, demonstrates that drug prevention needs to be systematically integrated into the learning structure. An effective curriculum focuses not only on conveying information but also on developing life skills, such as decision-making and resisting peer pressure. This integration has been shown to be a critical factor in the success of school-based prevention programs. A study by Liu et al., (2023) in a scoping review showed that a structured curriculum-based prevention program can improve students' knowledge, attitudes, and drug resistance skills. However, its effectiveness is greatly influenced by the delivery method and the appropriateness of the material to the students' social context.

Fourth, the school environment, as a social norm construct, confirms that school culture has a significant influence on student behavior. A positive, safe, and supportive environment can reduce the risk of substance abuse by building collective norms that discourage deviant behavior. Research by Maina et al., (2020) showed that a conducive school environment characterized by harmonious social relationships, emotional support, and clear policies can act as a protective factor against substance abuse in elementary school-aged children. All of these components are then integrated into a school-based prevention program as the main process. This program acts as a platform that processes various inputs into measurable outputs, namely increased knowledge, attitudes, and awareness. Interestingly, the figure also shows a hierarchical relationship, where improving cognitive and affective aspects is a primary prerequisite for achieving the ultimate goal of early prevention of drug abuse.

From a theoretical perspective, this research further emphasizes the importance of a qualitative approach in understanding complex social phenomena. However, there is variation in program implementation across cultural contexts. Several studies indicate that approaches not tailored to the local context tend to be less effective (Gusmões et al., 2022). Therefore, the practical implications of this research point to the need to improve teacher capacity and strengthen the integration of a values-based curriculum. Furthermore, developing a participatory approach is also crucial.





CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that schools have a strategic role in the early prevention of drug abuse through educational, preventive, and collaborative functions. These findings emphasize the importance of a comprehensive and contextual school-based approach in shaping student behavior. Implications of this research include strengthening education policies, increasing teacher capacity, and developing community-based programs. Theoretically, this study enriches the study of drug prevention through a qualitative approach. Further research is expected to explore program implementation empirically.

REFERENCE

- Badan Narkotika Nasional. (2022). Laporan Tahunan BNN. https://lkip-2022_final-ttd.pdf
- Dai, H., Ramos, A., Tamrakar, N., & Cheney, M. (2021). School personnel's responses to school-based prevention programs: A qualitative study. *Health Behavior and Policy Review*.
- Eisman, A. B., Kiperman, S., & Rupp, L. A. (2022). Understanding key implementation determinants for school-based prevention. *Translational Behavioral Medicine*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibab162>
- El-Khatib, Z., Herrera, C., Campello, G., & Mattfeld, E. (2021). Prevention of substance use in schools. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052613>
- Gusmões, J. D., Garcia-Cerde, R., & Valente, J. Y. (2022). Implementation fidelity of a Brazilian drug prevention program. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1186/s13011-022-00496-w>
- Halsall, T., Mahmoud, K., Iyer, S. N., & Orpana, H. (2023). Youth substance use prevention: A qualitative review. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2022.2149097>
- Handrianto, C., Jusoh, A. J., Talib, M. A., & Biru, R. (2025). Drug education curriculum: A systematic review. *Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia*.
- Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi. (2021). Laporan Implementasi Pendidikan Karakter Dan Pencegahan Narkoba Di Sekolah.
- Knight, A. J. (2025). An Ounce of Prevention: Counselor and Health Teacher Perception on Substance-Abuse Prevention Curricular Effectiveness (Doctoral dissertation, Marshall University).
- Liu, X. Q., Guo, Y. X., & Wang, X. (2023). Delivering substance use prevention interventions in





- educational settings. *World Journal of Psychiatry*, 13(7), 409.
- Maina, G., Mclean, M., Mcharo, S., & Kennedy, M. (2020). A scoping review of school-based indigenous substance use prevention in preteens (7–13 years). *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1186/s13011-020-00314-1>
- Muruges, V., & Nor, A. M. (2025). Key attributes of school-based interventions for preventing drug abuse among lower elementary schoolchildren in Malaysia: A qualitative research. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*.
- Nalugya, J. S., Skylstad, V., Babirye, J. N., & Ssemata, A. S. (2023). “She gives it to her child who doesn’t even talk”: A qualitative exploration of alcohol and drug use among primary school-age children in Uganda. *BMC Public Health*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-17016-5>
- Nordmyr, J., & Forsman, A. K. (2021). Roles and responsibilities in substance use prevention in the school setting. *Scandinavian Journal of Primary Health Care*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/02813432.2021.1935516>
- Utami, R. D., Suminar, P., & Widiyarti, D. (2026). The synergy of school and parental roles in preventing addictive substance abuse. *The Innovation of Social Studies Education*.

