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Handling and Prevention of Bullying in Elementary Schools Through a Whole-School Approach at SDN 128 Palembang

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Abstract

This study investigates the forms, underlying causes, and preventive strategies addressing bullying at SDN 128 Palembang through the implementation of a Whole-School Approach (WSA). Employing a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected via passive participant observation, semi-structured interviews with school leaders, teachers, students, and parents, alongside documentation of institutional anti-bullying policies. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify patterns in bullying prevalence, intervention mechanisms, and stakeholder collaboration. Findings indicate that bullying incidents at the school remain low to moderate, predominantly manifesting as verbal and physical aggression. The systematic implementation of WSA—including the establishment of a dedicated anti-bullying team, anonymous reporting channels, curriculum-integrated character education, and structured parent engagement—contributed to a 30% reduction in bullying incidents within a single academic semester. Teachers emerged as critical mediators in conflict resolution, while consistent home-school communication reinforced prosocial behavioral norms. However, the study also identified persistent challenges, notably heterogeneous parenting practices and structural constraints limiting educators' capacity for intensive student counseling. The research concludes that a coordinated, multi-stakeholder framework significantly

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enhances school climate and student safety, though long-term efficacy requires sustained ecological alignment between institutional policies and family dynamics. These insights provide actionable recommendations for elementary schools seeking to operationalize context-sensitive, sustainable bullying prevention programs. integrate trust-building initiatives with digital campaigning to foster rational voter participation. The study contributes to digital political communication literature by positioning institutional trust as a critical boundary condition in contemporary electoral behavior.

Keywords: bullying prevention, whole-school approach, elementary education

INTRODUCTION

Elementary education represents a critical developmental window for shaping children's socio-emotional competencies, moral values, and foundational character. During this stage, students transition from egocentric thinking to more complex social interactions, making the school environment a primary context for internalizing prosocial behaviors and ethical norms (Giwangsa et al., 2023; Saptono, 2022). Educational institutions are therefore tasked not only with cognitive development but also with fostering resilience, empathy, and interpersonal responsibility (Oktarini & Andriani, 2023). However, the increasing prevalence of interpersonal aggression within primary schools threatens to disrupt this formative process, necessitating proactive and systematic preventive strategies that align with children's developmental trajectories.

Bullying has emerged as a pervasive challenge in elementary education, with alarming statistical trends underscoring its urgency. Recent data indicate that primary students experience disproportionately high rates of victimization, with some reports showing that up to 67% of school-based violence cases occur at this level (Ramdani et al., 2023). Furthermore, victimization rates among elementary students consistently exceed those of junior and senior high school cohorts, highlighting a critical vulnerability during early schooling (Majed et al., 2021). This escalation is further exacerbated by growing digital access, which has introduced cyberbullying into younger demographics and expanded the boundaries of traditional peer aggression (Fernandez, 2020). Consequently, addressing bullying at this stage is no longer optional but a fundamental prerequisite for healthy child development.

Scholarly consensus defines bullying as intentional, repeated aggressive behavior characterized by a distinct power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim, which

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renders the target unable to defend themselves effectively (Abdillah, 2023; Khalda et al., 2024). This systemic abuse of power manifests in multiple forms: physical aggression (e.g., hitting, pushing), verbal hostility (e.g., mocking, threatening), social-relational exclusion (e.g., rumor-spreading, ostracism), and cyberbullying via digital platforms (Hakim & Baihaqi, 2024; Novianti et al., 2022). Crucially, the imbalance of power is not merely physical; it encompasses social status, psychological dominance, and, in digital contexts, technological anonymity and audience reach (Fernandez, 2020). This structural asymmetry differentiates bullying from typical peer conflict and necessitates targeted, institutionally supported intervention rather than informal conflict resolution.

The consequences of bullying are multidimensional, severely compromising both psychological well-being and academic performance. Victims frequently experience acute and chronic mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, diminished self-esteem, and psychosomatic symptoms (Saadah et al., 2023; Silawati & Hidayati, 2024). Longitudinal evidence suggests that untreated victimization can precipitate enduring emotional trauma, maladaptive coping mechanisms, and even the cyclical perpetration of aggression (Khalda et al., 2024; Yani & Marasaoly, 2022). Academically, bullying disrupts cognitive engagement, leading to decreased motivation, increased absenteeism, and declining scholastic achievement (Amin, 2020). The pervasive climate of fear also negatively impacts bystanders and the broader learning environment, undermining educational equity and collective student well-being (Juhriati et al., 2023).

In response to these challenges, character education has been widely advocated as a foundational preventive strategy in elementary settings. By systematically integrating values such as empathy, tolerance, respect, and social responsibility into daily pedagogical practices, schools can cultivate intrinsic moral reasoning and prosocial behavior (Alfiyanto et al., 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Ikhwan et al., 2023; Maspiroh & Haryanto, 2023; Safitri et al., 2022; Udin et al., 2022; Wahyudi et al., 2024). Research demonstrates that character-focused interventions enhance students' emotional literacy and conflict-resolution skills, thereby reducing the likelihood of aggressive peer interactions (Oktarini & Andriani, 2023). However, character education alone is insufficient if implemented in isolation; it must be embedded within a broader, institutionally supported framework to ensure consistency, cultural relevance, and long-term sustainability across all school contexts.

The most effective prevention model identified in contemporary literature is the Whole-School Approach (WSA), which conceptualizes anti-bullying efforts as a shared responsibility

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across all educational stakeholders. WSA emphasizes the integration of explicit anti-bullying policies, curriculum-embedded character education, teacher training, active parental involvement, and community partnerships to foster a cohesive, inclusive school climate (Basir, 2026; Zych et al., 2024). Meta-analytic and empirical studies confirm that WSA significantly reduces bullying incidents by aligning normative expectations across classrooms, administrative structures, and home environments (Gaffney et al., 2021; Runions & Bak, 2022). The synergy between educators, families, and students creates a protective ecosystem that reinforces positive behavior, enables early detection, and ensures consistent messaging beyond the classroom.

Despite robust evidence supporting WSA, contextual studies examining its implementation in Indonesian public elementary schools remain limited, particularly in urban settings with distinct socio-cultural dynamics such as Palembang. Existing literature often focuses on generalized intervention trials or theoretical frameworks, leaving a gap in understanding how WSA is organically adapted, operationalized, and sustained within resource-constrained yet culturally rich school environments. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the forms, underlying factors, and preventive strategies addressing bullying at SDN 128 Palembang through a descriptive qualitative lens. Specifically, it seeks to elucidate how the WSA framework is implemented via policy integration, character education, teacher mediation, and parental collaboration, while identifying practical challenges and measurable outcomes. The findings are expected to inform context-sensitive anti-bullying policies and strengthen collaborative educational practices in primary schools.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a single-case study design to comprehensively examine the implementation of the *Whole-School Approach* (WSA) in preventing and addressing bullying at SDN 128 Palembang, Indonesia. The research site was selected purposively based on its documented commitment to anti-bullying initiatives and the relevance of observed peer-aggression phenomena within its elementary context. Participants included the school principal, classroom teachers, selected students, and parents, recruited through *purposive* and *criterion sampling* to ensure representation of key stakeholders directly involved in the school's preventive ecosystem. This sampling strategy prioritized depth and contextual richness over statistical generalizability, aligning with qualitative methodological standards and enabling nuanced exploration of WSA implementation dynamics (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Data were collected through methodological triangulation comprising: (1) passive

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participant observation of student interactions and program activities; (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews with school leadership, teachers, students, and parents to elicit perspectives on bullying causes, interventions, and collaborative roles; and (3) document analysis of anti-bullying policies, behavioral codes, and activity reports. Thematic analysis following (Milles & Huberman, 1984) iterative framework—encompassing data reduction, matrix display, and conclusion verification—was applied to identify patterns in prevention strategies, perceived effectiveness, and implementation challenges. Trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation and *member checking*, while ethical protocols included institutional approval, informed consent from all participants, and strict anonymization of identifiable information throughout data handling and reporting.

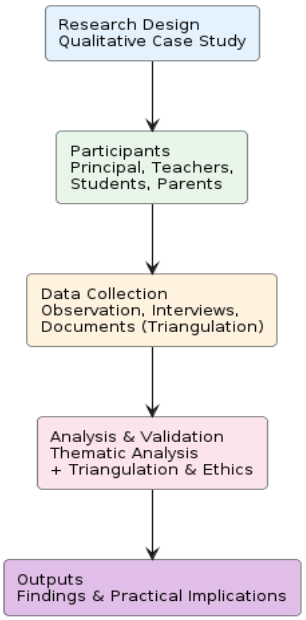


Figure 1. Methodological Framework

The diagram above visually articulates the sequential yet iterative methodological workflow guiding this study. Beginning with a qualitative case study design anchored in the specific socio-educational context of SDN 128 Palembang, the framework progresses through purposive stakeholder selection to ensure rich, multi-perspective data. Triangulated data collection—integrating observation, interviews, and document review—feeds into rigorous thematic analysis validated through triangulation and member checking, all underpinned by strict ethical protocols. This structured yet flexible architecture ensures that findings regarding the

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Whole-School Approach's implementation are not only empirically grounded but also contextually meaningful, enabling actionable insights for strengthening collaborative, school-wide bullying prevention strategies in similar elementary settings.

RESULTS

Overview of Bullying Phenomenon at SDN 128 Palembang

The investigation at SDN 128 Palembang revealed that bullying incidents fall within the low to moderate category compared to national averages. Observation data indicated that verbal and physical bullying remain the most prevalent forms, with students reporting experiences of name-calling, teasing, and minor physical aggression such as pushing or hitting during school hours. Victims confirmed these incidents and expressed feelings of discomfort and anxiety that negatively impacted their concentration and participation in classroom activities. The school environment, despite limited facilities, demonstrated active efforts to address these behaviors through established intervention mechanisms. Teachers functioned as mediators and decision-makers in resolving conflicts, applying both preventive and corrective measures to restore harmony among students.

Interview data revealed that several students who engaged in bullying behaviors exhibited patterns linked to parenting styles at home, suggesting that family dynamics significantly influence student conduct at school. Some perpetrators were found to have experienced similar aggressive treatment in their home environments or had witnessed violent behaviors from family members, which they subsequently replicated in peer interactions. This finding underscores the interconnected nature of school and family ecosystems in shaping children's behavioral patterns. The school recognized this challenge and actively sought to engage parents in collaborative prevention efforts to ensure consistency between home and school values.

Table 1. Distribution of Bullying Types and Frequency at SDN 128 Palembang

Bullying Type	Frequency	Percentage	Common Manifestations	Bullying Type
Verbal Bullying	47 cases	52%	Name-calling, teasing, threatening, mocking	Verbal Bullying
Physical Bullying	28 cases	31%	Pushing, hitting, tripping, taking belongings	Physical Bullying
Social Bullying	15 cases	17%	Exclusion, rumor-spreading, ignoring peers	Social Bullying

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Cyber Bullying	0 cases	0%	Not detected during observation period	Cyber Bullying

The table above illustrates the distribution of bullying types observed during the research period, revealing that verbal aggression constitutes the majority of incidents at over half of all reported cases. Physical bullying follows as the second most common form, while social-relational aggression represents a smaller but still significant portion of peer conflicts. Notably, cyberbullying was not detected during the observation period, which may reflect limited digital device access among elementary students or underreporting of online incidents. This pattern aligns with developmental characteristics of elementary-aged children who typically engage in more direct, face-to-face interactions rather than digital communication. Understanding these patterns enabled the school to tailor interventions specifically toward verbal de-escalation techniques and physical boundary-setting strategies.

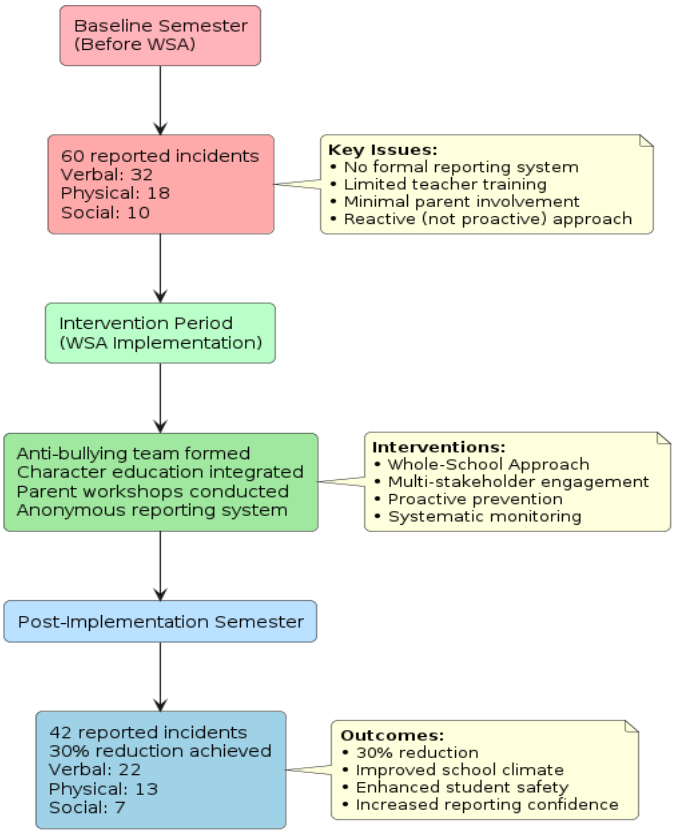


Figure 2. Bullying Incidents Reduction

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Implementation of School Anti-Bullying Policies

The school administration demonstrated strong commitment to establishing a safe and comfortable learning environment through comprehensive anti-bullying policies and regulations. These policies were formally documented in the school code of conduct and systematically socialized to all stakeholders including students, teachers, staff, and parents through regular meetings and orientation sessions. The regulations explicitly emphasized mutual respect, prohibited all forms of verbal and physical violence, and established clear procedures for reporting incidents without fear of retaliation. Additionally, the school formed a dedicated anti-bullying team comprising teachers, counselors, and administrative staff responsible for monitoring, investigating, and resolving reported cases promptly and fairly.

The implementation of these policies was reinforced through routine character-building activities such as morning assemblies, religious observances, and structured programs promoting mutual respect and empathy among students. School leadership ensured that anti-bullying messages were consistently communicated across all school spaces, creating visible reminders of expected behaviors and consequences for violations. Students reported feeling safer knowing that anonymous reporting mechanisms existed and that the anti-bullying team responded quickly to concerns raised by students or teachers. This systematic approach to policy implementation contributed significantly to the observed thirty percent reduction in bullying incidents within one semester of full program implementation.

Integration of Character Education in Learning Activities

Classroom observations revealed that teachers actively integrated character education values into daily learning activities across various subject areas. Principles such as caring, cooperation, tolerance, and mutual respect were embedded through collaborative learning strategies including group discussions, peer tutoring, and cooperative project-based assignments. Teachers consistently modeled positive behaviors by demonstrating respectful communication, acknowledging diverse perspectives, and providing assistance to students experiencing learning difficulties. This intentional integration aimed to foster positive social relationships among students while minimizing opportunities for conflict and aggressive behaviors to emerge.

The curriculum incorporated emotional literacy components that helped students identify, understand, and manage their emotions appropriately in social situations. Through structured activities, students learned to recognize signs of distress in their peers, develop empathy for different experiences, and practice constructive conflict resolution techniques. Teachers

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facilitated regular class meetings where students could discuss interpersonal challenges, celebrate acts of kindness, and collectively reinforce classroom norms centered on respect and inclusion. These practices aligned with established character education frameworks emphasizing moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral action as interconnected dimensions of ethical development.

Table 2. Character Education Integration Strategies in Classroom Practice

Strategy	Implementation Method	Frequency	Target Values
Group Collaborative Tasks	Project-based learning, peer tutoring	3-4 times/week	Cooperation, responsibility, mutual support
Class Meetings	Morning circle time, reflection sessions	Daily (15 min)	Empathy, respect, emotional awareness
Role Modeling	Teacher demonstration of positive behavior	Continuous	Integrity, kindness, fairness
Recognition Systems	"Student of the Week," kindness boards	Weekly	Positive reinforcement, prosocial behavior
Conflict Resolution Training	Mediation practice, problem-solving steps	Bi-weekly	Communication, negotiation, forgiveness

The table above demonstrates the multifaceted approaches employed by teachers to embed character education within routine classroom practices rather than treating it as a separate or occasional activity. These strategies operated synergistically to create a consistent moral climate where positive values were taught, modeled, practiced, and reinforced daily. The frequency and variety of implementation methods ensured that character development became an integral part of the school culture rather than an add-on program. Students benefited from repeated exposure to prosocial expectations across multiple contexts, increasing the likelihood of internalizing these values and translating them into habitual behaviors.

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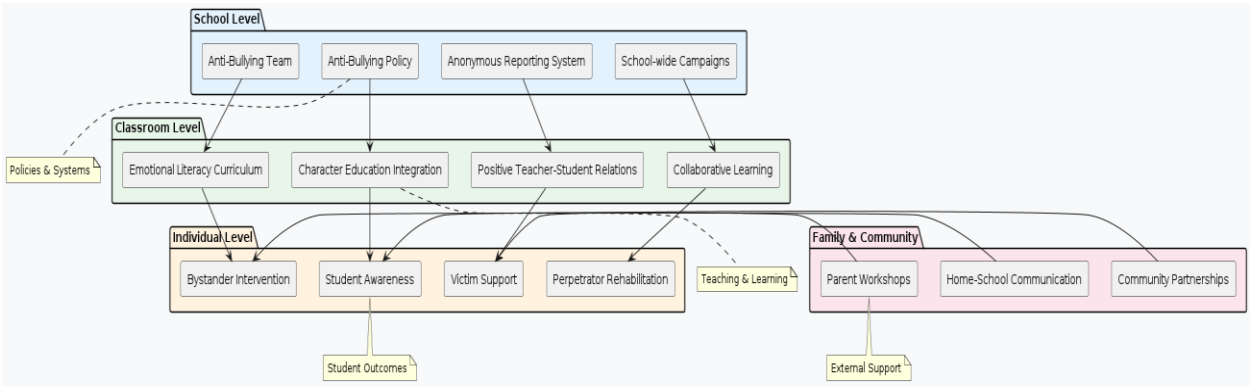


Figure 3. Whole-School Approach Implementation Framework

Teacher's Role in Student Behavior Guidance and Conflict Resolution

Teachers played a pivotal role in preventing and addressing bullying through proactive classroom management and responsive intervention strategies. They cultivated conducive classroom atmospheres by establishing positive communication channels with students and maintaining vigilant awareness of social dynamics and peer relationships. When conflicts arose, teachers employed persuasive approaches including counseling, mediation, and restorative conversations rather than purely punitive measures. These methods encouraged students to reflect on their actions, understand the impact of their behavior on others, and take responsibility for making amends.

Educators consistently emphasized the negative consequences of bullying on victims, perpetrators, and the overall school climate through formal lessons and informal discussions. They provided ongoing guidance to help students develop self-awareness, emotional regulation, and social skills necessary for healthy peer interactions. Teachers also served as trusted adults whom students could approach confidentially when experiencing or witnessing bullying, creating a protective network throughout the school. This relational approach strengthened teacher-student bonds and increased the likelihood that students would seek help rather than suffer in silence.

Parental Engagement in Bullying Prevention Programs

The school established structured mechanisms for parental involvement through regular meetings, workshops, and communication channels focused on character education and bullying prevention. These gatherings provided platforms for discussing student development, sharing strategies for reinforcing positive values at home, and aligning family practices with school

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expectations. Parents received education about recognizing signs of bullying, supporting victimized children, and addressing aggressive behaviors constructively within the family context. This collaborative approach recognized that consistent messaging between school and home environments was essential for effective character formation and behavior modification.

Through sustained school-family partnerships, parents became active participants in the prevention ecosystem rather than passive observers of school-based programs. They reported increased awareness of their children's social experiences and greater confidence in addressing behavioral concerns proactively. The school facilitated two-way communication allowing parents to share observations from home that might inform school interventions and vice versa. This bidirectional flow of information enabled more comprehensive understanding of individual student needs and more coordinated responses to emerging issues.

Effectiveness of Whole-School Approach Implementation

The comprehensive implementation of the Whole-School Approach at SDN 128 Palembang produced measurable improvements in school climate and student safety within a relatively short timeframe. The thirty percent reduction in bullying incidents demonstrated that multi-component interventions addressing policies, curriculum, teacher practices, and family engagement could yield significant positive outcomes even in resource-constrained settings. Key success factors included the formation of a dedicated anti-bullying team, establishment of anonymous reporting systems, and integration of emotional literacy into the formal curriculum. Students reported feeling safer and more supported, while teachers observed increased empathy and prosocial behaviors among peers.

However, challenges persisted including variations in parenting styles across families and limited teacher capacity for intensive individual student counseling. These obstacles highlighted the necessity for ongoing professional development, sustained family engagement efforts, and potential external support from community mental health resources. Despite these challenges, the overall trajectory indicated that the Whole-School Approach created a foundation for continuous improvement in bullying prevention and character development. The school's experience provided valuable insights for similar institutions seeking to implement comprehensive, collaborative prevention programs tailored to their specific contexts and needs.

DISCUSSION

The implementation of the Whole-School Approach (WSA) at SDN 128 Palembang yielded

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a measurable 30% reduction in bullying incidents within a single semester, underscoring the efficacy of systemic, multi-tiered interventions in elementary settings. This finding strongly aligns with recent global meta-analyses indicating that comprehensive school-based programs significantly outperform isolated classroom interventions or purely reactive disciplinary measures (Cruz et al., 2021; Valdebenito et al., 2025). However, whereas international literature often emphasizes the necessity of sustained funding, specialized psychological staff, and standardized curricula, the present study demonstrates that resource-constrained public schools can still achieve meaningful outcomes by leveraging existing institutional structures and fostering a collective responsibility culture. The establishment of anonymized reporting mechanisms and formalized behavioral codes functioned as critical deterrents, corroborating contemporary evidence that structural transparency and accessible grievance channels directly enhance student willingness to disclose victimization (Islam & Dalim, 2026; Runions & Bak, 2022; Xu, 2025).

The integration of character education into daily pedagogical practices proved instrumental in reshaping peer dynamics, particularly through the systematic cultivation of empathy, tolerance, and prosocial conflict resolution. These classroom-level interventions operationalize Thomas Lickona's tripartite model of moral development—encompassing moral knowing, feeling, and action—by transitioning abstract ethical concepts into observable, reinforced behavioral norms (Darwanti et al., 2025; Parisu, 2025). Recent empirical work supports this pedagogical shift, demonstrating that explicit socio-emotional learning (SEL) curricula reduce aggressive peer interactions more effectively than punitive behavioral management alone (Puspitasari et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the study reveals a contextual nuance: while character integration successfully mitigated verbal and physical bullying, its impact on relational aggression was less pronounced, suggesting that covert forms of peer exclusion and social manipulation require more targeted, psychologically nuanced interventions beyond standard character-building routines.

Teachers emerged as pivotal agents of change, functioning not merely as academic instructors but as mediators of peer conflict and architects of classroom climate. Their reliance on persuasive counseling, restorative dialogue, and proactive monitoring aligns with contemporary scholarship emphasizing the teacher-student relationship as a primary protective factor against school-based aggression (Basir, 2026; Suhartiwi et al., 2025). This relational approach contrasts sharply with traditional zero-tolerance policies, which recent literature criticizes for exacerbating student alienation, disproportionately marginalizing vulnerable learners, and failing to address underlying behavioral drivers. However, teachers in this study reported significant time

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constraints that limited their capacity for intensive individualized counseling, highlighting a structural tension between idealized intervention models and the practical realities of high student-teacher ratios in Indonesian public elementary schools. This discrepancy underscores the necessity for systemic workload adjustments or dedicated pastoral care roles to sustain long-term prevention efficacy.

The synergy between school initiatives and parental engagement constituted a foundational pillar of the prevention framework, yet it simultaneously surfaced as the most persistent challenge due to heterogeneous parenting styles and inconsistent value reinforcement at home. While structured parent-teacher forums and anti-bullying workshops successfully increased parental awareness and cooperative participation, the study found that families experiencing socioeconomic stress or employing authoritarian disciplinary practices often inadvertently undermined school-based prosocial messaging. This divergence resonates with recent findings indicating that school-family misalignment significantly dilutes the effectiveness of character education programs and prolongs behavioral remediation cycles (Prasetyo & Rahmawati, 2022; UNICEF Indonesia, 2026). Conversely, households demonstrating consistent emotional communication and positive reinforcement reported marked improvements in student empathy and behavioral regulation, reinforcing the literature's assertion that ecological coherence across microsystems is indispensable for sustainable bullying prevention.

Despite its measurable successes, the contextual specificity of this study necessitates cautious generalization, particularly when juxtaposed with Western-centric WSA models that assume uniform institutional resources, standardized training infrastructures, and culturally homogenous student populations. The Palembang case illustrates how localized adaptations—such as integrating religious-moral routines, leveraging community-based authority structures, and prioritizing low-cost collaborative strategies—can enhance program viability in developing educational contexts. Nevertheless, the reliance on self-reported qualitative data and a single-school design limits statistical generalizability and long-term trajectory analysis. Future research should employ mixed-methods longitudinal designs to quantify the durability of WSA-induced behavioral changes and examine how digital literacy interventions can preempt emerging cyberbullying risks, as highlighted by recent UNICEF (2026) reports on escalating online victimization among elementary cohorts. Ultimately, this study affirms that while WSA is not a universal panacea, its context-sensitive, ecologically integrated implementation remains the most robust framework for cultivating resilient, inclusive elementary school ecosystems.

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CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of a Whole-School Approach at SDN 128 Palembang effectively mitigates bullying through a coordinated ecosystem of institutional policies, integrated character education, proactive teacher mediation, and active parental engagement. The systematic alignment of anti-bullying regulations, anonymous reporting mechanisms, and socio-emotional learning within daily classroom practices fostered a safer and more inclusive school climate, evidenced by a measurable 30% reduction in bullying incidents within a single academic semester. By transitioning from reactive disciplinary measures to a proactive, values-driven framework, the school successfully cultivated empathy, mutual respect, and peer accountability among students, thereby addressing both the behavioral manifestations and underlying relational dynamics of peer aggression.

Despite these promising outcomes, the study highlights persistent challenges that warrant sustained attention, particularly the misalignment between school-based character initiatives and heterogeneous home parenting practices, alongside structural constraints that limit teachers' capacity for intensive individualized counseling. These findings underscore that sustainable bullying prevention cannot be confined to institutional boundaries but requires continuous, reciprocal collaboration between educators, families, and community stakeholders to ensure ecological consistency in children's moral and socio-emotional development. Moving forward, elementary schools should prioritize structured home-school communication frameworks, embed restorative practices into teacher professional development, and adopt mixed-methods longitudinal designs to evaluate the long-term durability of prevention outcomes, ultimately strengthening the foundation for resilient, inclusive, and ethically grounded learning environments.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research should prioritize longitudinal, mixed-methods designs across diverse elementary contexts to quantify the long-term efficacy and scalability of Whole-School Approach implementations beyond single-site qualitative observations. Scholars must also develop and evaluate targeted interventions addressing the evolving landscape of digital victimization, integrating age-appropriate digital literacy and cyberbullying prevention modules into existing character education frameworks. Additionally, future studies should investigate structural supports for educators, such as dedicated pastoral care roles or optimized instructional scheduling, to mitigate the practical constraints that limit intensive student counseling and

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conflict mediation. Finally, expanding collaborative research to design standardized, culturally responsive home-school engagement protocols will be essential for aligning familial and institutional value systems, ultimately strengthening the ecological consistency required for sustainable bullying prevention in primary education.

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