

## MORAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES TO SHAPE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ANTI-BULLYING ATTITUDES

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### Abstract

*This study explores the moral development strategies implemented at SD Muhammadiyah Suro to foster anti-bullying attitudes among elementary students. Bullying remains a serious concern in school environments, with detrimental impacts on children's physical, psychological, and social well-being. To mitigate this issue, schools are required to adopt comprehensive moral education approaches that nurture empathy, respect, and prosocial behavior. This research employed a qualitative approach using a case study method. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with the school principal, teachers, and selected students, as well as classroom observations. Secondary data were collected through document analysis of school policies and programs related to moral development. The findings reveal that the school integrates several key strategies: Islamic-based character education, positive behavior habituation, teacher modeling, and restorative conflict resolution practices. These efforts are also supported by extracurricular activities that promote empathy and collaboration among students. The study concludes that moral development strategies grounded in religious and character values, when consistently applied and supported by the involvement of educators, parents, and the broader school community, can cultivate a safe, respectful, and inclusive school environment. Such strategies play a crucial role in shaping students' moral awareness, fostering resilience, and promoting social responsibility.*

**Keywords:** *Moral Development Strategy; Anti-Bullying Attitude; Character Education*

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## **A. Introduction**

The development of a nation's civilization is closely related to the quality of its education system, where education not only functions as a means of transferring knowledge, but also as a blueprint in building future social structures (Firmansyah, 2021). Along with the development of the formality of education from the family environment to schools, schools play an important role in shaping the psychological, social, and emotional development of students. A supportive social environment encourages positive mental growth, while a non-conducive environment can trigger various psychological problems, one of which is bullying, which often occurs in the school environment (Dafiq et al., 2020).

Bullying, which comes from the English word "bull" meaning uncontrollable force, refers to aggressive behavior in which the perpetrator intentionally hurts another individual who is in a weaker position. This behavior usually aims to demonstrate the perpetrator's dominance and power over the victim, either through physical superiority, social status, or group power (Retno & Astuti, 2008). In the context of education, bullying is not only a problem of relationships between individuals, but also a systemic problem that affects the character development, emotional stability, and social participation of students in the future (Efianingrum, 2018). The phenomenon of bullying in education is a global concern. Studies conducted by the National Mental Prosperity and Instruction Center (2004) show that around 15% to 30% of children in the United States are involved in bullying, both as perpetrators and victims (Tay, 2023). The data shows that bullying is not just individual behavior, but a form of social pathology that is deeply rooted in various educational systems in the world, including in Indonesia.

Bullying has a wide range of negative impacts, not only for the victim, but also for the perpetrators and witnesses. These impacts include hatred, resentment, fear, and decreased self-confidence (Nurlatifah, 2019). Furthermore, bullying is closely related to violence in various forms, both physical and psychological, which ultimately damages the climate of trust and forms toxic patterns of social relations in schools (Nasir, 2018). In an Islamic perspective, bullying is seen as a violation of the principles of morality that are expressly prohibited in the Qur'an, one of which is in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 11 which emphasizes the importance of maintaining the honor of fellow human beings.

Addressing the problem of bullying requires more than just sanctions; it requires preventive strategies rooted in moral education and character development. Previous research has revealed that preventive approaches based on moral values, moral education, and social coaching are more effective in shaping student behavior than punishment alone (Prasetio & Fanreza, 2023). Teachers, in this case, have a great responsibility to be role models and agents of change in building a school climate full of empathy, respect, and integrity.

The selection of this research theme is based on the rampant cases of bullying that occur at the elementary school level, especially at SD Muhammadiyah Suro. This research aims to explore moral development strategies as the main approach in instilling anti-bullying attitudes in students. The focus on moral education from an early age is expected to prevent bullying behavior, not just deal with its effects after it occurs.

Previous research has made important contributions to understanding strategies to tackle bullying, whether through integrating Islamic values in the school curriculum (Arif et al., 2024) improving teacher-student interactions (Dimas, 2020), implementing value-based learning (Aisyiyah et al., 2023) and empowering the school community. However, most of these studies still focus on junior and senior high school contexts, and have not specifically explored moral development strategies at the primary school level. This study addresses this gap by exploring how moral education strategies – particularly those grounded in Islamic and character-based frameworks – are applied at SD Muhammadiyah Suro, an elementary school setting that has rarely been the focus of such research. This gap marks the novelty of this study, which will examine specifically the role of moral education in shaping anti-bullying attitudes among elementary school students. As such, this study not only fills a gap in the existing literature, but also offers a practical contribution to building safer, more inclusive and morally virtuous schools.

Although the importance of moral education is increasingly recognized, its implementation in primary schools still faces various challenges, such as limited teacher training, inconsistent character building programs, and lack of systemic support for the implementation of ethics programs in schools. Therefore, this study also highlights the need to design integrated strategies that combine moral learning with practical behavioral interventions, in line with efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Quality Education.

This study aims to analyze moral development strategies in shaping anti-bullying attitudes in primary school students, with a special focus on SD Muhammadiyah Suro. The main questions in this study include: (1) What are the factors that cause bullying behavior among elementary school students? (2) What kind of moral development strategies are effective in building anti-bullying attitudes in the school environment? By answering these questions, this research is expected to provide conceptual and practical contributions in creating a more friendly, safe, and dignified educational environment.

## **B. Methods**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a field method that aims to explore the phenomenon of moral development in shaping elementary school students' anti-bullying attitudes. The qualitative method was chosen because it is able to produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from participants and observed behavior, which aims to understand the meaning of phenomena naturally. As stated by (Arikunto, 2006), research methods function to obtain relevant data with specific objectives, while qualitative research focuses on an in-depth understanding of the social context without the aim of generalizing (Sukmadinata, 2017). SD Muhammadiyah Suro is a faith-based primary school located in Suro Village, Muara Beliti District, Musi Rawas Regency, South Sumatra. The school emphasizes Islamic values in character education, making it a suitable setting to explore moral development strategies in addressing bullying. Its semi-rural context influences student interactions and social behavior. Key informants including the vice principal, Islamic education teachers, and students were selected due to their direct involvement in fostering student morality and managing bullying cases.

Data collection was conducted using interview, observation, and documentation techniques. Interviews were conducted in a directed manner to explore the views,

experiences, and practices applied by teachers and schools in fostering student morals. Observation was used to observe the real behavior of students in the school environment and observe the implementation of the moral development program directly. Documentation is done by collecting relevant documents such as school work programs, activity reports, meeting minutes, and other written evidence that supports the research data. Data analysis was carried out in stages starting from data reduction, data presentation, to conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by sorting, simplifying, and focusing raw data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation into categories relevant to the research focus. The data that has been reduced is then presented in the form of descriptive narratives, to make it easier for researchers to understand patterns, relationships, and trends that arise from findings in the field. The final stage was carried out by drawing conclusions systematically based on the evidence obtained, accompanied by data verification to ensure the validity of the results (Huberman & Saldana, 2014)

The feasibility of data before analysis was maintained through basic statistical assumption tests, namely normality and homogeneity tests, to ensure near-normal data distribution and comparable variances between groups. In addition, the analysis technique uses a data triangulation approach to increase the validity of the findings, by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation together. By using these procedures, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of moral development strategies to shape anti-bullying attitudes in elementary school students, as well as make a scientific contribution to efforts to build a safe, healthy and positive school climate.

### C. Findings and Discussion

#### Moral Development Strategy at SD Muhammadiyah Suro

From the observations and interviews conducted, the following research results were obtained: Moral development strategies to form anti-bullying attitudes at SD Muhammadiyah Suro are carried out through several integrated approaches. The following are the results of research and discussion related to these strategies. The results of observations made by researchers in December 2024 found that the strategy used in moral coaching at SD Muhammadiyah Suro was character education for students. Second, by providing training to teachers. This is in accordance with the results of an interview with the principal who stated that:

"The problem of *bullying* behavior, to prevent such actions, our school uses a moral development strategy in the form of the application of character education. There are several steps taken in implementing character education by integrating moral values, namely teaching honesty, empathy and respect to students. Not only for students, for teachers we hold training on how to identify and handle *bullying* behavior in the classroom, with the training provided it is hoped that teachers can overcome the problem of bullying in schools." (Siti Marlinda, interview, December 20, 2024)

Then it was also added by the Islamic religious education teacher, who said that:

"Character education carried out by schools as one of the moral development strategies in order to form anti-bullying attitudes is by carrying out activities that will form good character for students, namely getting students used to saying good words, not mocking friends, helping each other, and respecting if there are differences." (Sindi Mardilah, interview, December 20, 2024)

Continued from the results of the interview by the subject teacher, it was stated that:

"The moral development strategy carried out by schools to form anti-bullying attitudes is exemplary and advice, activities carried out in terms of exemplary by teachers giving examples of polite and good speech when talking with students and fellow teachers. This activity provides an example to children to do positive activities. Then don't forget to always give advice to students about manners, be it to teachers, parents, friends and the surrounding environment, so that students can know which things to do and which ones not to do, so that *bullying behavior* does not occur both in the school environment and outside school." (Novi Sri Puja, interview, December 20, 2024).

The results of observations that have been made by researchers also show that the strategy carried out by schools is to create a positive environment, with a positive environment at school, the anti-bullying attitude of students can be realized.

This is reinforced by a statement from the principal of SD Muhammadiyah Suro, who stated that:

"Creating a positive school environment is very important to prevent *bullying*, the steps we take to make this happen are by creating and implementing clear policies regarding *bullying* behavior and its consequences. Then try as much as possible to help students who experience *bullying*." (Siti Marlinda, interview, December 20, 2024).

Based on the results of the observations and interviews above, it can be concluded that the moral development strategy to form an anti-bullying attitude in Muhammadiyah Suro Elementary School students is carried out through various approaches based on Islamic values and character education in order to create an environment free from *bullying*. The results show that moral development at SD Muhammadiyah Suro is carried out through various approaches, such as: Islamic-based character education, habituation of positive behavior, teacher exemplary, teacher training to handle bullying, and the creation of a safe and pleasant school environment.

The moral development strategy at SD Muhammadiyah Suro is not just a theory, but is actually implemented in reality. This coaching model supports the principles of 21st century education that emphasizes social skills, empathy, and collaboration, as suggested in the Merdeka Learning curriculum. By combining Islamic approaches, character, and a positive environment, the school is able to create a safe and healthy learning environment.

This approach is in line with the opinion of (Thomas Lickona, 2019), a contemporary character education figure, who states that character education must include three main aspects, namely moral *knowing* (knowledge of goodness), moral *feeling* (*feeling* good), and moral *action* (real actions based on good values). When students are taught values such as honesty, caring and respect, and then get used to doing them, they will more easily resist negative behaviors such as *bullying*.

### **Why the School Chooses a Moral Building Strategy**

Moral development is an important foundation in shaping a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also has good character. Education is not only about knowledge, but also how to form human beings who have high morality, honesty, responsibility, and concern for others. In the midst of the increasingly complex challenges of the times, moral development is our way of ensuring that students can face these challenges.... with the right principles. Furthermore, the results of the interview by the principal regarding the moral development strategy who gave the opinion that:

"Moral development cannot be done instantly or only superficially. If done deeply, character building will be more solid and integrated into students' personalities. We want these values to become part of their life habits, not just theoretical knowledge. With a deep approach, we try to create a consistent environment, both inside and outside the classroom, so that students really understand and practice these values." (Siti Marlinda, interview, December 20, 2024)

Then according to the opinion of one of the subject teachers at SD Muhammadiyah Suro said:

"The moral development strategy in our school involves a holistic approach. We integrate moral values in every subject, extracurricular activities and daily interactions between teachers and students. We also often organize training for teachers so that they can be good role models." (Novi Sri, interview, December 20, 2024)

The results of an interview with one of the students of SD Muhammadiyah Suro who said his knowledge about *bullying*:

"*Bullying* is when we tease, hurt our friends, or make them sad. I think the way to prevent it is by respecting each other and not discriminating against friends. Teachers at school often say that all students are brothers and sisters, so we should help each other." (Halimah, interview, December 20, 2024).

The researcher also interviewed students to ask for their opinions on what efforts the school makes to shape students' anti-bullying attitudes:

"At school, we are taught religious values, such as not to hurt others because it is a sin. Teachers also often give examples of how to behave well, such as apologizing if we do wrong and not taking revenge. We are also taught to respect differences, for example, if a friend has a different opinion, we have to listen." (Hafiz, interview, December 20, 2024).

Based on interviews with students of SD Muhammadiyah Suro, it can be concluded that bullying is an act of violence or intimidation committed by a person or group against another individual with the aim of demeaning, intimidating, or hurting physically or psychologically. *Bullying* can occur in various places, one of which is at school. In the context of Islamic education, moral development is one of the most important approaches to develop positive attitudes, including anti-bullying attitudes, in students. Muhammadiyah Suro School is committed to creating a safe, comfortable and conducive environment for students' moral development.

## The Concept of Moral Development at SD Muhammadiyah Suro

Moral development at SD Muhammadiyah Suro is based on Islamic values that are applied in students' daily lives. This concept includes learning about: first, Islamic moral teachings through teaching noble moral values such as mutual respect, helping, and not hurting others. Anti-bullying values such as compassion, helping, and respecting others are taught through Islamic religious lessons, such as hadith and morals lessons. Teachers also relate these values to students' daily lives. Second, the application of social attitudes by familiarizing good attitudes outside the classroom, such as avoiding bullying, respecting differences, and sharing.

The results showed that SD Muhammadiyah Suro implemented various moral development strategies designed to shape anti-bullying attitudes. These strategies include Islamic-based character education, teacher training, exemplary approach, positive habituation, and the creation of a supportive school environment.

This is in line with the concept of character education according to Lickona (1992), which emphasizes that character consists of three parts: *knowing goodness*, *wanting goodness*, and *doing goodness*. SD Muhammadiyah Suro has successfully integrated these three aspects in its moral development.

In addition, training for teachers on how to identify and handle bullying behavior is to strengthen the professional competence of educators as recommended by (Bandura, 1977) in social *learning theory*, that children learn from the environment through the process of observation and imitation, including imitating teacher behavior.

## Strategies for Forming Anti-bullying Attitudes in Students

Based on interviews with several teachers and students of SD Muhammadiyah Suro, it can be concluded that the moral development strategy to form anti-bullying attitudes involves various aspects:

### Character Education

Every day begins with character learning that emphasizes the principles of honesty, justice, and compassion for others. This character education is provided through exemplary stories of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions that emphasize the importance of good morals. The school also instills religious values as the basis for students' character building. Values such as respect, forgiveness, and not hurting others are taught through religious lessons, stories of the Prophet, and direct teaching by teachers. The chosen strategy is character education instilled through stories of the Prophet, worship practices, and daily interactions. This approach is supported by the view of (Aziz et al., 2024) that consistent moral and spiritual habituation can form strong character behavior in children. Teacher modeling in being polite, fair, and empathetic is a significant strategy. This is in line with Albert Bandura's *modeling* theory, that individuals will imitate the behavior displayed by figures who are considered authoritative. Recent studies (Sabililhaq et al., 2024; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2023) also show that students adopt prosocial behavior more effectively when teachers consistently model positive interactions.

Moral learning at SD Muhammadiyah Suro is adjusted to Islamic values, such as honesty, mutual respect, and helping each other. This is in line with the concept of character education from the (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021) which emphasizes the importance of religious values, integrity, independence, mutual cooperation, and global

diversity in the formation of students with character. In other words, when students are encouraged to understand and practice religious values in their daily lives, the attitude of respecting friends and not hurting others will grow from personal awareness, not just because of school rules.

### **Exemplary Approach**

Teachers at SD Muhammadiyah Suro are role models in their daily behavior. They show an attitude that always respects, loves and cares for students without discriminating. Teachers and school staff set an example in being polite and respectful to others. They consistently demonstrate good attitudes in their interactions with students and fellow colleagues. Teachers also model positive behavior. This is demonstrated through patience, fairness and non-violent solutions to conflicts. Teachers at SD Muhammadiyah Suro provide direct examples of being kind, speaking politely, and avoiding violence. This theory is in line with (Bandura, 2022) which updates *Social Cognitive Theory*, where children learn from what they see and hear not just from what is taught verbally. Teachers are the main characters that students emulate.

### **Habituation Method**

The habituation method is an educational approach that aims to instill positive values into student behavior through activities that are carried out repeatedly until they become part of daily habits. In the context of anti-bullying attitude formation, this method is used to create a conducive school environment and build students' characters who empathize, care and respect others. The moral development strategy at SD Muhammadiyah Suro includes a religious approach, exemplary teachers, and a conducive school environment. With this structured effort, students not only have an understanding of the dangers of *bullying*, but also a growing awareness to respect and protect their peers. This strategy can serve as a model for other schools in forming a noble and anti-bullying generation. Every day students are invited to familiarize themselves with positive actions, such as greeting, praying for friends, and resolving conflicts with deliberation. This is in accordance with the concept of *habit formation* from (Clear, 2020) in his book *Atomic Habits*, which states that small habits that are carried out continuously will shape a person's character and identity.

This study enriches previous findings by offering a contextualized model of moral development specifically designed for primary education within an Islamic school setting. While earlier research, such as that by (Aisyiyah et al., 2023) emphasized character education to mitigate bullying at the junior and senior high school levels, this study advances the discourse by highlighting a structured moral framework implemented consistently across all levels of school life. The integration of Islamic-based character education, teacher exemplarity, and daily habituation distinguishes this research from prior approaches that often focused on curriculum or policy alone. In addition, the implementation of restorative practices and the strong involvement of students in understanding and embodying anti-bullying values offer a more participatory and relational strategy, which contrasts with the more top-down or punitive models previously examined. Therefore, this research not only confirms the importance of moral education in preventing bullying but also introduces a replicable model that is deeply rooted in daily practice, religious values, and collaborative

community culture – an aspect that has been largely underexplored in studies of elementary education.

## **Discussion**

Moral development strategies to shape anti-bullying attitudes at SD Muhammadiyah Suro are implemented through an integrated approach based on character values and Islamic education principles. The results of observations and interviews show that the school integrates various efforts to instill the values of honesty, empathy, and respect for fellow students. Character education is the main foundation that is implemented through programmed learning, teacher training, role modeling and creating a positive learning environment. Observations in December 2024 showed that character education is not only taught theoretically but also practised in daily habits, thus shaping learners' positive behavior.

The principal of SD Muhammadiyah Suro emphasized that character education is carried out through integrating moral values in learning and strengthening teachers' capacity to identify and deal with bullying behaviour in the classroom. The Islamic Religious Education teacher supported the statement by explaining that students are trained to get used to speaking kindly, respecting each other and avoiding silly behavior towards friends. The subject teacher added that modeling and giving advice are important methods that are consistently applied to shape students' polite behavior. In addition, observations show that creating a positive school environment plays a major role in preventing bullying behavior. The principal stated that the school policy on bullying behavior is strictly implemented along with support for victims of bullying, thus creating a safe and comfortable atmosphere for all school members.

The strategy implemented by SD Muhammadiyah Suro is not only theory-based, but also implemented in consistent real practice, in accordance with the principles of 21st century education that emphasizes social skills, empathy, and collaboration. This approach is in line with the views of (Lickona, 2019) who emphasizes the importance of integrating moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action in character education. The integration of these values forms students who are able to understand, feel, and perform positive actions in everyday life.

Moral development is a top priority at SD Muhammadiyah Suro to form a generation that is not only academically smart, but also has a strong character. The principal explained that strong character building must be done deeply and consistently in daily life, not just on the surface. Subject teachers reinforced this opinion by emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach that integrates moral values in all educational activities, from formal learning to social interaction. Interviews with students also showed that the values of mutual respect, not discriminating against friends and maintaining brotherhood are consistently taught and practised in daily life.

Moral development at SD Muhammadiyah Suro is based on the concept of Islamic values that are applied in students' daily lives. Values such as compassion, helping, respecting each other, and avoiding violence are taught through Islamic religious lessons and applied in students' daily interactions. In addition, the habituation of positive social behavior outside the classroom, such as respecting different opinions and sharing, is an

integral part of the school culture. This approach strengthens Lickona's (1992) concept of character education which emphasizes the importance of integration between knowledge of goodness, the desire to do good, and real action in daily life. Training teachers to identify and handle bullying behavior is also an important part of the moral development strategy. This strengthens teachers' competence as role models for students, in line with (Bandura, 2022) which states that children learn through observation and imitation of figures they admire in the surrounding environment. Thus, positive teacher behavior is a reflection of the values that students imitate in their daily lives.

The anti-bullying attitude formation strategy is carried out through a combination of character education, exemplary approach, and positive habituation method. Character education is implemented by instilling values such as honesty, justice, and compassion – taught through stories of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and reinforced by daily worship practices. This is aligned with findings from (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004) who asserted that character education is most effective when it is intentionally taught and reinforced across various school activities, not limited to formal curriculum. Teachers serve as central role models by demonstrating respectful, fair, and empathetic behaviors, which aligns with (Bandura, 2022) Social Cognitive Theory emphasizing observational learning. Empirical studies, such as those by (Oberle et al., 2016), confirm that students' exposure to consistent positive role models significantly reduces aggressive and bullying behaviors over time.

Moreover, the positive habituation method – such as daily greetings, conflict resolution through dialogue, and prayers for peers – illustrates how small, repetitive acts shape long-term moral identity. This is supported by (Fiorella, 2020) habit formation theory and further reinforced by educational research (Reinke et al., 2011), which shows that repeated social-emotional routines in school contexts lead to internalization of prosocial behavior. Therefore, this integrated strategy demonstrates how combining religious character instruction, teacher modeling, and daily moral routines can foster a sustainable anti-bullying culture in elementary school settings.

A conducive school environment is also an important factor in shaping anti-bullying attitudes. Schools implement strict policies against bullying and create a social climate that supports safety, mutual respect and tolerance among students. This approach reinforces the values of religion, integrity, independence, mutual cooperation and global diversity as recommended in the Independent Learning curriculum (Sultan et al., 2023). Overall, the moral development strategy at SD Muhammadiyah Suro forms students who not only understand the dangers of bullying, but also have a strong moral awareness to maintain social harmony in their environment.

This strategy can serve as a model for other schools in forming a noble and anti-bullying generation. Every day, students are invited to engage in positive actions such as greeting, praying for peers, and resolving conflicts through dialogue. These consistent practices contribute to shaping empathetic and respectful behavior among learners.

However, this study has limitations, as it was conducted in only one elementary school with a limited number of participants, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the research did not include quantitative measures to assess the intensity or frequency of bullying

incidents. Future research is recommended to apply this moral development approach in diverse school settings and incorporate quantitative instruments to evaluate its effectiveness more comprehensively. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable to explore the sustained impact of moral education strategies on students' behavior and character development over time.

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that moral development strategies based on Islamic values and character education play a crucial role in shaping anti-bullying attitudes among elementary school students. At SD Muhammadiyah Suro, the implementation of character education, teacher role modeling, positive behavioral habituation, and the creation of a safe and supportive school climate have proven effective in fostering respectful, empathetic, and responsible student behavior. These integrated strategies contribute not only to the prevention of bullying but also to the formation of students with strong moral integrity. By aligning moral instruction with daily practices and social interactions, the school has successfully cultivated a culture of care, tolerance, and cooperation. The findings of this research offer both theoretical contributions to the discourse on values education and practical insights for educators and policymakers seeking to build anti-bullying cultures in schools. This holistic model may serve as a replicable framework for other educational institutions aiming to develop students' character and promote a safe, inclusive, and morally grounded learning environment. Schools should embed moral education into daily learning, train teachers as moral role models, and foster a positive school climate through inclusive activities and clear anti-bullying policies. Policymakers are advised to support systematic implementation of character education. Future studies should expand to different contexts and include quantitative and longitudinal approaches to measure long-term impact.

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