

The Strategic Role of School Principals in Preventing and Handling Bullying in Schools

Imam Ghazali ¹, Istanto ², Bambang Sumardjoko ³, Farouq Muhammad Najib ⁴

^{1,2,3} Faculty of Islamic Studies, Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, Surakarta, Indonesia

⁴ Islamic University of Madinah, Madinah

Email: imamalghozali7@gmail.com

Abstract

Objective: This study aims to analyze the strategic role of school principals in preventing and addressing bullying behavior in schools. This research focuses on principals' understanding of the factors causing bullying and the strategies they implement to create a safe and conducive school environment.

Methodology: This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with purposive sampling. Participants consisted of three principals: two elementary school principals and one high school principal, from schools that had experienced bullying. Data collection methods included interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing using triangulation techniques.

Results: The research results show that school principals have a good understanding of the factors causing bullying, including those originating from the family environment, peers, and school culture. Principals implement various prevention and response strategies, such as developing anti-bullying policies, developing student character, and collaborating with teachers and parents. Principals also play an active role in handling bullying cases through persuasive approaches and the application of educational sanctions.

Application/Originality/ Value: This study emphasizes the importance of principal leadership in creating a safe, child-friendly school environment that is oriented towards protecting students' rights.

Introduction Section

Bullying is a social phenomenon that continues to be a serious concern in the world of education due to its significant impact on student development. (Stiawan et al., 2024) Bullying is generally defined as aggressive behavior carried out intentionally and repeatedly by an individual or group against another individual in a weaker position, characterized by an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. (Nurfaniza & Margaret, 2024) This imbalance can stem from physical aspects, social status, popularity, age, or group support, so that the victim is in a powerless condition to fight or stop the action. (Syahrin et al., 2025)

In the context of education, bullying is seen as deviant behavior that hinders the creation of a safe, inclusive, and conducive learning environment. (Barsah, 2024) Bullying not only impacts the individuals directly involved, but also affects the overall psychosocial climate of the school. (Ula et al., 2024) Schools with high levels of bullying tend to exhibit a low sense of security, weak social relationships among school members, and a decreased comfort in the learning process. (Barsah, 2024) Therefore, bullying cannot be viewed as merely an individual problem, but rather as a systemic problem that requires integrated handling. (Richard et al., 2011)

Bullying can occur at all levels of education and takes many forms. Physical bullying includes actions such as hitting, kicking, pushing, spitting, throwing objects, and damaging or taking the victim's belongings. Verbal bullying includes teasing, insults, threats, and the use of demeaning language. (Syahputra et al., 2024) Meanwhile, relational or social bullying involves exclusion, spreading negative rumors, humiliating the victim in front of others, and manipulating social relationships. This form of bullying is often difficult to detect because it does not always involve physical violence, but it has a profound emotional impact. (Múzquiz et al., 2023)

The development of information technology has given rise to a new form of bullying known as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is carried out through digital media such as mobile phones and social media with the aim of hurting, humiliating, or psychologically intimidating victims. (Rahmiwati Marsinun & Dody Riswanto, 2020) The characteristics of cyberbullying, which are anonymous, easily spread, and have a relatively permanent digital footprint, make it a form of bullying that has the potential to have long-term impacts. (Nisrina et al., 2025) Furthermore, bullying can also appear in the form of sexual intimidation, whether through verbal comments, visual symbols, or unwanted physical contact, further strengthening the urgency of addressing bullying seriously in the school environment. (Fathiya Ainun Mardhiyah, 2025)

Bullying in schools has a direct impact on students' psychological, social, and academic well-being. Victims of bullying are at risk of experiencing anxiety, depression, low self-confidence, and impaired social relationships. (Oktarina

et al., 2025) These impacts often lead to decreased motivation to learn, difficulty concentrating, increased absenteeism, and even decisions to drop out of school. (Eka Bagus Pramudyaa, Diah Puri Widyawatib, Tasya Putric, Dinda Zahra Ummamid, 2024) In extreme cases, bullying can even trigger risky behaviors such as self-harm or suicide. (Mahzunah et al., 2024) The negative impact of bullying is not only felt by the victim, but can also form aggressive behavior patterns in the perpetrator and create a sense of insecurity for other students who witness it. (Paranti et al., 2022)

Empirical data shows that bullying remains a relatively common phenomenon in schools. The percentage of students reporting experiences of bullying indicates that bullying occurs in various forms, including physical, verbal, and social. (Muhammad Rizki Arfandi, 2025) These findings indicate that bullying is not merely an incidental occurrence, but rather a structural issue closely related to school culture, oversight systems, and educational leadership practices. (Arga & Irawan, 2025)

In efforts to prevent and address bullying, school climate plays a crucial role. School climate reflects the quality of social relationships, norms, values, and leadership practices that develop within the educational environment. Schools with a positive climate are characterized by mutually respectful relationships, active student engagement, strong teacher support, and fair and consistent implementation of rules. Positive teacher-student relationships have been shown to suppress aggressive behavior and create a sense of safety within the school environment. (Damayanti et al., 2024)

Conversely, authoritarian educational practices, weak oversight, and inconsistent rule enforcement can create space for bullying behavior to flourish. (Cornell, 2019)

As educational leaders, principals play a strategic role in formulating policies, building a positive school culture, and coordinating various efforts to prevent and address bullying. (Siti Alfi Napisah, Irman Suherman, 2024) The effectiveness of anti-bullying policies, the implementation of prevention programs, and the sustainability of case management are largely determined by the principal's commitment and leadership. (Sholeh et al., 2023) However, empirical studies specifically exploring the principal's role in the context of bullying prevention and management are still relatively limited.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to explore the strategic role of school principals in preventing and addressing bullying in schools. The research focuses on how school principals understand the phenomenon of bullying, implement intervention strategies, and build a safe, inclusive, and conducive learning environment for students. This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of educational policies and sustainable bullying prevention efforts.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with the aim of gaining an in-depth, comprehensive, and contextual understanding of the principal's strategic role in preventing and addressing bullying in schools. This approach was chosen because it can explore the meanings, perceptions, and practices of leadership that cannot be measured quantitatively (Creswell, 2018). The type of research used is qualitative phenomenological, which focuses on understanding the principal's experience in addressing the phenomenon of bullying (Lexy J. Moleong, 2018).

The research was conducted in three schools that had experienced bullying cases and were selected purposively based on a preliminary study, because they were relevant to the research objectives (Sugiono, 2019).

Participant selection was conducted using purposive sampling, a deliberate sampling technique based on specific criteria relevant to the research focus. The participants in this study consisted of three school principals: two elementary school principals and one high school principal. Principals were selected as primary participants because they play a strategic role in policy formulation, school climate management, and the implementation of bullying prevention and management strategies.

Interviews were used to explore the principals' perspectives, experiences, and strategies for preventing and addressing bullying in the school environment. The interviews used were in-depth, semi-structured interviews, allowing researchers to flexibly develop questions without deviating from the research objectives. Interviews were conducted in person and recorded to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the research data (Sugiono, 2019).

Interviews were used to explore the principals' perspectives, experiences, and strategies for preventing and addressing bullying in depth. The interviews used were in-depth, semi-structured, allowing researchers to develop questions flexibly while remaining focused on the research objectives. Interviews were conducted in person and recorded to ensure data accuracy.

In addition, document analysis was used as a supporting technique to strengthen the data from observations and interviews. Document analysis is a data collection method that examines various written documents relevant to the research focus to obtain accurate and in-depth information. The documents analyzed included school policies, codes of ethics, disciplinary regulations, anti-bullying policies, records of bullying incidents, and meeting minutes related to handling student behavior. Document analysis also serves as a means of data triangulation to increase the validity of research findings (Lexy J. Moleong, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques. The analysis process began with transcribing interview data, followed by data reduction to select relevant information. Next, the data was coded and grouped into categories and themes related to the principal's strategic role in preventing and addressing bullying. The final stage of analysis was drawing conclusions based on the patterns and meanings found in the data.

To maintain data validity, this study employed source and technique triangulation, comparing data obtained from observations, interviews, and documents. Triangulation was conducted to increase the credibility and reliability of the research findings. (Sugiono, 2019)

Table 1. Research Design and Procedures

Research Aspects	Description
Research Approach	Qualitative
Types of research	Phenomenological
Research Focus	The strategic role of the principal in preventing and handling bullying
Research Location	Three schools that have experienced bullying cases
Participants	3 principals (2 elementary schools and 1 high school)
Sampling Techniques	Purposive sampling
Data collection technique	Observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis
Research Instruments	Observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and document analysis sheets
Data Analysis Techniques	Content analysis (transcription, data reduction, coding, categorization, drawing conclusions)
Data Validity	Triangulation of sources and techniques

Results and Discussion

Based on observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis conducted at the three schools selected for the study, several key findings emerged that illustrate the strategic role of principals in preventing and addressing bullying in schools. These findings were analyzed and discussed thematically to provide a comprehensive understanding of principals' leadership practices in addressing bullying.

Principal's Understanding of the Bullying Phenomenon

The research results indicate that school principals have a fairly good understanding of the concept and characteristics of bullying. Principals view bullying as repeated aggressive behavior intended to harm or dominate a weaker party, whether physically, verbally, or psychologically. This understanding is gained through direct experience in handling bullying cases, leadership training, and interactions with teachers, students, and parents.

Principals also recognize that bullying doesn't always manifest as physical violence, but often takes the form of verbal and relational abuse, such as teasing, exclusion, and spreading rumors. Furthermore, several principals noted that technological advancements have given rise to forms of cyberbullying that are more difficult to monitor because they occur outside of school hours and within the school environment. This comprehensive understanding provides a foundation for principals in designing bullying prevention policies and strategies.

This finding is in line with the view that school leaders' understanding of understanding the characteristics of bullying is a crucial prerequisite for building an effective prevention system. Principals who understand the complexities of bullying tend to be more responsive and proactive in anticipating and handling cases that arise in the school environment.

The Principal's Role in Bullying Prevention

The research results show that principals play a strategic role in bullying prevention through the development of positive school policies and culture. One form of prevention is the development and implementation of anti-bullying policies outlined in school regulations, the student code of conduct, and applicable rules and regulations. These policies are disseminated to the entire school community through teacher meetings, student orientation activities, and parent meetings.

In addition to formal policies, the principal also plays a role in building a school culture that emphasizes the values of mutual respect, empathy, and tolerance. This effort is carried out through fostering positive behaviors, strengthening character education, and leading by example by the principal and teachers. The principal emphasizes the importance of teachers as role models in being fair, respecting differences, and rejecting all forms of violence.

In this context, the principal acts not only as a decision-maker but also as a driver of change in school culture. Participatory and communicative leadership creates a conducive school climate and minimizes the potential for bullying. These findings support the view that a positive school climate is a key protective factor in bullying prevention.

Principal Intervention Strategies in Handling Bullying

Research results show that when bullying occurs, the principal plays an active role in the handling process through an educational and restorative approach. The principal not only sanctions the perpetrator but also strives to understand the background of the bullying behavior. This approach involves guidance and counseling teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents.

Bullying cases are handled in stages, starting with clarification of the incident, mediation between the perpetrator and victim, and psychological support for all parties involved. The principal emphasized that the primary goal of handling bullying is not simply to impose punishment, but rather to build awareness and change students' behavior. Therefore, sanctions are educational and tailored to the severity of the offense.

This approach demonstrates that principals play a crucial role in ensuring that bullying is handled fairly and with a focus on recovery. This aligns with the principles of bullying management, which emphasize a balance between enforcing discipline and protecting students' rights.

Collaboration between the Principal, Teachers and Parents

Research findings also indicate that successful bullying prevention and management is heavily influenced by collaboration between principals, teachers, and parents. Principals actively encourage open communication and collaboration with parents through regular meetings, individual consultations, and student progress reports.

This collaboration enables schools and families to have a shared understanding of student behavior and the steps needed to address bullying. Principals view parents as strategic partners in shaping children's behavior and character, making parental involvement a crucial part of the bullying management strategy.

These results demonstrate that a collaborative approach can increase the effectiveness of school interventions. When schools and parents work synergistically, bullying prevention and response efforts can be more comprehensive and sustainable.

Challenges in Preventing and Handling Bullying

Despite school principals' efforts to fulfill their strategic role, this study also identified several challenges in preventing and addressing bullying. These challenges include limited supervision of students outside of class hours, a lack of awareness among some students and parents about the impact of bullying, and the emergence of cyberbullying cases that are difficult for schools to control.

Furthermore, limited human resources, particularly guidance and counseling staff, also hinder optimal support for victims and perpetrators of bullying. These challenges demonstrate that preventing and addressing bullying requires systemic and ongoing support from various parties.

Implications of the Principal's Strategic Role

Overall, the results of this study indicate that principals have a strategic role in creating a safe and bullying-free school environment. This role includes understanding the phenomenon of bullying, formulating policies, building a positive school culture, implementing educational intervention strategies, and strengthening collaboration with teachers and parents.

This discussion confirms that principal leadership is a key factor in the success of bullying prevention and management efforts in schools. Principals with strong commitment, social sensitivity, and strong managerial skills are able to manage bullying issues more effectively and sustainably.

Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that school principals play a strategic and central role in preventing and addressing bullying in schools. This role is reflected in the principal's ability to formulate anti-bullying policies, build a safe and inclusive school climate, and coordinate the entire school community in ongoing bullying prevention efforts.

The principal serves not only as a decision-maker but also as a role model and driver of change in school culture that upholds the values of mutual respect, empathy, and fairness. In handling bullying cases, the principal applies an educational and persuasive approach through case clarification, mediation, coaching, and teacher and parent involvement to restore social relationships and prevent recurrence of bullying behavior.

The research also shows that the success of bullying prevention and management is greatly influenced by effective collaboration between principals, teachers, parents, and students. While challenges remain, such as limited supervision and the rise of cyberbullying, strong and responsive principal leadership has been shown to create a safer, more conducive, and more welcoming learning environment for students.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express his gratitude to all parties who have provided support and contributions in the implementation of this research. Special thanks are extended to the lecturers of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta (UMS) who have provided guidance, direction, and constructive input during the research process and writing of this article. The author also expresses his appreciation to the school principals who were willing to participate and provide

information openly, as well as to the teachers and education staff at the schools where the research took place for their assistance and cooperation. Furthermore, the author would like to express his gratitude to all parties who cannot be mentioned individually for their support and contributions so that this research can be completed successfully .

Reference

- Arga, T. P., & Irawan, A. W. (2025). Why Does Bullying Occurs in Schools ? An Analysis from Michel Foucault ' s Theory Perspective Analysis. 16(1), 43–44. <https://ejournal.undiksha.ac.id/index.php/JIBK/article/view/90354>
- Barsah, Z. (2024). Fenomena Bullying Terhadap Kenyamanan Belajar di Lingkungan Sekolah. 3(3), 92–98. <https://doi.org/10.31960/dikdasmn-v3i3-2416>
- Cornell, D. (2019). Research Summary for the Authoritative School Climate Survey 1. 2–3. <https://education.virginia.edu/documents/yvpresearch-summary-authoritative-school-climate-survey2019-10-13pdf>
- Creswell, J. W. C. J. D. (2018). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches.
- Damayanti, S., Suryadi, K., & Tanszil, SW (2024). School Climate and Bullying Prevention A Civic Education Perspective. 5(4), 4980–4982. <https://jer.or.id/index.php/jer/article/view/1369>
- Eka Bagus Pramudyaa, Diah Puri Widyawatib, Tasya Putric, Dinda Zahra Ummamid, PAN (2024). Problems of Student Development in Elementary Schools Due to Bullying. 2(3), 995–996.
- Fathiya Ainun Mardhiyah, AD (2025). Scientific journal of human psychology. 10(6), 18–19.
- Lexy J. Moleong. (2018). Qualitative Research Methodology. (revised ed.). PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Mahzunah, AK, Sari, IY, Paradela, BV, Murti, B., & Tursina, E. (2024). The Impact of Cyberbullying on Self-Harming Behavior and Suicidal Thoughts among Adolescents : A Meta-Analysis. 09, 357–369. https://thejhp.com/index.php/thejhp/article/view/502?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Muhammad Rizki Arfandi, A. (2025). Commitment to the Group as a Continuity of Bullying Among Adolescents (Case Study of School X, Kampar). 3(974). <https://ojs.daarulhuda.or.id/index.php/Socius/article/view/2204>
- Múzquiz, J., Pérez, A. M., & José, G. (2023). Relationship between Direct and Relational Bullying and Emotional Well-being among Adolescents: The role of Self-compassion. Current Psychology, 42(18), 15874–15882. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-02924-3>
- Nisrina, G., Isyani, N., Meilani, P., & Dinata, KI (2025). Cyberbullying in the Digital Era: A Systematic Review from a Technology Psychology Perspective. 105–114.
- Nurfaniza, I., & Margaret, M. (2024). The Phenomenon of Bullying Victims at State Elementary School X in the Karang Tengah Region. 6(4), 942–952.
- Oktarina, ND, Wijayanti, F., & Rini, ZR (2025). Building a Bullying-Free School Environment to Prevent Mental Health Disorders in Elementary School Students. 7, 138-. https://jurnal.unw.ac.id/index.php/IJCE/article/view/3889?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Paranti, S.M., Takwin, B., Psikologi, F., & Indonesia, U. (2022). THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL SAFETY AND RESPONSES TO BYSTANDER BULLYING IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RURAL-URBAN CITIES. 20(April 2019), 2. <https://jpsikologi.esaunggul.ac.id/index.php/JPSI/article/view/174>
- Rahmiwati Marsinun & Dody Riswanto. (2020). Youth Cyberbullying Behavior in Social Media. 12(2), 98–111. <https://ojs.uma.ac.id/index.php/analitika/article/view/3704>
- Richard, J. F., Schneider, B. H., & Mallet, P. (2011). Revisiting the whole-school approach to bullying : Really looking at the whole school. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034311415906>

-
- Sholeh, M., Windasari, M., Anggana, B., Putra, W., & Stiawan, A. (2023). The Principal ' s Leadership Role to Minimize Bullying in Schools (Vol. 2023, Issue Ijcah). Atlantis Press SARL. <https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-152-4>
- Siti Alfi Napisah, Irman Suherman, R. H. (2024). PENCEGAHAN KASUS BULLYING DI LEMBAGA PENDIDIKAN BERBASIS PESANTREN THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN PREVENTING CASES OF BULLYING IN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL-BASED. 2(3), 237. <https://ojs.unida.info/index.php/al-kaff/article/view/13306/5382>
- Stiawan, A., Yudha, RK, & Jumri, R. (2024). Socialization in Preventing Bullying Among Junior High School Students at SMP 14 Seluma. 4(6), 228–237. <https://jurnal.umb.ac.id/index.php/JIMAKUKERTA/article/view/7099>
- Sugiono. (2019). Educational Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches.
- Syahputra, AI, Fitriana, S., & Dian, MAP (2024). JUBIKOPS: Journal of Guidance, Counseling, and Psychology THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-CONFIDENCE AND BULLYING BEHAVIOR OF GRADE XI STUDENTS OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL 3 PATI. 4(September), 152–159.
- Syahrin, RA, Rohayu, S., Lestari, TD, & Audya, W. (2025). Guidance Teachers' Strategy in Handling Bullying Cases in Elementary Schools. 1, 135–145.
- Ula, DM, Novariyanto, RA, Makassar, UN, Insan, U., Utomo, B., & Psikos, K. (2024). Vol. 2 No. 1 Year 2024 Liberosis: Journal of Psychology and Counseling Guidance. 2(1), 61–70. <https://doi.org/10.3287/ljpbk.v1i1.325>