



TEACHERS' STRATEGIES FOR INSTILLING AN ANTI-BULLYING ATTITUDE IN YOUNG CHILDREN

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the forms of bullying behaviour, its contributing factors, and the strategies teachers use to instill anti-bullying attitudes in early childhood students at TK IT Nurul Ilmi. This study was conducted at TK IT Nurul Ilmi, located at Jalan Kolam No. 1, Medan Area University Complex, Medan Estate, Percut Sei Tuan Subdistrict, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. The study was carried out during the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design, with data collection techniques including observation, interviews, and documentation of teachers and children aged 3–6 years. The results indicated that bullying behaviour manifests in verbal, physical, and social (relational) forms, influenced by immature emotional regulation, low empathy, environmental imitation processes, and limited communication skills in children. Teachers' strategies for instilling an anti-bullying attitude are implemented through an integrative approach, including the study of hadith, the application of social-emotional learning (SEL), modelling, the use of songs and educational games, as well as reflective and empathetic approaches. The implementation of these strategies is supported by a religious school environment, teacher consistency, and cooperation with parents, but faces obstacles such as differences in family backgrounds, children's still-developing personalities, and peer influence. This study emphasizes that instilling anti-bullying attitudes must be done systematically, continuously, and based on Islamic values to shape children's empathetic and prosocial character.

Keywords: Anti-Bullying, Preschool, Teacher Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a social behaviour issue that is receiving increasing attention in the field of education, including in early childhood education (PAUD). This phenomenon does not only occur among elementary school-aged children or adolescents, but also begins to emerge at an early age in simpler forms. In kindergarten settings, bullying behaviour can be observed through actions such as teasing, calling peers by unkind nicknames, pinching, snatching toys, pushing, and excluding peers from playgroups (Khadijah, 2016). Although often viewed as part of play dynamics, such behaviour has the potential to develop into a persistent pattern of aggression if not addressed appropriately from an early age (Candra et al., 2025). The resulting impacts are not merely temporary but can also affect children's social-emotional development, such as low empathy, difficulties in social interaction, and a tendency toward aggressive behaviour in the future. Therefore, instilling an anti-bullying attitude from an early age is a crucial component of children's character education.

Theoretically, bullying behaviour in early childhood is influenced by immature emotional regulation, developing empathy skills, and the process of imitating the surrounding environment (Khadijah, 2016). The social learning theory proposed by Bandura (1977) asserts that children learn through observation and imitation of models around them, including teachers as key figures in the school environment. Thus, the classroom environment and teacher strategies play a central role in shaping prosocial behaviour while preventing the emergence of aggressive behaviour.

However, in practice, there remains a gap between expectations and reality. Early childhood education is expected to foster children who exhibit empathy, mutual respect, and avoid bullying behaviour. However, in the field, aggressive behaviour—both verbal and physical—is still observed. Additionally, some teachers still view behaviours such as teasing or pushing as part of normal play

dynamics, resulting in interventions that are not yet optimal (Khadijah & Amelia, 2020; Millah et al., 2025). Other research also indicates that the implementation of anti-bullying education in early childhood education remains sporadic (rare) and lacks a structured, systematic pedagogical strategy (Cahyo et al., 2025). This situation highlights a research gap between the urgency of bullying prevention and the educational practices currently implemented in the field.

Various previous studies have examined efforts to prevent bullying among young children. National research indicates that child-friendly classroom management can create a safe learning environment and reduce aggressive behaviour (Wulandari et al., 2025). Additionally, positive interpersonal communication by teachers has been shown to be effective in fostering empathy in children (Ariandini et al., 2024). Previous studies also indicate that the social-emotional learning (SEL) approach is effective in reducing bullying behaviour and enhancing children's social-emotional skills (D. O. Y. Putri et al., 2025). Research by (Lubis, 2024) also confirms that SEL programs contribute significantly to improving children's prosocial behaviour and self-control. Nevertheless, most studies still focus on general educational psychology-based approaches, and few have specifically examined teachers' strategies for integrating Islamic values into bullying prevention for early childhood students.

From an Islamic perspective, anti-bullying behaviour has a strong foundation in the Qur'an and the hadith. Allah forbids believers from mocking one another and calling each other by offensive names in Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 11, which reads:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِنْ نِسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهُنَّ وَلَا تُلَاوِزُوا الْمُشْكَمَ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الْأَسْمُ السُّوءُ يُعَذِّبُ بِهِ الرِّجَالُ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

Translation:

“O you who believe, let not one group ridicule another—perhaps they may be better than them. Nor let women ridicule other women—perhaps they may be better than them. Do not insult one another, nor call each other by offensive nicknames. How evil it is to be called wicked after having believed. And whoever does not repent—those are the wrongdoers.”

This verse emphasizes that in Islam, all forms of behaviour that demean others—such as mocking, insulting, criticizing, or giving offensive labels—are strictly prohibited. This is because no one has the right to feel superior to others; it may be that the person being ridiculed is actually more honorable in the sight of God. This verse also serves as a strong foundation for rejecting bullying, as such actions are considered ظلم (wrongdoing) and are not in accordance with the اخلاق (moral character) of a Muslim. Islam teaches mutual respect, guarding one's speech, and treating others with kindness. If someone continues such behaviour without repentance, then they are among the wrongdoers.

الْمُسْلِمُ أَخُو الْمُسْلِمِ، لَا يَظْلِمُهُ وَلَا يَخْذُلُهُ وَلَا يَكْذِبُهُ وَلَا يَحْجَرُهُ

Translation:

“The Muslim is the brother of another Muslim. He does not ظلم (wrong) him, nor humiliate him, nor lie to him, nor look down upon him.” (Narrated by Muslim)

This hadith explains that fellow Muslims are brothers, and therefore must care for and respect one another. A Muslim must not commit injustice, must not neglect a brother in need, must not lie, and must not belittle or insult others. In essence, this hadith emphasizes the importance of being caring, honest, and respectful toward one another, so that harmonious relationships can be established and kept free from behaviours such as bullying or degrading others. This foundation affirms that attitudes of mutual respect and refraining from hurting others must be instilled from an early age as part of character development.

Based on the results of a preliminary study conducted at Nurul Ilmi Integrated Islamic Kindergarten (TK IT) through initial observations and direct classroom interactions, it was found that most children have demonstrated fairly good prosocial behaviour. These behaviours are reflected in daily activities, such as helping each other tidy up toys, patiently waiting for their turn to play, using polite language when speaking to teachers and peers, and being able to interact and cooperate in group activities. For example, during group play activities, some children were observed sharing toys and helping friends who experienced difficulties. While lining up, some children were also able to wait their turn without pushing, and even reminded their friends in a polite manner. This indicates that positive values such as empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect have begun to develop in children.

However, the preliminary findings also revealed that some children still display behaviours that lead to bullying, both verbally and physically. These behaviours appear in various simple forms typical of early childhood. For instance, some children mock their peers using unpleasant nicknames, such as calling names in a demeaning tone or laughing at others' shortcomings. In addition, exclusionary behaviour was also observed, such as not inviting certain children to play or rejecting their presence in a group. In terms of physical behaviour, some children showed aggression, such as forcibly taking toys, pushing others while competing for space, and in some cases, biting or disturbing peers to the point of making them cry. In other situations, some children used harsh language when feeling angry or disappointed, indicating that their emotional regulation skills are still developing.

These phenomena are generally considered normal within the context of early childhood development, as children are still in a phase where their ability to regulate emotions, understand others' feelings, and resolve social conflicts has not yet fully developed. Children tend to express emotions spontaneously without considering the impact on others. Additionally, such behaviours may also be influenced by imitation from their surrounding environment, including peers and media they consume. This condition shows that although prosocial values have been introduced at school, aggressive behaviours may still emerge as part of children's social interaction dynamics. Therefore, more directed, consistent, and systematic strategies from teachers are needed to instill anti-bullying attitudes. These efforts should not only focus on handling existing behaviours but also on prevention through value habituation, character reinforcement, and the development of children's social-emotional skills from an early age.

As an Islamic values-based educational institution, Nurul Ilmi Integrated Islamic Kindergarten (TK IT) is committed to shaping children's character with *akhlaqul karimah* (noble character), including instilling attitudes of mutual respect, empathy, and social awareness. However, to achieve this goal, pedagogical strategies are required that are not only reactive but also preventive and sustainable. Therefore, this study offers novelty by examining teachers' strategies in instilling anti-bullying attitudes through an integrative approach between social-emotional learning (SEL) and Islamic values in a real context at Nurul Ilmi Integrated Islamic Kindergarten.

Based on the above description, the research problems in this study are: (1) what forms of bullying behaviour and their causal factors exist among early childhood students at Nurul Ilmi Integrated Islamic Kindergarten; (2) what strategies teachers use to instill anti-bullying attitudes; and (3) what supporting and inhibiting factors influence the implementation. This study aims to identify forms of bullying behaviour and their causes, analyze teachers' strategies in instilling anti-bullying attitudes, and identify supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation at Nurul Ilmi Integrated Islamic Kindergarten.

Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the development of character education studies based on anti-bullying for early childhood, particularly those integrated with Islamic values. Practically, this study is expected to serve as a reference for teachers in designing effective, humane, and sustainable learning strategies to prevent bullying behaviour. Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of the teacher's role as the primary agent in creating a safe, inclusive, and bullying-free learning environment from an early age.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' strategies in instilling anti-bullying attitudes among early childhood students at Nurul Ilmi Integrated Islamic Kindergarten, located at Jln. Kolam No. 1, Universitas Medan Area Complex, Medan Estate, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. A qualitative approach is used because this study focuses on exploring meanings, processes, and participants' experiences in a natural context (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The case study design was selected to allow the researcher to examine the phenomenon contextually within a single educational institution comprehensively (Lubis & Ritonga, 2023).

The study was conducted in the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year with six main informants, consisting of two playgroup teachers, two Group A teachers, and two Group B teachers, with additional data sources from children aged 3–6 years. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, meaning those directly involved in implementing anti-bullying strategies were chosen (Miles et al., 2020). Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and

documentation to obtain in-depth and comprehensive information (Elviana & Lubis, 2023; Ritonga et al., 2022)

Data analysis employed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2020, p. 8). Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and time triangulation to guarantee the credibility of the findings (Moleong, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Forms of Bullying Behaviour and Contributing Factors in Early Childhood

1.1 Forms of Bullying Behaviour in Early Childhood

The findings indicate that bullying behaviour among early childhood students at Nurul Ilmi Integrated Islamic Kindergarten (TK IT) appears in relatively simple forms; however, it still has the potential to significantly impact children's social-emotional development if not addressed appropriately. Based on observations and interviews with teachers, bullying behaviour can be classified into three main types: verbal bullying, physical bullying, and social (relational) bullying.

a. Verbal Bullying

Verbal bullying is the most frequently observed form among young children, as they are actively developing language skills but have not yet fully understood the impact of their words. This behaviour does not occur only once but tends to be repeated in similar situations, thus meeting the characteristics of bullying. Verbal bullying typically occurs in daily activities, such as during playtime, classroom learning, and casual peer interactions.

Examples of situations observed in the kindergarten include:

1. During outdoor free play, a child repeatedly says to a peer, "You're so slow, that's why you lose!" during chasing games. This occurs almost every day. When another child falls, the same child often laughs and says, "Ha-ha, you fell again—you're so bad at this!" causing embarrassment and reluctance to continue playing.
2. During indoor play with toys, particularly block play, a child frequently says, "Your house is ugly, mine is better!" or "You don't know how to make this." These statements are repeated consistently, leading to decreased confidence in other children.
3. During classroom learning, when a child is asked to answer a question, another child often comments, "They'll get it wrong—they're not smart!" This behaviour occurs repeatedly across sessions, making the targeted child hesitant to participate.
4. During drawing or colouring activities, a child repeatedly mocks others' work by saying, "Your drawing is ugly," or "You always colour it wrong," which sometimes leads peers to stop completing their tasks.
5. While lining up, for example to wash hands, a child frequently complains, "You're taking too long—you can't even do it!" creating pressure on others.
6. In daily interactions, children repeatedly use nicknames such as "fat," "dark," "cry-baby," or "baby." Although initially intended as jokes, repeated use causes discomfort and social withdrawal.
7. During minor conflicts, children say, "I don't want to be your friend anymore!" or "You're mean!" repeatedly toward the same peer.

These verbal bullying behaviours generally arise not from intentional harm, but from spontaneous emotional expression and imitation of the surrounding environment (Bandura, 1977; Khadijah, 2016). However, because they occur repeatedly toward the same child, they are categorized as bullying rather than ordinary interaction (Isnayanti et al., 2024). This finding suggests that children's language development progresses faster than their social-emotional development (Khadijah, 2016). Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in guiding children to use respectful language, value others, and develop empathy in social interactions (Sahputra & Riadi, 2025).

b. Physical Bullying

Physical bullying is also quite frequently observed in early childhood, particularly in situations involving competition over toys, unmet desires, or simple conflicts during social interactions. This behavior does not occur only once; rather, it tends to reappear repeatedly in similar situations, especially among children who have not yet developed adequate emotional regulation and self-control. The forms

of physical bullying identified include forcibly taking toys, pushing, light hitting, teasing peers, pulling body parts (such as hands or clothing), and in some cases, children biting their peers.

Examples of real situations observed in kindergarten settings include:

1. During free play outside the classroom. In activities involving slides or swings, some children are frequently seen pushing their peers from behind to make them get off more quickly. This behavior occurs almost every day during turn-taking, causing other children to feel afraid and uncomfortable. In addition, there are children who repeatedly pull their peers' hands to seize their turn without waiting.
2. During playtime inside the classroom. In activities such as playing with blocks or toy cars, a child often takes toys directly from a peer's hands without permission. When the peer attempts to keep the toy, the child responds by pushing or lightly hitting. This behavior is not an isolated incident but occurs repeatedly whenever the child desires the same toy.
3. During group activities. When children engage in group play, some are observed to disturb their peers by pulling their clothes, pinching, or interfering with their work. For instance, a child may intentionally destroy a peer's block construction while laughing, and this behavior occurs repeatedly across multiple play sessions.
4. During conflicts or disputes. When conflicts over toys arise, children may immediately react with physical actions such as pushing or hitting. In several cases, certain children are found to repeatedly bite their peers when they feel upset or when their desires are not fulfilled. This biting behavior typically occurs more than once in similar conflict situations involving the same child.
5. During lining up or waiting for turns. In activities that require children to line up, such as washing hands or entering the classroom, some children frequently push the peers in front of them to make the line move faster. This behavior occurs almost daily and reflects a lack of patience as well as limited self-control.

Physical bullying behavior generally emerges as a form of spontaneous emotional expression, such as anger, frustration, or impatience (Rukmayana & Muthohar, 2025). Young children tend to rely on physical actions because their communication skills and emotional regulation have not yet developed optimally (Glenis Ovina Deborah, 2015). However, when such behavior occurs repeatedly toward the same peer or in similar situations, it can no longer be considered a normal conflict, but rather indicates bullying. These findings suggest that children are still in a developmental stage characterized by immature emotional regulation, thus requiring intensive guidance from teachers (Lubis, 2024; Lubis & Ritonga, 2023). Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in guiding children to resolve conflicts in a positive manner, teaching them how to ask appropriately, wait for their turn, and express emotions without hurting others (Glenis Ovina Deborah, 2015).

c. Social (Relational) Bullying

In addition to verbal and physical bullying, forms of social (relational) bullying were also identified. This type of bullying involves behaviors related to exclusion, rejection, or neglect within group interactions (Erlina, 2022). Unlike physical bullying, which is directly observable, social bullying tends to be more subtle; however, it has a significant impact on children's emotional well-being, including feelings of sadness, loneliness, and rejection (Anisah et al., 2023). This behavior does not occur only once but is often repeated toward certain children, gradually isolating them from their social environment.

Examples of real situations observed in kindergarten settings include: During group play activities, both inside and outside the classroom, some children are frequently heard saying phrases such as, "Don't let them join, we might lose," or "You are not allowed to play with us." This behavior is not an isolated incident but is repeated each time the excluded child attempts to join, eventually leading the child to withdraw and choose to play alone. Similarly, during group work or collaborative play, such as assembling puzzles, some children intentionally exclude a peer by not assigning them a role or by preventing them from participating. Even when the teacher has already assigned groups, certain children continue to ignore their peers during group interactions.

Social bullying behavior indicates that children are beginning to understand the concepts of group dynamics and social relationships; however, they have not yet developed the awareness to act inclusively, respect their peers, or accept differences. Children tend to choose friends based on personal preferences without considering the emotional impact of rejection on others. Although it may appear as a simple behavior, social bullying that occurs repeatedly can have serious consequences, such as

decreased self-confidence, the emergence of feelings of loneliness, and difficulties in establishing social relationships in the future.

These findings are consistent with the study by (Firdausy et al., 2025), which states that bullying in early childhood generally appears in simple forms related to play interactions. Nevertheless, such behavior should not be underestimated, as it has the potential to develop into persistent patterns of social aggression if not properly addressed at an early stage (N. Putri et al., 2025; Yuhana et al., 2025).

1.2 Contributing Factors in Early Childhood

Based on the findings of the study, bullying behavior among early childhood students at TK IT (Integrated Islamic Kindergarten) Nurul Ilmi does not emerge spontaneously; rather, it is influenced by various interrelated factors. These factors are both developmental (internal) and environmental (external) in nature, and they are reflected in children's behaviors that occur repeatedly in specific situations. The factors are as follows:

a. Immature Emotional Regulation

Young children are still in a stage of emotional development characterized by instability, which makes them unable to appropriately control feelings such as anger, disappointment, or frustration. The emotions that arise are often expressed spontaneously through aggressive actions, both verbal and physical (Aisyah et al., 2025; Khadijah, 2016).

A real example observed is during conflicts over toys, where a child who does not get a turn immediately grabs the toy or pushes their peer. This behavior occurs repeatedly whenever a similar situation arises. Another example is when a child loses in a game; the child becomes angry and uses harsh language such as, "I don't want to play with you anymore!" while withdrawing or disturbing others. These behaviors indicate that children are not yet able to manage their emotions constructively, and therefore require guidance in recognizing and expressing emotions in positive ways.

b. Limited Empathy Skills

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. In early childhood, this ability is still developing, which often results in children being unaware that their actions may hurt others (Sania et al., 2025).

For example, when a peer falls down, a child may laugh and say, "Haha, you fell again!" and repeat this behavior whenever similar incidents occur. In another situation, when a peer is crying, a child may respond by saying, "You're so whiny!" without realizing that the peer is feeling sad. Similarly, when mocking a peer's work, children may not be aware that their words can reduce their peer's self-confidence. These behaviors demonstrate that children have not yet developed the ability to take the perspective of others, and therefore need to be guided through social-emotional learning and the cultivation of caring attitudes.

c. Imitation Processes from the Environment

In accordance with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, children learn through observation and imitation of their surrounding environment, including family members, peers, and media.

A real example observed is that children who are frequently exposed to harsh words at home or through media, such as "stupid" or "ugly," tend to repeat these expressions at school almost every day when interacting with peers. Another example is children imitating behaviors such as pushing or hitting that they have seen in media or from other children, and then repeating these actions during play. These findings indicate that the environment has a significant influence on shaping children's behavior. When children are repeatedly exposed to negative behaviors, they are more likely to imitate and reproduce them.

d. Limited Communication Skills Limited

Although children begin to develop verbal abilities, not all are capable of expressing their needs or feelings clearly and appropriately. These limitations often lead children to use physical actions or negative expressions as alternative forms of communication.

For example, a child who wants to play with others but does not know how to initiate interaction may instead pull a peer's hand or push them. In another situation, when a child wants to borrow a toy, they may take it directly without speaking, and this behavior occurs repeatedly whenever they desire something. Similarly, when a child feels frustrated because they are not understood, they may respond with harsh expressions such as "I don't want to!" or "I hate you!" without being able to explain their feelings. These behaviors indicate that children require guidance in developing effective and respectful communication skills.

e. Lack of Understanding of Appropriate Behaviour

Children in early childhood are still in the process of learning social norms and are not yet able to clearly distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Without consistent guidance, children may perceive negative behaviors as normal or acceptable.

For instance, children may consider teasing as a form of joking and continue to repeat it daily without realizing its impact. In group play situations, some children may habitually exclude certain peers because they perceive such behavior as normal. Another example is when children imitate peers who use harsh language and then repeat these expressions in various situations, assuming that such behavior is acceptable. These observations highlight the important role of teachers in providing clear guidance regarding appropriate and inappropriate behavior through consistent practice and role modeling.

These findings are consistent with Bandura's social learning theory (1977), which emphasizes that children learn through processes of observation and imitation within their social environment. Thus, bullying behavior in early childhood can be understood as the result of interactions between individual developmental factors and social environmental influences.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that bullying behavior in early childhood is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. It is not influenced by a single factor, but rather by a combination of developmental and environmental aspects that interact with one another. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding and appropriate interventions from teachers are essential to prevent bullying behavior from an early stage and to ensure that it does not develop into more serious problems in the future.

2. Teachers' Specific Strategies in Instilling Anti-Bullying Attitudes

The findings reveal that although Nurul Ilmi Integrated Islamic Kindergarten (TK IT) has general policies for promoting anti-bullying attitudes, each teacher applies unique strategies in daily classroom practice. These strategies reflect teachers' creativity and experience in responding to children's behavioural dynamics. The approaches used are not only cognitive but also address affective, social, and spiritual aspects of child development. This makes the process of instilling anti-bullying values more contextual, meaningful, and accessible for young learners.

2.1 Habituation of Hadith, Collaboration with Parents, and Educational Games

Teacher 1 implements anti-bullying attitudes through a religious approach by habituating children to memorize and understand simple hadiths related to moral conduct. These include teachings that prohibit mocking, encourage patience and kindness, promote helping others, emphasize compassion, and forbid harming fellow Muslims. This activity is conducted routinely every morning before lessons begin, where children collectively recite and review hadiths under the teacher's guidance.

An example of a hadith implemented by the teacher is:

a) Hadith on the Prohibition of Mocking and Belittling

بَحْسِبِ امْرِئٍ مِنَ الشَّرِّ أَنْ يَحْضَرَ أَخَاهُ الْمُسْلِمَ

Meaning: "It is enough for a person to be considered evil if he insults his fellow Muslim." (Narrated by Muslim)

b) Advice Against Anger

إِنَّ قَلْبُكَ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ

Meaning: "Do not get angry, and Paradise will be yours." (Narrated by Ath-Thabrani)

c) Hadith on the Importance of Mutual Assistance

وَاللَّهُ فِي عَوْنِ الْعَبْدِ مَا كَانَ الْعَبْدُ فِي عَوْنِ أَخِيهِ

Meaning: "Allah will always help His servant as long as that servant helps his brother." (Narrated by Muslim)

d) Mutual Love (Brotherhood)

الْمُسْلِمُ أَخُو الْمُسْلِمِ لَا يَظْلِمُهُ وَلَا يُظْلَمُهُ

Meaning: "A Muslim is a brother to another Muslim; he must not wrong him nor insult him." (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim)

In practice, the teacher does not merely ask children to memorize hadiths but also explains their meanings using simple and contextual language. For example, when teaching a hadith about not hurting

others, the teacher explains, “If we push a friend until they fall, that means we are hurting them, and that is not allowed.” This explanation helps children connect religious values with their daily behaviour. When incidents occur in class—such as a child mocking or pushing a peer—the teacher immediately relates the situation to the hadith previously learned. For instance, the teacher may say, “We just learned that we should not hurt our friends, so why did that happen?” This approach enables children not only to remember but also to understand and internalize the value.

During a drawing activity, for example, a child became upset because another child used their crayons without permission. The child began speaking in a raised tone and almost snatched the crayons back. Observing this, the teacher approached calmly and connected the situation to a hadith meaning, “Do not become angry, and Paradise will be yours.” The teacher gently reminded the child that controlling anger brings reward from God. The teacher then guided the child to express their feelings appropriately, such as asking for their belongings politely. At the same time, the child who borrowed the crayons was encouraged to ask permission and apologize. Through this approach, children not only learn to avoid anger but also develop emotional regulation and problem-solving skills aligned with moral teachings.

In addition, the teacher collaborates with parents. When bullying behaviour occurs repeatedly, the teacher communicates with parents either directly or through a communication book. Parents are encouraged to reinforce the same values at home, such as reminding children of the hadiths learned at school. This collaboration helps create consistency between school and home environments. The teacher also utilizes educational games such as collage, mosaic, and maze activities to develop patience and emotional control. For instance, in a mosaic activity, children arrange small pieces of paper into a picture, requiring patience and focus. Children who are easily frustrated are guided to complete tasks gradually. This reflects the internalization process of values through stages of knowing, feeling, and acting, as proposed by (D. O. Y. Putri et al., 2025)

2.2 Songs as Affective Reinforcement

Teacher 2 uses songs as the primary medium for instilling anti-bullying attitudes. The songs contain simple moral messages, such as the importance of caring for one another, refraining from teasing, and not hurting peers. These songs are sung every day, particularly during the opening activities of the learning session. An example of the song implemented by the teacher is as follows:

Disini teman di sana teman, dimana-mana kita berteman
Tak ada musuh tak ada, semua saling tolong dengan teman
Tidak ejek-ejekan, tidak pukul-pukulan, saling tolong dan yang dengan teman 2x

Examples of classroom practice show that children are highly enthusiastic when singing the song while performing simple movements. This creates a joyful and energetic classroom atmosphere filled with positive emotions. Interestingly, when conflicts occur, the teacher does not immediately respond with harsh reprimands; instead, the teacher invites the children to sing the song again. For instance, when a child teases a peer, the teacher says, “Let’s remember our song,” and the entire class sings the anti-bullying song together. Afterward, the teacher asks, “Based on the song, how should we treat our friends?” The children respond, “We should be kind and not tease.” This approach allows children to internalize the message more easily without feeling directly blamed or criticized.

The use of songs as a learning medium has been proven effective, as young children tend to remember information more easily through rhythm and repetition (Haniya et al., 2024). Moreover, this approach strengthens emotional engagement and a sense of togetherness within the classroom, thereby supporting the development of positive social relationships among children (Agustin et al., 2025).

2.3 Spiritual Reflection through Istighfar

Teacher 3 employs a spiritual reflection approach as a strategy for addressing bullying behavior. When a child engages in inappropriate actions, such as hitting or teasing a peer, the teacher does not immediately impose physical punishment. Instead, the child is guided to recite *istighfar* (seeking forgiveness from Allah). In practice, the child is asked to repeat the recitation multiple times, ranging from 10 to 100 repetitions, depending on the severity of the behavior and the child’s condition. This activity is usually carried out in a designated corner of the classroom under the teacher’s supervision. Afterward, the teacher engages the child in a brief reflective dialogue about the behavior.

For example, a child who bites a peer is asked to sit calmly and recite *istighfar*. Once the child has finished, the teacher asks questions such as, “Why did you bite your friend?” and “How do you think your friend felt?” This approach helps the child become calmer and gradually recognize their mistake. The strategy supports the development of self-control and moral awareness. Furthermore, this religious-based approach strengthens internal values within the child, so that positive behavior is not only performed out of fear of the teacher but also arises from personal awareness (Wulandari et al., 2025).

2.4 Modelling (Teacher as Role Modeling)

Teacher 4 emphasizes that role modeling is the most effective strategy for instilling anti-bullying attitudes. Based on observational findings, the teacher consistently demonstrates positive behavior in every interaction, such as speaking gently, avoiding harsh reprimands, and showing respect toward each child. A clear example can be seen when the teacher deals with a child who is difficult to manage. Instead of reacting with anger, the teacher remains calm and patient. Children who observe this behavior tend to imitate the teacher’s way of handling problems.

In daily activities, the teacher also demonstrates how to apologize, express gratitude, and help others. Children naturally imitate these behaviors in their interactions with peers. This indicates that the modelling process has a very strong influence on shaping behavior in early childhood (Isnayanti et al., 2024).

2.5 Religious-Based Moral Consequences

Teacher 5 applies a consequence-based approach grounded in religious values to regulate children’s behavior. When bullying behavior occurs, the teacher explains that such actions are disliked by Allah. For example, the teacher may say, “If we tease our friends, Allah does not like it,” or “A good child should not hurt their friends.”

This approach helps children understand that every action has consequences, not only in a social sense but also in a moral and spiritual dimension. At an early age, children tend to distinguish between right and wrong based on the consequences they receive, making this approach relatively effective as an initial form of behavioral control (Candra et al., 2025).

2.6 Personal Dialogue and Empathic Approach

Teacher 6 employs a personal dialogue approach as the primary strategy for addressing bullying behavior in early childhood. This approach is implemented by engaging the child in a one-on-one conversation outside the group setting, allowing the child to feel more comfortable, safe, and less pressured when explaining their behavior. The main objective of this approach is to explore the underlying causes of the child’s actions, not to impose punishment, but to foster self-awareness and empathy.

In practice, when a child exhibits behaviors such as teasing, using harsh language, or excluding peers, the teacher does not immediately reprimand the child in front of the class. Instead, the teacher first separates the child from the group situation and then conducts a personal conversation using a gentle and caring tone. For example, a child who frequently teases peers is invited to speak privately with the teacher. The teacher may ask questions such as, “Why do you often say those things to your friend?” and “How did you feel at that moment?” After the child responds, the teacher provides a simple explanation of how such behavior affects others’ feelings, for instance, “If someone said that to you, you would feel sad too, wouldn’t you?”

Following the dialogue, the teacher guides the child to understand others’ perspectives in a way that is appropriate to their developmental level. The child is encouraged to imagine how their peer feels as the recipient of the behavior, gradually fostering a sense of empathy. This approach ensures that the child does not feel blamed or punished, but rather feels heard and understood by the teacher.

Moreover, this personal dialogue helps children learn to express their emotions more effectively, such as communicating feelings of anger, sadness, or disappointment without resorting to harsh words or physical actions. Therefore, this empathic approach not only serves to reduce bullying behavior but also contributes to the development of children’s social communication skills and emotional regulation in a more positive and sustainable manner.

3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Implementation

The findings of the study indicate that the success of implementing anti-bullying attitude development strategies at TK IT Nurul Ilmi is closely linked to the presence of supporting factors that strengthen the learning process, as well as inhibiting factors that present challenges for teachers in

practice. These two types of factors are interconnected and directly influence the effectiveness of the efforts carried out in children's daily interactions.

a. Supporting Factors

Several factors that support the successful implementation of anti-bullying attitude development at TK IT Nurul Ilmi are as follows:

1) A Religious and Conducive School Environment

TK IT Nurul Ilmi fosters a school culture grounded in Islamic values, such as the habituation of daily prayers, memorization of hadith, and the use of polite language. This environment indirectly creates a supportive atmosphere for instilling anti-bullying values.

A real example is that every morning before learning activities begin, children and teachers recite prayers together and review hadith related to caring for others and prohibitions against hurting peers. When a child begins to tease another, the teacher simply reminds them by saying, "Remember the hadith we learned; we should not hurt our friends," prompting the child to understand and correct their behavior.

2) Teacher Consistency in Reinforcement and Role Modeling

Teachers consistently apply rules, model positive behavior, and remind children in various situations. This consistency helps children more easily understand and internalize the values being taught.

For example, whenever conflicts arise, teachers consistently use the same approach by encouraging children to apologize to one another, shake hands, and use kind words. Because this practice is repeated daily, children eventually begin to perform these actions independently without being prompted.

3) Strong Collaboration between Teachers and Parents

Collaboration between the school and parents plays a crucial role in strengthening children's character education. Teachers not only address children's behavior at school but also communicate with parents to ensure that positive habits are reinforced at home.

For instance, when a child frequently uses harsh language, the teacher contacts the parents to inform them of the situation. Parents are then encouraged to limit the child's exposure to inappropriate media and to promote the use of polite language at home. Over time, noticeable positive changes in the child's behavior begin to emerge.

4) The Use of Varied and Engaging Learning Methods

Teachers employ a variety of methods such as storytelling, games, songs, and role-playing to instill anti-bullying values. These methods make it easier for children to understand the concepts, as they align with the developmental characteristics of early childhood learners.

A real example can be seen during role-playing activities, where children are asked to act out scenarios involving "a kind friend" and "a friend who likes to tease." After the activity, the teacher facilitates a simple discussion by asking, "Which behavior makes friends feel happy?" The children then respond and gradually develop an understanding of appropriate behavior.

5) The Presence of Clear and Mutually Agreed Classroom Rules

Teachers and children collaboratively establish simple rules such as "no teasing," "take turns," and "use kind words." These rules are repeated daily, allowing them to become behavioral guidelines for the children.

A real example occurs when a child violates a rule; the teacher simply reminds them by asking, "What is our rule?" The child then recalls the rule independently and begins to recognize their mistake.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate that bullying behavior among early childhood children at TK IT Nurul Ilmi manifests in three main forms: verbal, physical, and social (relational). These forms are generally still considered simple; however, when they occur repeatedly, they can have serious implications for children's social-emotional development. Verbal bullying emerges as the most dominant form, as children have already developed language abilities but have not yet acquired sufficient control over the impact of their words. As a result, children often use language to tease, belittle, or assign negative nicknames without understanding the emotional consequences for others. This finding is consistent with Wulandari et al. (2025), who argues that children's language development often progresses more rapidly than their social-emotional development, making them more susceptible to using language inappropriately in social interactions.

In addition, physical bullying is also observed in forms such as pushing, hitting, grabbing toys, and even biting. These behaviors typically occur in conflict situations or when children's desires are not fulfilled. This condition indicates that children have not yet developed optimal emotional regulation, leading them to express emotions through impulsive physical actions. This is supported by Wulandari et al. (2025), who state that aggressive behavior in early childhood is often a spontaneous expression of emotions such as anger or frustration. Meanwhile, social (relational) bullying is reflected in behaviors such as exclusion or rejection of peers during group play. Although it is less visible than physical bullying, this form of behavior significantly affects children's emotional well-being, leading to feelings of sadness, loneliness, and social rejection. Rukmayana & Muthohar (2025) emphasize that social bullying in early childhood can influence the development of children's self-confidence and social skills in the future.

The factors contributing to bullying behavior in early childhood consist of both internal and external elements that are closely interconnected. Internal factors include immature emotional regulation, low levels of empathy, limited communication skills, and a lack of understanding of appropriate behavior. Children tend to respond spontaneously without considering the impact of their actions on others. On the other hand, external factors involve imitation processes from the environment, in line with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which posits that children learn through observing the behaviors around them, including those of family members, peers, and media. When children are frequently exposed to aggressive behavior, they are more likely to imitate and replicate such actions in their daily lives.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that bullying behavior in early childhood is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple developmental and social environmental factors. Therefore, a comprehensive and continuous educational approach is required, involving both teachers and parents, to foster children's emotional regulation, empathy, and social understanding from an early age, thereby preventing bullying behavior effectively.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The research findings indicate that bullying behaviour among young children at Nurul Ilmi Islamic Kindergarten manifests in verbal, physical, and social forms, influenced by immature emotional regulation, low empathy, environmental imitation, and the children's limited communication skills. Although most children have demonstrated prosocial behaviour, actions such as teasing, pushing, and ostracizing are still observed and have the potential to escalate if not addressed appropriately. This study also found that effective teacher strategies for instilling anti-bullying attitudes are implemented through an integrative approach, namely instilling Islamic values (hadith), applying social-emotional learning (SEL), modelling, empathetic communication, and using varied learning methods such as songs and educational games. The success of implementing these strategies is supported by a religiously oriented school environment, teacher consistency, and collaboration with parents; however, it still faces obstacles such as differences in family backgrounds, children's still-developing personalities, and peer influence. Thus, instilling an anti-bullying attitude from an early age requires a systematic, sustainable, and collaborative approach to shape children's character so they become empathetic, respectful of others, and free from aggressive behaviour.

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