

Holistic Bullying Prevention in Pesantren: The Role of Peer Support and the Bullyguard Educational Framework

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Abstract

Bullying in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) is a pressing issue, considering that Islamic boarding schools should be spaces for character development and religious values. This phenomenon indicates a gap between moral teachings and social practices in the daily lives of students. This study aims to explore the implementation of the BullyGuard approach as a bullying prevention strategy based on education and peer mentoring at the Ma'had Ilmu Al Qur'an (MIQ) Al Hikam Islamic Boarding School in Wonosobo. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, then analyzed thematically using NVivo software. The results show that the BullyGuard approach is able to create a more supportive and child-friendly social environment, with a decrease in cases of verbal and social bullying and increased solidarity among students. The active role of the ustadz, the involvement of administrators, and peer empowerment are key to the success of this model. This research contributes to the development of educational intervention models based on religious values and relevant to the local cultural context of Islamic boarding schools. The conclusion of this study shows that the integration of psychosocial approaches and spiritual values is effective in establishing a safe and inclusive Islamic boarding school ecosystem. Further research is recommended to test this model in various Islamic boarding schools with a mixed methods approach to enrich the findings.

Keywords: *Child-friendly Education, Islamic Boarding Schools, Peer Mentoring*

Abstrak

*Bullying di lingkungan pesantren merupakan isu yang mendesak, mengingat pesantren semestinya menjadi ruang pembinaan karakter dan nilai-nilai keagamaan. Fenomena ini menunjukkan adanya kesenjangan antara ajaran nilai moral dan praktik sosial di kehidupan sehari-hari santri. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi implementasi pendekatan *bullyguard* sebagai strategi penanggulangan *bullying* berbasis edukasi dan pendampingan teman sebaya di Pondok Pesantren Ma'had Ilmu Al Qur'an (MIQ) Al-Hikam Wonosobo. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik menggunakan bantuan perangkat lunak NVivo. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan *bullyguard* mampu menciptakan lingkungan sosial yang lebih suportif dan ramah anak, dengan menurunnya kasus *bullying* verbal dan sosial serta meningkatnya solidaritas antar-santri. Peran aktif ustaz, keterlibatan pengurus, dan pemberdayaan teman sebaya menjadi kunci keberhasilan model ini. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pengembangan model intervensi pendidikan berbasis nilai agama dan relevan dengan konteks budaya lokal pesantren. Kesimpulan dari studi ini menunjukkan bahwa integrasi pendekatan psikososial dan nilai spiritual efektif dalam membentuk ekosistem pesantren yang aman dan inklusif.*

Penelitian lanjutan disarankan untuk menguji model ini di berbagai pesantren dengan pendekatan *mixed methods* untuk memperkaya hasil temuan.

Kata Kunci: Pendampingan Teman Sebaya, Pendidikan Ramah Anak, Pesantren

A. INTRODUCTION

Bullying in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) is a complex and crucial issue, even though they are known as moral and religious-based educational institutions (Borualogo, 2024; Shibuya et al., 2023). Theoretically, Islamic boarding schools have a strong value system to prevent negative behaviors such as bullying (Dewi et al., 2021; Farooqui & Kaushik, 2021). The Islamic principles underlying Islamic boarding school life, such as compassion, brotherhood, and mutual respect, should be the main deterrents against bullying (Mehfooz, 2021; Rahman, 2021). However, the reality on the ground shows that bullying still occurs in some Islamic boarding schools. Why does this happen? One reason is the lack of implementation of these values in the daily lives of students. Studies show that most cases of bullying in Islamic boarding schools occur due to hierarchical seniority and minimal supervision from boarding school administrators. This indicates a gap between theory and practice. At the Al-Hikam Quranic Studies Islamic Boarding School (MIQ) in Wonosobo, Central Java, despite clear rules regarding student behavior, bullying still occurs among students. Bullying often takes the form of teasing, name-calling, and sometimes physical violence. Some students perceive these behaviors as normal and normal, leading to a lack of understanding of the psychological impact of bullying. Although physical violence is less common, it remains a particular concern for the boarding school due to its significant impact on mental health and social relationships among students.

Furthermore, it was found that an integrated psychological approach at the boarding school remains limited. Although religious teachers actively provide advice and moral guidance to students, more in-depth psychological support, especially for victims of bullying, has not been fully implemented. A limited number of counselors is a limiting factor, preventing students who are victims of bullying from receiving sufficient emotional support to overcome the psychological impact. This indicates a gap in the support system that needs to be addressed so that the boarding school can become a safer place and support the mental and emotional development of students. As evidence, research conducted by Syukriani et al. (2022) found that Islamic boarding school students (*santri*) had experienced verbal, physical, or social bullying. Furthermore, the study showed that some perpetrators of bullying often felt justified by specific local traditions or cultures within the Islamic boarding school. As a result, victims not only experienced psychological trauma but also decreased motivation to learn. In conclusion, there

is an urgent need to bridge the gap between the ideal values of Islamic boarding schools and the existing social reality.

The phenomenon of bullying in Islamic boarding schools does not only occur in the form of physical violence but also involves verbal and psychological aspects (Assylbekova et al., 2024; Mukhtar et al., 2023). In some cases, bullying is carried out by senior students against junior students as a form of enforcing "discipline" that is inconsistent with Islamic values (Borualogo & Casas, 2022; Ofori, 2023). For example, a junior student who does not follow certain rules may be the target of ridicule or even physical violence. In an Islamic boarding school environment that emphasizes togetherness, these actions create fear and discomfort for victims.

Furthermore, the lack of reporting of bullying cases is often due to shame or fear of retaliation from the perpetrator. In some Islamic boarding schools, there is a culture of silence, where victims are reluctant to disclose their experiences to the boarding school administrators or their families. This indicates the need for a more inclusive and supportive approach to handling bullying cases. This phenomenon makes it clear that bullying in Islamic boarding schools is not just an individual problem but a systemic issue that requires serious attention.

Several previous studies have explored the issue of bullying in Islamic boarding schools. One such study is by Adisa et al. (2024), which highlights the contributing factors to bullying in Islamic boarding schools, including senior hierarchies, lack of supervision, and weak reporting systems. This study recommends the need for a more systematic approach to preventing and addressing bullying, but does not provide specific guidance on how such an approach can be implemented.

Another study by Shahzad et al. (2023) emphasizes the importance of character education in preventing bullying in Islamic boarding schools. A religious values-based approach can be effective if supported by specific training for caregivers and senior students. However, this study focused more on prevention than on addressing bullying cases that have already occurred. This study aims to address the shortcomings of previous research by developing a comprehensive approach that includes education and peer mentoring.

This study introduces the "BullyGuard" approach as a new strategy for addressing bullying at the Ma'had Ilmu Al Qur'an (MIQ) Al-Hikam Islamic Boarding School in Wonosobo. BullyGuard combines religious values-based education with peer mentoring as agents of change. The uniqueness of this approach lies in empowering students to become part of the solution, not merely recipients of intervention. By involving peers, BullyGuard is expected to create a more supportive environment and prevent bullying from occurring on an ongoing basis.

A tentative answer to the problem of bullying in Islamic boarding schools is that an approach involving religious values education and peer mentoring can effectively reduce bullying cases. This approach is based on the argument that students are more likely to accept and understand positive messages from their peers than from formal authorities. Furthermore, religious values education can strengthen students' moral awareness and social responsibility. Therefore, this study aims to test the effectiveness of the BullyGuard approach as an innovative solution to address bullying in Islamic boarding schools.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it allows for a deep dive into the phenomenon of bullying in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and provides a comprehensive understanding of the application of the BullyGuard approach as an intervention strategy based on education and peer mentoring. The case study was chosen because it allows for intensive exploration of a specific social context, in this case the Ma'had Ilmu Al-Qur'an (MIQ) Al-Hikam Islamic Boarding School in Wonosobo, which is characterized by the cultural diversity of its students. Qualitative case studies are relevant in educational research because they provide a holistic view of complex phenomena (Yin, 2018).

Data sources in this study include primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, involving various informants such as students, *ustadh* (teacher), and boarding school administrators. Triangulation techniques were used to ensure data validity by comparing data from various sources and techniques. Interviews were conducted semi-structured to allow for the flexibility to elicit in-depth information from the research subjects. Participatory observation was used to directly observe the social interactions of students in daily life at the Islamic boarding school. Documentation was used to analyze relevant Islamic boarding school documents, such as regulations, anti-bullying programs, and student activity reports (Moleong, 2017).

The data analysis process was conducted using thematic analysis, assisted by NVivo software for coding, categorization, and theme visualization. Researchers read the data thoroughly and then conducted an open coding process to identify key meaning units. Data categories were then grouped into broad themes, such as types of bullying, the role of peers, and the effectiveness of the BullyGuard intervention. This study also employed member checking and audit trail techniques to ensure the reliability and traceability of the research process. Subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with the following

criteria: students who had experienced or witnessed bullying, administrators involved in the BullyGuard program, and active peer mentors. This technique is commonly used in qualitative research to obtain informants who can provide relevant and in-depth information (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This research shows that the Al-Hikam Qur'an Science Islamic Boarding School (MIQ) in Wonosobo actively and progressively strives to create a safe and child-friendly environment through a structured approach to combating bullying. Despite encountering various forms of bullying, including verbal, social, and occasionally physical, the school has not turned a blind eye. Instead, it has created a space for transformation by adopting the BullyGuard approach as an innovative intervention model aligned with Islamic values.

One striking positive aspect is the boarding school's awareness of the importance of internal cultural change. They recognize that religious values are not only taught in the scriptures but must be applied in the students' daily interactions. Therefore, the boarding school has developed more humane rules of conduct, strengthened its supervision system, and facilitated a character education approach based on compassion and respect among students.

The implementation of the BullyGuard model at this boarding school involves training and empowering students as agents of change. Students are trained to become peer mentors, guiding their peers in resolving conflicts, and conveying anti-bullying values through a communicative and equitable approach. Activities such as group discussions, role-playing, and mentoring programs have provided a safe space for students to learn to understand each other and avoid harmful behavior.

The involvement of the *ustadh* (Islamic teachers) and Islamic boarding school administrators is a key factor in creating a child-friendly environment. They not only serve as teachers but also as moral mentors, present in the students' daily social interactions. This approach strengthens the students' trust in adult figures and creates a nurturing and nurturing atmosphere.

Interview Results Table

<i>Informants</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>Answers</i>
<i>Santri 1</i>	What form of bullying have you experienced or witnessed?	More verbal bullying such as taunts and nicknames.
<i>Santri 2</i>	How do you feel when you see or experience bullying?	Scared, feeling stressed, and not knowing who to report it to.

<i>Informants</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>Answers</i>
<i>Ustadz</i>	What is the role of teachers in handling bullying cases in Islamic boarding schools?	Teachers give advice, but there is no systematic psychological approach.
<i>Islamic Boarding School Administrators</i>	What is the strategy of Islamic boarding schools in creating a child-friendly environment?	We implement the BullyGuard program and peer engagement.

Field findings revealed increased openness in reporting bullying cases. With the establishment of a peer mentoring system, students feel more comfortable and are less afraid to report or discuss the issues they face. This indicates that social trust within the Islamic boarding school community has grown, and a climate of togetherness has been successfully established. Observations indicate behavioral changes among students. They are beginning to show empathy for others, avoiding aggressive actions, and showing greater concern for friends experiencing difficulties. The decrease in the intensity of verbal and social bullying is also a clear indicator of the success of the collaborative and consistent intervention.

The BullyGuard program is not only curative but also preventative. Education about bullying is integrated into religious studies, sermons, and character building activities in the classroom. The Islamic boarding school has successfully integrated Islamic values such as *rahmah* (compassion), *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood), and *adab* (ethics) into daily learning and guidance, thus becoming pillars that strengthen the boarding school's position as a child-friendly institution.

MIQ Al-Hikam Islamic Boarding School has succeeded in building a more humane educational ecosystem. Through the synergy between the religious values approach, strengthening supportive social structures, and empowering students as the main actors of change, this Islamic boarding school has demonstrated concrete steps as a model of an Islamic educational institution that is safe, educational, and friendly for child growth and development.

Discussion

The BullyGuard approach implemented at the MIQ Al-Hikam Islamic boarding school represents a concrete practice in building a child-friendly Islamic boarding school. This aligns with the inclusive and compassion-based educational approach outlined in Islamic educational theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach. The microenvironment, including peers, teachers, and administrators, plays a crucial role in shaping children's behavior and protecting them. The boarding school has successfully created a conducive social space through the harmonization of these roles.

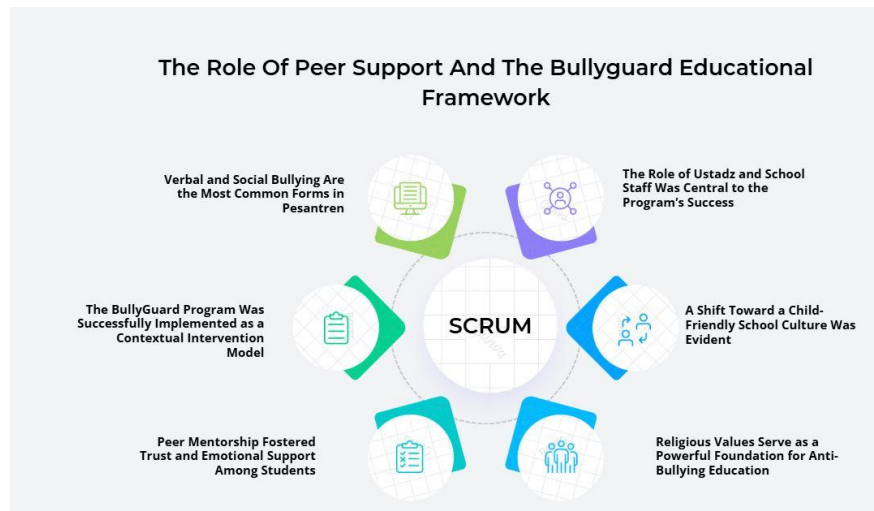
The support of the religious teachers (*ustadh*) is a key success factor in fostering a positive atmosphere at the boarding school. They not only teach but also guide and nurture students using a more dialogical approach. By strengthening the emotional bond between *ustadh* and students, the boarding school is able to foster a sense of security, a key foundation for child-friendly education. The success of this approach is supported by Albert Bandura's social learning theory. In this context, students emulate the positive behavior demonstrated by the *ustadh* and peer mentors. Through the BullyGuard program, students receive real-life role models in implementing values such as empathy, tolerance, and mutual cooperation in their daily interactions. This also strengthens social and emotional literacy, which is crucial for character development.

Compared with previous studies, such as those by Shahzad et al. (2023) and Adisa et al. (2024), which focused more on theory or system requirements, this study demonstrates excellence in direct practice. Innovation at the implementation level makes MIQ Islamic boarding school a concrete example of integrating religious values and psychosocial approaches in preventing and addressing bullying. Another advantage is the strengthening of a child-friendly reporting system. In many Islamic boarding schools, victims of bullying often remain silent due to fear or shame. However, with a peer-to-peer approach, students feel more comfortable speaking up about their problems. This demonstrates that the Islamic boarding school has succeeded in building a social system that favors children and eliminates the cultural taboo against reporting violence.

Challenges remain. Cultural change does not happen overnight. Some senior students initially showed resistance to the concept of peer mentoring. However, through ongoing training and strengthening of Islamic values, this resistance gradually diminished and was replaced by an understanding of the importance of maintaining the honor and safety of others. From a policy perspective, this approach provides a strong foundation for developing a contextual anti-bullying curriculum in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). The government and Islamic educational institutions can replicate the BullyGuard model, adapting it to their respective cultures and local characteristics. Furthermore, this approach reinforces the principle of Islamic education, *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (blessing for the universe), which promotes compassion for all.

The academic contribution of this research is also significant. It broadens the scope of studies on Islamic boarding school-based education as institutions adaptable to modern psychosocial approaches. It demonstrates that Islamic boarding schools are not static but dynamic, capable of evolving into educational institutions that are not only religious but also humane and child-friendly. The BullyGuard approach implemented at MIQ Al-Hikam serves

as an inspiring example for the transformation of Islamic boarding school education. The integration of religious values, the involvement of all parties, and the empowerment of students make Islamic boarding schools not only places for religious learning but also safe havens for growing as dignified individuals. This is the new face of child-friendly Islamic boarding schools that deserves widespread dissemination.



Picture: The Role of Peer Support and the Bullyguard

The findings of this study reveal six key insights into the implementation of the BullyGuard program in an Islamic boarding school context. First, verbal and social bullying were found to be the most prevalent forms, often normalized due to entrenched seniority systems and lack of supervision. Second, the *pesantren* demonstrated a proactive stance by adopting the BullyGuard model—a culturally responsive intervention that integrates religious value education with peer mentoring. Third, the peer support mechanism played a pivotal role in fostering trust, encouraging victims to speak up, and building a more empathetic student culture. Fourth, the consistent involvement of *ustadh* and school staff was instrumental in reinforcing moral guidance and sustaining the program's values in daily student interactions. Fifth, the program contributed to a measurable cultural shift toward a safer, more inclusive, and child-friendly learning environment. Lastly, the integration of Islamic values such as *rahmah* (compassion), *adab* (etiquette), and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) proved effective in promoting sustained behavioral change, making BullyGuard a contextually grounded and spiritually resonant model for anti-bullying education in *pesantren* settings.

D. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the BullyGuard approach, which integrates religious values education and peer mentoring, has proven effective in addressing bullying at the Al-Hikam

Qur'anic Science (MIQ) Islamic Boarding School in Wonosobo. These findings provide a deeper understanding of how Islamic boarding school cultural transformation can occur through student empowerment, the active involvement of religious teachers, and the creation of a supportive social system. This research contributes to strengthening community-based intervention models and spiritual values relevant to the context of Islamic education, and enriches the literature on bullying prevention in Islamic boarding schools. Within the social and cultural context, the study findings demonstrate that religious institutions can progressively adapt to child protection issues with a contextual and humanistic approach. However, limitations include the limited scope and the lack of long-term measurement, so further research remains open for exploration in other Islamic boarding schools with more varied approaches.

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that other Islamic boarding schools begin adopting the BullyGuard approach as a systematic program to build child-friendly educational environments. Educational practitioners and Islamic boarding school administrators need to be actively involved in anti-bullying values training and psychosocial support. For academics, further research could be directed at quantitatively evaluating long-term impacts and exploring parental involvement in interventions. Future research could also utilize more diverse methodological triangulation or comparative studies between Islamic boarding schools with different cultural backgrounds. This would deepen understanding of the effectiveness of similar approaches in various social and religious contexts.

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