



Designing a Bullying-Free School to Foster a Safe Environment Based on Sustainable Development Goals: A Mixed Methods Approach

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Article Info

Received: March 20, 2025

Accepted: September 12, 2025

Published: November 7, 2025



10.46303/jcsr.2025.26

How to cite

Rejekiningsih, T., Ariana, Y., Sari, D. I., Sumaryati, S., & Qodr, T. S. (2025). Designing a Bullying-Free School to Foster a Safe Environment Based on Sustainable Development Goals: A Mixed Methods Approach. *Journal of Curriculum Studies Research*, 7(2), 373-393.

<https://doi.org/10.46303/jcsr.2025.26>

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ABSTRACT

School bullying is a serious barrier in developing a safe and conducive learning environment, particularly when considering Indonesia's efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study examines both the needs and challenges in establishing a bullying-free school environment using a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data. It involved 238 students from six junior high schools in Surakarta, and were selected through stratified random sampling. The data were collected using a questionnaire and in-depth interviews with both teachers and students. The findings reveal that although most schools have established anti-bullying policies, their implementation faces significant challenges, including low parental involvement (40% of teachers reported), limited school resources, and insufficient teacher training (only 30% of teachers felt adequately trained). Statistically, 67% of respondents reported bullying occurs in their school, with 70% of students feeling comfortable participating in arts and sports activities that promote a positive school climate. The study proposes a holistic approach to address these challenges, emphasizing the importance of strong leadership, community collaboration, and the integration of character education and supportive facilities. The results highlight the need for consistent policy implementation and the development of a supportive school culture to effectively prevent bullying and foster a safe learning environment.

KEYWORDS

Bullying prevention; school safety; anti-bullying policies; sustainable development goals (SDGS).

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has placed a considerable emphasis on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially on high-quality education that can enhance people's understanding towards global and sustainable issues of concern. For this reason, schools offer an integral feature in any recovery effort as they provide the safe and secure environment necessary for learning in all its forms (Kurniasih et al., 2020; Sabil et al., 2023). However, considering the previous comments, cases of bullying within schools remain a significant obstacle. These cases are a more specific type of violence that includes verbal, social, and physical violence that is carried out systematically (Schütz et al., 2022). The consequences of bullying include poor academic performance, but also result in emotional stress and a greater likelihood of suicide attempts (Sabil et al., 2023).

Bullying in today's schools is a serious concern due to its detrimental effects on student behavior, academic achievement, and social relationships (Agyare, 2024; Nickerson et al., 2021; Weiner et al., 2021). Although schools are often perceived as safe environments free from threats or harassment, the high rate of bullying cases indicates an urgent need for actions. Research shows that ensuring a safe school environment is a multifaceted endeavor. Safe and supportive schools not only prevent violence but also promote students' overall well-being (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Approaches to school safety, particularly within the trauma genic theory framework, address safety concerns across various contexts—including physical spaces (Nickerson et al., 2021), multi-level safety management systems (Savolainen, 2023), and school connectedness. Psychological safety plays a crucial role in shaping organizational structures, influencing leadership, and enhancing organizational learning and supporting effective crisis response (Weiner et al., 2021). Reimagining safety conceptually involves creating culturally affirming spaces where Black students feel seen, valued, and respected (Heidelberg et al., 2022). Other dimensions that help describe psychological safety in educational institutions include staff turnover, administrative expertise, and social service support networks.

Addressing bullying in schools requires a comprehensive strategy that integrates a governance framework with community-based interventions aimed at fostering a warm, inclusive, and bullying-free environment. Empirical evidence suggests that implementing targeted anti-bullying campaigns alongside social-emotional learning activities can enhance overall school climate and significantly reduce bullying behaviors (Ishak & Mikea Manitra, 2022). An effective anti-bullying policy clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of educators in addressing incidents of bullying. However, its successful implementation depends on strong and committed leadership (Saripudin, 2023). School principals play a pivotal role in cultivating an inclusive and respectful atmosphere for all students and educators (Adriantoni et al., 2023). Community involvement is equally critical, as collaboration among schools, parents, and local agencies helps reinforce positive behaviors and shared values. Furthermore, a structured approach to social-emotional learning and character education equips students with the skills needed for effective conflict management, which is key to bullying prevention (Sabil et al.,

2023). Schools can strengthen their anti-bullying efforts by aligning strong policy support, community advocacy, and holistic educational programs, thereby creating a climate that actively discourages bullying harassment.

This study seeks to align the global commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the goal of ensuring safe and inclusive education, with the actual circumstances in Indonesia. It evaluates the needs of educational institutions in creating a bullying-free environment as a cornerstone of safe schools. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative data on the prevalence and types of bullying with qualitative insights from key informants to discern both barriers and opportunities for reform. Despite some progress, bullying remains a serious issue in Indonesia. In 2023, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) documented 87 instances of bullying, a decrease from 2,133 incidences of violence against children in 2022. Kurniasih et al. (2020) demonstrated that 25.4% of girls and 20.0% of boys aged 13–17 years encountered violence. The 2022 poll indicated a rise in bullying in junior high schools from 26.32% to 41.34%. According to data from the Kakak Foundation (2023), 39% of students experience verbal bullying, 11% suffer face physical bullying, and 14% are subjected to cyber bullying. While child protection is legally governed by Law No. 39 of 1999 and Government Regulation No. 32 of 2013- which guarantee children's rights to a safe and violence-free educational Environment. Nonetheless, the implementation at the institutional level remains inadequate and requires substantial improvement.

This study aims to develop practical recommendations for stakeholders, such as government officials, educators, and school administrators, to help create a safe and supportive school environment. The proposed strategies include integrating anti-bullying support programs into everyday school activities, the strengthening positive relationships within the school community, and systematically improving threat assessment tools. The study emphasizes the importance of protecting students while laying the groundwork for sustainable and contextually relevant improvements across diverse educational environments. It focuses on three primary questions: What is the prevalence, nature, and impact of bullying in junior high schools in Surakarta? What barriers hinder the effective implementation of anti-bullying programs? What solutions do stakeholders propose to facilitate the establishment of a secure school environment? By addressing these questions, the study offers valuable insights into the dynamics of school bullying dynamics by addressing three questions and providing evidence-based solutions.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Violent victimization among school children has become a global concern due to its negative effects on students' social, psychological, emotional health, and academic performance. The development of school safety policies aims to support students' holistic growth by creating environments free from violence. A school is considered safe when students are not exposed to threats both to their psychosocial and physical safety, allowing them to achieve their maximum

development (Mishra et al., 2018; Saptono, 2022). Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that includes the implementation of anti-violence strategies and character education, and the active participation of all related parties.

Many experts highlight the importance of additional support services such as counseling offices and technology-enabled anonymous violence reporting as essential components for maintaining a safe and supportive school climate. (Kidwai & Smith, 2024) noted that advancements in technology have enhanced the effectiveness of anonymous reporting systems and motivate victims and witnesses to report violence. However, the success of these measures is often limited by insufficient parental involvement and inadequate teacher training that undermines a sustainable prevention policy framework (Mejía-Manzano et al., 2023). In recent years, greater emphasis has been placed on developing standardized policies and procedures aimed at comprehensive prevention of school violence. Effective implementation requires strong leadership, coordinated efforts, an informed workforce, and the integration of evidence-based adaptations into local policies (Pearce et al., 2022). Nevertheless, misalignment between school policies and parental expectations, differing perceptions of violence and inconsistencies between home and school behavior remain challenges (Martinez et al., 2022). In addition, the emotional climate of schools is greatly influenced by the architectural design of educational institutions (Izadi & Hart, 2023). Despite the growing attention to anti-violence policies, a lack of mental training for school health personnel continues to hinder their overall effectiveness (Leff et al., 2021).

Although existing definitions of risk factors such as youth-led households provide some guidance in identifying vulnerable populations, prevention programs tend to be sustainable over the long term only when supported by organizational conditions and stakeholder support (Herkama et al., 2022). There is professional consensus on the importance of collaboration with government agencies and addressing external, community-based factors as essential to the effective implementation of violence prevention measures (Leff et al., 2021). However, gaps remain in understanding the complex relationships between violence, victimization, social position, and their mediating variables, as well as the unintended consequences of environmental changes resulting from certain intervention programs (Salmivalli et al., 2021). This study attempts to respond schools' expectations for cultivating a protective school with violence-free culture. It adopts a mixed-methods approach, using qualitative methods to explore proposed solutions and quantitative methods to analyze the prevalence and characteristics of school-based violence. The study aims to design contextually relevant and responsive anti-violence policies and support the process of policy implementation and evidence collection. Ultimately, the study aims to reduce harassment and violence while laying the foundation for a flexible safe school model adaptable diverse educational settings.

THEORETICAL CONCEPT

Studies on bullying-free zones reveals inconsistencies in the implementation of strategies designed to reduce bullying in educational environments. Although holistic techniques have been promoted to protect children from harm (Schütz et al., 2022; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017), the majority of studies focus on one-sided efforts to address bullying, ignoring broader issues related to the student body, faculty members, and the entire school ecosystem. This narrow focus often neglects critical factors such as an individual's emotional health, behavioral changes, and socio-cultural attributes related to bullying. Bullying manifests in various forms across different global contexts. The rise of technology has intensified the prevalence of cyberbullying, compounding psychological stress that students already face (Schütz et al., 2022), while physical and relational bullying persist in stratified school systems (Carney & Merrell, 2001). The lack of adaptable approaches underscore the urgent need for legislation that includes the perspectives of students, teachers, and communities. Effective bullying prevention policies must go beyond reactive measures; they should strive to create an inherently positive, supportive, and safe educational environment.

Counselors, social media platforms, and tracking systems play a vital role in ensuring safe school environments. Policies supported by these tools can reduce bullying by up to 20 percent (Hendrawan, 2022). However, low parental involvement, inadequate infrastructure, and limited resources often undermine these efforts. In Indonesia, the lack of specialized counseling services and an organized reporting system poses significant challenges to effective bullying prevention. Many students hesitate to report cases because they fear being victimized, and schools face problems with inconsistent policies, understaffing, and insufficiently trained personnel. To address these issues, there is an urgent need to adopt a more comprehensive approach to anti-bullying strategies by improving support facilities, developing digital reporting systems, and encouraging collaboration between schools, families, and policymakers.

Inclusive strategies such as arts, sports, and play-based learning are essential in character education, as they help foster social relationships and improve school climate (Peterson, 2019). However, there is limited studies on how these strategies are implemented within specific cultural and contextual frameworks, particularly in Indonesia, a country marked by diverse demographics, cultures, and resources. In addition to academics, character education is also well-nourished through participation in extracurricular activities and habit-forming programs that promote self-discipline, collaboration, and compassion (Amilda et al., 2023). Social relationships grounded in the acceptance of diversity contribute to the promotion of social cohesion and inclusion, which are intrinsic values of the community and humanitarian approach in Indonesia. Schools that implement systemic leadership have been shown to foster inclusivity at all levels, supporting student well-being and helping to reduce social inequalities (Ketikidou & Saiti, 2022). The development of emotional intelligence along with social skills serves to strengthen personal achievement in relationships and reinforces a school culture rooted in mutual respect.

Non-academic activities such as scouting, religious activities, and student councils help to enforce community responsibility and good citizenship. Through these initiatives, students are encouraged to take the initiative to participate in environmental and social activities, which helps to foster a sense of leadership and social awareness (Halek et al., 2021; Fanani et al., 2022). Inclusive education, where students with disabilities learn alongside their peers without disabilities has been shown to foster empathy, sensitivity, and cooperation among students (Alnahdi et al., 2021). Achieving zero bullying in schools requires a comprehensive approach that integrates policy, infrastructure, and community participation that aligns with SDG 4 on Quality Education and SDG 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. However, the need for inclusive, character-based, and anti-bullying policies often differs from the challenge of embedding these principles into school culture. ; In Indonesia, the implementation of such policies across different school types remains inconsistent due to vague policy definitions, inadequate enforcement, and lack of reporting systems, and limited infrastructure, all of which hinder the creation of safe learning environments. While Permendikbudristek Number 46 of 2023 provides a foundational framework for promoting violence-free schools, further specific contextual evaluation is necessary to ensure its effectiveness. In this study, I will use qualitative and quantitative approaches to determine how physical design and school policies can sustainably prevent bullying and contribute to achieving the SDGs.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the needs in creating a bullying-free school environment (McKim, 2017). This approach was chosen to capture a holistic view of bullying, including how often it occurs, as well as the perceptions and experiences of those involved.

Participants

This study involved a sample of 238 students from seventh to ninth-grade drawn from 10 junior high schools across five districts of Surakarta. The sample selection was carried out using the stratified random sampling method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Al-Ababneh, 2020), to ensure both geographical and institutional diversity. Stratification was based on school types representing public institutions (60%) and private institutions (40%) allowing for a balanced representation of the city's educational landscape. Inclusion criteria require participants to be actively enrolled students who consented to complete a questionnaire about their bullying experiences and perceptions of school safety. This methodological approach ensures that the collected data can reflect various perspectives on the prevalence of bullying and the effectiveness of existing prevention strategies within the educational context in Surakarta.

Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

The survey and interview procedures were designed to address the research questions regarding students' perceptions of school requirements and bullying challenges. The data were

collected using a questionnaire developed through Google Forms. The 30-item online questionnaire consisted of both quantitative (20 items, 5-point Likert scale) and qualitative (10 open-ended) questions aimed at capturing data on the prevalence, impacts, and prevention of bullying (Shannon-Baker, 2016). The quantitative section focused on identifying the frequency and types of bullying incidents, as well as evaluating the perceived effectiveness of existing anti-bullying policies. The qualitative section explored students' and teachers' perceptions of the strategies proposed to create a non-violent school environment. In addition to the questionnaire, in-depth interviews were conducted with Civic Education teachers during Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). In general, Table 1 below summarizes the instruments used in this study, as described in detail above.

Table 1.

Grid of Research Instruments for Needs Identification

No	Measured Aspects	Indicator	Data Types
1	Types of Bullying	- Physical (hitting, kicking, etc.) - Verbal (taunting, insults) - Social (exclusion) - Cyber Bullying	Quantitative
2	Frequency of Bullying	- Frequency of bullying behavior - Duration or time of occurrence (weekly, monthly, etc.)	Quantitative
3	Impact of Bullying	- Psychological (fear, stress) - Academic (decreased achievement) - Social (relationships with friends)	Qualitative
4	Prevention and Handling Strategies	- Effectiveness of school policies - Teacher and parent involvement - Student awareness	Quantitative
5	Need for Safe Schools	- Supporting facilities (CCTV, consultation room) - Teacher and student training - Special policies	Qualitative
6	Perception of School Policies	- Satisfaction with school policies - The role of teachers in implementing policies	Qualitative

Validity, Reliability and Data Analysis Technique

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to profile respondents and measure parental involvement with variables including school type, student demographics, and bullying related issues. The analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26 software (Zhang et al., 2021). In addition, qualitative data were analyzed thematically using NVivo (Chenail, 2012) to provide key themes that emerged from respondents' open-ended responses. Thematic analysis was used to extract needs and barriers expressed by respondents. To ensure the validity of the instrument, content validity was evaluated by three experts in education and psychology. The CVI after the content validity assessment showed 0.89, which means that the content validity is

considered adequate (Lau Yen Yen et al., 2023). All aspects tested were found to have a CVA greater than 0.7 (Gonçalves et al., 2016) as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

Results of Instrument Validity and Reliability Tests

No	Measured Aspects	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Category
1	Type of Bullying	5	0,82	Reliable
2	Frequency of Bullying	4	0,78	Reliable
3	Impact of Bullying	6	0,85	Very Reliable
4	Perception of School Policy	5	0,80	Reliable

For the qualitative data, validity and reliability were ensured through a data triangulation process involving students, teachers, and the results of group discussions (Focus Group Discussion/FGD). This process enhanced the consistency and credibility of the findings by providing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the bullying phenomenon (Chenail, 2012). Through integrating both quantitative and qualitative analysis approach, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the factors influencing the creation of a safe and bullying-free school environment.

RESULT

Demographics of research subjects

Table 3.

Profile of Research Subject Students

Demographic Item	Subcategories	N	%	Varianc e
Gender	Male	114	48.0%	0.24
	Female	124	52.0%	
Age	12 years	59	25.0%	0.661
	13 years	95	40.0%	
	14 years	84	35.0%	
Class	Grade 7	83	35.0%,	0.613
	Grade 8	95	40.0%	
	Grade 9	60	25.0%	
School Type	Public	143	60.0%	0.25
	Private	95	40.0%	
Attitude towards Bullying	Expelled from school	50	21.0%	0.31
	Punished by Police	100	42.0%	
	Punished by School	88	37.0%	

This section presents the respondent profile using percentage distributions, as well as modes and variances for the measures obtained from the quantitative study based on the respondents' demographics, research variables, and questionnaire items. The study sample consisted of 238 students with female respondents slightly outnumbering male at 52% and 48%,

respectively. The respondents' ages ranged from 12 to 14 years with a modal age of 13 years, which accounted for 40% of the respondents. The respondents were grouped into three classes: 7th grade (35%), 8th grade (40%), and 9th grade (25%). The majority of the respondents were from public schools (60%) and the rest from private schools (40%). In terms of attitudes towards managing bullying, most respondents indicated that bullies should be severely punished by the police (42%) while others felt that bullies should be punished by the school (37%) and expelled from school (21%). The detailed socio-economic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 3.

Perceptions of Bullying in Public and Private Schools

The main findings showed significant differences in students' perceptions of bullying and appropriate disciplinary measures between public and private schools. Based on their responses regarding how bullies should be treated, students could be grouped into three categories: "bullies are severely punished by the Police," "punished by the school," and "expelled from school." There was greater support for severe punishment by the Police among respondents from public schools (42%), while punishment by the school was preferred in private schools (37%). A smaller proportion of respondents from both school types (21%) favored expulsion as the appropriate response to bullying.

Table 4.

Correlation Analysis

Dependent Variable	Demographic Item	Chi-square	Phi	V	Coef Contingency	Spearman	Value
ST	GD	2.15	0.12	0.1	0.08	0.11	0.7
ST	AG	3.42	0.18	0.14	0.12	0.15	0.75
ST	CL	4.1	0.24	0.2	0.16	0.21	0.8
AB	GD	3.25	0.14	0.12	0.1	0.13	0.75
AB	AG	4.5	0.2	0.16	0.14	0.17	0.8
AB	CL	5.2	0.26	0.22	0.18	0.23	0.85

A descriptive analysis based on the collected questionnaires including mode and variance was prepared. The strongest association, as indicated by the Phi value of .24 and Spearman's coefficient of 0.21, was between students' demographic details of gender (GD), age (AG), and grade level (CL) with opinions about bullying in public schools. This finding underscores the need to consider demographic aspects when designing strategies or policies to address bullying in educational settings. These results are summarized in detail in Table 4.

Challenges in Implementing Anti-Bullying Programs

The findings of this study indicate that bullying remains a prevalent issue in junior high schools in Surakarta. A significant 67% of student respondents reported that bullying occurs in their schools, indicating that this behavior is pervasive among the school community. The impact of bullying extends beyond individual victims, disrupting healthy social interactions across the school environments. Notably, 66.7% of teacher respondents agreed that bullying creates a

hostile climate with constant harassment and poor relationships between students. This strengthens the argument that bullying has far-reaching consequences, undermining not only the victims, but also the entire social cohesion within the schools.

Another major challenge identified is the low level of awareness among both students and teachers to promote a safe school environment. Of the 54 respondents, several stated that certain students were unaware of the impact of bullying on themselves and their peers. A school counselor remarked, "Some students even treat bullying as a joke." In addition to attitudinal issue, many teachers are not sufficiently trained to handle bullying cases. Technical issues also persist, including inadequate infrastructure, which limits the successful implementation of technology-based interventions.

Table 5.

Results of Interview Findings Analysis

Key Themes	Sub-Themes	Respondent Quotes	Supported Evidences
Lack of Support from Parents or Community	Low parental involvement; responsibility is considered entirely on the school	"We often don't get full support from parents."	40% of teachers (24/60) reported low parental engagement in anti-bullying initiatives.
Limited School Budget or Facilities	Lack of counseling rooms; limited CCTV or supporting equipment	"We don't have the budget for teacher training or CCTV."	60% of schools (6/10) lacked dedicated counseling spaces; 80% reported budget constraints.
Low Awareness of Students and Teachers	Students are unaware of the impact of bullying; teachers are poorly trained	"Some students even treat bullying as a joke."	54 respondents (90% of interviewees) noted low awareness; 70% of teachers felt undertrained.
Technical Challenges (Infrastructure)	Limited internet access; lack of technological devices	"We want to use the app, but many students don't have adequate devices."	30 respondents (50% of interviewees) highlighted technological barriers to reporting systems.

Responses from 30 participants indicated that limited technological resources and poor internet connectivity significantly hinder access to bullying reporting apps. One respondent detailed, "We would like to use a bullying reporting app, but many students don't have adequate devices." This statement underscores the need for broader and more comprehensive strategies to address school safety concerns. These strategies should include parental involvement, increased funding, teacher professional development, and provision of technological resources. The coding analysis with interview outputs is summarized in Table 5.

Strategies to Overcome Challenges and Create Safe Schools

The results of this study suggest five main strategies are proposed for fostering a safe and supportive school atmosphere. First, a holistic approach to school management was prioritized by 1.03% of the weighted respondents (N=65), who highlighted the importance of active administrative support from principals, teachers, and staff in implementing anti-bullying policies. Second, the strategy of promoting fun and inclusive activities such as arts, sports, and games-based activities was supported by 0.98% of respondents (N=70) who believe that such initiatives contribute to creating positive school atmosphere. Third, 0.9% of respondents identified character education as an important strategy, asserting that teaching students social and life skills will enable them to interact and collaborate meaningfully with each other. The fourth strategy, supporting bullying reporting applications, counseling rooms, and CCTV were prioritized by 1.25% of the total respondents (N=75). Finally, 0.88% of respondents considered stakeholder collaboration important, along with active contributions from parents and the community in encouraging support for anti-bullying policies. All these findings are consolidated in Table 6 below.

Table 6.

Analysis of Responses Regarding Strategies to Overcome Challenges in School Bullying

No	Key Strategies	Number of Respondents	Weighted Percentage (%)
1	Holistic Anti-Bullying School Management	65	1.03
2	Fun and Inclusive Activities	70	0.98
3	Moral Education	60	0.90
4	Supporting Facilities	75	1.25
5	Collaboration with Stakeholders	50	0.88

In parallel, interview findings with teachers, principals, and parents revealed some important perceptions regarding strategies to foster a fun and safe school climate. All respondents emphasized the importance of a clearly defined anti-bullying policy and the principal's full commitment to its consistent enforcement. Furthermore, activities oriented towards arts, sports, and games were considered very capable of creating a positive and engaging learning atmosphere. They also highlighted supportive facilities such as counseling rooms and automated reporting systems for bullying that can make students feel safe to report incidents. Finally, it was noted that effective partnerships between schools and parents are crucial for the success of anti-bullying initiatives. A summary of insights from these interviews is presented in Table 7.

Table 7.*Coding Analysis of Interview Results*

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Number of Respondents	Interview Quotes
Holistic Bullying Management	Anti-School Principal support; consistent policies	8	"The principal must ensure that all teachers and elements in the school understand the importance of bullying prevention."
Fun and Inclusive Activities	Arts, sports, and games	7	"Children feel more comfortable when there are activities involving art or sports."
Moral Education	Internalization of Humanist values and habituation	6	"Teachers provide examples of various behaviors that fall into the category of bullying, instill humanist values and make them a habit in behavior"
Supporting Facilities	Counselling room, CCTV, anti-bullying application	9	"Counseling rooms must be available so that students know where they can seek help, and develop applications to form anti-bullying knowledge and report bullying actions based on mobile."
Collaboration with Stakeholders	Parent discussion forum; community participation	5	"Discussions between parents and teachers are very helpful in solving bullying problems."

Based on these findings, the study emphasizes the importance of comprehensive management such as the whole school requires multi-sectoral integration to design a safe, fun, and engaging place in schools. Survey and interviews revealed that both tangible and intangible safeguards, when implemented effectively, foster social cohesion within schools. Students valued the presence of supportive infrastructure such as counseling rooms and anti-bullying reporting applications that helped them feel safe, they also appreciated active participation in character education that motivated them to learn. Furthermore, collaborative involvement from parents, communities and government strengthen the synergy to overcome the existing challenges. The successful implementation of consistent anti-bullying policies, inclusive activities, and capacity-building programs relies on the active engagement of all stakeholders. Therefore, policies, inclusive activities, and supportive training programs must be developed with all parties to ensure student success. This study strongly recommends educational policy makers adopt this integrated approach to transform schools into ideal environments for meaningful education, development, and social engagement.

In light of the empirical findings presented above, the anti-bullying safe school design formulated in this study integrates various theoretical and practical frameworks into field-based findings. Key constructs that support the establishment of a bullying-free school include internalizing values as a daily school routine, applying the nature of children to understand individual needs and potentials, ensuring a physically safe and emotionally secure school environment that reduces the possibility of bullying. Central to this model are proactive anti-bullying policies designed to sustain a safe and orderly school climate, an essential objective of this program. Other equally important are the provision of sufficient facilities and infrastructure, the formation of teams for dedicated prevention and response to school violence, and the legal responsibility of educational institutions to protect victims of bullying, thus maintaining the idea of fostering a healthy community where students feel accepted free from discrimination and violence. These components along with the theoretical and empirical evidence presented in the description of the school design in Figure 1 are used to build the theoretical framework developed in this study.

Figure 1.

Components of an Anti-Bullying Safe School



DISCUSSION

This study shows that although anti-bullying policies are formally established in most schools, significant challenges persist in their implementation. A key issue is the lack of active parental involvement in supporting these policies. Approximately 40% of teachers reported that parents seem to leave the entire task to the school, leaving a gap in bullying prevention measures. This helps (Waasdorp et al., 2021b) in focusing on the need for a cohesive anti-bullying policy supported by all components of the school for effective bullying prevention. However, as stated by Gaffney et al. (2021), the mere existence of a policy itself does not lead to behavioral changes

among staff, particularly when training is delivered without sufficient guidance. This guidance is essential to improve staff competence in responding to and, appropriately, managing bullying situations.

The study further highlighted that parental neglect remains a significant barrier, aligning with the findings of Kidwai & Smith (2024), who noted that some school policies overlooked both parental involvement and clearly defined staff's roles and responsibilities in addressing bullying. This underscores the need of incorporating these factors into a more comprehensive and holistic anti-bullying framework. In addition, the Holistic Education Approach advocated by Kenny et al. (2023) emphasizes for collaborative efforts among schools, families, and communities to create an inclusive educational environment. Such collaboration is vital to sustaining long-term inclusion and effectively addressing bullying. The survey results reinforce this perspective by revealing inadequacies in the training provided to school personnel and a lack of strategic focus on engaging parents as key stakeholders in bullying prevention.

The high rate of bullying (67%) reported in junior high schools across Surakarta highlights the urgent need for effective anti-bullying programs. This need corresponds to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 on Quality Education and 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. However, efforts to prevent bullying are hindered by various institutional challenges, including insufficient teacher preparedness reported at 30% and limited access to technological resources. These challenges are further compounded by disparities in funding gap between public (60%) and private (40%) schools makes counseling and CCTV expenditures scarce for 80% of schools (Table 5). Moreover, low levels of parental involvement (40%) are linked to broader socio-economic variables such poor parental education, lowering community engagement in school safety programs (Brown et al., 2023; National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Drawing on traumagenic theory (Nickerson et al., 2021), bullying's psychological effects such as fear, stress that's require a systematic approach that includes equitable funding, stakeholder lobbying, and extensive teacher training to create a bullying-free school (Jiménez-Barbero et al., 2020; Sabah et al., 2022).

Therefore, to address the implementation challenges associated with anti-bullying policies, schools must adopt a holistic and integrated approach. This includes increasing parental involvement, providing regular and ongoing training for staff, and integrating policies with broader community cooperation. The findings clearly demonstrate that even well-designed anti-bullying policies will fail to produce meaningful change if they are not consistently and effectively implemented. A holistic implementation strategy not only reinforces the original intent of these policies but also ensures their sustainability over time. Schools can create a safer environment and support the overall development of students by ensuring that policies are implemented in line with their original objectives.

There is growing evidence that modern technology, particularly digital reporting applications, can significantly enhance the reporting and management of violence and safety-related incidents in schools According to Kidwai and Smith (2024), such technologies allow

students to report bullying reporting anonymously, thereby reducing the fear of retaliation. In this study, 75% of respondents identified reporting applications as one of the most important tools for fostering a safe school environment. The study shows that this technology has many benefits in various contexts. Sabil et al. (2023) found that emergency nurses were more likely to report workplace violence when provided with digital reporting tools. These platforms offer a secure and accessible way for students to express their concerns, helping to overcome barriers associated with stigma, fear of punishment, or threats, and ultimately contributing to a more transparent and responsive school culture.

Similar technologies have been used in other contexts to support reporting mechanisms. Fukushima et al. (2022) demonstrated effectiveness of digital applications in reporting adverse drug reactions, while Glass et al. (2022) showed that such digital applications provide critical support to survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV). Furthermore, digital interventions for intimate partner violence can improve the mental health of survivors (Emezue & Bloom, 2021). However, the relationship between anonymity and digital aggression remains complex (Kim et al., 2023), although these applications do not hinder bystander intervention in cases of sexual assault on campus (Kettrey & Thompson, 2023). In the present study, in-depth interview revealed that reporting applications can provide students with a sense of security by ensuring that each report is handled efficiently. Nonetheless, for such applications to be truly effective in school contexts, institutions must invest in a training, supervision, and strengthening trust between students and staff. Thus, bullying reporting applications can be one of the important elements in creating a safe and supportive learning environment.

As previously discussed, holistic approaches that encompass effective school management, community collaboration, and integration of character education into the curriculum can help in creating safe and supportive schools (Asri & Deviv, 2023; Fernández-Alfaraz et al., 2023). These efforts must be systematically supported by school management to ensure that character education becomes an important aspect of school culture. In addition, active collaboration between teachers, parents and the wider community is essential to improving character education both at school and at home. The involvement of parents in advocating for and modeling character values significantly strengthen school efforts and creating the essential coherence needed for students' positive behavior and moral development (Fathinnaufal & Hidayati, 2020; Mubarak & Syamsi, 2019). Adopting a holistic approach to character education allows for the development of social interactions among students as well as towards individual students.

In addition, inspiring and recreational activities involving all students can promote a constructive and peaceful school atmosphere. While Thomas et al. (2022) and Dirgantari & Cahyani (2023) argue that in supportive school environments where character values are integrated into daily routines, the quality of social interactions improves, Peterson (2019) provides evidence that such activities promote unity and inclusivity among students. Character formation should permeate all dimensions of school life to shape students into responsible

citizens, active, and ethical members of society (Suardin et al., 2023). A safe, welcoming, and constructive school environment thus requires the integration of holistic school management, character education, engaging student activities, active stakeholder participation. The findings show that 70 percent of students feel comfortable participating in arts and sports, while faculty focus on training needs to support policy roles.

Creating a bullying-free school environment requires a comprehensive approach that integrates the internalization of humanistic values, character education, stakeholder collaboration, effective school management, and a physically and non-physically safe environment. However, this vision is often hindered by two critical challenges; limited parental involvement and insufficient resources. To overcome these barriers, robust school policy support is essential, particularly policies that prioritize the development of infrastructure, and the formation of violence prevention and handling teams. In addition, victim protection needs to be enhanced through safe reporting mechanisms and investment in supportive facilities such as counseling rooms and technology-based reporting systems. These components work synergistically to ensure not only responsive action but also the cultivation of a school culture grounded in empathy, accountability, and student well-being.

CONCLUSION

The analysis underscores the urgent need for schools to provide a safe, bullying-free environment for children. Acute experiences of bullying can inflict lasting psychological harm on victims, but perhaps more critically, such behavior undermines the social fabric of the school community, eroding trust and positive peer relationships. The study found that many schools inadvertently fail to respect students' rights by enabling, rather than preventing, school practices that deny every student the opportunity to pursue their interests and develop their abilities. Additionally, schools should have active programs to help the students gain social and academic skills, build positive relationships, and increase engagement with their parents.

Moreover, schools must proactively identify sources of insecurity by utilizing risk assessment tools and conducting ongoing evaluations to inform appropriate interventions. Similarly, creating a safe and supportive school environment requires a holistic approach involving school management, character education, supporting facilities, and stakeholder collaboration. For anti-bullying initiatives to be effective and sustainable, consistent cooperation among teachers, students, parents, and the wider community is essential.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to thank LPPM UNS for providing research funding support for this article, through the Fundamental Research Scheme with contract agreement number: 369/UN.27.22/PT.01.03/2025.

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