

## Strengthening The PAI and Buddy Programs In Efforts To Prevent Bullying In The School Environment

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### Abstract

This study discusses the strengthening of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and the implementation of the Buddy Program as an integrated strategy to prevent bullying in schools. The prevalence of bullying in various educational institutions demonstrates the need for interventions that are not only curative, but also preventive and sustainable. Strengthening PAI plays a crucial role in instilling noble moral values, empathy, caring, and social responsibility in students. Through a contextual, collaborative, and character-oriented learning approach, PAI becomes the foundation for building a religious, humanistic, and child-friendly school culture. This study used a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation in schools implementing both programs. The results show that the integration of PAI and the Buddy Program is effective in reducing the potential for bullying behavior and fostering an inclusive and empathetic school climate. In conclusion, the synergy between values education through PAI and social assistance through the Buddy Program serves as a strategic model that can be implemented in holistic and sustainable bullying prevention efforts.

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## 1. Introduction

Bullying in schools is a serious problem that continues to receive public attention and attention from child protection agencies. National data shows an increasing trend in bullying incidents in recent years, making this issue a threat to the safety, mental health, and development of students. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) recorded an increase in the number of complaints and cases of child violence, including incidents of

bullying in schools. The KPAI's annual report noted a significant increase in complaints throughout 2024 and the previous period (Hikmat et al., 2024).

Several quantitative data sources support this picture. Data compiled by the Indonesian Education Monitoring Network (JPPI) and media reports show a surge in the number of violence/bullying cases: from dozens at the beginning of the decade to hundreds to thousands of reports in recent years (e.g., a sharp increase from 2022–2024) (Smith et al., 2023). The 2023 National Assessment reported that approximately 36.31% of students are at risk of experiencing bullying incidents, and a UNICEF survey also found a high proportion of young people who have been victims of cyberbullying or experienced repeated bullying. These figures illustrate the broad scale and multifaceted nature of the problem (physical, verbal, psychological, and cyber) (Barus et al., 2023).

The impact of bullying on victims is long-lasting and serious: mental health problems (stress, anxiety, depression), decreased academic performance, absenteeism, decreased self-esteem, and long-term consequences such as relationship problems and suicide risk. Not only are victims affected, but perpetrators also potentially experience problems with moral and social development, and the school climate becomes unsafe and uncondusive to learning. Local research and policy reviews emphasize that bullying reduces the quality of learning and hinders the goal of inclusive education (Hidayati & Wahyuni, 2023).

The handling of bullying in Indonesia has so far shown weaknesses: differences in perceptions between teachers and students regarding the school's response to bullying reports (e.g., teachers tend to believe issues are addressed, while students feel their reports are not followed up), limited systematic prevention programs, and weak integration of character values into daily school practices. The UNICEF report highlights these gaps and the need for a more responsive approach to students' experiences. Furthermore, although some schools have adopted anti-bullying policies, sustainable and evidence-based implementation of these programs is still rare (Rueda et al., 2022).

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Peer mentoring models, such as the Buddy Program, have emerged as an effective socio-practical intervention for bullying prevention and early intervention. The Buddy Program facilitates mentoring relationships between students (senior-junior or peers) that provide emotional support, promote positive norms, and informal supervision that can reduce opportunities for bullying to occur. This program also strengthens positive social networks within schools, making it easier for victims to report and for perpetrators to experience social correction from their environment. Several field studies and implementation reports indicate that the Buddy Program can increase students' sense of safety, school attachment, and caring

among students when implemented in a structured manner and combined with teacher training and supervision (Sun & Clarke-Midura, 2022).

Although Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and the Buddy Program hold theoretical promise, empirical evidence on the synergy of these two approaches in the Indonesian school context remains limited. Many case reports focus on one-sided programs (curriculum-only or social intervention-only), and few studies evaluate the integration of religious values education with peer mentoring models for bullying prevention (Muru'atul Afifah & Riftini Yulaiyah, 2022). This gap is a critical rationale for conducting research that examines integrated implementation: whether systematic strengthening of Islamic Religious Education (curriculum, methods, attitude evaluation) combined with the Buddy Program can reduce bullying incidents, improve school climate, and enhance the responsiveness of students and teachers (Syahfitra et al., 2023).

Based on the empirical conditions and preliminary studies, this study aims to fill the gap in evidence regarding the effectiveness of synergy between strengthening Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and implementing the Buddy Program as a strategy for preventing bullying in schools (Alharthi, 2020).

The objectives of the study are (1) to describe the conditions of bullying in the target schools; (2) to analyze the role of strengthening Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in forming protective values and attitudes against bullying; (3) to examine the implementation of the Buddy Program as a social support mechanism; and (4) to evaluate the impact of the integration of the two approaches on reducing bullying cases and improving school climate. The results of the study are expected to provide policy and practice recommendations for schools, education stakeholders, and policymakers to develop a holistic, values-based, and sustainable bullying prevention model.

## **2. Research Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative approach because its primary focus is to deeply understand the processes, experiences, and dynamics that occur in the implementation of strengthening Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and the Buddy Program in school environments as a bullying prevention effort. The qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the meaning behind the behaviors, interactions, and responses of teachers and students in a more comprehensive manner, resulting in a holistic understanding of the effectiveness of both programs in building a safe and inclusive school culture (Spinuzzi, 2023).

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted directly within the school environment to observe Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching practices, student interactions, the implementation of the Buddy Program, and social situations that could potentially trigger or prevent bullying. Through observation, researchers were able to capture the actual behavior, communication patterns, and daily activities of students and teachers without intervention that would alter the field conditions (Roh et al., 2021).

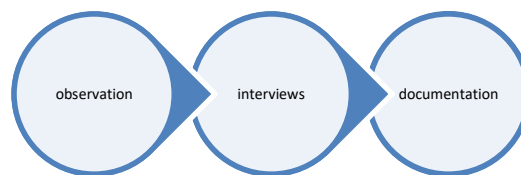


Figure 1 research data engineering flow

Through the combination of these three techniques, this research is expected to produce rich, in-depth, and credible data on how the integration of PAI strengthening and the Buddy Program can contribute to the prevention of bullying in schools.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Strengthening Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Contributes Significantly to the Formation of Students' Anti-Bullying Attitudes

Strengthening Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in shaping students' character, particularly in fostering anti-bullying attitudes within the school environment. Essentially, PAI serves not only as a cognitive-focused subject but also as a medium for internalizing noble moral values, social empathy, and self-control. These values are highly relevant for preventing bullying, which frequently occurs in physical, verbal, and psychological forms in the educational environment.

In practice, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is strengthened through learning that focuses on cultivating positive attitudes, cultivating morals, and providing role models by teachers. Topics such as morality towards others, the prohibition against harming others, the importance of respecting differences, and strengthening Islamic brotherhood serve as the primary foundation for instilling spiritual and moral awareness in students. When students understand that all forms of violence, intimidation, and bullying are prohibited by Islamic teachings, they develop self-control and social sensitivity.

Strengthening Islamic Religious Education (PAI) also encourages the creation of a religious and humanistic school culture. Activities such as practicing greetings, smiling, and greetings, daily religious sermons, religious mentoring, and other religious programs create a more conducive school atmosphere and foster mutual respect. This positive environment has been proven to minimize the potential for conflict and aggressive behavior among students. Consistently internalizing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) values will reduce students' tendency to engage in actions that harm their peers.

Furthermore, Islamic Religious Education teachers play a dual role as educators and moral guides. Teachers not only teach theory but also ensure that students are able to practice Islamic values in their daily lives. A dialogic approach, role models, and ongoing guidance make students feel valued and supported. The emotional bond established between teachers and students is also a crucial factor in preventing aggressive behavior.

In the context of bullying prevention, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) activities directly foster empathy, social awareness, and caring for others. Students are trained to understand

the feelings of others, avoid hurtful actions, and help friends in need. These values are crucial for creating a safe, comfortable, and violence-free environment.

Strengthening Islamic Religious Education (PAI) significantly contributes to the formation of anti-bullying attitudes in students, not only through formal learning processes but also through habituation, role models, and a religious school culture. PAI is a crucial pillar in building noble character, enabling students to become individuals who value humanity, uphold brotherhood, and reject all forms of bullying. Through continuous PAI strengthening, schools can create a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also morally and socially mature.

### **3.2. Buddy Program Increases Social Support and Reduces the Risk of Bullying**

The Buddy Program is a strategic approach to creating a safe, inclusive, and bullying-free school environment. This program is typically designed by pairing students as "buddies" either between seniors or juniors, or between students of the same age to provide mutual support, develop empathy, and build positive relationships within the school environment. In practice, the Buddy Program has proven effective in increasing social support and reducing the risk of bullying by providing a safe, focused, and caring space for interaction.

At the psychosocial level, the Buddy Program acts as a support system that allows students to feel accepted and less alone. Many bullying cases stem from social isolation, a lack of friends, or specific characteristics that make students vulnerable to becoming victims. With a buddy, students have a friend ready to listen, help, and provide a sense of security in their daily school activities. This fosters emotional stability, boosts self-confidence, and fosters the courage to report or avoid risky situations when potential bullying arises.

On the other hand, the Buddy Program also strengthens positive social values, such as empathy, mutual assistance, cooperation, and the ability to understand others' feelings. Students involved as buddies are trained to be sensitive to their friends' needs, provide moral support, and serve as role models in creating healthy interactions. This experience encourages students to treat their friends in a friendlier and more humane manner, thereby reducing the tendency to engage in aggressive behavior. By increasing social empathy, the potential for bullying, both direct and indirect, can be significantly reduced.

Furthermore, the Buddy Program serves as a communication bridge between students and the school. Students who become buddies can communicate potential problems experienced by their peers to teachers or counselors, allowing for faster and more targeted prevention. This program weakens the culture of silence that often occurs in bullying cases, as students feel they have a strong support network and are not afraid to seek help. This creates a highly effective early prevention mechanism for addressing various forms of peer violence.

Furthermore, the Buddy Program can build a more inclusive school community. Students from diverse backgrounds, personalities, and abilities can interact more positively through structured friendships. These interactions help break down stereotypes, reduce discrimination, and foster a sense of community. When inclusive values develop, schools automatically develop a stronger, positive culture, and this type of environment has proven to be a natural deterrent to bullying.

Overall, the Buddy Program not only increases social support for students but also creates a safe and violence-free school climate. With buddy mentors ready to provide assistance, students feel more secure, while bullying behavior can be suppressed through developing empathy, positive interactions, and effective communication. Ultimately, the Buddy Program is one of the best preventative strategies for building a generation of students who care about each other, respect each other, and are able to resist all forms of bullying in their daily lives.

### **3.3. Integrating PAI Strengthening and the Buddy Program Effectively Builds a Caring and Inclusive School Culture**

The integration of Strengthening Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and the Buddy Program is a highly effective strategic collaboration in building a caring, inclusive, and bullying-free school culture. These two programs complement each other in creating an educational environment that emphasizes not only academic aspects but also character development, empathy, and humanitarian values. When PAI values, which emphasize noble morals, mutual respect, and Islamic brotherhood, are combined with the humanistic inter-student mentoring system in the Buddy Program, a more positive school atmosphere is created that is conducive to students' social-emotional development.

Strengthening Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in this context provides a strong moral and spiritual foundation for students. Through learning about morality, the importance of helping others, avoiding harmful behavior, and respecting differences, students are guided to understand that every individual has dignity that must be protected. These values form an important foundation for developing a caring and inclusive attitude. When PAI is implemented consistently through teacher role models, daily practices, and a religious school culture, students will become accustomed to positive, non-discriminatory behavior and be able to refrain from aggressive or demeaning actions.

Meanwhile, the Buddy Program reinforces these values through real-world practice. This program provides a space for students to support each other through structured friendships. Students who act as buddies accompany their friends in various school activities, assisting with adaptation, providing emotional support, and even providing a confidant during difficult situations. The presence of buddies creates a sense of security, reduces social isolation, and increases students' comfort in interacting within the school environment. This program is highly effective in encouraging positive interactions and reducing the potential for bullying that stems from social inequalities or differences in background.

When these two programs are combined, schools gain two powerful strengths: the moral values of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and the social support of the Buddy Program. The values taught in PAI, such as empathy, compassion, mutual respect, and mutual assistance, find a concrete implementation platform in buddy interactions. Students not only learn moral values theoretically, but also directly practice them through everyday actions with their peers. This integration creates continuity between classroom learning and actual behavior in the school environment.

Furthermore, the integration of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and the Buddy Program also strengthens a school culture that values diversity. Students from diverse backgrounds and backgrounds are brought together in buddy relationships that encourage

them to get to know, understand, and accept one another. This reduces discriminatory attitudes and opens up greater opportunities for inclusivity. Such an environment fosters a sense of belonging, which is key to preventing bullying and building a harmonious school community.

Furthermore, the collaboration between these two programs creates an early prevention system for bullying. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can collaborate with Buddy Program mentors to monitor students' emotional and social well-being. Students experiencing problems are more easily identified because they have a buddy available to report them. This allows for faster and more targeted intervention.

Overall, the integration of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Strengthening and the Buddy Program not only positively impacts student behavior but also creates a caring, inclusive, and safe school ecosystem for all members of the school community. This collaboration fosters a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also morally, emotionally, and socially mature. The school culture formed through the integration of these two programs is a crucial foundation for building a humanistic educational environment that fosters mutual respect and rejects all forms of bullying in everyday life.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Strengthening Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has proven effective in shaping students' character through the internalization of noble moral values, such as empathy, mutual respect, and social responsibility. These values serve as a moral foundation that encourages students to avoid aggressive behavior and create harmonious relationships with peers. Furthermore, the Buddy Program plays a significant role in fostering a positive and supportive social atmosphere. Through a student-to-student mentoring system, the program helps create a sense of security, increases caring, and strengthens healthy interactions among students. The presence of buddies makes it easier for students to receive emotional and social support, thereby reducing the opportunity for bullying. Overall, the integration of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) strengthening and the Buddy Program has had a significant impact on creating an inclusive, religious, and bullying-free school culture. The synergy between these two programs not only reduces bullying rates but also improves the quality of social relationships and the school climate, making the educational environment more conducive to student character development and learning.

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