



The Role of Civics Learning in Facilitating the Development of Anti-Bullying Characters in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the strategic role of Civic Education (Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan or PKn) in shaping students' character at the elementary school level, with a particular focus on instilling anti-bullying values, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and preventing as well as intervening in bullying behavior. The research addresses the growing concern over school bullying, which negatively affects students' emotional well-being and social development. By exploring how PKn can serve as a medium for moral and ethical education, this study contributes to both the theoretical understanding and practical implementation of character education in elementary schools.

The research was conducted at SDN Kowangbinangun using a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and documentation of school activities. The collected data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This method ensured that the findings were systematically derived from field data.

The study found that PKn plays a crucial role in promoting moral values such as empathy, responsibility, tolerance, and justice among students. Through interactive teaching methods, including group discussions, reflection activities, and collaborative tasks, students developed improved interpersonal skills, including assertive communication and conflict resolution. PKn also effectively functioned as a preventive and intervention tool against bullying, as teachers actively provided awareness, corrected negative behaviors, and fostered a safe and supportive school environment.

This study concludes that PKn serves as an effective instrument in cultivating a respectful, empathetic, and cooperative school culture, which ultimately reduces bullying incidents. Future research may explore the integration of digital tools in PKn learning to enhance character education outcomes.

Keywords: Role, Civic Education Learning, Character, Anti-Bullying

Introduction

Civic Education (PKn) plays a strategic role in shaping the character of elementary school students. However, the practice of PKn learning in Indonesia often faces challenges in internalizing character values, including anti-bullying attitudes. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) illustrates the severity of the issue: in the first quarter of 2023 alone, 87 cases of bullying were officially reported, with many more likely going unreported. KPAI also recorded an increase in the total number of bullying-related incidents, with 1,138 cases involving both physical and psychological violence (KPAI, 2023, p. 308). The Child Protection Report for the 2016–2020 period further indicated that approximately 480 children became victims of school-based violence, predominantly related to bullying (Rahayu et al., 2023, p. 308).

UNICEF (2021, p. 204) also reported that 41% of children under the age of 15 in Indonesia experience peer bullying. Data from the Indonesian Teachers' Federation (FSGI) in 2023 revealed 23 recorded bullying incidents between January and September. Of these cases, 50% occurred at the junior high school level, 23% at elementary schools, 13.5% at senior high schools, and 13.5% at vocational schools, with most cases in junior high schools involving both students and educators as perpetrators. Some incidents even resulted in fatalities. In early 2024, KPAI reported 141 cases of child violence, including bullying (Anggraini, 2023, p. 37).

Other studies have shown that certain teachers are either directly involved in bullying or fail to intervene when it occurs. Such behavior reflects a failure to fulfill their role as moral exemplars and as reflective guides for students (Fadil, 2023, p. 128). This negligence not only violates professional responsibility but also implicitly legitimizes harmful behavior. Ignoring bullying has serious legal and social implications and tarnishes the image of teachers, who are expected to protect and educate with empathy. Bullying is also more commonly perpetrated by peers, as observed in SD Kowangbinangun, where minor disagreements and trivial issues escalated into fractured social relationships. Some students even influenced others to take sides, causing conflicts to spread and divide the class into factions (Romadoni, 2024).

KPAI reports indicate that approximately 30% of bullying cases in Indonesia occur in elementary schools. This data highlights that, despite the moral values taught through PKn, bullying remains a serious issue among students (Muryani et al., 2023, p. 9). Supporting research suggests that one key factor behind the prevalence of bullying in elementary schools is the lack of effective instructional approaches in PKn learning (Prasetyo, 2023, p. 77). Consequently, it is crucial to investigate how PKn can systematically foster anti-bullying character development in elementary school students.

Civic Education (PKn) is a core subject in elementary schools aimed at shaping students into responsible, ethical, and well-rounded citizens. PKn is designed to instill moral, national, and social values, including tolerance, justice, and respect for others (Murtiningsih et al., 2024, p. 87). Within this framework, PKn can serve as a strategic platform for developing anti-bullying character, given its inherent moral and social value orientation (Abdullah, 2017, p. 49).

The anti-bullying character traits promoted through PKn include empathy, courage, and respect. Empathy, or the ability to understand the feelings of others, is a key factor in preventing bullying (Nugraha et al., 2017, p. 37). Equally important is the courage to take a stand against bullying, coupled with respect for individual differences. These values can be effectively integrated into PKn lessons through approaches that are meaningful and relevant to students' lives.

Teachers play a pivotal role in this process. They are not only facilitators but also role models who demonstrate anti-bullying behaviors (Akhyar, 2024, p. 160). Teachers must create an inclusive classroom environment where every student feels safe and valued. PKn materials can be leveraged to address social issues such as bullying, helping students understand its impacts and encouraging them to respond appropriately (Awwaliansyah, 2021, p. 41).

Equally important is the broader school environment, which serves as an educational ecosystem that shapes character formation. Research has shown that student interactions with their environment—including teachers, peers, and school policies—significantly influence character development (Hasna et al., 2021, p. 4972). School policies that firmly address bullying, coupled with anti-bullying programs, can reinforce the efforts of PKn learning in creating a safe and supportive environment (Tamaeka et al., 2022, p. 2425).

To date, studies on the role of PKn in character formation for elementary students have largely focused on three main aspects. First, many studies emphasize the cultivation of nationalism (Santoso et al., 2023, p. 250). Second, other research primarily explores the internalization of tolerance through PKn (Sukmawati & Aliyyah, 2023, p. 2876). Third, some studies examine civic knowledge in terms of rights and obligations. However, research specifically addressing how PKn can directly foster anti-bullying character in elementary schools remains limited.

In other words, comprehensive and targeted research on the role of PKn in anti-bullying character development is still scarce, particularly at the elementary school level. Addressing bullying in elementary education is not merely an academic concern but also a moral imperative for nation-building (Sugiyono, 2015, p. 9). Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in existing research by examining the role of PKn instruction in facilitating the development of anti-bullying character among fifth-grade students at SDN Kowangbinangun. Research focusing on character reinforcement through subjects like PKn is both urgent and often overlooked in academic discourse (Pratiwi & Sitorus, 2024, p. 54).

Methods

A. Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research method using Grounded Theory within a field research design. According to Sugiyono (2015, p. 9), qualitative research is conducted on natural settings where the researcher serves as the primary instrument. Sampling was carried out using purposive sampling that developed into snowball sampling, while data were collected through triangulation to enhance validity. Data analysis followed an inductive approach, emphasizing understanding the meaning of the data rather than seeking broad generalizations (Bungin, 2020, p. 312).

This study applied Straussian Grounded Theory, which provides systematic procedures for constructing theory from empirical data through three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This approach, developed by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1998, pp. 12–15), is more structured compared to classical grounded theory. In the open coding stage, initial concepts and categories are identified from raw data. Axial coding involves linking these categories to discover causal patterns. Finally, selective coding integrates the core categories into a central theory (Martin & Turner, 2018, p. 45).

B. Data Sources

The research utilized both primary and secondary data sources.

1. Primary data were collected through direct interaction with the school principal, Civic Education (PKn) teachers, students, and other school staff at SDN Kowangbinangun. These data focused on analyzing the role of PKn learning in developing anti-bullying character among fifth-grade students (Rahayu, Wista, Syawaluddin & Wahyuni, 2023, p. 308).
2. Secondary data were obtained from books, scientific journals, dissertations, and relevant articles, such as studies by Muryani, Susi et al. (2023, p. 9) and Awwaliansyah (2021, p. 41), which support the analysis of Civic Education and character education.

C. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation.

1. Observation
Observations were conducted in an unstructured, participatory manner. Brewer emphasizes that participatory observation requires researchers to engage in the daily activities of research subjects to gain in-depth understanding (Sejati, 2019, p. 23). The researcher observed PKn learning processes, teacher-student communication patterns, and classroom dynamics related to anti-bullying character formation.
2. Interviews
Structured interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and students to gain insight into school policies, teacher strategies, and student experiences in PKn learning as a means of preventing bullying (Rachmawati, 2007, p. 37).
3. Documentation
Documentation involved collecting physical evidence such as notes, photos, and recordings. According to Agave (2020, p. 2), documentation strengthens the validity of findings and deepens the understanding of the studied phenomena.

D. Data Trustworthiness

Data trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, and dependability (Salim, 2007, p. 165).

1. Credibility was maintained by triangulating data from observations, interviews, and documentation.
2. Transferability was achieved by providing a detailed description of the school context and learning processes (Hasna et al., 2021, p. 4972).
3. Dependability was ensured by drawing conclusions based on consistent field data.

E. Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis followed the Straussian Grounded Theory approach:

1. Open Coding – Identifying initial concepts emerging from the data.
2. Axial Coding – Linking categories to reveal causal relationships and patterns.
3. Selective Coding – Developing a central theory that explains the role of PKn learning strategies in shaping anti-bullying character (Creswell, 2015).

Result

Civic Education (PKn) plays a strategic role in shaping students' character from an early age, including fostering anti-bullying values in elementary schools.

A. PKn as a Medium for Moral and Ethical Education

Civic Education (PKn) is instrumental in shaping students' moral and ethical foundations, particularly in instilling anti-bullying values. Observations at SDN Kowangbinangun show that PKn integrates moral values through its learning materials, reinforces social norms based on empathy and tolerance, and cultivates awareness of students' rights and responsibilities.

PKn teachers not only deliver subject content but also provide personal guidance to students who may be prone to engaging in bullying behavior. A fifth-grade teacher stated:

"I can see that PKn really helps students understand how to respect their rights and responsibilities. Through the lessons, they learn to be more empathetic, respect differences, and resolve conflicts peacefully. PKn is not just theory – it builds the moral character that students apply in daily life."

The principal added: *"PKn plays an important role in instilling values such as mutual respect, tolerance, responsibility, discipline, fairness, cooperation, and solidarity. This strategy is supported by school policies that integrate character education and religious values, creating a more positive and harmonious environment."*

Student testimonies support these findings. Raisa said, *"I learned that bullying is wrong because it can hurt others."* Rahmatullah added, *"PKn teaches about teamwork and cooperation, so we help each other more at school."* Meanwhile, Alvano shared, *"I didn't realize bullying could be so harmful, but now I understand and don't want to do it anymore."* Rivano Ardio Saputra also noted, *"I once made an anti-bullying poster in class. It helped me and my friends understand why we need to prevent it."*

B. PKn as a Medium for Strengthening Interpersonal Relationships

Beyond shaping moral character, PKn also enhances students' interpersonal skills by improving social competence, promoting a culture of mutual respect, and fostering assertive communication. Anti-bullying discussions in the fifth-grade classroom showed that students were interactive and able to express their opinions effectively.

The principal explained: *"We implement strategies to strengthen students' social skills, such as forming counseling teams and supervising areas prone to bullying. This ensures that PKn goes beyond theory and equips students with social skills they can apply in daily life."*

The fifth-grade teacher added: *"In PKn lessons, we instill values of respect, tolerance, and solidarity to reduce bullying. We want students to understand that every individual deserves to be treated well, and mocking peers is unacceptable at school."*

Students also acknowledged the benefits. Alvano said, *"PKn teaches us the many impacts of bullying, so my friends and I became more aware and stopped doing it."* Rivano Ardio Saputra affirmed, *"After learning and creating anti-bullying posters, we became more careful in how we speak and act."*

C. PKn as a Tool for Bullying Prevention and Intervention

Civic Education also plays a crucial role in bullying prevention and intervention by instilling moral values, strengthening communication skills, and fostering a positive learning environment. Observations showed that teachers not only addressed negative behaviors but also provided personal guidance to students who were likely to engage in bullying.



The fifth-grade teacher explained: *"In PKn lessons, we consistently reinforce values such as mutual respect, tolerance, and solidarity. We want students to understand that insulting or mocking friends is not an acceptable attitude."*

The principal emphasized: *"We integrate character and religious values into PKn to create a positive environment. This helps students communicate effectively, express their opinions without harming others, and resolve conflicts peacefully."*

Students also felt the impact. Rahmatullah shared, *"PKn teaches teamwork and cooperation, so we help each other more at school."* Alvano added, *"PKn shows us the many negative effects of bullying, which makes us more aware and motivated to stop it."*

Discussion

A. PKn as a Medium for Moral and Ethical Education

Civic Education (PKn) plays a strategic role in shaping students' character from an early age, particularly in instilling anti-bullying values in elementary school environments. As a subject oriented toward the development of democratic attitudes, tolerance, and legal awareness, PKn serves as an effective medium for fostering a culture of mutual respect, empathy, and social responsibility among students (Rahayu, Wista, Syawaluddin & Wahyuni, 2023, p. 308).

Findings from interviews, observations, and documentation at SDN Kowangbinangun indicate that PKn teachers integrate anti-bullying values through interactive methods such as discussions and reflective activities. This approach helps students understand the importance of empathy, responsibility, and fairness, while also modifying the behavior of those who may be prone to engaging in bullying (Hasna et al., 2021, p. 4972).

Theoretically, PKn shapes character through moral education to develop students' potential in spiritual, self-regulatory, intellectual, personal, and social dimensions, as well as in fostering noble character and civic skills (Bungin, 2020, p. 312). PKn facilitates the internalization of civic values, which contributes to bullying prevention. Previous studies have shown that PKn effectively enhances empathy, reduces aggressive behavior, fosters positive social interactions, and suppresses bullying through the active role of teachers (Muryani et al., 2023, p. 9).

B. PKn as a Medium for Strengthening Interpersonal Relationships

Observations and interviews at SDN Kowangbinangun reveal that PKn plays a key role in strengthening students' interpersonal relationships. PKn teachers promote social skills through group discussions on cooperation, mutual assistance, and anti-bullying practices. Students learn to express opinions politely, listen to different perspectives, and resolve conflicts peacefully (Sejati, 2019, p. 23).

One student, Rahmatullah, stated, *"PKn teaches us to work together, so now we often help friends who are struggling."* This finding indicates that PKn helps students build healthy communication and peer relationships.

From a theoretical perspective, PKn fosters communication skills and social interaction because it aims to cultivate democratic attitudes, responsibility, and social awareness (Sugiyono, 2015, p. 9). Positive social interactions during childhood are crucial for the development of self-confidence and social identity. Previous research also confirms that PKn learning embedded with social values is effective in enhancing students' communication and teamwork skills (Awwaliansyah, 2021, p. 41).

C. PKn as a Tool for Bullying Prevention and Intervention

Interviews and observations at SDN Kowangbinangun also demonstrate that PKn plays an important role in both preventing and intervening in bullying incidents. Teachers actively raise awareness among students who may be prone to bullying and address negative behaviors to create a safe learning environment. Within PKn lessons, students are taught to respect others, embrace tolerance, and uphold fairness and solidarity. The fifth-grade teacher emphasized that students are guided to understand that every individual deserves to be treated well and that mocking peers is unacceptable behavior (Salim, 2007, p. 165).

PKn nurtures students' character through the internalization of democratic and social values, encouraging empathy and fostering assertive communication so students can express their opinions without harming others (Creswell, 2015, p. 112). PKn also teaches the concept of rights and responsibilities, which helps build moral awareness and discourages bullying behavior.

Bullying is defined as repeated aggressive behavior involving an imbalance of power, whether physical, verbal, or social, with the intent to harm or dominate others. It may take the form of physical aggression (hitting, kicking), verbal abuse (insulting, teasing), or relational bullying (social exclusion). The impacts on victims are significant, including fear, low self-esteem, anxiety, and even depression (Pratiwi & Sitorus, 2024, p. 54). Therefore, schools must educate students about the definition and negative consequences of bullying to encourage more mindful social interactions.

Previous studies indicate that value-based PKn programs effectively raise students' awareness of the impacts of bullying and foster a culture of mutual respect in schools (Martin & Turner, 2018, p. 45).

.Conclusion

Civic Education (PKn) plays a strategic role in shaping the character of elementary school students, particularly in instilling anti-bullying values. Through learning that emphasizes moral and ethical development, PKn helps students cultivate empathy, responsibility, and awareness of their rights and obligations as members of the school and the wider community. In addition, PKn serves as a medium for strengthening interpersonal relationships by encouraging healthy communication, cooperation, and a culture of mutual respect. PKn is also effective as a tool for bullying prevention and intervention through the internalization of social and democratic values that motivate students to resolve conflicts peacefully. By integrating value-based learning strategies, PKn not only imparts knowledge but also shapes positive social behaviors that support the creation of a safe, harmonious, and bullying-free school environment.



Declarations

Author contribution statement

Specifies the exact contributions of each author in a narrative form.

Funding statement

The funding agency should be written out in full and include the grant number, which can be included in brackets. The funding agency needs to be listing in the "Organization Name." If there is only one funding agency, the Organization Name [grant number xxxxxx] supported this research. If there are multiple agencies or grant numbers, then it should be formatted as such: This research was supported by the Organization Name [grant numbers xxxxxx]; the Organization Name [grant number xxxxxx]; and the Organization Name [grant number xxxxxx]. If there is no funding information, they should state: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. If an organization providing not monetary support (maybe they provided facilities, survey samples, etc.), please mention that that organization supported the research.

Data availability statement

Data availability statements provide a statement about where data supporting the results reported in a published article can be found - including, where applicable, hyperlinks to publicly archived datasets analyzed or generated during the study.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper. Alternatively, The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships, which may be considered as potential competing interests.

Additional information

Additional information in a narrative form.

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