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Holistic Pedagogical Strategies: Combating Bullying in Islamic Secondary Schools Through Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to prevent bullying at Islamic Secondary School 1 Poso, Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. Bullying remains one of the most pressing problems in contemporary educational settings, generating substantial adverse consequences for students' mental health and social development. This study aimed to describe the forms of bullying occurring in the research site, identify their contributing factors, and analyze the strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers to prevent them. A qualitative descriptive-exploratory design was employed, combining pedagogical and psychological perspectives. Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews with the head of madrasah, Islamic Religious Education teachers, guidance and counseling teachers, the vice-head for student affairs, and students, together with documentation studies, and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicate that verbal bullying is the most prevalent form encountered, driven by family disharmony, the school environment, and social media exposure. The prevention strategies adopted by Islamic Religious Education teachers encompass sustained moral guidance and character coaching, the integration of Islamic values into classroom instruction, personalized approaches to students, cross-unit collaboration within the madrasah, and the application of educative rather than punitive sanctions. These findings underscore the strategic potential of religious education teachers as proactive psycho-spiritual agents of character transformation in mitigating bullying within Islamic secondary education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is fundamentally a deliberate, planned, and continuous process of guidance designed to optimize student development (Nabi et al., 2025). This endeavor cannot be reduced to the mere transfer of knowledge; it must also encompass the formation of an integrated personality, or the transfer of values. As mandated by

Indonesia's Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, the principal orientation of national education is to develop students' potential so that they possess spiritual and religious strength, self-control, sound character, intelligence, noble morals, and skills relevant to communal life (Beatty et al., 2021). Within this landscape, Islamic Religious Education bears an ethical and strategic responsibility as the driving axis of character formation, directing students to internalize and embody prophetic values in their daily conduct (Anam & Mendez, 2025; Hishnuddin & Jazilurrahman, 2025).

Yet this ideal vision of education is frequently undermined by troubling sociological realities on the ground. One of the most acute social pathologies confronting contemporary schools is the pervasive incidence of bullying (Fitriyana & Fahrudin, 2026; Lohmeyer & Threadgold, 2023). As a deliberate and repeated abuse of power differentials—manifested in verbal, physical, or psychological forms—bullying produces a destructive academic climate (Hammarén et al., 2022). The phenomenon transcends demographic boundaries of age and gender, with the highest prevalence observed among adolescents at the secondary education level (Nickerson et al., 2023). Its consequences are profoundly systemic, ranging from acute stress, academic anxiety, and prolonged depression to distorted self-confidence and social isolation that can permanently impede victims' psychological development (Kostakopoulou & Mahmoudi, 2024).

Doctrinally, Islam possesses a rigorous theological apparatus that categorically rejects all forms of human degradation (Sharife, 2025). The Qur'an explicitly prohibits mockery, derision, and the debasement of human dignity, as enshrined in QS. al-Hujurat/49:11. This verse affirms that destructive behaviors such as verbal bullying and negative labelling constitute violations of universal social ethics that undermine ukhuwah (brotherhood). Although this normative foundation is broadly understood at the societal level, comprehension of it frequently remains confined to the cognitive-textual dimension within the classroom, generating a wide gap between the normative doctrine of sacred texts and the reality of students' interpersonal morality in schools.

To date, the literature on school bullying intervention has been dominated by counseling-psychology approaches, formal guidance-and-counseling policies, or punitive disciplinary regulations (Gaffney et al., 2021; Hensums et al., 2023). In much of this prior research, the role of PAI teachers has been positioned peripherally, limited to delivering moral content or offering ethical advice only after incidents have occurred, that is, in a reactive capacity (Mukhlis et al., 2026; Tuna, 2022). Very few studies have examined how Islamic Religious Education teachers construct their role as proactive agents of change capable of transforming theological texts such as QS. al-Hujurat/49:11 into a contextual and integrative methodology for bullying prevention.

This is precisely the novelty this study offers. Rather than merely documenting the routine duties of Islamic Religious Education teachers, this study deconstructs and analyzes in depth the manifestation of Islamic Religious Education teachers' role as psycho-spiritual stewards of students at Islamic Secondary School 1 Poso. As a state-run Islamic educational institution situated in a sociologically diverse region, Islamic Secondary School 1 Poso requires its Islamic Religious Education teachers to possess

resilience and pedagogical strategy. This study investigates how the internalization of the values embedded in al-Hujurat is applied not only through classroom instruction but also embedded within school culture to foster a safe, comfortable, emancipatory, and mutually respectful learning climate.

Building on this context, this study aims to uncover, analyze, and comprehensively document how PAI teachers at Islamic Secondary School 1 Poso perform their strategic function in preventing and mitigating bullying behavior. Specifically, it seeks to (1) describe the dominant forms of bullying occurring among students, (2) identify the factors contributing to its occurrence, and (3) analyze the general and personalized strategies employed by PAI teachers to prevent it. The findings are expected to make a novel theoretical contribution to the body of knowledge on PAI pedagogy oriented toward social-pathology prevention and, practically, to serve as a blueprint for educators and policymakers in formulating integrative, theologically grounded, and child-friendly character-intervention programs.

2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive-exploratory qualitative design to capture, describe, and interpret the social phenomenon of bullying prevention in depth and within its natural context. To comprehensively dissect the dynamics of bullying prevention, the analysis was sharpened through two complementary analytical lenses: a pedagogical approach, used to evaluate, map, and analyze the effectiveness of the instructional strategies and preventive actions implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers; and a psychological approach, applied to unpack the behavioral aspects, mental states, and psychosocial drives of the students involved in the bullying cycle, whether as perpetrators, victims, or witnesses.

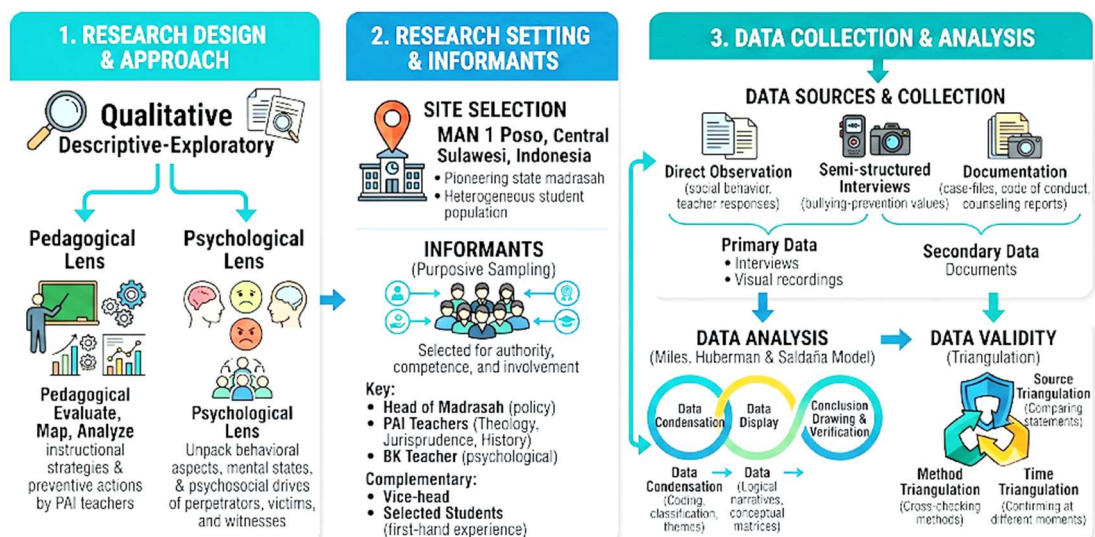


Figure 1. Research Methodology Framework

The research was conducted at Islamic Religious Education 1 Poso, Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. This site was purposively selected for its institutional character as one of the pioneering state Islamic Religious Education in the

region, representing the sociological heterogeneity of the local student population, with a subject base of 324 students in the 2025/2026 academic year. Informants were determined through purposive sampling to ensure that the selected subjects possessed authority, competence, and direct involvement relevant to the study's focus. Key informants comprised the head of madrasah as the highest policymaking authority; PAI teachers responsible for *Akidah Akhlak* (Islamic Theology and Ethics), Fikih (Islamic Jurisprudence), and *Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam* (History of Islamic Civilization); and the guidance-and-counseling teacher as the unit responsible for students' psychological handling. The vice-head of madrasah for student affairs was involved as a complementary informant to enrich the sociological and managerial perspective, and selected students were interviewed to obtain rich, saturated data reflecting first-hand peer experience.

Data were classified into two main categories: primary data, sourced from the verbal corpus of interviews and visual recordings of direct field observation, and secondary data, obtained through institutional document review, prior case-handling records, and internal madrasah regulations relevant to the topic. Data collection combined three adaptive techniques. Direct observation focused on students' social-interaction behavior outside the classroom and teachers' situational responses during peer friction. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were guided by a flexible interview protocol that allowed exploration of informants' accounts regarding the theological-pedagogical implementation of bullying-prevention values. Documentation study was used to validate empirical records such as case-handling files, the madrasah code of conduct, and periodic counseling reports.

Data analysis followed the interactive, continuous model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising three principal stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During condensation, raw data were coded and classified according to themes of bullying prevention and value internalization. Data was then presented in the form of logical narratives and conceptual matrices to facilitate valid conclusion drawing.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the data, the researchers applied rigorous triangulation techniques, comprising source triangulation (comparing statements across informants), method triangulation (cross-checking interview, observation, and documentary results), and time triangulation (confirming data at different moments and situations within the madrasah environment).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Forms of Bullying

The findings reveal that verbal bullying constitutes the most prevalent form of bullying occurring at Islamic Secondary School 1 Poso. Its manifestations include mocking peers' physical characteristics—such as commenting on skin color, height, or body weight—assigning inappropriate nicknames, invoking parents' names as objects of ridicule, and belittling peers' weaknesses or shortcomings. All informants concurred

that no significant cases of physical or relational (social) bullying were identified within the madrasah environment. Verbal bullying is frequently unrecognized as such by perpetrators, who regard it merely as joking, even though its psychological impact on victims is considerable, including feelings of shame, diminished self-confidence, and disrupted comfort in social interaction and learning.

PAI Teacher: "Cases of physical bullying—hitting or other physical violence—are almost never found in a significant way at our madrasah, and neither is extreme social exclusion. What remains our heaviest challenge is verbal bullying. It is the most dominant and frequently repeated behavior among our students, most often through body-shaming remarks, inappropriate nicknames, mockery involving parents' names, and belittling a peer's academic or personal shortcomings." (Informant 1)

Guidance and Counseling Teacher: "About 90 percent of the cases handled in our counseling room are verbal in nature. The core problem is a bias in awareness: perpetrators often do not realize they are bullying. Their usual alibi is, 'I was only joking.' Meanwhile, the impact on victims is substantial—many experience a sharp decline in self-confidence, shame, difficulty concentrating in class, and in some cases reluctance to attend school." (Informant 2)

Student: "Physical fights or students being completely excluded from friend groups are rare here. But teasing through words—that's something we hear almost every day, usually mocking a friend's parents, height, or skin color, said as a joke, even though the friend being teased often just goes quiet and stops wanting to talk." (Informant 3)

Factors Contributing to Bullying

Three principal categories of contributing factors were identified. First, family factors: disharmonious family conditions—such as parental divorce, frequent domestic conflict, or insufficient parental supervision—were found to influence the emergence of negative student behavior at school, as students from less conducive family environments tend to displace the emotional pressure they experience at home onto their peers. Second, school factors: disparities in social status, economic background, academic ability, or physical appearance among students have the potential to trigger bullying behavior, particularly in the absence of adequate supervision and guidance from the school. Third, social-media factors: exposure to violent content, hate speech, or aggressive behavior on social media contribute to shaping students' interaction patterns with peers in real life.

General Prevention Strategies (Classical-Cultural)

PAI teachers at Islamic Secondary School 1 Poso consistently provide moral guidance and instill noble character values—such as empathy, tolerance, and mutual respect—both within classroom instruction and across various madrasah activities, including morning assembly, congregational prayer, and flag-raising ceremonies. Teachers integrate bullying-prevention material into instruction by contextually linking

Qur'anic verses, hadith, and exemplary narratives of Islamic figures—such as the gentleness and honesty of Abu Bakr ash-Shiddiq—as models of conduct for emulation. Bullying-prevention material was also introduced during the Madrasah Student Orientation Period (Matsama) for incoming students as an early preventive measure and is further integrated into extracurricular activities such as Scouts and the Youth Red Cross (PMR).

PAI Teacher: "Broadly, we divide our efforts into two domains: a general strategy that is classical and collective, and a specific strategy that is more personal. For the general strategy, our focus is cultural habituation and reinforcing ethical values, every morning assembly, every sermon after congregational prayer, we never tire of weaving in messages about empathy, tolerance, and mutual respect. We also embed anti-bullying material from the very start, during Matsama for new students, and we collaborate with Scout and PMR coaches to carry these values into their activities." (Informant 1)

Specific Prevention Strategies (Personal)

Specific strategies focus on more targeted, personalized handling. PAI teachers adopt a personal approach to each student, building open communication to understand individual backgrounds, character, and emotional conditions. Within Akidah Akhlak instruction, teachers place particular emphasis on akhlakul karimah (noble character) and explain the dangers of reprehensible conduct such as *ghibah* (backbiting), *namimah* (slander), *fitnah* (defamation), and *tajassus* (the habitual pursuit of others' faults or weaknesses). Behaviors frequently identified as triggers of verbal bullying. Students are guided to understand the concept of *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) and the theological consequences of harming others through speech. Case handling is conducted collaboratively among PAI teachers, guidance and counseling teachers, homeroom teachers, the vice-head of student affairs, and the head of madrasah, involving parents when necessary. Guidance and counseling teachers are allocated dedicated weekly classroom time for routine evaluation and coaching.

*PAI Teacher: "In Akidah Akhlak class, we dissect together what *ghibah*, *namimah*, *fitnah*, and especially *tajassus* mean—the habit of searching for others' faults, which is often the spark behind verbal bullying. We guide students to grasp that hurting a friend through speech carries theological consequences within the concept of *ukhuwah Islamiyah*." (Informant 1)*

Guidance and Counseling Teacher: "We apply a cross-unit collaboration system, so handling bullying never happens in isolation. There is close cooperation among PAI teachers, our counseling unit, homeroom teachers, the vice-head of student affairs, and even the head of madrasah, and we involve parents directly whenever the impact escalates. We are also given a fixed weekly slot to enter classrooms for routine environmental evaluation and coaching." (Informant 2)

Sanctions

Sanctions applied at Islamic Secondary School 1 Poso are educative and proportionate to the severity of the violation. For minor infractions—such as unintentional mockery or careless harsh speech—PAI teachers assign religious, educative sanctions, requiring students to memorize and explain the content of specific Qur'anic verses or hadith prohibiting harm to fellow Muslims. For serious or chronic (repeated) violations, cases are referred fully to the Guidance and counseling unit, which processes them in stages according to the madrasah's code of ethics, beginning with private counseling, followed by a written agreement, and, if necessary, a parental summons for joint resolution.

Guidance and Counseling Teacher: "Our sanction principle is educative and measured. Minor violations are handled by the PAI teacher through religious sanctions such as memorizing and explaining a relevant verse or hadith about the prohibition of hurting fellow Muslims, because this touches their spiritual awareness. Serious or repeated violations move fully into our counseling process, private counseling, a written agreement, and, if needed, calling in the parents." (Informant 2)

Discussion

The dominance of verbal bullying found in this study corroborates prior findings in rural and semi-rural Islamic secondary schools, where peer-group dynamics tend to normalize verbal teasing as an accepted mode of social bonding rather than as an act of aggression (Abdurrohim et al., 2024; Arif et al., 2024; Nasirudin et al., 2026; Zahid, 2024). This normalization is closely tied to what Hensums et al. (2023), Polanin et al. (2022), Ng et al. (2022), and Xing et al. (2023) describe as the 'just kidding' alibi, a psycho-theological defense mechanism whereby perpetrators disavow the harm of their words by reframing bullying as humor. The present findings extend this argument empirically: both the PAI teacher and the guidance and counseling teacher at Islamic Secondary School 1 Poso independently identified this bias in awareness as the central obstacle to prevention, suggesting that interventions must target perpetrators' metacognition of harm, not merely their behavior.

The three contributing factors identified—family disharmony, school-environment disparities, and social-media exposure—are consistent with the multi-level ecological understanding of bullying documented in the literature. Family disharmony and insufficient parental supervision have been shown to correlate significantly with bullying involvement among students in public Islamic schools (Pang et al., 2025; Samsuddin & Khilmiyah, 2025), while exposure to violent or hateful content on social media has been found to shape offline interaction patterns among adolescents in Islamic Secondary Schools (Syafaq et al., 2026). The convergence of these three factors in a single research site underscores the systemic, rather than individual, nature of bullying causation, reinforcing the argument that prevention cannot rest on classroom instruction alone but must engage family and digital-literacy dimensions as well.

With respect to the strategies employed, the findings position PAI teachers not as peripheral moral commentators but as proactive psycho-spiritual agents, a role that diverges from earlier characterizations of PAI teachers as reactive figures confined to post-incident moral advice. The contextualization of QS. al-Hujurat/49:11 into classroom practice and school culture at Islamic Secondary School 1 Poso operationalizes what [Marolla-Gajardo and Lozano Mas \(2025\)](#) theorize as a theological framework for anti-bullying curricula, demonstrating that normative doctrine can be translated into a lived pedagogical methodology rather than remaining confined to textual instruction. Likewise, the explicit dissection of ghibah, namimah, fitnah, and tajassus as root behavioral triggers aligns with [Ahmed et al.'s \(2025\)](#) argument that these concepts provide a distinctly Islamic diagnostic vocabulary for identifying the antecedents of verbal and cyber bullying, offering an analytic lens that conventional counseling frameworks do not readily supply.

The study's findings on cross-unit collaboration—linking PAI teachers, guidance and counseling teachers, homeroom teachers, student-affairs leadership, and parents—resonate with prior evidence that collaborative intervention between Islamic education teachers and school counselors improves the consistency and reach of anti-bullying handling ([Hakim et al., 2025](#)) and that integrated monitoring systems synergizing school leadership, religious-education teachers, and parents strengthen institutional response capacity ([Azizah et al., 2025](#)). Embedding anti-bullying content within the Matsama orientation program further reflects the value of early, preventive exposure documented by [Fauzan and Sulaeman \(2022\)](#), while its extension into extracurricular activities such as Scouts and (Scouts and the Youth Red Cross) PMR mirrors findings that co-curricular integration reinforces solidarity values beyond the classroom.

Finally, the educative rather than purely punitive character of the sanctions applied at Islamic Secondary School 1 Poso—requiring reflection on religious texts for minor infractions and staged counseling for serious ones—supports the broader argument that religious edutainment forms of discipline are more effective than punitive regulation in reforming student conduct within Islamic Secondary School settings ([Fasya et al., 2023](#); [Mulyana, 2023](#)) and aligns with recent comparative evidence favoring educational sanctions over strictly punitive rules in faith-based institutions ([Akhyar et al., 2024](#)). Taken together, these findings suggest that the psycho-spiritual stewardship exercised by PAI teachers at Islamic Secondary School 1 Poso constitutes a coherent, theologically grounded model of bullying prevention that integrates classical-cultural habituation with personalized, collaborative, and restorative case management.

This study is not without limitations. As a single-site, descriptive-qualitative case study, its findings are context-bound and may not be directly generalizable to madrasahs with different institutional cultures or regional characteristics. The reliance on interviews and observational data also leaves open the possibility of self-report bias among informants. Future research would benefit from multi-site comparative designs, the inclusion of quantitative instruments to measure the prevalence and severity of bullying before and after intervention, and longitudinal designs capable of tracking the durability of behavioral change attributable to PAI teachers' strategies over time.

4. CONCLUSION

Bullying at Islamic Secondary School 1 Poso is predominantly manifested as verbal bullying—including physical mockery, negative labelling, and the exploitation of parents' names—triggered by a convergence of family disharmony, the school climate, and destructive exposure to social media, all of which significantly contribute to psycho-emotional disturbance among victims. In response, PAI teachers effectively implement an integrated preventive and interventional strategy through two complementary patterns: a general pattern grounded in the classical-cultural inculcation of prophetic moral values across madrasah activities, and a specific pattern anchored in personalized approaches, contextual-theological curriculum deepening (including the reduction of ghibah and tajassus behaviors), cross-unit collaboration with Guidance and counseling teachers and parents, and the application of educative-religious sanctions—all of which have proven capable of curbing the prevalence of bullying and fostering a safe, emancipatory, and conducive learning ecosystem.

This study recommends that the strategies employed by PAI teachers in preventing bullying be continuously developed and strengthened, both through enhancing teachers' capacity to detect and handle bullying cases and through reinforcing cooperation between the madrasah and students' families. In addition, madrasahs should continue to raise students' awareness of the impact of bullying through engaging and sustained programs, thereby cultivating a generation of young people of noble character who respect one another and are free from all forms of bullying.

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