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Civic Education and Bullying: Strengthening the Civic Disposition in Preventing Bullying in Junior High Schools

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EDUCAZIONE CIVICA E BULLISMO: POTENZIARE
LE DISPOSIZIONI CIVICHE PER PREVENIRE IL BULLISMO
NELLE SCUOLE MEDIE INFERIORI

ABSTRACT

Bullying is a persistent form of violence that disrupts the educational environment and harms students' emotional and academic development. Addressing bullying requires more than just punishment; it involves promoting civic virtues like responsibility, empathy, and respect that help students build inclusive communities. This qualitative case study examined how junior high schools in Surabaya use civic education, specifically the Pendidikan Pancasila (Pancasila Education) subject, to foster civic dispositions and prevent bullying. Data were collected from January to April 2024 through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis across four state junior high

schools. Participants included students, teachers, and principals. Interview transcripts and field notes were thematically coded and analyzed using NVivo 15. The findings show that schools have implemented procedures to prevent and address bullying, and that Pancasila Education classes effectively promote civic dispositions and reduce bullying incidents. By incorporating value-based activities such as case discussions, role plays, and anti-bullying declarations, schools encourage students to internalize democratic values and act as defenders rather than perpetrators or bystanders. The study emphasizes the importance of aligning civic education with broader anti-bullying strategies and offers recommendations for improving curriculum and policy.

Keywords: Bullying; Civic disposition; Civic education; Junior high schools; Qualitative case study.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a complex issue that harms students' well-being and affects the quality of teaching and learning. National data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) show that reports of school bullying continue to increase, especially in junior high schools (Lestari, 2018). Globally, research connects bullying to negative psychosocial outcomes, such as depression, loneliness, suicidal thoughts, and lower academic achievement (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Chen *et al.*, 2024). Current interventions range from legal punishments to school-based programs, but many emphasize responses after incidents rather than focusing on developing the character traits needed to prevent violence. Civic disposition is the habit of mind and heart that encourages responsible participation in civic life. It offers a promising approach to preventing bullying. Studies on character and civic education show that civic education can promote respect for others, empathy, and social responsibility (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Komalasari, 2018; Ramadhani & Halimi, 2023). Anti-bullying advocates have also been shown to foster civic dispositions that reduce bullying (Suhendar & Halimi, 2023).

Despite an increasing amount of research on anti-bullying programs, studies rarely examine how civic education influences the development of civic dispositions that promote pro-social behavior. This study fills this gap by exploring how junior high schools in Surabaya implement civic education to build civic dispositions and reduce bullying. The study is guided by two questions: (1) How is civic education carried out to foster civic dispositions that prevent bullying in junior high schools? (2) How do students,

teachers, and principals view the effectiveness of civic education, especially Pancasila Education, in stopping bullying? By addressing these questions, the research adds to the literature on character education and offers practical advice for educators and policymakers interested in sustainable, value-based strategies to prevent bullying.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. *Research design*

This research used a qualitative case study approach to thoroughly examine the role of civic education in preventing bullying. The case study method is appropriate for exploring phenomena closely connected to their real-world context and needing multiple sources of evidence to understand their complexity (Yin, 2018). The study was conducted in four public junior high schools in Surabaya, selected intentionally for their involvement in anti-bullying efforts and willingness to participate.

2.2. *Data collection*

Data were gathered from January to April 2024. Three complementary methods were used:

- a. *Semi-structured interviews* – A total of twenty-four interviews were conducted: sixteen with students in grades 7-9, six with teachers, and two with principals. The questions focused on participants' experiences with bullying, their understanding of civic responsibility, and their views on Pancasila Education classes. Sample questions included: «Can you describe how bullying is handled at your school?», «What values from Pancasila Education encourage respecting others?», and «How have these lessons affected your behavior around peers?». Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, was recorded, and transcribed verbatim.
- b. *Classroom observations* – Six classroom observations, each lasting 90 minutes, were conducted during Pancasila Education lessons focusing on topics such as human rights, diversity, and democratic participation. Notes recorded teaching strategies, student engagement levels, instances of bullying or supportive actions, and how teachers guided discussions

- on civic values. Each classroom was observed twice to ensure a comprehensive assessment over time.
- c. *Document analysis* – Relevant documents such as school anti-bullying policies, lesson plans, student declarations, and NVivo coding reports were examined to triangulate the findings. Ethical protocols were followed: informed consent was obtained from all participants and their parents, and the study received approval from the ethics committee of Universitas Negeri Surabaya. Participants' identities were protected with anonymous codes (e.g., S1 for student 1).

2.3. Participants

Purposive sampling ensured that participants provided rich, relevant information for the study. *Table 1* summarizes the characteristics of the sample.

Table 1. – Sample characteristics.

PARTICIPANT GROUP	NUMBER (N)	AGE RANGE	GENDER (F/M)	NOTES
Students	16	13-15 years	9/7	Recruited from grades 7-9 in four schools
Teachers	6	28-50 years	4/2	Pancasila Education teachers and counsellors
Principals	2	45-55 years	1/1	School leaders responsible for anti-bullying policies
Schools	4	–	–	Public junior high schools in Surabaya

The characteristics of the research participants, as summarized in *Table 1*, provide an essential foundation for understanding the complex dynamics of bullying prevention and character education in Indonesian public junior high schools. The sample includes 16 students, six teachers, two school principals, and 4 schools, enabling a multilevel analysis across individual, interpersonal, and organizational contexts.

At the student level, participants aged 13-15 represent early adolescence, a stage when peer relationships strengthen and vulnerabilities related to bullying become more apparent. The fairly balanced gender distribution (9 females, 7 males) provides cross-gender insights into experiences of safety, peer norms, and bystander behavior. Teachers, aged 28 to 50, include both Pancasila Education teachers and school counselors, positioning them as key figures in translating value-based pedagogy into preventive

and responsive practices. The participation of two principals, each leading one of the four schools, allows the study to gather institutional perspectives on policy enforcement, school culture, and leadership's influence on anti-bullying efforts. Including four public schools in Surabaya adds contextual variation and improves the ecological validity of the findings.

These multi-actor and multi-institutional features guided the analytical approach and formed the basis for the multilevel actor map shown in *Figure 1*. The figure illustrates how student experiences, teacher practices, leadership policies, and broader school environments interact as interconnected layers influencing the implementation of anti-bullying and character-building initiatives.

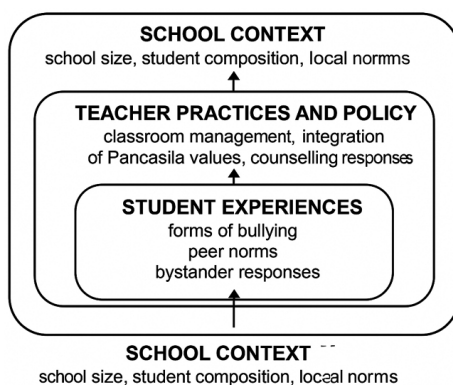


Figure 1. – Multilevel actor map of anti-bullying and character education in public junior high schools.

2.4. Data analysis

Interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documents were analyzed thematically using NVivo 15. Coding employed a hybrid inductive-deductive approach. Deductive codes were based on the concept of civic disposition (e.g., responsibility, empathy, respect, participation), while inductive codes emerged from participants' narratives. Code frequencies were examined to determine thematic saturation, and relationships among codes were visualized with conceptual models. Divergent cases and disconfirming evidence were identified to enhance analytical rigor. Peer debriefing sessions among the research team helped improve coding and interpretations.

3. RESULTS

The analysis identified four main themes: (1) institutional procedures for preventing and addressing bullying, (2) the effectiveness of Pancasila Education in fostering civic responsibility, (3) the internalization of civic values by students, and (4) challenges and differing viewpoints. *Table 2* summarizes the themes and code frequencies.

Table 2. – Themes and code frequency.

No	THEME	CODE FREQUENCY (N)	ILLUSTRATIVE CODES	DESCRIPTION
1	Anti-bullying procedures	34	Reporting mechanisms, disciplinary sanctions, peer mediation, anti-bullying declaration	Schools have formal guidelines outlining reporting channels, sanctions and restorative practices. Regular declarations during student orientation emphasise zero tolerance for bullying.
2	Effectiveness of Pancasila Education	28	Case discussions, value clarification, role-playing	Participants noted that lessons on diversity, human rights and mutual respect made students more aware of the harmful nature of bullying. Teachers used current cases to make material relevant, and students internalised lessons through role-play.
3	Internalisation of civic values	26	Responsibility, empathy, respect, participation	Students reported greater sensitivity to peers' feelings and a willingness to intervene when witnessing bullying. Teachers observed improvements in students' empathy and respect for others' rights.
4	Challenges and divergent perspectives	12	Limited time, deep-rooted norms, inconsistent enforcement	Some participants felt that change was gradual and that entrenched cultural norms and limited instructional time hindered impact. A few students viewed bullying as harmless teasing, indicating the need for continued education.

3.1. *Anti-bullying procedures*

The *Figure 2* shows that preventing bullying behavior can be achieved through various management methods and case-specific interventions, especially in junior high schools in Surabaya. These cases demonstrate that handling is carried out according to procedures unique to each school to effectively address bullying among students and ensure proper resolution. Overall, bullying remains a common issue in Surabaya's schools because it is a global problem that can affect students' mental and social well-being (Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

All participating schools had formal procedures to prevent and respond to bullying. These included reporting systems, counselor mediation, and clear disciplinary sanctions. Students recalled an annual anti-bullying declaration signed at the beginning of the school year: «Every new student is required to sign a declaration stating what is allowed and what is not allowed», explained one student (S3). Teachers emphasized that consistent enforcement and support from school leaders are essential for fostering a culture of safety.

Research warns, however, that punitive and short-term measures alone are not enough for effective bullying prevention. A brief from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2017) notes that zero-tolerance policies might discourage reporting and fail to address the complex power dynamics involved in bullying; it also cautions that conflict resolution and peer mediation are inappropriate because bullying is a form of victimization rather than a mutual conflict. The same brief emphasizes that simple, short-term solutions, such as assemblies or isolated lessons, do not significantly reduce bullying; instead, schools need to change their climate and expectations for behavior.

A report by the National School Climate Center (NSCC) similarly contends that the best remedy for bullying is to create positive school climates; thus, effective bullying prevention is equivalent to improving school climate (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013). Empirical studies have demonstrated that supportive school climates characterized by healthy relationships, clear norms, and emotional safety reduce bullying and promote bystander intervention (Abraczinskas *et al.*, 2022). These insights highlight the importance of restorative practices, student empowerment, and climate-wide initiatives beyond disciplinary actions.

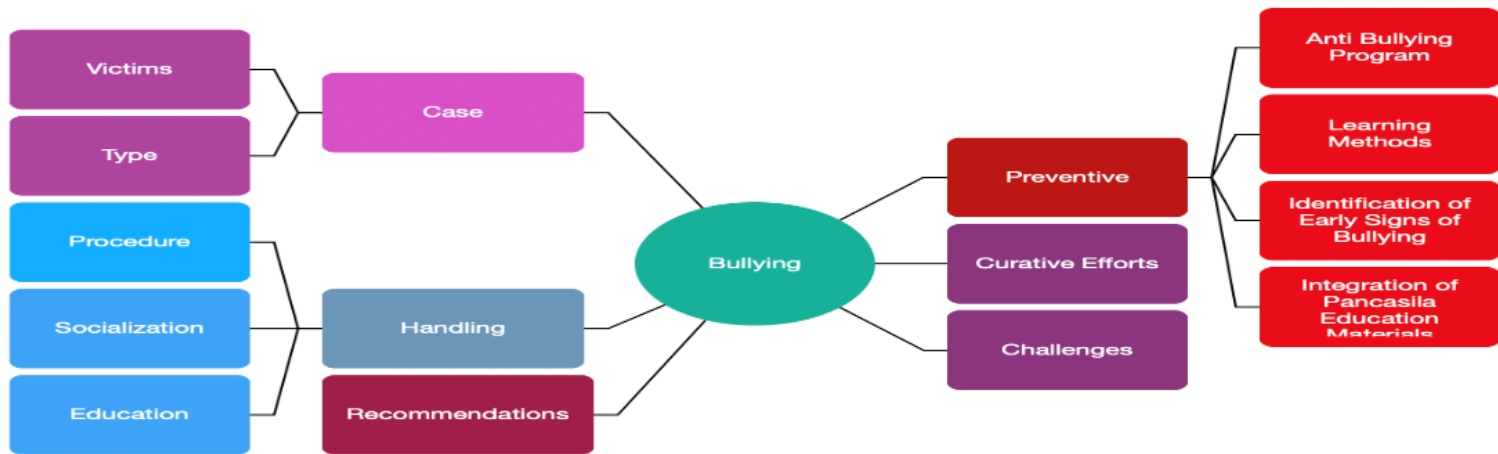


Figure 2. – Prevention of bullying practices in schools.

3.2. Effectiveness of Pancasila Education

Pancasila Education has become a key platform for cultivating civic values. Teachers reported using case studies, current events, and role-playing to help students understand the impact of bullying: «When we discuss racial diversity, students realize that mocking a friend for their appearance constitutes verbal bullying», a teacher (S3) noted. Students echoed this view; one mentioned that discussing real cases made the lessons more meaningful and encouraged them to change (S1). The repeated structure of the curriculum covering rights and responsibilities in grade 9, rules and constitutions in grade 8, and core values in grade 7, helped students connect ideas across grades and internalize values.

The role of civic education in moral growth and violence prevention is well documented in the literature. Research-based character education programs emphasize values clarification, moral reasoning, and participatory learning; such programs have been shown to promote prosocial behavior and reduce aggression (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Komalasari (2018) reports that living values education within Pancasila Education nurtures civic disposition by modeling respect and tolerance.

Ramadhani and Halimi (2023) explain that civic education consists of cognitive knowledge, civic skills, and civic disposition, which they define as attitudes that support constitutional democracy and manifest as open, tolerant, and responsible behaviour. Peer-led initiatives complement formal instruction; in Indonesia's ROOTS program, thirty students are selected as anti-bullying change agents who spread positive messages, model good behaviour, and reduce the impact of bullying (Suhendar & Halimi, 2023). The success of such initiatives supports the argument that civic education can be a powerful tool for cultivating dispositions that counteract bullying. Similarly, Hutchins (2014) argues that aligning anti-bullying lessons with civic duty and the common good increases student buy-in and encourages them to defend their peers.

3.3. Internalisation of civic values

Participants consistently emphasized the development of responsibility, empathy, and respect. One teacher noted that «students who once participated in bullying now hesitate because they understand the impact on victims». Students also reported feeling more comfortable defending peers and reporting incidents. This aligns with research showing that civic education improves students' social skills, sense of belonging, and willingness

to intervene (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Komalasari, 2018). It further reflects findings from Indonesian initiatives where anti-bullying change agents helped foster good civic dispositions and reduce bullying (Suhendar & Halimi, 2023).

Furthermore, our findings align with recent research on school climate and civic education. Damayanti *et al.* (2024) document that school environments characterized by safety, emotional support, and healthy interpersonal relationships decrease the frequency and severity of bullying, and that civic education promotes social awareness, virtues, and participation in anti-bullying initiatives. Research summarized by Abraczinskas *et al.* (2022) indicates that positive school climates – defined by supportive relationships, perceptions of safety, and explicit norms are linked to fewer bullying incidents, and norms that encourage bystander intervention result in lower rates of bullying. They also emphasize that establishing a supportive climate requires attention to youth voice and autonomy, especially during adolescence. Our participants' focus on empathy and respect supports these findings and underscores the integrative role of Pancasila Education in fostering civic virtues.

3.4. *Challenges and different perspectives*

Although most participants acknowledged the benefits of civic education, some expressed concerns. Teachers noted limited instructional time for value-oriented activities, while students said that social norms sometimes normalised mild teasing. A principal warned that «change takes time; we see progress, but deeply rooted habits do not vanish overnight». These divergent perspectives underscore the need for sustained efforts and broader community involvement.

International scholarship reflects these challenges. Abraczinskas *et al.* (2022) report that perceptions of school climate differ among student groups; marginalized students, including racial minorities, LGBT youth, and students with disabilities, often describe more negative climate experiences and are disproportionately targeted by bullying. The same study notes that school-wide interventions such as SWPBIS produce mixed results for marginalized students and may not fully address disparities. A report by the NSCC warns that many schools implement short-term «bullying prevention» programs or punitive approaches that are separate from climate improvement and thus have limited positive effects (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013). These insights highlight the need for inclusive, systemic strategies that involve students from diverse backgrounds and challenge cultural norms that normalize teasing.

3.5. *Conceptual model*

To visualize the relationships found in the analysis, *Figure 3* shows a conceptual model that explains how civic education promotes civic dispositions such as responsibility, empathy, and respect, and how these dispositions help create an inclusive school climate and prevent bullying. The model demonstrates the mediating role of civic dispositions in the relationship between educational inputs and behavioral outcomes.

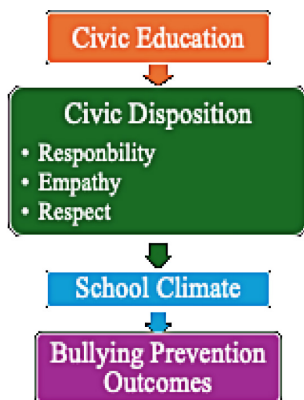


Figure 3. – Conceptual model illustrating the relationships between civic education, civic disposition (with sub-components responsibility, empathy and respect), school climate and bullying prevention.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. *Interpreting the findings in light of international literature*

The results show that civic education, particularly Pancasila Education, can develop civic dispositions that discourage bullying. This finding aligns with international research advocating holistic, integrated approaches to bullying prevention. Character education experts claim that programs based on moral reasoning, participatory learning, and parental involvement reduce aggression and promote prosocial behavior (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Policy briefs from the National School Climate Center highlight that effective bullying prevention is inseparable

from improving school climate and warn against isolating anti-bullying efforts from broader climate reforms (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013).

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2017) similarly advises that zero-tolerance policies, peer mediation, and short-term solutions are ineffective, and that schools need to change their climate and behavioral expectations instead. Recent research shows that positive school climates reduce bullying and that involving students in setting norms improves program effectiveness (Abraczinskas *et al.*, 2022). By emphasizing values such as empathy, respect, and social responsibility, civic education helps students recognize the harm caused by bullying and develop the skills to intervene. Our findings build on this research by highlighting the unique role of civic disposition: rather than simply discouraging negative behavior, Pancasila Education encourages students to internalize positive civic virtues.

The study also highlights the importance of peer influence. Anti-bullying change agents and peer educators have been shown to model prosocial behavior and reduce bullying (Suhendar & Halimi, 2023). In our case, the annual anti-bullying declaration and student-led campaigns fostered a sense of collective responsibility. This aligns with research indicating that supportive peer environments improve the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs and that aligning civic messages with students' sense of duty toward the common good increases engagement (Hutchins, 2014).

4.2. *Original contributions and theoretical implications*

While previous studies have examined anti-bullying programs, few have explored civic disposition as a mediating mechanism. The current study adds to theory by suggesting that civic disposition is not just a result of civic education but also a pathway through which education influences behavior. This view encourages educators to develop curricula that explicitly teach civic virtues and give students opportunities to practice them. The conceptual model (*Fig. 1*) illustrates this mechanism and could guide future research on character education.

4.3. *Practical implications*

For practitioners, the findings suggest that integrating civic education into antibullying policies can enhance prevention efforts. Schools should: (1) set aside enough time for discussions about values and rights; (2) adopt

participatory methods such as case studies and roleplays; (3) involve students in creating and signing antibullying declarations; and (4) involve parents and communities to strengthen civic values outside the classroom. Policymakers might consider updating curricula to emphasize civic virtues and providing teacher training on leading sensitive discussions.

4.4. Comparison with other contexts

Research from other countries similarly emphasizes that civic education can reduce bullying by enhancing students' social skills and sense of belonging. Large-scale reviews indicate that comprehensive school-based programs incorporating character education and parental involvement are effective across various settings (Tofi & Farrington, 2011). Although legal frameworks, cultural norms, and curriculum structures vary, the core idea that civic education develops attitudes that prevent bullying remains consistent. Our findings from Surabaya thus add an Indonesian perspective to this global discussion and show how local values (Pancasila) can be used to promote character development.

4.5. Limitations and future research

Several limitations should be considered. First, the sample was relatively small and drawn from schools that were already proactive in anti-bullying initiatives, which may limit generalizability. Second, as a qualitative case study, the findings are based on self-reported perceptions and may be influenced by social desirability. Third, the cross-sectional design does not capture long-term changes in behavior. Finally, the analysis relied on thematic coding; while measures were taken to ensure rigor, researcher bias cannot be eliminated entirely.

Future research could address these limitations by using larger, more diverse samples and including quantitative measures of bullying incidents and civic attitudes. Longitudinal designs would offer insights into how civic education impacts behavior over time. Comparative studies across different regions or countries could examine cultural differences in the link between civic disposition and bullying. Additionally, experimental studies might test specific teaching methods that promote civic virtues.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the importance of civic education as a tool to prevent bullying in junior high schools. By encouraging civic values such as responsibility, empathy, and respect, Pancasila Education helps students internalize democratic principles and act as defenders rather than perpetrators or passive bystanders. Participants viewed the program as effective and observed improvements in school climate, although they also recognized ongoing challenges and cultural norms that need continuous effort. Schools and policymakers should therefore incorporate civic education into anti-bullying initiatives, dedicate time for reflective learning, and collaborate with parents and communities. Building the civic dispositions of young people is not only crucial for preventing bullying but also for developing active, compassionate citizens.

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RIASSUNTO

Il fenomeno del bullismo continua a rappresentare una criticità rilevante per il benessere psicologico e il rendimento scolastico degli studenti. Le risposte punitive da sole non risultano sufficienti; la prevenzione richiede un percorso educativo capace di sviluppare responsabilità, empatia e rispetto, ovvero quelle disposizioni civiche che favoriscono relazioni scolastiche più inclusive. Questo studio di caso qualitativo analizza in che modo alcune scuole medie inferiori di Surabaya integrino l'educazione civica – in particolare l'insegnamento della Pendidikan Pancasila, all'interno delle strategie di prevenzione del bullismo. La ricerca si basa su interviste semistrutturate, osservazioni in classe e analisi documentarie condotte tra gennaio e aprile 2024 in quattro scuole pubbliche. Gli studenti, gli insegnanti e i dirigenti scolastici intervistati evidenziano l'efficacia di attività didattiche fondate sui valori, come discussioni di casi reali, esercitazioni di role-play e dichiarazioni antibullismo, che contribuiscono a interiorizzare i principi democratici e a promuovere comportamenti di tutela verso i compagni. I risultati mostrano che tali pratiche non solo supportano l'attuazione dei protocolli scolastici contro il bullismo, ma favoriscono anche un clima relazionale più collaborativo. Lo studio propone, in conclusione, alcune indicazioni per il rafforzamento curricolare e per politiche educative orientate alla prevenzione.

Parole chiave: Bullismo; Disposizioni civiche; Educazione civica; Scuole medie inferiori; Studio qualitativo.

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