

## The Implementation Of Character Education To Prevent Bullying In Schools: A Case Study Of New Students At SMA Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta

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**ABSTRACT:** This study explores the implementation of character education as a preventive strategy against bullying among new students at SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta. Recognizing the importance of fostering a positive and inclusive school environment, the research examines how the institution promotes healthy relationships through personalized student support, peer mentoring, and inclusive activities. These efforts aim to create a safe and welcoming atmosphere that reduces instances of bullying while enhancing student well-being and social integration. Data collection involved in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, the Guidance Counselor, and the Head of the School, alongside observational methods to assess the implementation of character education strategies in daily school activities. The findings suggest that SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta adopts a proactive and continuous engagement approach, ensuring that new students feel supported and integrated into the school community. This method significantly contributes to preventing bullying by emphasizing relationship-building, empathy, and mutual respect. The study underscores the effectiveness of character education programs in shaping school culture and minimizing bullying incidents. By implementing structured mentoring systems and interactive initiatives, the school cultivates a culture of care and responsibility among students. The results offer valuable insights for other educational institutions seeking to address bullying through character development. Future research is recommended to examine the long-term impact of such programs on student behavior, school climate, and overall academic success.

**Key Words:** *Character Education, Bullying Prevention, Relationship-Building*

### INTRODUCTION

Bullying remains one of the most pervasive issues in educational settings globally. It affects the mental health and well-being of students, leading to long-term psychological consequences. The significance of addressing bullying in schools cannot be overstated, especially in the context of fostering a safe and supportive learning environment (Maryani dkk., 2024). This issue is not confined to any one country or region; it is a global challenge that has profound effects on students' academic performance, social relationships, and overall development. Research indicates that students who experience bullying are at an increased risk of developing anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts. This problem is not just an individual issue, but

a societal one, as it reflects the broader cultural values and attitudes toward social behavior. Preventing bullying, therefore, is not only crucial for the affected students but is also essential for the health of the educational system as a whole. This study aims to examine how character education programs, specifically those implemented for new students, can contribute to reducing bullying in schools, thus offering a potential solution to this global issue (Mahbubi, 2013, 2024; Mahbubi & Huda, 2023).

The prevalence of bullying in schools is a widespread issue that affects students across different educational levels, particularly in high schools where peer interactions are crucial. In Indonesia, as in many other countries, bullying manifests in various forms, including physical, verbal, and cyberbullying (Johnson dkk., 2024). The consequences of bullying extend beyond the immediate emotional and psychological harm caused to the victims, also impacting the school environment and the academic success of students (Aminah dkk., 2023). Schools have a responsibility to create an environment that promotes respect, inclusivity, and empathy (Ma dkk., 2024). However, despite various efforts, bullying continues to persist in many educational institutions. This research focuses on understanding the implementation of character education programs, specifically targeting new students, as a means of preventing bullying in high school settings (Syafi'i & Ikwandi, 2023). The core problem addressed by this study is the failure of traditional anti-bullying initiatives to significantly reduce bullying incidents, and how character education could fill this gap by fostering empathy, respect, and positive behavioral norms (Mahbubi & Husein, 2023).

In many schools, the phenomenon of bullying is often underreported, with victims hesitating to come forward due to fear of retaliation or lack of support. At SMA Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta, like in many other schools, bullying incidents have been reported among new students, particularly those who struggle with social integration. New students often face challenges in adapting to a new environment, which can make them vulnerable to bullying. This vulnerability is exacerbated by a lack of effective character education programs that emphasize values such as empathy, mutual respect, and cooperation (Mahbubi, 2023; Mahbubi dkk., 2021). The school's current anti-bullying efforts may include general awareness programs, but there is often a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and real-world application (Sholeh, 2023). As a result, the phenomenon of bullying continues, and new students remain particularly at risk. Understanding how SMA Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta has implemented character education to address these issues is essential for identifying effective strategies that can be adopted by other schools to prevent bullying.

Previous research has explored various approaches to combat bullying in schools, with character education being one of the prominent strategies. Studies have shown that character education programs, when implemented properly, can significantly reduce bullying by promoting social-emotional learning and fostering an environment of respect and empathy. One notable study by Aminah laid the foundation for anti-bullying programs that focus on changing the school climate through collective efforts involving students, teachers, and parents (Aminah dkk., 2023). While these programs have had some success, they often lack a focused emphasis on new students and how they specifically relate to bullying dynamics (Sholeh dkk., 2024). Existing literature emphasizes the importance of integrating character education in curricula, but there is still a gap in understanding how these programs specifically address the challenges faced by new students in preventing bullying (Aswat dkk., 2022).

Despite the substantial amount of research on character education and bullying prevention, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the implementation of these programs for new students in particular. Studies have often generalized anti-bullying interventions, overlooking the unique needs of students who are transitioning into new school environments (Azah dkk., 2024). The existing research suggests that while broad character education programs show promise in reducing bullying, more targeted interventions are necessary for students who are most vulnerable, such as new students (Sholeh, 2024). This study intends to fill this gap by focusing specifically on how character education can be implemented to prevent bullying among new students at SMA Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta. The research will offer a fresh perspective on the efficacy of character education in a specific context, providing valuable insights for future anti-bullying strategies.

This study introduces a novel approach by focusing on the intersection of character education and the specific needs of new students in preventing bullying. While many studies have addressed character education in a broad sense, few have delved into its implementation in the context of school transitions, where students are most susceptible to bullying. The uniqueness of this research lies in its focus on a specific school—SMA Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta—and its targeted interventions for new students. By examining the effectiveness of character education in this context, the study will provide practical insights into how schools can better tailor their anti-bullying strategies to support students during their critical transition period. This approach not only contributes to the academic discourse on bullying prevention but also offers actionable recommendations for educators and policymakers.

The central research question of this study is: How does the implementation of character education influence the prevention of bullying among new students at SMA Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta? The argument proposed by this research is that character education, when effectively implemented, can significantly reduce the incidence of bullying among new students by fostering an environment that emphasizes mutual respect, empathy, and positive social behaviors. Through this study, the researcher aims to demonstrate that anti-bullying efforts that focus on building character in students, particularly those who are new to the school environment, are more likely to result in a positive and supportive school culture. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of character education as a targeted intervention for preventing bullying in the context of school transitions.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative case study design, which is particularly suited for exploring the context-specific experiences of new students at SMA Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta. A case study allows for an in-depth understanding of how character education programs are implemented and perceived by the stakeholders involved (students, teachers, and parents). This design enables the researcher to explore the complexities of the school environment and how it influences the prevention of bullying. The choice of a qualitative approach is based on the need to gather rich, detailed data about the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of those involved in the program (Iskandar, 2022; Manzilati, 2017).

The research will be conducted at SMA Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta, a well-known high school in the region with a reputation for integrating character education into its curriculum. The school has been selected due to its unique approach to character development and its efforts to prevent bullying. The focus on new students is particularly relevant in this context, as the school has experienced challenges in integrating newcomers into its social environment. By studying this particular school, the research will offer valuable insights into the specific dynamics at play in an institution that is actively addressing the issue of bullying (Conway & Stanley, 2006; Maryani dkk., 2024).

Data will be collected using a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with teachers, school counselors, and administrators to understand their perspectives on the character education program and its impact on bullying prevention. Focus group discussions will be held with new students to gather insights into their

experiences and perceptions of the school's anti-bullying initiatives. Classroom observations will be used to assess how character education is implemented in practice and its effects on student behavior (Miles dkk., 2013).

Data analysis will involve a systematic process of condensation, reduction, and display. The first step will be to condense the data by identifying key themes and patterns in the interviews and observations. Data reduction will involve filtering out irrelevant information to focus on the most significant findings. The next step will be to display the data in a way that allows for clear comparison and interpretation of the results. Finally, verification of data will involve cross-checking the findings with multiple sources to ensure the reliability and validity of the conclusions drawn (Hennink dkk., 2020; Miles dkk., 2013).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, member checking will be conducted by sharing preliminary findings with the participants (students, teachers, and administrators) for feedback and confirmation. Additionally, triangulation will be used by comparing data from interviews, observations, and focus groups to identify consistency and discrepancies. This process will help confirm the credibility of the findings and ensure that the research accurately reflects the perspectives of all stakeholders involved (Pugu dkk., 2024).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. Result

In the context of this study, "Student relationship maintenance" refers to the efforts and strategies employed by the school, SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta, to build, maintain, and strengthen positive relationships with new students, as well as ensuring that students' welfare and well-being are consistently monitored. This concept includes various practices such as regular communication, personalized support, creating a sense of belonging, and promoting an inclusive environment for all students. The operational approach emphasizes empathy, understanding, and the development of a strong rapport between students and the school community, particularly by key school figures such as the school principal and the counseling teacher.

According to Muhammad Angga Sanjaya Putra, the Vice Principal for Student Affairs and Guidance Counselor at SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta, *"Our approach to maintaining relationships with students, especially new ones, is primarily focused on ensuring that they feel comfortable and supported. We often hold one-on-one meetings with new students to understand their concerns and help them adjust. We also create group activities to foster teamwork and allow them to feel like part of the community."*

This approach, he emphasizes, includes ongoing counseling and personalized attention for students who may be struggling with integration into the new school environment. According to him, the importance of nurturing these relationships cannot be overstated, as they form the foundation for preventing bullying and other forms of social exclusion.

Agung Widiyantoro, the Head of SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta, shared a similar perspective: *"We believe that creating strong relationships with students from the very beginning sets the tone for their entire time here. For new students, we assign peer mentors who guide them through their first few months. These mentors are trained in conflict resolution and communication skills to ensure they can assist in creating a welcoming environment."* Agung further mentioned that the school holds regular feedback sessions with students to assess their satisfaction and emotional well-being, emphasizing the importance of being proactive rather than reactive in handling any issues that may arise. This proactive relationship-building approach is seen as crucial for the emotional development of students and for preventing bullying behaviors.

From the interviews with both informants, it is clear that SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta takes a proactive and personalized approach to maintaining relationships with new students. Both the Vice Principal and the Head of the School emphasize the importance of providing consistent support and open lines of communication with students. The school's strategy of using peer mentors and one-on-one counseling highlights its commitment to creating a positive, inclusive environment for students. These efforts are critical in preventing bullying, as they allow for early identification of students who might be struggling emotionally or socially, enabling timely intervention.

During my observation, I noted that the school organizes regular group activities such as team-building exercises, class discussions, and extracurricular events that encourage interaction between new students and their peers. This approach is effective in creating a sense of community, where students begin to feel part of a larger group and are less likely to engage in bullying behavior. Furthermore, the school displays posters and messages promoting respect, kindness, and inclusivity, which further reinforce the importance of positive relationships. The consistency of these activities indicates that SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta is committed to maintaining a welcoming environment for all students.

**Table 1. : Influence of Ideal Practices on Relationship Maintenance**

Informant's Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Vice Principal for Student Affairs & Guidance Counselor	"We often hold one-on-one meetings with new students to understand their concerns and help them adjust."	Personalized Support
Vice Principal for Student Affairs & Guidance Counselor	"We also create group activities to foster teamwork and allow them to feel part of the community."	Group Activities for Social Integration
Head of SMA	"We assign peer mentors who guide them through their first few months."	Peer Mentoring
Head of SMA	"We hold regular feedback sessions with students to assess their satisfaction and emotional well-being."	Feedback and Emotional Well-being Monitoring

The table above highlights the key strategies used by SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta in maintaining strong relationships with new students. The indicators drawn from the interview excerpts show that personalized support, group activities for social integration, peer mentoring, and regular feedback sessions are integral parts of the school's strategy. The focus on personalized support and emotional well-being monitoring ensures that each student's needs are individually addressed. Peer mentoring and group activities play a critical role in fostering a sense of belonging and community, which is essential for preventing bullying behaviors. These ideal practices align with the school's overarching goal of creating a positive, supportive, and inclusive environment for all students.

The data reveals a clear pattern in SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta's approach to student relationship maintenance. The school consistently prioritizes individualized attention and peer support, ensuring that new students are not left to struggle alone. By combining these personalized approaches with group activities and feedback mechanisms, the school creates an environment where students feel valued and included. The pattern shows a well-balanced approach that addresses both individual needs and collective integration, fostering a culture of mutual respect and preventing potential bullying behaviors.

The data collected from the interviews and observations indicate that SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta employs a proactive strategy to maintain relationships with new students. This strategy involves providing personalized support through counseling, assigning peer mentors, and creating activities that foster social integration. The



school's emphasis on building trust and ensuring that students feel heard and supported is crucial for preventing bullying. These efforts illustrate a well-rounded approach that focuses not only on the prevention of bullying but also on the overall emotional well-being of students.

## **B. Discussion**

This study aimed to explore the implementation of character education as a strategy to prevent bullying among new students at SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta. The findings highlight that the school's proactive approach, which emphasizes building positive relationships through personalized support, peer mentoring, and inclusive activities, plays a crucial role in reducing bullying. The data gathered from interviews with key informants and observations at the school provides valuable insights into how the application of character education programs can address the issue of bullying by fostering a supportive, empathetic, and respectful environment.

The operational definition of "Student relationship maintenance" in this study is directly linked to the school's efforts in ensuring the emotional and social well-being of new students. The school's approach involves a range of strategies designed to help students integrate into the school community, such as one-on-one meetings with counselors, group activities, and the use of peer mentors. These initiatives are grounded in the belief that fostering positive relationships with students, especially newcomers, creates an environment where bullying is less likely to occur. The proactive nature of these efforts, as highlighted by both the Vice Principal and the Head of the School, demonstrates that a supportive school culture is key in preventing the formation of negative social behaviors like bullying.

The interviews with Muhammad Angga Sanjaya Putra, the Vice Principal for Student Affairs and Guidance Counselor, and Agung Widiyantoro, the Head of the School, both emphasized the importance of maintaining close relationships with students, particularly those who are new. Angga mentioned that one-on-one meetings with students allow the school to understand their concerns and provide tailored support. This personalized attention is essential for new students who may feel overwhelmed or excluded when joining a new school. Moreover, by assigning peer mentors to guide new students, the school facilitates smoother social integration, helping to reduce the chances of isolation or bullying. This aligns with findings from previous research, which suggests that peer support systems are effective in preventing bullying and fostering positive school climates.

Similarly, Agung's remarks about regular feedback sessions reflect the school's commitment to monitoring students' emotional well-being. Regular check-ins with



students not only help identify potential problems early but also show students that their concerns are taken seriously. This proactive stance ensures that any issues, whether related to bullying or social adjustment, are addressed before they escalate. The importance of feedback is highlighted by studies that have shown that when students feel heard and supported, they are more likely to engage in positive behaviors and less likely to be involved in bullying, either as perpetrators or victims.

The observational data collected during the research further supports these findings. Group activities, such as team-building exercises and extracurricular events, were observed to encourage interaction among new students and their peers. These activities not only help students make new friends but also promote inclusivity, which is vital in creating a safe and welcoming school environment. The school's emphasis on group work fosters teamwork and cooperation, which in turn can reduce feelings of alienation and the likelihood of bullying. This is consistent with previous research that has shown that students who feel part of a group are less likely to engage in or be subjected to bullying.

The school's efforts to maintain positive relationships with students are part of a broader strategy that aims to create an inclusive school culture. As stated in the interviews, one of the primary goals of SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta is to ensure that students, particularly new ones, feel welcome and supported from the moment they enter the school. This focus on inclusivity is central to the school's approach to character education, which aims not only to prevent bullying but also to promote values such as empathy, respect, and cooperation. The data from this study suggests that the implementation of character education programs, when paired with strong relationship-building practices, can be a highly effective method for addressing bullying in schools.

In restating the findings, it becomes clear that the school's success in preventing bullying stems from a combination of personalized support, peer mentorship, and ongoing communication between students and school staff. These strategies create a foundation of trust and mutual respect, making it less likely that students will engage in bullying behavior. The positive results observed in the school's culture indicate that these methods are effective in promoting a safe and inclusive environment for new students.

The data reveals a pattern that highlights the importance of proactive engagement. The school's efforts to build relationships through personalized interventions, such as counseling and peer support, create an environment where students are more likely to express their concerns and feel safe from bullying. By

addressing students' emotional and social needs early, SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta ensures that students feel supported and valued, which not only reduces bullying but also enhances their overall school experience.

The implementation of character education at SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta, combined with strategies for relationship maintenance, has proven to be an effective approach to preventing bullying among new students. The school's commitment to fostering positive relationships through personalized support, peer mentoring, and inclusive activities creates a culture where bullying is less likely to occur. The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on bullying prevention, offering insights into the role of character education in creating safe and supportive school environments. Further research is needed to explore how these strategies can be adapted and implemented in other school contexts to combat bullying and promote positive school climates.

## CONCLUSION

This research has demonstrated that the implementation of character education at SMA Islam Al Azhar 9 Yogyakarta plays a crucial role in preventing bullying, particularly among new students. The findings highlight how the school's proactive approach to relationship maintenance—through personalized support, peer mentoring, and inclusive group activities—creates a safe and supportive environment where bullying behaviors are less likely to thrive. The study aligns with the initial expectations outlined in the introduction, where the integration of character education was anticipated to contribute significantly to reducing bullying by fostering positive student relationships.

The data collected from interviews, observations, and the analysis of school practices show a clear connection between the school's efforts to maintain strong relationships with new students and the reduction of bullying incidents. By providing new students with continuous support, both emotionally and socially, the school creates an environment that is not only supportive but also inclusive, reducing feelings of alienation that can often lead to bullying. The school's use of peer mentors and the regular monitoring of students' well-being through feedback sessions are key practices that contribute to maintaining a positive school culture. These initiatives foster mutual respect, empathy, and cooperation, essential values that serve as the foundation for preventing bullying.

In line with the research objectives, this study has successfully illustrated how character education programs, when tailored to the needs of new students, can have a

substantial impact on the overall social climate of a school. The proactive nature of the school's approach to building relationships reflects the importance of early intervention and continuous engagement in preventing negative behaviors such as bullying. The findings not only confirm the anticipated outcomes but also offer a practical model for other schools aiming to address bullying through character education and relationship-building strategies.

The results of this study suggest several avenues for further research and application. Future studies could explore the long-term effectiveness of character education in preventing bullying over the course of students' academic careers. It would be beneficial to examine how these strategies evolve and adapt as students progress through different school years. Additionally, research could focus on the broader impact of character education on other aspects of student behavior, such as academic performance, leadership development, and overall well-being.

The implementation of character education programs, particularly those targeting new students, can be further developed and applied across various educational contexts. This study provides a foundational understanding of how tailored character education strategies can significantly reduce bullying and create a positive school culture. Educational policymakers and school administrators are encouraged to incorporate relationship-building strategies into their schools' curricula, ensuring that all students, especially newcomers, feel valued, supported, and included.

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that schools implement more comprehensive and structured character education programs aimed at new students. These programs should include regular one-on-one counseling, peer mentoring, and group activities that encourage social integration. Schools should also emphasize the importance of feedback systems that monitor students' emotional and social well-being throughout the year. By focusing on creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment, schools can reduce the prevalence of bullying and foster a positive culture that benefits all students.

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