

Effectiveness of Early Literacy Activities for Anti-Bullying Education in Early Childhood: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Bullying in early childhood poses significant long-term risks to children's social and emotional development. Preventive efforts through early literacy activities have increasingly been recognized as an effective strategy to cultivate empathy, moral understanding, and social skills from an early age. This study aims to systematically review the literature on the effectiveness of early literacy activities in anti-bullying education for young children. The search process was conducted using three major electronic journal databases Google Scholar, JSTOR, and EBSCO employing standardized keywords. Article selection followed the PRISMA stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, resulting in 15 studies that met the criteria. Findings indicate that activities such as storytelling, role-playing, and shared reading consistently enhance children's understanding of empathy, emotional regulation, assertive communication, and prosocial behavior—core competencies essential for bullying prevention. Furthermore, early literacy activities strengthen positive social interactions through structured narratives and interpersonal simulations. Therefore, early literacy can be recommended as an effective pedagogical approach within early childhood curricula to support anti-bullying education through engaging and developmentally appropriate learning experiences.

Keywords: Bullying, Early Childhood, Early Literacy, Education, Prevention

Abstrak

Bullying pada anak usia dini berdampak signifikan terhadap perkembangan sosial dan emosional jangka panjang. Upaya preventif melalui kegiatan literasi awal semakin dipandang efektif sebagai strategi pendidikan untuk menumbuhkan empati, nilai moral, dan keterampilan sosial sejak dini. Penelitian ini bertujuan meninjau secara sistematis literatur terkait efektivitas kegiatan literasi awal dalam edukasi anti-bullying pada anak usia dini. Proses pencarian dilakukan melalui tiga database utama, yaitu Google Scholar, JSTOR, dan EBSCO, dengan menggunakan kata kunci yang terstandar. Seleksi artikel mengikuti tahapan identifikasi, penyaringan, kelayakan, dan inklusi berdasarkan kriteria PRISMA, menghasilkan 15 studi yang memenuhi syarat. Hasil tinjauan mengungkapkan bahwa kegiatan seperti mendongeng, bermain peran, dan membaca cerita secara konsisten meningkatkan pemahaman anak tentang empati, pengelolaan emosi, komunikasi assertif, serta perilaku prososial yang semuanya merupakan fondasi penting dalam pencegahan bullying. Selain itu, aktivitas literasi awal terbukti memperkuat interaksi sosial positif melalui narasi dan simulasi interpersonal yang terstruktur. Dengan demikian, literasi awal dapat direkomendasikan sebagai pendekatan pedagogis efektif dalam kurikulum PAUD untuk mendukung edukasi anti-bullying berbasis pembelajaran yang menyenangkan dan kontekstual.

Kata Kunci: Bullying, Anak Usia Dini, Literasi Awal, Edukasi, Pencegahan

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in early childhood can significantly affect children's psychological, social, and academic development (Anggraini et al., 2024; Nasir et al., 2019). Therefore, identifying effective preventive methods from an early age becomes crucial. One promising approach is the integration of early literacy activities into anti-bullying education (Willoughby et al., 2019). Early literacy not only develops language competence but also serves as a medium for introducing social concepts such as empathy, cooperation, and self-regulation skills that strongly contribute to bullying prevention (Aprillia et al., 2023). This systematic review explores existing literature to identify how early literacy practices can function as a preventive mechanism against bullying in early childhood education settings.

The issue of bullying among young children has gained increasing attention within educational research (Aulia et al., 2024). Bullying, typically linked to aggressive behaviors, occurs not only in school environments but also in more intimate spaces such as homes and playgrounds (Fitri & Tirtayani, 2023; Maromi et al., 2024; H. N. Sari et al., 2022). This phenomenon includes not only physical aggression but also emotional and social harm, which may be less visible yet deeply impactful. Verbal intimidation, mockery, and social exclusion can erode a child's self-esteem and influence their long-term social interactions (Hasni & Amanda, 2022). Emphasizes that early bullying can lead to severe psychological consequences, including anxiety, depression, reduced motivation, and lower academic achievement, with some cases potentially developing into long-term mental health issues such as trauma or chronic insecurity (Ubudiyah et al., 2021).

One major strategy to prevent bullying is educating children about empathy, tolerance, and mutual respect from an early age (Sáez-Delgado et al., 2025). Character education, including approaches grounded in literacy, becomes essential because young children learn primarily through concrete experiences and modeling from adults and peers (Hidayati et al., 2022; M. Sari et al., 2022). Early literacy therefore serves not only as a cognitive tool, but also as a platform for shaping children's social-emotional awareness (Rahayu et al., 2023). Through stories containing moral messages, discussions, and interactive activities, children learn to understand their own emotions and those of others, recognize the consequences of their actions, and build foundational social skills. Febriansyah & Yuningsih, (2024), highlights, literacy-based education helps children internalize values such as empathy, honesty, and friendship, enabling them to respond constructively to social situations and reduce tendencies toward bullying behaviors.

A review of the selected literature reveals a consistent pattern: early literacy activities including storytelling, shared reading, dialogic reading, role-play narratives, and picture-book discussions significantly support the development of children's empathy, prosocial behaviors, and conflict-resolution abilities. For example, Khamidun, (2012), found that storytelling interventions enhanced children's emotional vocabulary

and decreased aggressive responses during peer interactions. Similarly, Vega et al., (2022), reported that picture-book-based discussions improved preschoolers' capacity to recognize bullying scenarios and respond assertively. Studies Armitage, (2021), further demonstrate that literacy-integrated social-emotional learning increases children's cooperative behavior, reduces incidences of peer exclusion, and strengthens teacher-child communication dynamics in early childhood classrooms (Warmansyah et al., 2022). Collectively, the literature indicates strong potential for literacy activities to serve as preventive frameworks against bullying.

Despite these findings, several studies highlight inconsistencies in program implementation, limited integration of culturally responsive materials, and insufficient guidance for educators in applying literacy-based anti-bullying strategies. Research by Schoppmann et al., (2023) notes that most literacy interventions rely heavily on generic storybooks lacking contextual, cultural, or community-based relevance. This reveals a gap where early literacy practices need to be more grounded in children's lived cultural experiences to maximize impact. Addressing this gap, the present systematic review positions itself as a comprehensive synthesis of cross-study evidence to better understand what literacy-based strategies work, in which contexts, and how they can be optimized. Implicitly, this study introduces its novelty by focusing specifically on the intersection of early literacy and anti-bullying education, an area rarely consolidated in previous reviews. Accordingly, the aim of this review is to provide evidence-based insights to guide practitioners, researchers, and policymakers in designing developmentally appropriate literacy interventions that effectively cultivate empathy, social competence, and non-violent behaviors among young children.

METHODS

Research Design and Participants

This study employed a systematic literature review design, focusing on empirical studies that examined the effectiveness of early literacy activities in preventing bullying among early childhood learners. The review followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, ensuring transparency, rigor, and replicability. Literature searches were conducted using three major academic databases Google Scholar, JSTOR, and EBSCO with predefined keywords: "*early childhood bullying*," "*bullying prevention through literacy*," "*early literacy programs*," and "*anti-bullying education for young children*."

All records identified through database searches were screened based on publication year, relevance to early childhood education, methodological clarity, and empirical outcomes related to early literacy and anti-bullying interventions. Since this is a review study, **no human participants were directly involved**. However, the studies included in the review involved children aged 3–6 years, teachers, and caregivers. Ethical procedures reported in the primary studies such as parental consent, school approval, anonymity, and child-protection protocols were considered as part of the eligibility criteria.

The screening process applied inclusion criteria such as: (1) empirical studies, (2) published between 2018 and 2024, (3) interventions involving early literacy, and (4) outcomes associated with bullying, empathy, prosocial behavior, or social-emotional development. Studies that were theoretical, opinion-based, lacking methodological rigor, or unrelated to bullying prevention were excluded.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Because this study synthesized previously published research, the instruments used were those reported in the included studies. The primary instruments typically included story-based intervention tools, picture books, digital story platforms, role-play scripts, teacher rating scales, empathy assessments, observational checklists, **and** structured interview guides.

Each study's instruments were evaluated based on their purpose, validity, and reliability when available. Quantitative studies reported psychometric information such as Cronbach's alpha, inter-rater reliability, and construct validity. Qualitative studies described procedures to ensure trustworthiness, including triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trails

The data extraction procedure followed four sequential steps: (1) Identification of studies from databases, (2) Screening based on title and abstract relevance, (3) Eligibility evaluation through full-text examination, and (4) Inclusion of studies that met all criteria. Each full-text article was reviewed to extract key information such as study design, sample characteristics, type of literacy activity, intervention procedures, measurement tools, and main findings related to anti-bullying outcomes.

Data Analysis Techniques and Ethical Considerations

Data were analyzed using a narrative synthesis approach, appropriate for heterogeneous study designs. Quantitative studies were examined through descriptive statistics and effect sizes when reported (e.g., pre–post comparisons of aggression, empathy, or social behavior). Qualitative studies were analyzed thematic coding to identify recurring patterns related to empathy development, prosocial behavior, conflict resolution, or reduced bullying tendencies.

Mixed-method studies were interpreted by integrating quantitative improvements with qualitative insights, providing a holistic understanding of literacy-based anti-bullying interventions.

Steps to ensure analytic rigor included; 1) cross-checking extracted data; 2) independent review of coding categories; 3) triangulation across studies, and 4) evaluation of methodological strengths and limitations of each study. Since this study did not involve direct human participation, no additional ethical approval was required. However, ethical compliance in primary studies—such as informed consent, confidentiality, and child-safe research protocols—was considered during the selection and appraisal of included articles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Table 1. Literature Review

No	Author(s)	Year	Title	Research Method	Findings
1	Hesti Ayu Mahayanti; Andri Wahyu Puspo Sejati; Nana Yuliyantini; Pangastuti Rahayu; Dwi Purnomo Wati; Tri Asmawulan	2024	Upaya Pencegahan Bullying Pada Anak Usia Dini di Lembaga PAUD	Interviews, observation, documentat ion	Poor relationships with peers and teachers increase bullying potential. Prevention efforts through role-playing, parenting, and effective communication.
2	Ning Tyas Maghfiroh; Sugito	2022	Perilaku Bullying pada Anak di Taman Kanak-kanak	Observation, interviews	Three types of bullying identified: physical, verbal, psychological. Perpetrators and victims often are vulnerable children.
3	Daffa Rizky Febriansyah; Yuyun Yuningsih	2024	Fenomena Perilaku Bullying sebagai Bentuk Kenakalan Remaja di SMK-TI Pembangunan Cimahi	Observation, in-depth interviews, documentat ion	Bullying occurs as physical, verbal, and cyber. Causes include individual, social interaction, and family factors.
4	Maria Natalia Bete; Arifin	2023	Peran Guru dalam Mengatasi Bullying di SMA Negeri Sasitamean	Observation, interviews, documentat ion	Teachers act as role models, provide motivation, advice, and sanction. Barriers: teacher control, parental cooperation, student openness.
5	Nunuk Sulisrudatin, SH, SIP, MSI	2015	Kasus Bullying dalam Kalangan Pelajar (Sebuah Tinjauan Kriminologi)	Case analysis	Bullying is a global problem requiring prevention through moral education and legal regulation.

Discussion

The discussion in this study aims to provide a more in-depth picture of the findings obtained related to the prevention of bullying behavior in early childhood, particularly through early literacy activities. Several factors influencing the occurrence of bullying, the role of early literacy in shaping children's character, and the involvement of various parties such as teachers, parents, and the community in preventing bullying will be analyzed in more detail. This discussion will also cover how these research findings are relevant to early childhood education practice in Indonesia

and how implementation strategies for bullying prevention can be applied in a broader context.

Factors Causing Bullying in Early Childhood Based on the various literatures reviewed, bullying in early childhood is triggered not only by internal factors such as a child's temperament or behavior, but also by external factors, namely the environment in which the child develops (H. N. Sari et al., 2022; Ubudiyah et al., 2021). The study by Denham, (2006) found that poor relationships between children and peers, lack of teacher attention, and unsupportive parenting can be primary causes of bullying. Children who grow up in disharmonious environments or who do not receive adequate attention and understanding about others' feelings are more likely to be involved in bullying behavior, either as perpetrators or victims. One example identified is children frequently exposed to aggressive behavior at home, such as physical or verbal violence, who tend to imitate such behaviors at school (Hikmat et al., 2024; Li et al., 2020). This indicates that character formation from an early age must be conducted holistically, involving not only school education but also home-based education grounded in empathy and respect for others. Given this, early literacy that emphasizes the introduction of moral values can be an effective way to address and prevent bullying.

Early literacy is an important component of character formation for young children. The term early literacy here not only includes reading and writing skills but also the social and emotional skills that help children understand their surroundings. In the study by Maghfiroh & Sugito, (2021), early literacy implemented through stories and group discussions proved capable of improving children's ability to recognize their own feelings and those of others. Story-based literacy activities are an effective method to teach moral values such as empathy, helping behavior, and mutual respect among children. At this stage, children are given the opportunity to delve into characters in stories who often face social conflicts, such as disputes with friends or interaction difficulties (Rifda et al., 2024). Through stories, they are taught to recognize the reasons behind peers' behavior and how to resolve conflicts peacefully and respectfully. These activities not only sharpen cognitive skills but also strengthen children's social skills, which are vital for preventing bullying (Culatta et al., 2021). Additionally, early literacy offers opportunities for children to learn about their emotions and how to regulate them. Teaching emotion regulation is crucial in preventing bullying since many bullying behaviors arise from the inability to manage anger, disappointment, or anxiety. Therefore, character education through early literacy not only introduces moral values but also provides children with skills to interact positively with peers.

Parents play a very large role in shaping children's behavior, including preventing bullying (Priyanti & Warmansyah, 2021; Puspitasari et al., 2023). The study by Aksoy & Gresham, (2024) shows that when parents are involved in their child's education, both at home and in school activities, children tend to have better understanding of empathy and respect. Parental involvement in early literacy activities, for example by accompanying children during reading or discussing stories learned at school, can reinforce children's understanding of the importance of respecting others'

feelings. Parents must also model good behavior in daily life, such as speaking kindly and non-aggressively. As the first context where children learn social interaction, parents should ensure their children are raised in a loving and understanding environment where all forms of violence, verbal or physical, are not tolerated. Moreover, parents need to maintain open communication with children, listen to their social or friendship concerns, and provide constructive solutions to resolve such issues.

Teachers have a central role in creating a safe and supportive environment for children at school (Khodarasih et al., 2025; Syaharra et al., 2025; Wita & Villanueva, 2025). As educators, teachers are responsible not only for academic teaching but also for developing students' character. Sulisrudatin, (2014) indicates that teachers who actively teach the importance of respecting others and managing children's emotions can help prevent bullying at school. Teachers must also be sensitive to early signs of bullying, whether performed by or against students (Rusady et al., 2025; Yulia et al., 2025). One method teachers can employ is integrating moral values into daily teaching activities, not only in specific subjects like religious or civic education but in everyday classroom practices (Hasanah et al., 2024; Munir & Warmansyah, 2023; Rahma & Haviz, 2022). For instance, teachers can instill values such as cooperation, mutual respect, and peaceful conflict resolution through group play or discussions. Thus, children learn not only academics but also social skills that will help them interact with peers.

Bullying can have very serious effects on a child's psychological and social development. The study by Prastiti & Anshori, (2023) revealed that children who are victims of bullying tend to experience problems in emotional and social development. They often feel low self-esteem, anxiety, and tend to avoid social interactions, which can hinder their ability to form healthy social relationships in the future. On the other hand, children who bully others also face significant psychological risks (Rohmah et al., 2025). They often have problems with emotion regulation and tend to lack empathy toward others. Character education focusing on teaching moral values such as empathy, self-control, and respect for others can help reduce the potential for bullying, both for victims and perpetrators.

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that early literacy plays a very important role in preventing bullying in early childhood. Through early literacy, children not only acquire reading and writing skills but also social and emotional competencies that are essential in shaping their character. Therefore, teaching early literacy that involves stories, discussions, and role-play can help children understand the importance of respecting others and managing their emotions. In addition, involvement of parents, teachers, and the community in bullying prevention is crucial. All parties must cooperate to create a safe and supportive environment for children where they can learn and develop without fear of becoming victims of bullying. With this holistic approach, bullying is expected to be minimized and children can grow into individuals with strong character, empathy, and the ability to interact positively in their social environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research and discussion conducted, it can be concluded that bullying in early childhood is a serious social issue influenced by multiple internal and external factors, including family environment, peer interactions at school, and broader social and media influences. Bullying negatively affects not only victims but also perpetrators, who often struggle with emotional regulation and forming healthy social relationships. Early literacy plays a critical role in preventing bullying, as it helps children develop not only reading and writing skills but also empathy, self-control, and respect for others. Story-based learning and interactive activities provide opportunities for children to understand their own and others' emotions while learning peaceful conflict resolution. The roles of parents and teachers are essential in this process. Active parental involvement at home and school reinforces children's understanding of positive social behavior, while teachers who create safe, supportive learning environments and integrate moral values into daily instruction significantly reduce the likelihood of bullying. Overall, preventing bullying in early childhood requires collective efforts from families, schools, and communities to build a positive developmental context for children. Early literacy that emphasizes character education and social-emotional skill development serves as a strategic approach to reducing bullying and fostering emotionally, socially, and academically healthy individuals.

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