

The Role of Teachers in Addressing the Bullying Phenomenon in the Digital Era for Generation Alpha in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Bullying, including cyberbullying, has increasingly affected Generation Alpha students in elementary schools, creating challenges for teachers in maintaining a safe and child-friendly learning environment in the digital era. This study aims to analyse the roles of teachers and principals in preventing and addressing bullying through the implementation of G.R. Terry's management functions: planning, organising, actuating, and controlling at SDN 1 and SDN 2 Pasirjaya. A qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation analysis involving principals, teachers, and students. The findings reveal that teachers and principals have implemented POAC-based management strategies by integrating bullying prevention into instructional planning, establishing collaborative anti-bullying teams, applying character education and digital literacy approaches in daily learning activities, and conducting continuous supervision through behavioural evaluations and digital reporting systems. These practices indicate that the systematic application of management functions enables educators not only to respond to bullying incidents but also to proactively foster a child-friendly school culture and strengthen students' ethical behaviour in digital spaces.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Bullying in the digital era has become a global issue that significantly affects the climate of primary education [1]. The rapid development of information technology has transformed patterns of student interaction, causing bullying to no longer occur solely in physical or direct verbal forms, but also to expand into digital spaces, commonly referred to as cyberbullying [2]. UNESCO reports that one in three students worldwide has experienced violence or bullying at school, either directly or through digital media[3], [4]. This data

underscores the urgency of strengthening teachers' roles in creating safe, emotionally healthy learning environments.

In Indonesia, this situation shows an alarming trend. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission recorded a 37% increase in reported bullying cases among primary school students compared to the previous year [5], [6]. This increase is closely related to the characteristics of Generation Alpha students, who grow up immersed in digital environments and actively use social media, instant messaging applications, and online games [7], [8]. These digital spaces often become mediums for intimidation, harassment, and verbal violence that are difficult for adults to monitor directly [9].

Primary schools are ideally safe spaces that support children's academic and socio-emotional development [10], [11]. However, the reality in schools indicates a discrepancy between the ideals of character education and daily educational practices. This condition demands a strategic role from teachers, not only as instructors but also as mentors and protectors of students. Teachers are expected to foster empathy, ethical communication, and healthy digital literacy as integral components of the learning process [12].

From an educational management perspective, the role of teachers can be examined through G.R. Terry's management functions, namely planning, organising, actuating, and controlling [13], [14]. Through this approach, teachers are viewed not only as classroom practitioners but also as educational managers who design strategies, coordinate resources, implement programs, and evaluate efforts to prevent and address bullying in primary schools. Therefore, strengthening teachers' managerial roles is essential in building a child-friendly school culture in the digital ERA.

Several empirical studies highlight the role of teachers in addressing bullying in elementary schools. For example, research by Ramadhanti and Hidayat examines teacher strategies for addressing bullying among students in Indonesian primary schools, showing that teachers use qualitative approaches such as observation, interviews, and documentation to identify and respond to various forms of bullying, including physical and verbal abuse [15].

In a similar study, Pujiarani et al. [16] investigated the strategies educators use to handle bullying cases at SDN Mandalasari 1. Their findings emphasise the important role of teachers in prevention and management, showing how they design and implement strategies to identify bullying incidents and respond strategically.

Internationally, research by Muchlish et al. [17] finds that teachers in Indonesian primary schools act as mediators, facilitators, advisors, and enforcers when addressing bullying behaviours. This study uses qualitative methods to demonstrate how classroom teachers cultivate social relationships and provide guidance and sanctions to students involved in bullying.

Despite the insights from these studies, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the managerial perspective of teachers, specifically how they implement the structured functions of educational management (planning, organising, actuating, and controlling) to prevent and address both traditional and cyberbullying in primary schools. While prior research emphasises teachers' strategies and perceptions, it rarely analyses these roles through a management-theory lens, such as G.R. Terry's framework.

Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in integrating educational management theory with bullying prevention in the digital era. By examining how teachers and principals operationalise the four functions of management, this research contributes a unique managerial perspective to the existing body of literature. It provides empirical evidence from two primary schools with different social characteristics that confront similar challenges.

Based on these studies, a research gap exists in the analysis of teachers' roles as educational managers in comprehensively implementing G.R. Terry's management functions to prevent and address bullying in the digital era, particularly at the primary education level. In addition, studies on the context of semi-urban primary schools with diverse social characteristics remain limited.

The novelty of this study lies in integrating educational management perspectives into the issue of digital bullying, as well as its focus on the roles of teachers and principals in practically implementing management functions to build a child-friendly school culture and strengthen digital literacy. This study also provides empirical insights from two primary schools with different social characteristics but facing similar challenges. This study aims to analyse the roles of teachers and principals in implementing educational management functions in preventing and addressing bullying in the digital era, identify managerial strategies applied in building a child-friendly school culture and strengthening students' digital literacy, and describe the challenges and opportunities in implementing educational management in the context of digital bullying at SDN 1 and SDN 2 Pasirjaya, Karawang Regency.

2 METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design, aiming to provide an in-depth and holistic understanding of teachers' roles in addressing bullying phenomena in elementary schools through the lens of an educational management functions analysis (POAC: Planning, Organising, Actuating, Controlling) adapted from George [18]. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables contextual, in-depth exploration of social phenomena, focusing on understanding meanings from participants' perspectives, which is essential for comprehending the complex dynamics of bullying in school environments [19], [20].

The case study design, as fundamentally explained by Robert K. Yin in [21] "Case Study Research and Applications" and Robert E. Stake in [22] "The Art of Case Study Research," allows researchers to investigate contemporary phenomena intensively within real-life contexts, particularly when boundaries between the phenomenon and context are unclear. The selection of this descriptive case study aligns with the objective of describing in detail and analysing teachers' roles.

The research sites were two elementary schools: SDN 1 Pasirjaya and SDN 2 Pasirjaya, in Karawang Regency. These two sites were selected based on specific criteria: they represent different social and cultural characteristics yet face similar bullying challenges, including those in the digital domain. Selecting these two cases also enables contextual comparisons that enrich the research findings [23].

Primary and secondary data were collected through triangulation of various techniques to enhance the validity and reliability of findings [24], [25]. These techniques included in-depth semi-structured interviews with principals, upper-grade class teachers, and select students to explore perceptions, experiences, understanding of bullying, handling strategies, and implementation of educational management functions. This in-depth interview technique, a key method in qualitative research [26], aims to obtain rich, personal narratives from participants. Additionally, the researcher conducted participatory observation to directly observe student social interactions, learning practices, and the implementation of child-friendly school policies and bullying prevention efforts. This observation, guided by the literature of Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw [27], provides empirical context and behavioural data to complement interview information. Meanwhile, documentation analysis involved reviewing and analysing relevant documents, including school rules, disciplinary case reports, bullying prevention modules, and anti-bullying policies. Document analysis, as a qualitative research method [28], complements interview and observation data with written evidence and formal policy frameworks.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, a systematic approach for managing and interpreting qualitative data [29], [30], [31]. This model encompasses three interconnected, ongoing activities: data reduction through selection, focusing, simplification, abstraction, and transformation of raw field notes throughout the research to identify relevant patterns and themes [29]; data display by organizing information into structured formats like matrices or narratives to facilitate interpretation and conclusion drawing [29]; and conclusion drawing and verification, where the researcher extracts meaning from data and verifies conclusions through data re-checking and cross-source consistency.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of results, triangulation was employed [25], [32]. The applied triangulations were source and method/technique triangulation. This approach, aligned with qualitative methodology principles [24], strengthens findings via data convergence from diverse perspectives and methods, enhancing research credibility [33], [34]. Thus, this study meets trustworthiness criteria credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as recommended by Lincoln and Guba [25], [32].

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Planning

The research results indicate that teachers at SDN 1 and SDN 2 Pasirjaya have proactively implemented the planning function by emphasising the prevention of bullying behaviour from the lesson design stage. At SDN 1 Pasirjaya, planning is rooted in strengthening religious and moral values. This is embodied through the design of routine activities such as joint prayers and character reflection integrated into morning habituation before core learning begins. As expressed by one class teacher at SDN 1.

Meanwhile, SDN 2 Pasirjaya demonstrates a more adaptive and responsive planning strategy to the challenges of the digital era. Teachers at SDN 2 developed lesson plan documents that include digital ethics content, an initiative prompted by the widespread use

of mobile devices among students. The principal of SDN 2 explained that meetings with teachers resulted in an agreement to incorporate digital ethics material into the RPP, even planning special sessions to discuss commenting ethics on social media.

3.1.2 Organizing

In terms of organisation, both schools demonstrate a commitment to establishing collaborative work structures to support the implementation of anti-bullying policies. At SDN 1 Pasirjaya, organising is carried out by clearly assigning tasks to religious teachers, class teachers, and the principal. The principal of SDN 1 outlined the formation of the "Character Mentoring Team," where the religious teacher is appointed as the daily executive chair for moral matters, and class teachers act as direct supervisors in the classroom, creating a clear reporting structure:

On the other hand, SDN 2 Pasirjaya implements the organising function by establishing the "Digital Anti-Bullying Task Force," involving not only teachers but also parent representatives. One teacher at SDN 2 explained that this small team is tasked with organising reports related to incidents in student WhatsApp groups, with clear task divisions: teachers monitor at school, while parents monitor at home.

3.1.3 Actuating

The implementation of bullying prevention activities at SDN 1 and SDN 2 Pasirjaya reflects the actuating function, oriented toward digital literacy and character building. Teachers at SDN 1 apply a personal and religious approach through moral guidance. One teacher from SDN 1 recounted their practice, where they actively provide advice, motivate students to forgive each other, and touch on their religious side through a "heart-to-heart" approach during incidents or free time:

In contrast to SDN 1, teachers at SDN 2 innovatively integrate digital literacy into thematic learning to analyse internet content. This was confirmed by a statement from a fifth-grade teacher who often uses examples from platforms like Facebook or TikTok, then invites students to discuss whether the content constitutes bullying or just criticism. This implementation allows students to practice content analysis directly, helping them understand the difference between criticism and insults in a digital context:

3.1.4 Supervising

In the supervising aspect, both schools undertake systematic efforts to ensure the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs. SDN 1 Pasirjaya relies on weekly behaviour evaluations. The principal explained the control mechanism, conducted every Monday after the ceremony, in which teachers gather to evaluate violation cases and monitor changes in student behaviour, demonstrating a regular, direct, observation-based approach.

Meanwhile, SDN 2 Pasirjaya demonstrates innovation in the supervising function by implementing a digital-based reporting system to monitor incidents in real time. One teacher explained that students can report bullying via a provided Google Form, even anonymously.

Data from the form is then reviewed weekly, enabling more measurable supervision without waiting for incidents to go viral.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Planning

The findings of this research significantly strengthen and expand previous research by Pujiarani et al. [16], which identified the role of teachers in designing bullying prevention steps. However, the novelty of this study lies in systematically integrating these prevention strategies into the framework of G.R. Terry's planning management function. Unlike the more general approach of Pujiarani et al., this research explicitly demonstrates how schools, from the RPP planning stage, have adapted the curriculum to address digital bullying challenges among Generation Alpha. For instance, SDN 1 Pasirjaya instils religious and moral values through routine habituation, reflecting proactive efforts to build students' character as a foundation for preventing negative behaviour. Meanwhile, SDN 2 Pasirjaya shows an adaptive response to the digital era by incorporating digital ethics and social media commenting ethics into its RPP. This approach not only fills the literature gap regarding planning as an incidental strategy but also proves that anti-bullying planning can be designed as a structured and systematic managerial framework, explicitly addressing the massive threat of cyberbullying. This is crucial for Generation Alpha growing up in a digital environment, emphasising the importance of intentional educational interventions from the outset.

3.2.2 Organizing

The organisational structures in both schools align with the findings of Muchlish et al. [17], which underscore the role of teachers as mediators and facilitators in addressing bullying. However, the unique contribution of this research lies in how these individual roles are institutionalised and structurally organised within an integrated school management system. At SDN 1 Pasirjaya, the formation of the "Character Mentoring Team" with clear task divisions among religious teachers, class teachers, and the principal demonstrates a structured effort to address moral and behavioural issues. Similarly, SDN 2 Pasirjaya's "Digital Anti-Bullying Task Force," involving teachers and parent representatives, highlights a cross-stakeholder collaborative approach. This goes beyond previous research that tended to focus on teachers' personal roles, emphasising that effective and sustainable anti-bullying efforts require a strong organising function. Thus, these findings illustrate that bullying prevention and handling are not solely individual responsibilities but the result of a well-organised system that unites various school and family elements to achieve common goals. This organisation is key to ensuring consistency and effectiveness in implementing anti-bullying policies.

3.2.3 Actuating

The implementation of bullying prevention activities in both schools reflects a dynamic and adaptive actuating function. This aligns with the research by Ramadhanti & Hidayat [15], which identified the use of qualitative approaches to address physical and verbal bullying. However, this study fills an analytical gap by expanding the scope of implementation to the complex realm of cyberbullying. SDN 1 Pasirjaya employs a personal and religious approach through "heart-to-heart" moral guidance, which is effective in fostering empathy and resolving internal conflicts. On the other hand, SDN 2 Pasirjaya implements actuation through digital literacy innovations, integrating internet content analysis into thematic learning. This approach directly equips students with critical skills to distinguish between criticism and insults in the digital environment. It proves that educational management implementation at SDN Pasirjaya is not merely reactive to incidents but also proactive in preparing Generation Alpha students with safe and ethical digital navigation skills. Thus, actuation is not just about responding but also about empowering students with essential competencies to face challenges in the virtual world.

3.2.4 Supervising

The supervising aspect in this research affirms the study's position in filling the literature gap regarding the managerial perspective. As identified in the introduction, many previous studies tended to discuss strategies without framing them within a complete management cycle. The findings on the supervising function significantly complement G.R. Terry's management cycle, providing empirical evidence that the success of bullying prevention, both traditional and digital, depends on a strong supervising function to ensure the sustainability of a child-friendly school culture. SDN 1 Pasirjaya uses regular weekly behaviour evaluations based on direct observation, demonstrating a commitment to consistent monitoring. Meanwhile, SDN 2 Pasirjaya demonstrates adaptive innovation through a digital reporting system based on Google Forms, enabling anonymous reporting and real-time incident monitoring. This mechanism not only ensures accountability but also allows early detection and rapid response to cyberbullying incidents that may be difficult to identify through traditional methods. This emphasises that management efforts require not only program initiation but also ongoing adaptive monitoring and evaluation to achieve long-term goals in building a safe and supportive school environment.

4 CONCLUSION

This study concludes that applying G.R. Terry's management functions (planning, organising, actuating, and controlling) provides a coherent managerial framework for strengthening teachers' and principals' roles in addressing bullying in the digital era. The main finding highlights that bullying prevention becomes more effective when it is managed as a systematic educational process rather than as a reactive response to incidents. The study implies that educational management perspectives are essential for enabling teachers to function not only as instructors but also as educational managers, shaping a child-friendly school culture and promoting ethical digital behaviour among Generation Alpha students.

This research is limited to a qualitative case study conducted in two elementary schools, which may limit the transferability of the findings to different educational contexts, school cultures, or regional settings. Future research is recommended to involve a broader range of schools, apply mixed or quantitative methods, and examine the long-term impact of POAC-based management on students' social behaviour, digital citizenship, and psychological well-being. For the general public, this study contributes by emphasising the shared responsibility of schools, teachers, and parents in preventing bullying and fostering safe digital environments, thereby supporting the development of socially responsible, digitally literate young citizens in an increasingly technology-driven society.

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