



The effectiveness of islamic character values-based group counseling in reducing bullying behavior among students in brebes regency

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Article Info	Abstract
Keywords: bullying behavior; group counseling; Islamic character values; junior high school students.	Bullying remains a significant psychosocial problem in educational settings, negatively affecting students' psychological well-being, social relationships, and academic adjustment. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of Islamic character-based group counseling in reducing bullying behavior among junior high school students in Brebes Regency, Indonesia. A quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control-group design was employed, involving 30 students selected through purposive sampling based on identified bullying-related problems. Participants were divided into experimental and control groups, with the experimental group receiving counseling integrating Islamic character values, including empathy, compassion, justice, responsibility, and mutual respect. Bullying behavior was measured using a scale assessing verbal aggression, physical aggression, and manipulative behavior, with acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .745$). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a paired-samples t test. The findings indicated a reduction in bullying scores following the intervention, with the highest score in the experimental group decreasing from 93 to 85, compared with 93 to 91 in the control group. The reported pretest–posttest analysis also indicated a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$). These findings suggest that Islamic character-based group counseling is a promising approach for addressing bullying behavior and promoting positive interpersonal relationships among junior high school students. Further comparative analyses are needed to establish the intervention's effectiveness relative to the control condition.

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Introduction

Bullying is a persistent psychosocial problem in educational settings, characterized by intentional and repeated aggressive behavior involving an imbalance of power between perpetrators and victims. Such behavior may occur through physical aggression, verbal harassment, social exclusion, and relational manipulation, potentially undermining students' psychological well-being, interpersonal relationships, and educational experiences. Diannita et al. (2023) emphasized that bullying negatively affects students' social and emotional development, while Ibrahim et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of addressing aggressive behaviors through structured behavioral interventions. Furthermore, bullying extends beyond individual aggression, reflecting complex interactions among personal characteristics, peer relationships, and school environments. Consequently, understanding bullying requires a comprehensive perspective that considers both individual behavior and the social contexts in which aggressive interactions occur.

Bullying remains a significant concern in schools worldwide, including Indonesia, because of its potential consequences for students' psychological adjustment, academic engagement, and social functioning. Repeated exposure to bullying may contribute to emotional distress, social withdrawal, reduced self-confidence, and difficulties establishing positive peer relationships. Moreover, bullying perpetration may be reinforced by negative peer norms, inadequate emotional regulation, and limited awareness of the consequences of aggressive behavior. Zaneva et al. (2025) demonstrated that perceived social norms were associated with bullying

perpetration and victimization among Indonesian students, emphasizing the influence of peer environments on bullying-related behaviors. Similarly, Boulton et al. (2023) highlighted the potential contribution of educational interventions to strengthening students' anti-bullying beliefs. These findings indicate that effective bullying prevention should address not only individual behavior but also the social and moral values shaping students' interpersonal interactions.

Schools play a fundamental role in preventing and addressing bullying through comprehensive educational and guidance and counseling services. School counselors are responsible for facilitating students' personal and social development, promoting constructive interpersonal relationships, and supporting behavioral changes among students experiencing bullying-related difficulties. Group counseling represents a potentially beneficial intervention because it provides opportunities for students to explore interpersonal problems, exchange experiences, develop self-awareness, and practice more adaptive social behaviors. Oral et al. (2023) demonstrated the potential benefits of solution-focused group counseling for students experiencing peer bullying, while Gaffney et al. (2021), through a systematic review and meta-analysis, confirmed that structured school-based anti-bullying programs can reduce bullying perpetration and victimization. These findings support the importance of developing systematic counseling interventions that integrate behavioral change strategies with students' social and emotional development.

One potential approach is group counseling based on Islamic character values, which integrates counseling processes with moral principles such as compassion, honesty, justice, empathy, responsibility, and respect for others. Islamic character education emphasizes ethical awareness and constructive interpersonal behavior, encouraging students to recognize the consequences of their actions and develop responsibility toward others. Hasan and Azizah (2022) highlighted the importance of integrating bullying prevention perspectives into Islamic religious education, particularly through the development of moral awareness and positive social conduct. Furthermore, Cipriano et al. (2023) demonstrated that school-based social-emotional learning interventions can strengthen students' interpersonal competencies and positive behaviors. Although these findings do not directly establish the effectiveness of Islamic character-based group counseling, they provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for integrating moral reflection, emotional awareness, and prosocial behavior development into counseling interventions.

Despite the growing evidence supporting school-based anti-bullying interventions, further investigation is needed to understand how culturally and religiously grounded counseling approaches contribute to reducing students' bullying behavior. Previous research has examined behavioral interventions, anti-bullying education, and counseling approaches, but the specific contribution of Islamic character values integrated into structured group counseling warrants further empirical examination, particularly among junior high school students. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the effectiveness of Islamic character-based group counseling in reducing bullying behavior among junior high school students in Brebes Regency, Indonesia. By integrating Islamic moral principles with group counseling activities, this study seeks to contribute empirical evidence to the development of culturally responsive school counseling interventions and strengthen practical strategies for promoting respectful, empathetic, and responsible interpersonal behavior.

Method

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control-group design to examine the effectiveness of Islamic character-based group counseling in reducing bullying behavior among junior high school students. The study was conducted in Brebes Regency, Central Java, Indonesia, involving 30 students selected through purposive sampling based on predetermined criteria related to bullying-related problems. The participants were assigned to an experimental group receiving Islamic character-based group counseling and a control group serving as a comparison. Both groups completed pretest and posttest assessments to evaluate changes in bullying behavior following the intervention.

The research procedure consisted of participant selection, pretest administration, intervention implementation, posttest administration, and data analysis, as illustrated in Figure 1. Initially, students were screened to identify those meeting the research criteria. Following group assignment, both groups completed a pretest to assess their initial levels of bullying behavior. The experimental group subsequently participated in Islamic character-based group counseling designed to strengthen empathy, compassion, honesty, justice, personal responsibility, and respect for others. The counseling activities encouraged students to recognize the consequences of bullying, reflect on their interpersonal behaviors, and develop constructive responses to peer conflicts. Following the intervention, both groups completed a posttest using the same instrument to evaluate changes in bullying behavior.

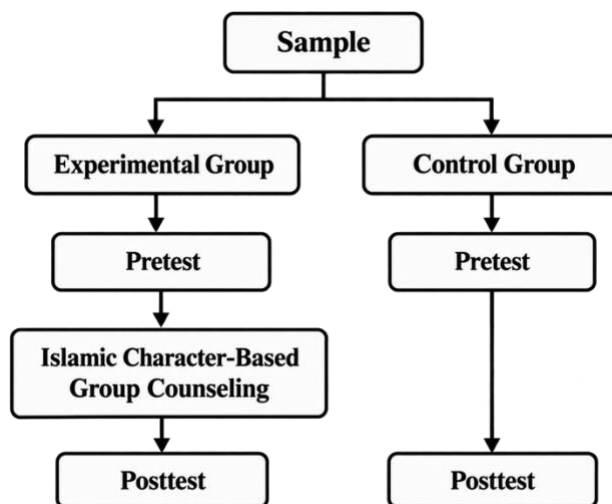


Figure 1. Research Implementation Procedure

Bullying behavior was assessed using a bullying behavior scale developed based on three primary behavioral indicators: verbal aggression, physical aggression, and manipulative behavior. The instrument was administered before and after the intervention to measure changes in students' bullying-related behaviors. Preliminary item validity evidence was examined using Pearson product-moment correlations. All retained items demonstrated correlation coefficients exceeding the specified critical value ($r = .361$), indicating that they met the item-correlation criterion established in this study. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of $\alpha = .745$, indicating acceptable reliability for the research instrument.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Bullying Behavior Levels

Group	<i>Pretest t Highest</i>	<i>Pretest lowest</i>	<i>Posttest Highest</i>	<i>Posttest t lowest</i>
Experimental Group	93	62	85	61
Control Group	93	62	91	60

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the distribution of bullying behavior scores, including minimum and maximum values across the experimental and control groups at pretest and posttest. A paired-samples *t*-test was employed to examine changes in bullying behavior in the experimental group following the intervention. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < .05$. The findings were interpreted to identify patterns of behavioral change associated with Islamic character-based group counseling, while comparisons between the experimental and control groups were considered in evaluating the intervention outcomes.

Result and Discussion

The preliminary assessment revealed that students in both the experimental and control groups exhibited varying levels of bullying behavior, ranging from very low to very high. Based on the reported categorical distributions, approximately half of the students in each group demonstrated high or very high levels of bullying-related behavior, indicating that aggressive interpersonal interactions remained a concern within the school environment. The relatively similar baseline patterns suggest that both groups experienced comparable behavioral challenges before the intervention. Nevertheless, descriptive similarities should be interpreted cautiously, as the absence of statistically significant differences does not necessarily establish complete equivalence between groups. These initial findings underscore the importance of providing structured counseling interventions that address students' aggressive behaviors, interpersonal awareness, and moral responsibility.

Following the implementation of Islamic character-based group counseling, the experimental group demonstrated a favorable descriptive pattern in bullying behavior. As illustrated in Figure 2, the highest recorded bullying score in the experimental group decreased from 93 at pretest to 85 at posttest, whereas the corresponding score in the control group decreased only slightly, from 93 to 91. These findings indicate a greater reduction in the upper range of bullying scores among students who participated in the counseling intervention. However, the changes in minimum scores were relatively small in both groups, suggesting that the observed patterns may not have been uniform across participants. Therefore, although these descriptive findings provide

preliminary indications of improvement, changes in extreme scores alone cannot establish the magnitude or statistical significance of the intervention effect.

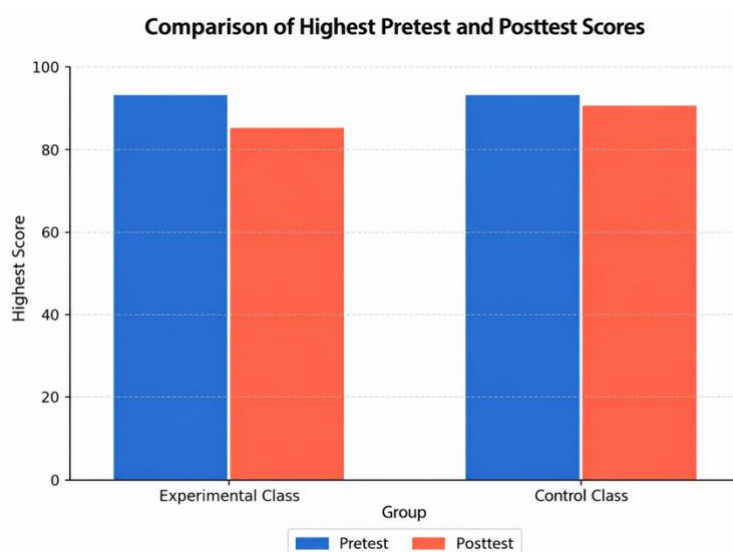


Figure 2. Comparison of Bullying Scores Between the Experimental and Control Classes

The reported inferential analysis indicated no statistically significant difference between groups at pretest ($p > .05$), whereas a statistically significant difference was reported at posttest ($p < .05$). These results are consistent with the possibility that Islamic character-based group counseling contributed to reducing bullying-related behaviors among participating students. Nevertheless, the strength of this interpretation depends on the statistical procedures used to evaluate between-group differences and changes over time. The findings should therefore be interpreted alongside the broader evidence demonstrating the potential effectiveness of structured school-based anti-bullying interventions. Gaffney et al. (2021), through a systematic review and meta-analysis, demonstrated that school-based prevention programs significantly reduced bullying perpetration and victimization, although intervention outcomes varied across educational contexts. Similarly, González Moreno and Molero Jurado (2024) found that interventions combining bullying prevention with the promotion of prosocial competencies contributed to more positive interpersonal behaviors and school environments.

The potential contribution of Islamic character-based group counseling may be understood through the integration of moral reflection, emotional awareness, and behavioral development. Islamic character values, including empathy, compassion, honesty, justice, and mutual respect, provide a normative foundation for encouraging students to recognize the consequences of their actions and reconsider behaviors that harm others. Through structured group discussions and interpersonal reflection, students may develop greater awareness of the emotional consequences of verbal aggression, physical intimidation, and manipulative behavior. In this context, counseling extends beyond communicating moral principles by encouraging students to translate those principles into constructive interpersonal responses. However, these processes should be regarded as plausible mechanisms of change rather than established explanations, because changes in moral reasoning and empathy were not directly measured in this study.

Another important mechanism concerns the development of social responsibility through group interaction. Group counseling provides opportunities for students to exchange experiences, understand alternative perspectives, receive constructive feedback, and develop shared expectations regarding acceptable interpersonal behavior. These activities may encourage participants to reconsider negative peer norms and develop greater responsibility for maintaining respectful relationships. Research conducted in Indonesian schools by Zaneva et al. (2025) demonstrated that perceived negative social norms were associated with bullying perpetration and victimization, suggesting that modifying peer expectations may represent a promising target for bullying prevention. Accordingly, Islamic character-based group counseling may contribute to developing positive group norms by integrating religious values with collaborative reflection and interpersonal learning.

The findings may also be interpreted from a social-emotional learning perspective. Developing empathy, emotional regulation, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills may help students respond more constructively to interpersonal conflicts and reduce reliance on aggressive behavior. Cipriano et al. (2023), in a comprehensive meta-analysis, demonstrated that school-based social-emotional learning interventions

improved students' social competencies, attitudes, behaviors, and peer relationships. Similarly, González Moreno and Molero Jurado (2024) highlighted the importance of strengthening prosocial behaviors alongside bullying prevention efforts. These findings support the broader rationale for combining character education with structured counseling activities. Nevertheless, the present study does not establish whether improvements in emotional regulation, empathy, or prosocial behavior mediated the observed changes in bullying scores.

Conclusion

Based on the research on the effectiveness of group counseling based on Islamic character values in reducing bullying behavior, it can be concluded that this approach significantly decreases bullying among students. After receiving the group counseling treatment, the experimental group showed a significant reduction in bullying behavior, with more students falling into the “Low” and “Very Low” categories in the posttest compared to the control group. The t-test results indicated a significant difference in the experimental group. Therefore, counseling based on Islamic character values that emphasize respect, compassion, and social justice has proven effective in reducing bullying behavior in schools. This study is limited to one school and a relatively small sample size, so the results may not be fully generalizable to a broader population. Further research is recommended to involve more schools and more diverse samples, and to consider other factors, such as the role of parents and the social environment, in reducing bullying behavior.

Author Contributions Statement

Nova Nurfauzi: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft. **Anwar Sutoyo:** Supervision, Methodology, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Awalya:** Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Declaration of Generative AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT to assist with language editing and to improve its readability. The authors reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the published article.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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