



BUILDING CHILDREN'S CHARACTER THROUGH DEMOCRATIC PARENTING: BULLYING PREVENTION STRATEGY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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<p>Info Article</p> <p>Received : 07 Maret 2025</p> <p>Revised : 11 April 2025</p> <p>Accepted : 11 Mei 2025</p> <p>Publication : 30 Mei 2025</p>	<p>Abstract: <i>Bullying in elementary schools is often triggered by children's weak social character due to authoritarian or permissive parenting. This service aims to improve the understanding and skills of parents and teachers in implementing democratic parenting as a bullying prevention strategy. Activities are carried out through three stages: needs analysis (surveys and interviews), education (seminars, parenting training, and teacher workshops), and evaluation (pretest-posttest, observation, and group discussions). Results showed a significant increase in democratic parenting literacy, a shift in parenting behavior to be more communicative and supportive, and a decrease in mild bullying cases in the intervention class. School and parent collaboration was shown to shape a social environment that supports children's prosocial character development. The implications of this activity emphasize the importance of integrating democratic parenting-based character education into school programs and ongoing parenting forums. This effort is effective in creating a safe, inclusive and empathetic learning climate as a form of bullying prevention from an early age.</i></p>
<p>Keywords: <i>Children Character, Democratic parenting, Bullying prevention.</i></p> <p>Kata Kunci: Karakter anak, Pola asuh demokratis, Pencegahan bullying</p>	<p>Abstrak: Bullying di sekolah dasar sering dipicu oleh lemahnya karakter sosial anak akibat pola asuh otoriter atau permisif. Pengabdian ini bertujuan meningkatkan pemahaman dan keterampilan orang tua serta guru dalam menerapkan pola asuh demokratis sebagai strategi pencegahan bullying. Kegiatan dilakukan melalui tiga tahap: analisis kebutuhan (survei dan wawancara), edukasi (seminar, pelatihan parenting, dan lokakarya guru), serta evaluasi (pretest–posttest, observasi, dan diskusi kelompok). Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan dalam literasi pola asuh demokratis, pergeseran perilaku pengasuhan menjadi lebih komunikatif dan suportif, serta penurunan kasus bullying ringan di kelas intervensi. Kolaborasi sekolah dan orang tua terbukti membentuk lingkungan sosial yang mendukung perkembangan karakter prososial anak. Implikasi kegiatan ini menekankan pentingnya integrasi pendidikan karakter berbasis pola asuh demokratis ke dalam program sekolah dan forum parenting berkelanjutan. Upaya ini efektif dalam menciptakan iklim pembelajaran yang aman, inklusif, dan penuh empati sebagai bentuk pencegahan bullying sejak usia dini.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Bullying in elementary school settings is a serious problem that impacts children's psychological well-being, social development, and academic achievement (Murphy et al., 2022). Bullying behavior can be physical, verbal, or relational, all of which have long-term consequences for victims and perpetrators (Camodeca & Nava, 2022). Various studies have shown that family factors, especially parenting, play an important role in shaping children's behavioral tendencies related to bullying (Qian et al., 2022). Unresponsive and authoritarian parenting tends to encourage children to be aggressive or passive in dealing with social conflicts (Lorence et al., 2019). In contrast, democratic parenting has been shown to be effective in instilling the values of empathy, assertive communication, and healthy emotion regulation, which can be a bulwark in preventing bullying behavior (Lee et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, the prevalence of bullying in elementary schools is still high. A report from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MoECT) shows that cases of bullying in schools have increased in recent years (Novianto et al., 2024). However, existing interventions focus more on enforcing discipline in schools without optimizing the role of families in shaping children's character. Therefore, a parenting-based approach is needed that can be implemented by parents to help children develop healthy social skills and prevent bullying behavior.

Although various anti-bullying programs have been implemented in schools, the role of the family, particularly parenting, is often overlooked in existing interventions. Research shows that children who grow up in authoritarian or permissive parenting tend to have a higher risk of becoming both perpetrators and victims of bullying (Pinquart, 2016). However, there are not many service programs that specifically provide training to parents on the application of democratic parenting in the context of bullying prevention.

In addition, there is still a gap between the theory of democratic parenting and its implementation in everyday life. Parents often face challenges in adopting effective and consistent communication strategies in guiding their children (Smetana, 2017). Therefore, a community service-based program is needed that provides education and assistance for parents in implementing democratic parenting to build children's character and prevent bullying behavior in elementary schools.

This community service program aims to: (1) Increase parents' understanding of the concept of democratic parenting and its relationship with bullying prevention; (2) Train parents in implementing effective communication strategies and positive discipline to build children's character; (3) Help teachers understand the importance of collaboration with parents in creating a school environment that supports children's social development and; (4) Encourage the formation of a more harmonious educational ecosystem through cooperation between families and schools.

Several previous studies have examined the relationship between parenting and bullying behavior, but there are still gaps in the application of democratic parenting as a prevention strategy at the family level (Hong et al., 2017). Most anti-bullying programs focus on school interventions, such as increasing teacher supervision or sanctioning bullying perpetrators (Espelage & Hong, 2017). However, studies on how democratic parenting can be practically applied to shape children's character and reduce the tendency of bullying behavior are limited. This program aims to fill this gap by providing community-based education and training that focuses on the family as the main agent in shaping children's social values.

The uniqueness of this program lies in the integration of a democratic parenting approach in bullying prevention in elementary schools. The program not only focuses on educating parents, but also provides hands-on practice sessions, case studies, and mentoring for parents in implementing more effective parenting. By involving teachers and education personnel, the program also encourages synergy between families and schools in building a safe and supportive environment for children's development.

In addition, the community-based approach used in this program allows for sustainability through the formation of support groups for parents and periodic discussion forums. Thus, this program is expected to have a long-term impact in preventing bullying behavior and creating a generation of children who are more empathetic and socially responsible.

METHOD

This activity uses a community-based participatory approach, where parents, teachers, and students are actively involved in every stage of implementation. The methods used are interactive education, practice-based training, and evaluative monitoring to ensure the effectiveness of the program in preventing bullying behavior

through the application of democratic parenting. The location of this activity is at the State Elementary School 1 Batulo, Kadolo Katapi Village, Wolio District

Targets:

- a) Parents of elementary school students (especially grades 3A and 3B) who want to improve their understanding and skills in democratic parenting.
- b) Teachers and education personnel who play a role in guiding students in the school environment.

Stages of Activity Implementation

Stage 1: Needs Analysis and Initial Survey

- 1) Conduct initial observations and interviews with teachers and parents to understand the dominant parenting patterns and bullying cases at school.
- 2) Measuring parents' initial understanding of democratic parenting and bullying behavior.

Stage 2: Education and Training of Parents and Teachers

- 1) Activities are conducted through interactive seminars, workshops, and group discussions with the following methods:
 - a. Parenting Seminar:
 - b. Introduction to the concept of democratic parenting and its relation to bullying prevention.
 - c. Case studies and discussions on the role of parents in shaping children's social behavior.
 - d. Practical Workshop:
 - Effective communication techniques between parents and children.
 - Positive discipline strategies to build children's character.
 - Simulation of how to handle children's conflicts with a democratic approach.
- 2) Training for Teachers:
 - a. Introduction to the concept of parenting in the school environment.
 - b. Strategies to build parental involvement in student character education.

Stage 3: Evaluation and Reflection

- 1) Measuring the increase in understanding and behavior change after the intervention.
- 2) Interviews with teachers and observations at school to see changes in students' social dynamics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

In this service activity, a needs analysis was previously carried out through field observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and parents and an initial survey on the understanding of the application of parenting and the phenomenon of bullying in elementary schools. This aims to obtain a factual picture of the social dynamics of students, patterns of interaction between friends, forms of bullying that occur, and the extent to which parents and teachers understand democratic parenting as a strategy for shaping children's character.

Initial activities were carried out through observation of the elementary school environment and semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents from grade 3 to grade 5. The following are the results of a survey of parents' understanding of democratic parenting and bullying involving 20 parents of students who participated in this service activity:

No	Survey Indicators	Percentage of Correct Answers	Interpretation
1.	Know the characteristics of democratic parenting such as sympathetic response two-way communication logical discipline	28%	Understanding is still limited
2.	Admit to using verbal violence in disciplining children	45%	There are still risky parenting practices
3.	Know the impact of bullying on children's development	32%	Low awareness of the consequences of bullying
4.	Have discussed with children about social conflicts at school	30%	Lack of open communication
5.	Involved in school activities related to character education	20%	Low parental involvement

Observations show the existence of social dynamics that lead to the practice of verbal and social bullying between students. Interviews with teachers revealed that 65% of teachers said they had handled cases of bullying between students in the last 6 months. The form of intervention carried out so far is still reactive and has not been integrated with a parenting approach or sustainable character education. Meanwhile, interviews with parents showed quite contrasting variations in parenting patterns. Around 60% of parents admitted to using authoritarian parenting because it was considered the fastest to provide compliance. Another 30% tended to be permissive, and only 10% showed an understanding of democratic parenting.

Referring to the results of the initial needs analysis, the service activity team carried out several interventions, namely:

1. Seminars and Education for parents and teachers: increasing the literacy of democratic parenting

Seminars and parent education activities were carried out in response to the low conceptual understanding and practical skills in implementing democratic parenting in the family environment, as found in the needs analysis stage. This activity is designed with an interactive and participatory approach so that parents not only gain theoretical knowledge, but are also able to apply it concretely in their daily interactions with their children.



Figure 1: Parenting Education Seminar

The seminar was conducted in two main sessions. The first session focused on strengthening conceptual literacy about democratic parenting. The material presented included:

1. Definition and characteristics of democratic parenting, which is characterized by a balance between responsiveness and control, open communication, and respect for children's autonomy.
2. Comparison of authoritarian, permissive, and democratic parenting in shaping children's prosocial behavior and its impact on the risk of bullying.
3. The role of emotions, empathy and self-regulation as long-term outcomes of democratic parenting practices

The second session focused on practicing parenting skills, particularly in the areas of communication and positive discipline. This activity involves:

1. Simulation of using active listening techniques and I-messages to build empathic and non-judgmental communication.
2. Practice setting family rules with children, establishing logical consequences, and reinforcing positive behavior through praise and social reinforcement.
3. Small group discussions to share experiences and reflect on the parenting practices that have been carried out.



Figure 2. Parenting Workshop

2. School-Parent Collaboration Activities in Building a Social Environment that Supports Children's Character

Collaborative activities between schools and parents are implemented as part of an integral strategy to build an educational ecosystem that supports children's character building, especially in efforts to prevent bullying behavior. This collaboration is not only administrative or incidental, but is developed in a participatory and sustainable manner through a forum of communication and active role-based interventions.



Figure 3. School-Parent Collaborative Forum

The implementation of activities includes three main strategies:

1. School-Parent Collaborative Forum

Implemented in the form of an open dialog between teachers, parents, and service facilitators. The aim is to equalize perceptions regarding the role of each party in shaping children's social behavior and identifying risk factors for bullying. Participants develop a joint commitment in the form of a code of conduct for interaction and communication that applies at home and school.

2. Joint Training with Teachers and Parents

The training material focuses on cross-context (school-home) communication strategies, non-violent intervention approaches, and the preparation of a positive environment action plan. The activity was complemented with a roleplay of a bullying case, where teachers and parents practiced handling the case from two perspectives collaboratively. This simulation strengthens awareness of the importance of value consistency between home and school in shaping children's behavioral norms.

3. Building a Child Character Monitoring System

Teachers and parents are trained to use the prosocial behavior monitoring sheet and early indicators of bullying, which were developed together in this activity. Monitoring is conducted regularly and the results are reflected in monthly meetings or community-based parenting activities.



Figure 4. With Parents and Teachers

3. Evaluation and Reflection: Assessing the Impact of Democratic Parenting Intervention in Bullying Prevention

Evaluation and reflection activities were conducted at the end of the intervention as a systematic effort to measure the impact of the implementation of democratic parenting education on improving parenting literacy, changes in parent and teacher behavior, and student social dynamics in elementary schools. This evaluation consists of three approaches:

1. Cognitive Evaluation: Measuring the increase in knowledge and understanding of parents and teachers through a pretest-posttest instrument.
2. Behavioral Evaluation: Observing changes in communication patterns and discipline practices of parents, as well as teachers' approaches in handling student interactions.
3. Qualitative Reflection: Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to identify subjective experiences, barriers, and successes in implementing democratic parenting.



Figure 5. Evaluation and Reflection

Evaluation Results

1. Improved Parenting Literacy

Based on the pretest and posttest results from parents of participants, there was a significant increase in the average knowledge score from 62.3 to 84.5 (0-100 scale). The understanding of the concept of democratic parenting, the importance of empathic communication, as well as the impact of parenting on bullying behavior increased consistently.

Teachers also showed improved understanding in linking parenting with students' social dynamics at school, as well as in developing strategies for parental involvement in character education.

2. Practical Behavior Change

From the results of participant observations and reflection sheets:

- a. 73% of parents started implementing two-way communication and reduced the use of corporal punishment or verbal threats.
- b. 58% of teachers reported that students became more cooperative and resolved social conflicts more quickly verbally after the implementation of a consistent positive discipline approach between home and school.
- c. Participant Reflection

The FGD results showed that most parents thought this approach opened a new awareness of the importance of educating children through role modeling, consistency, and respect for children's voices. Teachers noted an increased collective awareness within the school community of the importance of school-family communication.

However, challenges were reported, including:

1. Parents' limited time to consistently implement the new parenting style.
2. Different values and parenting styles between fathers and mothers in some families.
3. Lack of school policy support for sustainable parental involvement programs.

Discucion

Based on the results of the activities of the service team, through participatory observation and formative evaluation of activities, several important findings were found in the seminar and education activities for parents and teachers, among others:

1. An increase in conceptual understanding is seen from the results of a short pretest-posttest, where 84% of participants showed an increase in understanding scores about the characteristics of democratic parenting.
2. Participant responses were very positive. 91% of parents stated that this was the first time they had participated in an activity that directly taught democratic parenting strategies.
3. Commitment to real change. 76% of participants expressed the ability to implement two-way communication and reduce the practice of physical and verbal punishment.

4. Effectiveness of participatory methods. Participants tended to be more active and enthusiastic when given the opportunity to tell stories, discuss cases, and engage in simulations.

Increasing democratic parenting literacy in parents is a crucial aspect in bullying prevention strategies in elementary schools. When parents are able to model empathic, fair, and consistent communication, children tend to have better social skills, low aggressiveness, and high empathy towards peers (Pinquart, 2016; Smetana, 2017) In addition, democratic parenting has been shown to be positively correlated with children's moral development, social perspective taking, and emotion regulation (Bornstein et al., 2023)

This activity also shows that the transformation of parenting practices is possible through an educational approach that is not patronizing, but empowering. When parents feel valued, heard and involved, they are more open to changes in parenting practices. Therefore, similar programs need to be developed sustainably in the form of school- and village-based parent learning communities.

Collaboration between schools and parents in building a healthy and supportive social environment has been proven to be an important foundation in children's character building and bullying prevention. Meaningful, rather than merely administrative, parental involvement has a direct impact on the cohesiveness of norms and consistency of values that children receive (Epstein, 2018; Walker et al., 2004)

Through the collaborative approach developed in this activity, schools are no longer the only actors in character education, but rather part of an interconnected educational ecological system (Olivia & McLeod, 2024). Children who receive consistent social messages from home and school tend to have better self-control, higher empathy, and resistance to aggressive behavior or social dominance (Bornstein et al., 2023)

The joint training also increased the capacity of teachers and parents in handling potential bullying in a preventive and educative manner. By sharing an understanding of the characteristics, forms, and impacts of bullying, both parties can act immediately when early signals of deviant behavior appear. This model reflects the practice of shared responsibility in creating a safe and inclusive learning environment (Espelage & Hong, 2017)

In addition, this collaboration builds social trust between schools and families, which is a prerequisite for program sustainability. When communication is open and

empathy-based, supervision of children becomes not a form of control, but a shared practice for healthy growth and development.

During the collaboration process, several significant findings were found:

1. The level of parent participation is high, with more than 80% attendance in discussion forums and trainings.
2. Improved communication between teachers and parents can be seen from the formation of an online communication group (WhatsApp Group) specifically to discuss children's social dynamics, not just academic matters.
3. Teachers reported a decrease in conflicts between students and an increase in helping each other after 3 weeks of implementation of the social code of conduct resulting from the collaboration forum.
4. Parents began to be actively involved in the development of classroom rules and became resource persons for thematic classroom activities, such as “Good Character Day”.

Evaluation and reflection showed that the democratic parenting-based intervention not only increased parents' and teachers' literacy and skills, but also had a real impact on improving the social climate in the classroom and school. This is in line with previous research findings that democratic parenting is positively correlated with low aggression, high empathy, and prosocial behavior in school-age children (Carlo et al., 2018; Pinquart, 2016). Evaluation models that integrate cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects are considered effective in providing a comprehensive picture of service outcomes. Reflection integrated into the evaluation not only serves as an assessment tool, but also as a means of collective learning for all parties. This evaluation also reinforces the importance of continuity of community-based parenting programs as well as structural support from schools so that behavior change can continue in the long term. Therefore, the main recommendations are the establishment of a School-Parent Forum and the integration of the democratic parenting agenda in school management policies.

Based on existing research and literature, parenting plays a central role in shaping children's social behavior. However, most bullying prevention programs still focus on school-based interventions without optimally involving families. Therefore, efforts are needed to increase parents' understanding and skills in implementing democratic parenting to create an environment that supports positive social development and prevents bullying behavior.

This activity provides benefits for parents and teachers, namely educating parents about the concepts and benefits of democratic parenting in shaping children's character, training parents in implementing democratic parenting with an effective communication approach and positive discipline, facilitating teachers in understanding the role of families in preventing bullying behavior at school and building collaboration between schools and parents in creating a safe and bullying-free environment.

Bullying is a social problem that impacts children's psychological and academic well-being. Many interventions focus on addressing bullying in schools, but pay little attention to the role of families. Democratic parenting, characterized by open communication, emotional support and positive discipline, helps children develop empathy, emotion regulation and social skills. Children raised with democratic parenting are more likely to avoid aggressive behavior and form healthy social interactions. Some of the interventions carried out in this service activity are:

1. Parent Education: Providing an understanding of democratic parenting and its impact on children's behavior.
2. Parenting Training: Provides parents with skills in implementing positive communication and discipline patterns.
3. School-Parent Collaboration: Helps teachers and parents create an environment that supports children's prosocial character.

With the implementation of the above activities, it is hoped that parents will have better skills in guiding children democratically, reduce the level of bullying in elementary schools through the active role of families, and build synergy between families and schools in building children's character and the publication of the results of this service activity in the form of scientific articles.

Some research results that have been conducted related to democratic parenting and bullying actions show that the importance of preventing bullying behavior through socialization of bullying prevention by developing Emotion Zone media (Ulfa, Kosilah, et al., 2025), besides that bullying prevention can also be done through information services so as to increase student self-awareness (Wijaya, 2024). Democratic parenting applied by parents will shape children's personalities (Ulfa et al., 2023), and shape children's interests (Ulfa, Edison, et al., 2025), even grandparents' culture-based parenting (in authoritative parenting) carried out by parents, has shaped children's personalities to be more independent, honest, socialize well, be responsible, have good social interactions and the cultivation of religious values (Ulfa et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

The results of this service activity show that democratic parenting can be an effective preventive strategy in building children's prosocial character and reducing the tendency of bullying behavior in the elementary school environment. Interventions involving parenting literacy education, positive communication and discipline training, and strengthening collaboration between schools and parents are proven to increase understanding, awareness, and responsive and supportive parenting practices both at home and at school. These findings underscore the importance of a holistic education ecosystem approach, where children's character development is not only the responsibility of schools but is also significantly influenced by the quality of family parenting and parent-teacher partnerships. Therefore, there is a need to institutionalize community-based parenting programs and integrate democratic parenting values in school policies as part of a long-term strategy to create a learning climate that is safe, inclusive and oriented towards children's psychosocial well-being.

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