

Original Article

Effectiveness of a Positive Deviance-Based Educational Intervention on Children’s Self-Esteem for Bullying Prevention: A Quasi-Experimental Study



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ABSTRACT

Background: Bullying is a critical school issue rooted in low self-esteem, which serves as a major vulnerability factor for children. This study aims to analyze the role of Positive Deviance (PD) education in improving children’s self-esteem as a bullying prevention strategy.

Methods: A quantitative quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design was employed. The population consisted of grade VI students at SD Negeri 101893 Bangun Rejo, with a total sample of 58 students, divided into an experimental (n=29) and a control (n=29) group. Sampling involved identifying "positive deviants"—children who successfully overcame bullying risks—to develop the PD education module. Variables measured included knowledge, self-esteem (SE), and Positive Deviance Bullying behavior (PB) as dependent variables, collected via validated instruments. Ethical clearance was ensured throughout the procedure, and data were analyzed using Paired and Independent t-tests.

Results: Most respondents were aged 11–12 years, and the experimental group had a higher proportion of females (65.5%). The experimental group showed significant improvements in knowledge (p=0.0001), self-esteem (p=0.043), and behavior (p=0.034). Independent t-test results confirmed significant differences between the experimental and control groups for knowledge (p=0.013), self-esteem (p=0.037), and behavior (p=0.024), indicating the intervention’s effectiveness.

Conclusion: Positive Deviance education effectively enhances children’s self-esteem, providing a vital psychological foundation for bullying prevention. It is recommended that future programs adopt a whole-school approach involving teachers and parents to support long-term behavioral change and sustainability.

Keywords: Bullying; Self-Esteem; Positive Deviance; School-Based Intervention; Child Health.



Implications for Practice:

- Implementation of Asset-Based Interventions in School Curricula by applying Positive Deviance (PD) education modules as an effective bullying prevention strategy.
- Strengthening Mental Resilience as a Clinical and Preventive Decision by collaborating with health workers and school counselors who must focus their interventions on improving self-esteem.
- Integration of Prevention Policies Based on a whole-school approach involving teachers and parents to reinforce anti-bullying norms and ensure the sustainability of student behavior change

Introduction

Bullying is a critical issue that causes long-term adverse effects on child development, including mental health disorders, social development barriers, and decreased academic performance. Globally, this phenomenon encompasses not only physical violence but also verbal, social, and cyber forms ([Zhang et al., 2024](#)) that significantly threaten children's psychological well-being ([Olweus, 2013](#)).

Data shows an alarming prevalence of bullying; the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that one in three children worldwide experience bullying ([World Health Organization, 2020](#)). In Indonesia, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) consistently reports high rates of bullying, which often leads to depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts. At the local level, many cases in schools remain undetected or are not handled effectively, which reinforces negative behavior patterns ([Hellfeldt et al., 2019](#)).

This research is important because, even though the Indonesian government has issued Permendikbudristek No. 46 of 2023, the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs is often limited, as they fail to address the psychological roots of

children's vulnerability ([Ministry of Education, Culture, and Research, 2023](#)). Focusing on improving self-esteem is highly relevant for child health and nursing practitioners because it is a key protective factor that builds children's resilience to social pressure.

Conventional anti-bullying programs are often top-down and fail to contextualize solutions in applied health practices in schools ([George et al., 2024](#)). There is a gap in the use of locally based approaches; while many programs focus on reporting perpetrators, few explore how replicating the positive behaviors of students who have successfully overcome the risk of bullying (positive deviants) can strengthen students' internal strengths.

This study was guided by the concept of Positive Deviance (PD) integrated with psychosocial resilience theory ([Tolmatcheff et al., 2022](#)). In the context of health, this approach is in line with the adaptation model that emphasizes strengthening individuals' ability to respond positively to their environment by identifying successful local practices in their own communities and using Positive Deviance (PD) as the main intervention strategy by identifying successful local behaviors ([Marsh et al., 2004](#)). The PD module works through the mechanism of vicarious experience (learning from peers), which, according to Bandura (Self-Efficacy Theory), is key to increasing children's self-efficacy in rejecting bullying ([Bandura, 1977](#)).

This study variable links Positive Deviance education (as an intervention) with increased self-esteem and bullying prevention behavior (as an outcome). This framework assumes that by studying the behavior of socially successful "model students," other students can improve their self-perception and social adaptation skills, thereby strengthening their psychological foundation for rejecting bullying ([Han et al.,](#)

2022). Theoretically, the causal pathway in this study begins with modeling the behavior of positive deviants who build students' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). This efficacy enables students to adapt more effectively socially, which then activates their internal sociometer, increasing self-esteem. Ultimately, this increased self-esteem becomes the primary protective factor against bullying behavior.

The results of this study contribute to community nursing and school health practices by providing a contextual and sustainable bullying prevention model (Munthe, 2023). In practical terms, this can improve school nurses' competence in designing psychosocial interventions that focus not only on preventing violence but also on empowering students' internal capacity to create a safe school environment.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effectiveness of Positive Deviance (PD)-based education in improving children's self-esteem as a key strategy for preventing bullying at SD Negeri 101893 Bangun Rejo.

Methods

Study Design

This research employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control-group design. The study compared an experimental group receiving a Positive Deviance (PD) education intervention against a control group that received no treatment to evaluate its impact on children's self-esteem and bullying prevention (Gaffney et al., 2021).

Participants

The participants in this study were elementary school students recruited from Grade VI at SD Negeri 101893 Bangun Rejo. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants, including

the identification of “positive deviants,” defined as students who demonstrated high self-esteem and the ability to cope effectively with bullying risks despite being in the same environment as their peers. The total sample consisted of 58 students, who were equally divided into an experimental group (n = 29) and a control group (n = 29). Inclusion criteria included students who were actively enrolled in Grade VI, present during the baseline data collection, and willing to participate in the study. Exclusion criteria were students who were absent during the intervention or posttest sessions and those who withdrew or transferred during the study period. Participants were recruited through coordination with the school administration after obtaining formal permission to conduct the research.

Instruments

The research instrument used in this study was an adapted and modified questionnaire derived from the Positive Deviance framework, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), and established bullying prevention constructs. The instrument was designed to measure three main variables: knowledge, self-esteem, and bullying prevention behavior. It consisted of three sections, including a 10-item knowledge questionnaire and two Likert-scale instruments (1–5 scale) measuring self-esteem and bullying prevention behavior, each comprising 10 items. Content validity was established through expert review involving academics and health education specialists, ensuring the relevance and comprehensiveness of all items. Construct validity was confirmed by aligning each item with the theoretical framework of asset-based and psychosocial resilience approaches. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's alpha, yielding coefficients above 0.80, indicating excellent internal consistency. Before use, the instrument was reviewed and approved

for adaptation to ensure cultural and contextual suitability for elementary school students.

Intervention

The intervention in this study consisted of a Positive Deviance (PD)-based educational program designed to enhance students' self-esteem and promote bullying prevention behaviors. The intervention began with the identification of "positive deviants," defined as students who demonstrated high self-esteem and the ability to successfully avoid or cope with bullying within the same school environment. Insights from these students were used to develop a context-specific PD educational module. The program was implemented in the experimental group through structured educational sessions delivered by the research team from the Bachelor of Midwifery Program at STIKes Mitra Husada Medan. The sessions emphasized peer learning, positive behavior modeling, and active student engagement. The intervention was conducted within the school setting (SD Negeri 101893 Bangun Rejo), while the control group did not receive any PD-based education and continued with the standard school curriculum without additional intervention.

Data Collection

Data were collected in 2025 at SD Negeri 101893 Bangun Rejo, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The data collection process consisted of two phases: a pretest administered prior to the intervention to obtain baseline measurements of knowledge, self-esteem, and bullying prevention behavior, and a posttest conducted after the intervention to assess changes in these variables. Data were collected using structured and validated questionnaires distributed to all participants ($n = 58$). The questionnaires

were administered directly by the research team, who provided guidance and clarification to ensure that students understood each item, considering the participants' age and cognitive level. All responses were recorded anonymously to maintain confidentiality and reduce response bias.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using statistical software to perform both descriptive and inferential analyses. Univariate analysis was conducted to describe the distribution of participants' demographic characteristics, including age and gender. For inferential analysis, a paired t -test was used to examine within-group differences in knowledge, self-esteem, and bullying prevention behavior before and after the intervention. An independent t -test was subsequently applied to compare the mean differences (Δ scores) between the experimental and control groups to determine the effectiveness of the Positive Deviance-based educational intervention. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was applied for all statistical tests.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained through the institutional review board at STIKes Mitra Husada Medan prior to data collection. Permission to conduct the study was also secured from the school administration of SD Negeri 101893 Bangun Rejo. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and their guardians before participation. Participants were assured that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, no identifying information was recorded, and all data were coded and used solely for research purposes.

Results

This study involved 58 sixth-grade students as respondents, divided into an experimental group and a control group.

The characteristics of the sample are as follows:

Complete details of the respondents' demographic characteristics are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Characteristics in Experimental and Control Groups

Variable	Category	Experimental Group (n, %)	Control Group (n, %)
Age	11 years	23 (79.3%)	1 (3.4%)
	12 years	6 (20.7%)	23 (79.3%)
	13-14 years	0 (0%)	4 (13.8%)
Gender	Male	10 (34.5%)	14 (48.3%)
	Female	19 (65.5%)	15 (51.7%)
Class	VI	29 (100%)	29 (100%)

Respondents ranged in age from 11 to 14 years old. In the experimental group, the majority of respondents were 11 years old (79.3%), while in the control group, the majority were 12 years old (79.3%). The sample consisted of 24 males (41.4%) and 34 females (58.6%). In the experimental

group, 19 respondents (65.5%) were female, while in the control group, 15 respondents (51.7%) were female. Data analysis was performed using a paired t-test to examine changes within groups and an independent t-test to compare effectiveness between groups (**Table 1**).

Knowledge about Bullying

Table 2. Paired t-Test Results for the Experimental Group

Variable	Pretest (Mean±SD)	Posttest (Mean±SD)	p-value
Knowledge	8.86±1.48	10.97±1.49	0.001
Self-Esteem (SE)	35.28±4.40	37.97±4.55	0.043
Positive Deviance Behavior (PB)	31.59±6.99	35.03±4.18	0.034

The experimental group showed a significant increase in knowledge scores from a mean of 8.86 to 10.97 ($p = 0.0001$). The Independent t-test showed a significant difference between the experimental and

control groups ($p = 0.013$). The hypothesis that Positive Deviance education increases respondents' knowledge is supported (**Table 2**).

Self-Esteem

Table 3. Paired t-Test Results for the Control Group

Variable	Pretest (Mean±SD)	Posttest (Mean±SD)	p-value
Knowledge	10.95±2.99	10.83±3.60	0.861
Self-Esteem (SE)	30.86±6.66	32.83±10.55	0.153
Positive Deviance Behavior (PB)	32.69±5.32	33.97±8.55	0.542

The self-esteem score in the experimental group increased significantly from 35.28 to 37.97 ($p = 0.043$).

Comparison between groups showed a significant difference in improvement ($p = 0.037$). The hypothesis that Positive

Deviance education increases children's self-esteem is supported (**Table 3**).

Bullying Prevention Behavior (Positive Deviance Behavior)

Table 4. Independent t-Test Results Between Experimental and Control Groups

Variable	n	Experimental (Mean±SD)	Control (Mean±SD)	p-value
Knowledge	29	2.10±2.01	-0.14±4.21	0.013
Self-Esteem (SE)	29	3.69±6.85	2.17±11.93	0.037
Positive Deviance Behavior (PB)	29	3.45±8.34	1.78±11.14	0.024

In the experimental group, behavior scores increased from 31.59 to 35.03 ($p = 0.034$). The between-groups test also showed a significant difference in final scores between the experimental and control groups ($p = 0.024$). The hypothesis that Positive Deviance education influences bullying prevention behavior is supported (**Table 4**).

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that Positive Deviance (PD)-based education significantly improves students' self-esteem and knowledge about bullying prevention ([Oktafia et al., 2024](#)). These findings align with the theoretical framework of the asset-based approach, which emphasizes identifying positive behaviors within the community to address social problems ([Fine et al., 2022](#)). These results support previous research by UNICEF ([Innocenti, 2024](#)), which states that schools with positive deviant practices have a safer environment because they utilize positive peer norms. Unlike conventional anti-bullying programs, which often focus on punishing perpetrators, our findings show that strengthening internal protective factors such as self-esteem through peer role models provides a stronger foundation for children to reject negative behaviors ([Sultana et al., 2023](#)).

This study provides new insights: interventions do not always have to come

from rigid external instructions; they can be built on positive behaviors already present in students' own environments (local wisdom). This research supports the theory of psychosocial resilience, which holds that high self-esteem is an important mediator of the effectiveness of violence prevention in schools ([Setiadi et al., 2021](#)). The main contribution of this study is the development of a contextual PD education module for elementary school students ([Noboru et al., 2021](#)), which can serve as a reference for future research on developing more inclusive, group-based intervention strategies ([Hikmat et al., 2024](#)).

Implications and limitations

This study provides a conceptual and theoretical contribution to the fields of nursing and child health by reinforcing the relevance of the Positive Deviance (PD) approach as an asset-based framework for strengthening psychosocial resilience, particularly by enhancing self-esteem as a protective factor against bullying. The findings support integrating social learning and self-efficacy theories, demonstrating that modeling positive peer behaviors can be an effective mechanism for internal behavioral change among children. Scientifically, this study advances the understanding of how locally derived behavioral models can be systematically incorporated into intervention design, offering an alternative to conventional deficit-based approaches. However, several

limitations should be acknowledged. The relatively small sample size and single-site setting limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the quasi-experimental design, lacking long-term follow-up, limits the ability to assess the sustainability of the observed effects over time. Future research is recommended to involve larger, multi-site samples and longitudinal designs to validate further and extend these findings.

Relevance to Practice

The findings of this study offer practical applications for nursing and community health practice, particularly in school-based settings within Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs). The Positive Deviance (PD)-based educational approach can be directly implemented by nurses, school health practitioners, and counselors as a low-cost, culturally relevant intervention to enhance children's self-esteem and prevent bullying. In resource-limited settings, this approach is feasible because it utilizes existing student role models rather than relying on external resources or specialized programs. Practically, health workers can integrate PD modules into routine school health programs, identify and engage "positive deviant" students as peer educators, and collaborate with teachers to reinforce positive behaviors through regular classroom activities. For institutions and policymakers, these findings support the development of school health policies that prioritize preventive, peer-based psychosocial interventions as part of a whole-school approach. This strategy is particularly relevant in LMIC contexts where sustainable, scalable, and community-driven interventions are essential for improving child mental health outcomes.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Positive Deviance (PD)-based educational interventions are effective in improving students' self-esteem, knowledge, and bullying prevention behaviors in elementary school settings. The findings highlight that strengthening internal psychosocial factors through peer-based, contextually grounded approaches provides a more sustainable foundation for preventing bullying than conventional methods. The key take-home message is that empowering existing positive behaviors within the student community can be a powerful, feasible strategy to promote mental resilience and create safer school environments, particularly in resource-limited contexts.

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CrediT Authorship Contributions Statement

Retno Wahyuni: Conceptualization, Writing - Original Draft, Project administration, Supervision.

Marliani: Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing - Review & Editing

Lusiatun: Validation, Data Curation, Writing - Review & Editing

Ahmad Japar: Resources, Project administration, Validation

Ingka K Pangaribuan: Software, Formal analysis, Visualization

Kismiasih Adethia: Methodology, Investigation, Writing – Review & Editing

Herna Rinayanti Manurung: Conceptualization, Supervision, Project administration, Data curation

Bunga Aulia Dwi F.: Investigation, Data Curation, Software

Intan Putri Sinaga: Investigation, Visualization

Juwita Rantika D.: Investigation, Validation

Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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Supplementary Materials

Supplementary File S1: Research Instrument contains the full questionnaire used for data collection.

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