# Compassionate Learning in Enhancing Anti-Bullying Traits among Students of Pesantren-Based Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyse the compassionate learning approach to strengthen students' anti-bullying character in pesantren-based madrasahs. The study is conducted at Islamic Elementary School/Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Tarbiyatul Banin Pekalongan Winong Pati, Indonesia, a pesantren-based madrasah that utilizes a compassionate learning approach. This research employs a qualitative approach using a case study. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the madrasah principal and teachers, measurement of students' levels of compassion through questionnaires, direct observation, and relevant documentation. Miles and Huberman's interactive data analysis was applied through stages including data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results indicate that compassion is employed as a learning approach in the madrasah, albeit without a written policy. This approach is reinforced by the madrasah environment that fosters compassion, the integration of compassionate values into learning, and students' empathetic behavior. Compassion-based learning can enhance anti-bullying character traits, as evidenced by 96% of students exhibiting positive empathy, 64% displaying high moral courage, and 84% demonstrating high social awareness. Based

on the research findings, schools or madrasahs should develop a design for a compassionate learning environment to bolster students' positive character traits.

**Keywords**: *compassionate learning, anti-bullying character, pesantren-based madrasah.*

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pendekatan pembelajaran berbasis kasih sayang (*compassionate learning*) dalam memperkuat karakter anti-perundungan pada siswa madrasah ibtidaiyah berbasis pesantren. Penelitian ini dilakukan di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Tarbiyatul Banin Pekalongan Winong Pati, Indonesia, sebuah madrasah yang mengimplementasikan pendekatan pembelajaran berbasis kasih sayang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan kepala madrasah dan guru, pengukuran tingkat kasih sayang siswa melalui kuesioner, observasi langsung, serta dokumentasi relevan. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi tahap pengumpulan data, reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran berbasis kasih sayang telah diterapkan dalam proses pembelajaran di madrasah, meskipun belum tertuang dalam kebijakan tertulis. Pendekatan ini diperkuat oleh lingkungan madrasah yang mendukung nilai-nilai kasih sayang, integrasi nilai-nilai kasih sayang ke dalam pembelajaran, serta perilaku empatik siswa. Pembelajaran berbasis kasih sayang terbukti mampu meningkatkan karakter anti-perundungan pada siswa, yang ditunjukkan dengan 96% siswa memiliki empati yang baik, 64% menunjukkan keberanian moral yang tinggi, dan 84% memiliki kesadaran sosial yang tinggi. Berdasarkan temuan ini, sekolah atau madrasah disarankan untuk merancang lingkungan pembelajaran yang berlandaskan kasih sayang guna membentuk karakter positif pada siswa.

**Kata kunci**: *pembelajaran berbasis kasih sayang, karakter anti-perundungan, madrasah berbasis pesantren.*

## INTRODUCTION

The school, madrasah, and pesantren are all educational structures and spaces that facilitate educational interactions (Fadli, 2023) in a systematic and measurable manner (Zydziunaite et al., 2022). During these interactions, teachers perform two vital functions: first, the moral development of students as a core component of character building (Bariah, 2020; Mafrudlo et al., 2023); and second, the nurturing of each student's unique capabilities (Rubtsov & Ulanovskaya, 2022) to enable their optimal development.

Unfortunately, however, many educational institutions today are perceived as hostile toward children (Humaeroh et al., 2021), and some are even likened to prisons. Bullying is increasingly prevalent (Evangelio et al., 2022). For example, a second-grade elementary school student in Gresik went blind after being stabbed with a meatball stick, and MR, an 11-year-old fourth grader from Banyuwangi, committed suicide due to bullying (Restiawan & Kurniati, 2023). According to PISA 2022 data, in Indonesia, 4% of students reported feeling unsafe on their way to school, 6% felt unsafe in their classrooms, and 17% felt unsafe in other areas of the school such as hallways, cafeterias, and restrooms (OECD, 2022).

Indonesia ranks among the countries most affected by bullying in the ASEAN region. Females are more frequently the victims of bullying compared to males (Aizenkot & Kashy-

Rosenbaum, 2021) and bullying rates are increasing due to the rising use of social media (Barlett et al., 2021). The long-term consequences of bullying are almost always negative (Bowes et al., 2015), whether they are physical or emotional, and they may arise from traditional bullying or cyberbullying.

Students from broken families, for example, are more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior and bully others due to the lack of parental attention and affection (Broll & Reynolds, 2020; Firlana, 2023). Therefore, it is essential that teachers adopt a compassionate approach to learning, as this can positively influence both student behavior and academic performance. This approach highlights the importance of compassion, empathy, and self-awareness within the teaching and learning process (Gachago et al., 2022).

The pesantren-based Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Tarbiyatul Banin has the crucial role of instilling religious and social values. The values rooted in the pesantren distinguish this madrasah from other educational institutions (Hasnawati & Nadliroh, 2023). A madrasah can embody an inclusive character marked by openness and tolerance, which is evident in this case (Rohman et al., 2023). According to the Head of the Madrasah, Maqhosid, this institution implements the concept of pedagogical compassion in its teaching and learning activities. This is achieved by integrating values such as piety, sympathy, empathy, social care, and mutual cooperation into both the curriculum and students' daily activities (Alnashr et al., 2022). Teachers, therefore, encourage students to actively engage in social activities such as community service, mutual cooperation, visiting sick peers, and other actions inspired by social and religious values.

The issue addressed in this study focuses on the holistic understanding of the compassionate learning approach within Indonesian pesantren-based madrasahs—an area that merits deeper exploration. This distinguishes the research from previous studies and opens new pathways for future inquiry into Islamic pedagogy and pesantren culture. Specifically, it examines how the compassionate learning approach fosters anti-bullying attitudes among students in pesantren-based madrasahs. This research fills an important gap by providing context-specific, empirical, and faith-integrated insights into how compassionate learning can be effectively applied in pesantren-based madrasahs to reduce bullying behavior. While many earlier studies were conceptual, policy-driven, or lacked an Islamic focus, this study uniquely combines pedagogical compassion, measurable student outcomes, and Islamic moral philosophy in a real-world primary education setting.

Bullying and Its Consequences on Students

Victims of bullying often suffer from negative emotional states such as anxiety and depression (Evangelio et al., 2022). Both victims and perpetrators tend to demonstrate low educational attainment (Paulmony et al., 2022) and exhibit poor academic performance (Delprato et al., 2017). For children at the elementary school level, bullying can severely impact their self-image, leading to feelings of shame, rage, trauma, and anxiety (Oktaviany & Ramadan, 2023), as well as fostering anti-social mental development (Mei et al., 2023). Adults who were bullied as children are statistically more likely to face unemployment and poverty compared to those who were not bullied (Brimblecombe et al., 2018). Therefore, the consequences of bullying are extensive, affecting not only the victims but also the aggressors, with long-lasting effects that can persist well into adulthood.

Part of the rise in bullying incidents may be attributed to an educational system that prioritizes academic performance at the expense of holistic student development (Herawati & Deharnita, 2019). This is evident in teaching and learning practices that are overly focused on grades and rankings, while students' character and moral development are often neglected (Francis et al., 2022). As a result, the educational experience—meant to be engaging and enjoyable—is replaced by a culture that fosters individualism, insensitivity, and unethical behavior.

Firlana (2023) supports the idea that ethical decline can be mitigated through compassion-centered parenting, which fosters children's independence, promotes a cheerful disposition, and enhances their ability to cope with stress. Alongside compassion, trust and shared goals are essential to building collaborative pedagogical and nurturing relationships that support lifelong learning (Nissilä et al., 2022). Positive traits and moral values can be cultivated and strengthened through a compassionate approach to teaching (Gachago et al., 2022; Rao & Rithvik, 2022).

Developing Anti-Bullying Character

Bullying is an aggressive or hostile behavior that is deliberately repeated and often directed at someone who lacks the power to defend themselves (Rozi, 2021). Numerous contributing factors can influence bullying, including family dynamics, peer relationships, mass media, and the school environment (Herawati & Deharnita, 2019). Elements of the school setting—such as classroom furniture, playground design, the school building, security cameras, and even the electrical layout—can either reduce or exacerbate bullying among students (Francis et al., 2022). Therefore, schools must respond proactively by implementing effective anti-bullying policies to ensure students feel safe and supported.

To help prevent bullying, schools can adopt comprehensive measures, such as policies that involve parents and require adjustments to school rules, curriculum, and administrative procedures (Gaffney et al., 2021). These efforts may begin with the incorporation of specific skills like empathy training and social-emotional learning programs, which have been shown to reduce relational aggression in children (Kim et al., 2022). Additionally, effective communication between schools and parents is crucial to ensure awareness of the impact of bullying and the need for preventive action (Paulmony et al., 2022).

Anti-bullying character refers to the attitudes and behaviors that aim to eliminate all forms of bullying while fostering an empathetic and safe school environment (Coloroso, 2003). This character involves the courage to confront unjust behavior, the empathy to understand and share others' feelings, and the awareness to avoid becoming a bully, victim, or passive bystander (Olweus, 1993). These traits position students to actively help eliminate bullying within the school setting.

Several pro-social behaviors serve as key indicators of empathetic anti-bullying character. Shallowness is a lack of emotional depth or the inability to empathize with victims and offer genuine support (Strauss et al., 2016). Enthusiasm is active participation in preventing or addressing bullying, such as reporting incidents or supporting victims (Kanov et al., 2004). Responsibility means recognizing that one's words and actions impact others and being willing to take ownership of them. Respect means valuing differences in culture, religion, gender, or other identities, and refraining from bullying individuals based on these traits. Solidarity means providing emotional and physical support to peers who are bullied

while refusing to engage in or condone bullying behavior. Moral courage is the strength and willingness to stand up against wrongdoing with the intent to stop bullying (Gilbert, 2017).

Bullying is a serious issue that demands thoughtful and strategic intervention. Schools, in collaboration with parents, can address this challenge by implementing school-wide anti-bullying programs and fostering moral character development in students. By teaching empathy, active engagement, responsibility, respect, solidarity, and moral courage, schools can cultivate an environment free from bullying. Every student deserves to be protected and supported through these educational efforts.

**METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method (Creswell, 2019) to gain an in-depth understanding of the application of compassionate learning in shaping anti-bullying character at MI Tarbiyatul Banin Pekalongan Winong Pati, Indonesia. The research site was selected purposively, as the madrasah is known for its culturally rooted implementation of compassionate learning practices. The research subjects included the madrasah principal, sixth-grade teachers, and 26 sixth-grade students (10 boys and 16 girls).

The data sources comprised both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly by the researchers through in-depth interviews with the school principal and teachers, direct observations of classroom learning and student social interactions, and a student questionnaire designed to measure key aspects of anti-bullying character—namely, empathy, moral courage, and social concern. Secondary data were collected from existing school documentation, including program activity records, regulations, and reports of students' social activities.

Data collection instruments included semi-structured interview guides, observation sheets with compassion-related indicators, four-point Likert scale questionnaires, and document checklists. To ensure the validity of the data, both source and method triangulation techniques were employed, alongside member checking with informants.

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by (Miles et al., 2014), which involves four key stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The data were analyzed narratively and presented thematically to illustrate the relationship between the implementation of compassionate learning and the strengthening of students' anti-bullying character. This analytical process was conducted reflectively and continuously throughout the research period.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**
**Implementing a Compassionate Learning Approach in Madrasahs**

Assessing the effectiveness of compassion-based learning can be focused on four key components: the learning environment, the learning process, student behavior, and madrasah policies. These elements indicate that the learning environment at MI Tarbiyatul Banin is conducive to the implementation of compassion-based learning. This is important because compassion in education enables teachers to better understand the socio-emotional needs of students, particularly those who are less fortunate or marginalized (Pallitt et al., 2022). A school culture enriched with social-emotional competence, as highlighted in previous studies

(Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), also contributes to a supportive classroom climate and improved learning outcomes.

Based on these components, the research findings at MI Tarbiyatul Banin Pekalongan Winong are illustrated in the following image:
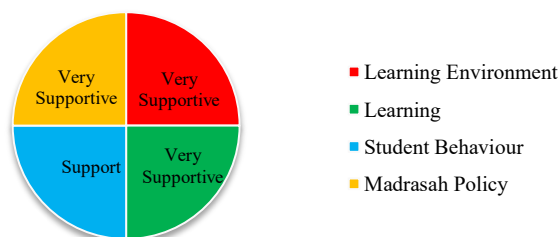


**Figure 1.**
**Components Supporting Compassionate Learning**

The students of MI Tarbiyatul Banin exhibit strong anti-bullying character traits, as they consistently demonstrate empathy toward their peers and are often willing to intervene or offer help when they witness bullying. This character is cultivated through compassion-based education, which enhances brain functions related to empathy and emotional regulation (Kaur, 2020). The supportive learning environment at MI Tarbiyatul Banin plays a significant role in fostering these compassionate behaviors, enabling students to develop a stronger anti-bullying disposition.

The emphasis on loving-kindness in Islam incorporates foundational principles such as *rahmatan lil alamin* (compassion toward all creation) (Sistiadi & Fauzi, 2023), *ihsan* (doing good in the best possible way), and *uswatun hasanah* (emulating the exemplary conduct of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him). Educational and pedagogical efforts grounded in religious values and their spiritual actualization are critical in shaping students' character (Firdaus, 2022). The Islamic concept of mercy stems from the root word *ra-hi-ma*, which is one of the divine names and attributes of Allah ar-Rahman, The Most Compassionate. Islam consistently advocates for gentleness, kindness, and compassion toward all creatures (Muvid, 2021).

A true Muslim is encouraged to be compassionate toward others and to spread this compassion wherever they go (Al-Jawzi, n.d.). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated in a hadith, "irhamu man fi al-ard yarhamkum man fi al-sama," meaning, "have mercy on those who are on earth, and the One in the heavens will have mercy on you" (Al-Tirmidhi, 1975). Those who lack compassion cannot truly claim to follow the Prophet, as Allah does not love those who do not show mercy to others (Al-Bukhari, n.d.).

In Surah Al-Anbiya (21:107), Allah states that He sent the Prophet Muhammad as a mercy to all the worlds. According to Tafsir Al-Munir, this verse means that the Prophet's mercy extends not only to human beings but also to the jinn and all aspects of nature (Zuhaili, 2009). The Prophet's own compassionate conduct in teaching Islam played a crucial role in the spread and acceptance of the religion.

Philosophically, the concept of compassionate learning is rooted in humanism. Humanism holds that individuals live only once and should strive to live fully—both in action and in the pursuit of meaning and joy (Lamont, 1997). Humanism views learning not merely

as the acquisition of information, but as a vital process for nurturing moral and ethical human beings. Consequently, humanism can be effectively integrated into religious education (Barnes, 2024).

Humanism emphasizes respect for the human condition, the interpretation of personal experience, and the pursuit of individual development to the fullest extent. Beyond intellectual growth, it values emotional, social, and spiritual development as well (Lamont, 1997). Compassionate learning, rooted in these principles, treats each student as a unique individual with distinct needs and potential.

In more practical terms, this means students are treated with compassion, respect, and empathy within the learning process, through the intentional creation of supportive educational environments (Kurniawan, 2019). Teachers recognize and appreciate individual differences, promote student autonomy, and encourage self-expression (Still, 2018). The ultimate goal of educational humanism combined with compassion is to foster a socially engaged and ethically grounded learning process.

**Compassionate Learning and Anti-Bullying Character Building**

The values of compassion at MI Tarbiyatul Banin Pekalongan Winong are not limited to religious subjects; rather, compassion is integrated across all subjects taught. This reflects a comprehensive and balanced educational approach that nurtures the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning (Fitria & Fadriati, 2022). As a result, every subject—whether mathematics, science, civics, cultural arts, or the Indonesian language—incorporates moral and social skills aimed at fostering empathy, care for others, and the development of anti-bullying character.

At MI Tarbiyatul Banin, compassion-based learning is implemented as a cohesive, collaborative learning process that encourages cooperative problem-solving among students. Teachers actively participate in this process by connecting academic content with values of compassion. This approach aligns with Lickona's (2012) theory of character education, which emphasizes the integration of virtuous character and academic excellence. Through embedding compassion into the curriculum, students develop positive traits such as intellectual integrity, good manners, peaceful behavior, and non-aggressiveness—key indicators of an anti-bullying disposition.

The results of research into the anti-bullying character of students at MI Tarbiyatul Banin Pekalongan Pati, Central Java are illustrated in the following data:
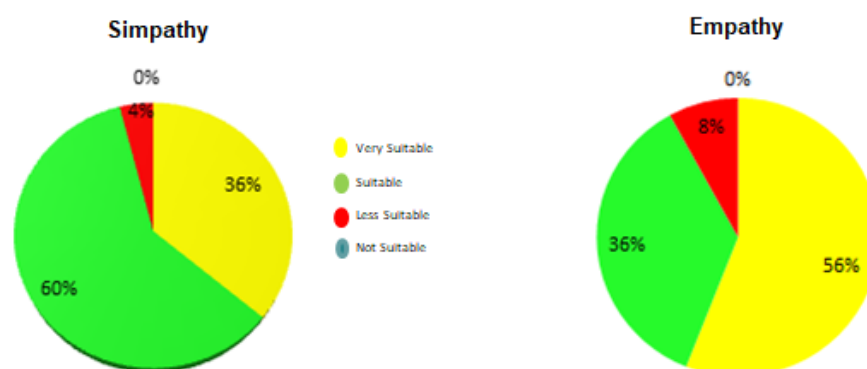


**Figure 2. Level of Sympathy and Empathy of Students**

The quantitative assessment of the anti-bullying tendencies of students at MI Tarbiyatul Banin has shown remarkable results, particularly in the development of sympathy and empathy. The data reveals that 96% of the students possess a high level of sympathy, while the remaining 4% demonstrate a moderate level. These essential components of compassion—sympathy and empathy—are foundational for shaping compassionate individuals (Gachago et al., 2022). A structured approach that emphasizes these positive traits can be effectively achieved through compassionate learning strategies.

Teachers at MI Tarbiyatul Banin Pekalongan Winong play various roles within the compassion-based learning framework. They are not merely instructors, as traditionally understood, but also serve as guides and mentors, helping students internalize and embody the value of compassion. Their daily practices reflect this approach through the expression of care in student interactions, including counseling, emotional support, and nurturing classroom activities. Research supports the idea that teacher role modeling is strongly associated with the development of positive student character, including traits that counteract bullying (Iswandi, 2019; Mulyati et al., 2020).

As an Islamic-oriented institution, MI Tarbiyatul Banin Pekalongan Winong has adopted multiple compassionate learning strategies. These include expressions of kindness, concern, and concrete actions to alleviate the suffering of others. The school's commitment to compassion is evident in its routine practices of charitable giving and community service, such as sending students to visit sick classmates or support bereaved families. These activities provide holistic support—not only moral and spiritual but also financial—to community members in times of need.
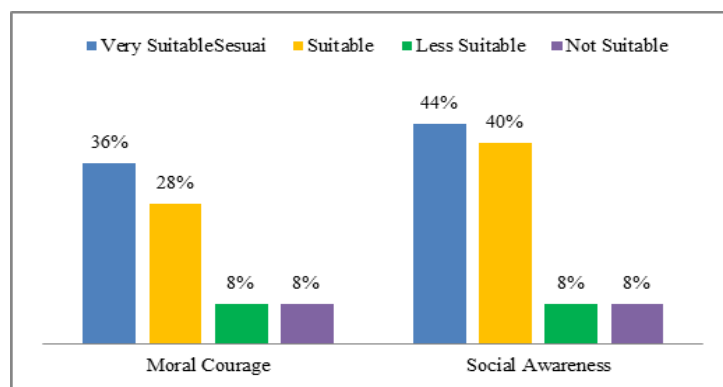


**Figure 3. Moral Courage and Social Concern of Students**

The effectiveness of the compassion-based approach is demonstrated by the increase in students' anti-bullying moral courage and social responsibility. Based on the analysis, only 8% of students avoid reporting bullying, while as many as 64% exhibit high or very high levels of moral courage. The madrasah's implementation of compassion-based strategies has strengthened students' moral resilience, enabling them to address bullying more proactively. These findings align with Still's research (Still, 2018), which explored teacher-student interactions within a school-wide compassionate learning framework and found similar positive behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, Jazaieri (2018) argues that compassion is a vital prerequisite for effective learning, noting that meaningful behavioral transformation begins within the student and then extends beyond the classroom.

Additional data reveal that compassion-focused approaches have significantly improved students' social concern: 44% of students show very high levels, 40% moderate, and 16% low. This heightened sense of social care is evident in student volunteerism, including supporting bereaved community members and engaging in environmental care activities. These results support the findings of Parisi (2022), whose research highlighted the role of compassion and inclusive education in fostering tolerant and empathetic attitudes. In Islam, such practices fall under the concept of Rahmah, which refers to love and compassion as a guiding educational philosophy (Abitolkha & Muvid, 2021). For example, MI Tarbiyatul Banin Pekalongan Winong demonstrates its commitment to inclusive education by supporting students with mental health challenges and other disabilities. Teachers offer additional assistance to help these students feel safe, relaxed, and fully integrated into the school environment. The institution promotes acceptance and tolerance, helping prevent bullying that often stems from discrimination against those with special needs.

This holistic approach to nurturing student empathy functions as a para-educational strategy that prepares students to face more complex social challenges in the future. In educational contexts, developing affection for others enhances one's ability to care for the needs and emotions of those around them. Such efforts help students gain both intellectual and socio-emotional competence (Gazali, 2018), foster positive interpersonal relationships, and cultivate wisdom in navigating life's varied situations. Such a comprehensive approach shapes students into responsible, ethical, and environmentally conscious individuals.

**CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that while compassionate learning has been organically adopted by pesantren-based madrasahs such as MI Tarbiyatul Banin Pekalongan, it has not yet been formally codified in educational policies or curriculum frameworks. Nevertheless, its impact is clearly evident in the learning environment, student behavior, and daily interactions. Compassionate learning plays a significant role in shaping students' anti-bullying character by fostering empathy, moral courage, and social awareness. The findings suggest that schools and madrasahs should institutionalize this approach through formal policies, structured curricula, and continuous teacher training to ensure its sustainability and broader influence. Additionally, future research should investigate how compassionate education can be systematically integrated into national education strategies, ensuring that humane and values-based pedagogical models become the norm rather than the exception.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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