



Teachers' Interpersonal Communication for Internalizing Islamic Values Against Verbal Bullying

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Abstract

Verbal bullying in elementary schools remains a persistent problem that is often overlooked as a normal aspect of children's social interaction, despite its potential psychological and socio-emotional consequences. This study aims to examine how teachers' interpersonal communication strategies facilitate the internalization of Islamic values in addressing verbal bullying among elementary school students. A qualitative case study design was employed in an Islamic elementary school in West Java, Indonesia. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis involving four teachers and nine students. Data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal three interconnected communication strategies; i) preventive communication through role modeling (*uswah hasanah*) and greeting habituation; ii) responsive communication through gentle speech (*qam'lan layyinah*) and empathetic dialogue; and iii) restorative communication through personal advice (*man'izah hasanah*) and the reinforcement of brotherhood values (*ukhuwwah*). These strategies facilitated the internalization of Islamic values such as *rahmah* (compassion), *iffah al-lisan* (ethical speech), and *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), which contributed to reducing verbal bullying tendencies and strengthening students' awareness of respectful communication. This study contributes to the literature on Islamic educational communication by proposing a value-based interpersonal communication framework for bullying prevention and intervention in elementary school settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying in elementary education has become a global concern due to its high prevalence and its adverse impact on children's mental health (Papadopoulos, 2021; Setko et al., 2022). The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that approximately one in three school-aged children worldwide has experienced at least one incident of bullying within the past six months, with verbal bullying being the

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most common form (Armitage, 2021). Furthermore, a UNESCO report published in 2024 indicates that nearly 40% of bullying cases in elementary schools are verbal in nature and often go unreported because they are perceived as a normal part of children's social interactions. In Indonesia, data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) show that bullying cases in schools continue to increase and are particularly prevalent at the elementary school level (Ningsih, 2023). Verbal bullying, including teasing, name-calling, insults directed at physical appearance or abilities, and verbal threats, often receives inadequate attention. Yet, its consequences may persist over time. Previous studies have shown that children who experience repeated verbal bullying exhibit higher levels of anxiety than those who experience physical bullying (Santos et al., 2023).

From a psychological perspective, elementary school age represents a critical stage in the development of self-concept, self-esteem, and moral reasoning. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, children at the concrete operational stage begin to understand social rules but remain highly dependent on authority figures, such as teachers, in determining what is right and wrong (Kurniawan et al., 2022). Similarly, from Kohlberg's perspective of moral development, elementary school children are generally situated at the level of conventional morality, where they begin to internalize social norms but are not yet capable of engaging in independent abstract moral reasoning (Mathes, 2021). In this context, teachers occupy a strategic position as figures who not only transmit knowledge but also shape students' ethical understanding. When verbal bullying is not addressed appropriately, victims may experience anxiety, depression, social isolation, and declining academic performance, whereas perpetrators may continue to exhibit patterns of verbal aggression into adolescence and adulthood (Rahmatullah et al., 2021).

From an Islamic perspective, verbal bullying is considered a reprehensible act that contradicts the ethical principles of social interaction prescribed in the Qur'an and Hadith. Allah explicitly prohibits ridicule, offensive labeling, prejudice, and backbiting in Q.S. Al-Hujurat (49): 11–12. Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized that a Muslim should neither oppress nor demean fellow Muslims (Zain et al., 2025). Therefore, Islamic education regards communication as an essential means of fostering social relationships grounded in the values of *rahmah* (compassion), *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood), and *'iffah al-lisan* (ethical speech) (Baroud et al., 2025; Kassymova, Engkizar, et al., 2025). These values are highly relevant to efforts aimed at preventing and addressing verbal bullying in school environments.

As central figures within schools, teachers bear the responsibility of internalizing these values among students. One important means of accomplishing this is through interpersonal communication, namely face-to-face interaction that enables direct, empathetic, and reciprocal exchanges of messages (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2019). The effectiveness of interpersonal communication is generally characterized by openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. Within the context of Islamic education, these principles can be enriched by Qur'anic values such as *qawlan layyinan* (gentle speech), *qawlan sadidan* (truthful speech), *uswah hasanah* (exemplary conduct), and *mau'izah hasanah* (benevolent advice). Through interpersonal communication grounded in these values, teachers can serve as key agents in fostering students' moral awareness and preventing the development of verbal bullying behaviors.

Although previous studies have highlighted bullying prevention efforts and the internalization of Islamic values within educational settings, limited attention has been given to the role of teachers' interpersonal communication in this process. Saidi et al (2025), for example, examined the internalization of Islamic values as a preventive strategy against bullying through extracurricular activities but did not

explore in depth how teachers communicate during critical moments when verbal bullying occurs in everyday interactions. Similarly, the study by Talgatov, et al (2025) emphasized the importance of a holistic approach adopted by Islamic Education teachers in character development but did not sufficiently explain the communication dynamics occurring at the micro-interactional level between teachers and students. Furthermore, studies on the internalization of Islamic values have predominantly focused on formal classroom instruction rather than spontaneous interactions that emerge in everyday school life. Consequently, research examining teachers' interpersonal communication strategies in internalizing Islamic values for addressing verbal bullying in elementary schools remains limited.

In fact, the internalization of values often takes place through micro-level interactions that emerge naturally within the school environment. When teachers provide persuasive guidance to perpetrators, offer empathetic support to victims, or facilitate reconciliation among students, they simultaneously transmit moral and spiritual values that shape students' social behavior. Such situations constitute teachable moments that play an important role in character formation, yet they have received relatively little attention in the field of Islamic educational communication (Bear & Maureen, 2015).

Based on these considerations, this study aims to describe and analyze teachers' interpersonal communication strategies in internalizing Islamic values for addressing verbal bullying in elementary schools. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on teacher–student micro-interactions during critical incidents of verbal bullying, its integration of interpersonal communication theory with Qur'anic values, and its effort to explain how interpersonal communication functions as a medium for the internalization of Islamic values in the context of verbal bullying intervention. The findings are expected to contribute to the advancement of Islamic educational communication scholarship while providing practical implications for teachers, school leaders, and policymakers in developing spiritually grounded anti-bullying strategies.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth teachers' interpersonal communication strategies in internalizing Islamic values for addressing verbal bullying in elementary schools. This approach was selected because it enables researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon within its natural setting without manipulating the variables under investigation. Qualitative research aims to understand meanings, experiences, and participants' perspectives through data in the form of words, expressions, and actions collected directly from the field (Engkizar et al., 2026; Swain & King, 2022).

The study was conducted at an Integrated Islamic Elementary School selected purposively because it integrates Islamic values into both instructional activities and character education programs. The research site was chosen based on its commitment to character development initiatives that are relevant to the prevention and management of verbal bullying. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement in and experience with the phenomenon under investigation. This technique enabled the researcher to identify participants who possessed relevant knowledge and experiences and were therefore able to provide rich and meaningful information regarding the research focus (FitzPatrick, 2019).

The participants consisted of four teachers, including two classroom teachers, one Islamic Education teacher, and one homeroom teacher. In addition, nine students participated in the study, comprising five victims, two perpetrators, and two witnesses of verbal bullying. The students were selected based on their direct involvement in verbal bullying incidents within the school environment. The number

of participants was determined according to the principle of data sufficiency until data saturation was achieved.

Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participant observation was conducted over a three-month period, from January to March 2026, by observing teacher–student interactions both inside and outside the classroom. The observations focused on the communication strategies employed by teachers to prevent, respond to, and resolve incidents of verbal bullying, as well as on activities designed to foster the habituation of Islamic values in everyday school life. Through participant observation, the researcher was able to gain a contextual understanding of naturally occurring behaviors and social interactions within the research setting (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format with all participants. Interviews with teachers focused on their experiences in addressing verbal bullying, the interpersonal communication strategies they employed, the Islamic values they sought to internalize, and the challenges they encountered throughout the process. Interviews with students aimed to explore their experiences related to verbal bullying and their perceptions of teachers' communication practices. To ensure the psychological well-being of child participants, interviews were conducted in the presence of homeroom teachers and in accordance with ethical principles governing research involving minors (Denny & Weckesser, 2022; Engkizar Oktavia, et al., 2026). All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for data analysis.

Documentation was used as a supplementary data source and included school activity records, teacher–student communication books, school policies related to bullying prevention, and documentation of character education activities. Documentary data served to support and verify findings obtained through observations and interviews while also providing a broader institutional context for the phenomenon under investigation (Baroud et al., 2025; Kassymova et al., 2025).

Data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2019). During the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, categorized, and coded the data according to the research focus. The data were then organized into narrative descriptions and thematic matrices to facilitate the identification of patterns, relationships, and emerging themes. Finally, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure the consistency and credibility of the interpretations. Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection, enabling the researcher to further explore emerging findings during the fieldwork process (Htay et al., 2025; Jaafar et al., 2025; Masani & Fabanjo, 2026).

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from teachers, students, and school documents. Technique triangulation involved cross-checking findings derived from observations, interviews, and documentation. In addition, member checking was carried out by confirming the researcher's interpretations with participants to ensure that the meanings conveyed accurately reflected their experiences. These strategies were employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

This study adhered to established research ethics principles. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate after receiving detailed information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, potential benefits, and possible risks. For student participants, written informed consent was also obtained from their parents or guardians. Participant confidentiality was maintained through the use of codes or pseudonyms in all research reports and publications. All research data were stored

securely and used solely for academic purposes in accordance with participant protection principles (Kalkman et al., 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis revealed that teachers' interpersonal communication strategies for internalizing Islamic values in addressing verbal bullying were implemented through three main phases: preventive, responsive, and restorative. These phases were interconnected and formed a continuous process aimed not only at stopping bullying behavior but also at instilling Islamic values in students' social interactions. The values most frequently internalized included *uswab ḥasanah* (exemplary conduct), *rahmah* (compassion), *ukhummah* (brotherhood), *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), and *'iffah al-lisan* (ethical speech).

Preventive Communication through Role Modeling and Habituation

The findings indicate that teachers sought to prevent verbal bullying through preventive communication strategies centered on role modeling and habituation. Observations revealed that teachers consistently used respectful language, positive forms of address, and avoided expressions that could demean or stigmatize students. Teachers also demonstrated communication behaviors that reflected respect for others, thereby serving as role models for students' interpersonal interactions.

One classroom teacher explained:

"I always remind myself that children pay more attention to what I do than to what I say. Therefore, I make it a habit to use kind words and address them with positive names."

In addition to role modeling, the internalization of values was reinforced through routine activities such as greeting students every morning, collective prayers before lessons, and classroom activities designed to encourage positive peer relationships. According to interview data, these activities helped foster students' awareness of the importance of respecting and treating their peers kindly.

One student stated:

"My teacher always tells us that we are all brothers and sisters and should never mock one another. Because of that, I felt confident enough to tell her when a classmate called me by an offensive nickname."

These findings suggest that preventive communication functions not only as a means of conveying behavioral expectations but also as a mechanism for cultivating a classroom culture that promotes positive social relationships.

Responsive Communication through Gentle and Empathic Dialogue

When incidents of verbal bullying occurred, teachers tended to employ persuasive and empathic communication approaches. Observational data showed that teachers did not immediately resort to punishment or public reprimands. Instead, they approached the students involved, engaged them in personal conversations, and sought to understand the situation before taking further action.

In one observed incident, a teacher responded to verbal teasing by approaching the group of students involved and initiating a calm dialogue. This approach helped de-escalate the situation and prevented the conflict from intensifying.

One teacher explained:

"If children are immediately scolded, they usually become defensive or withdraw. That is why I prefer to talk to them calmly so that they can understand their mistakes."

Interviews with students revealed that this approach made them feel respected and encouraged them to express their feelings and explain the reasons behind their behavior. These findings indicate that empathic communication plays a crucial role in stopping verbal bullying while simultaneously fostering students' moral awareness.

Restorative Communication through Personal Advice and Strengthening

Brotherhood

After the bullying behavior had been addressed, teachers continued the intervention process through restorative communication aimed at repairing relationships between perpetrators and victims. The findings revealed that teachers provided personal guidance to perpetrators and facilitated dialogue among the students involved.

According to interview data, teachers generally encouraged perpetrators to reflect on the consequences of their actions and to identify ways to repair damaged relationships. In several cases, perpetrators voluntarily apologized or undertook specific actions as a form of accountability for their behavior.

One homeroom teacher stated:

"I do not immediately judge them. Instead, I encourage them to understand how their classmates feel and to think about how they can make things right."

Victims of verbal bullying also reported that the dialogue sessions facilitated by teachers enabled them to express their feelings openly and experience emotional relief.

One student victim explained:

"After we were brought together and I was able to explain how I felt, the student who had bullied me apologized. Now our relationship is much better."

These findings demonstrate that restorative communication serves not only to resolve existing conflicts but also to strengthen social relationships among students and promote a more inclusive and harmonious learning environment.

Integration of Islamic Values within the Communication Cycle

The findings indicate that the internalization of Islamic values through teachers' interpersonal communication occurs within a cyclical process consisting of three interconnected phases: preventive, responsive, and restorative. Each phase serves a distinct function in addressing verbal bullying while simultaneously reinforcing specific Islamic values.

Phase	Objective	Core Islamic Values	Communication Strategies
Preventive	Preventing bullying before it occurs	<i>Uswab ḥasanah, ukhummwah, ta'awun</i>	Role modeling, greeting habituation, "One Smile, One Brother/Sister" activities
Responsive	Stopping bullying when it occurs	<i>Rahmah, qawlan layyinan, 'iffab al-lisān</i>	Gentle approaches, active listening, reflective questioning
Restorative	Repairing relationships and preventing recurrence	<i>Mau'izab ḥasanah, ukhummwah, tambah</i>	Personal advice, restorative dialogue, apology and reconciliation activities

The data suggest that these phases do not operate in a strictly linear sequence. Instead, they form a recurring cycle in which preventive, responsive, and restorative communication practices continuously reinforce one another. Teachers reported that the consistent implementation of these three phases contributed to a noticeable reduction in verbal bullying incidents and fostered a more inclusive classroom environment (Rohimah, 2024; Sabah et al., 2022).

Observational data further revealed that preventive communication created a foundation of mutual respect among students, responsive communication enabled immediate intervention during bullying incidents, and restorative communication facilitated emotional recovery and relationship repair. Together, these phases constituted an integrated communication process through which Islamic values were embedded into students' daily social interactions (Fauziyah et al., 2021; Firmansyah, 2022; Suciartini & Sumartini, 2019; Sunanih et al., 2025).

Several teachers also reported that sustained implementation of the communication cycle was associated with a decline in the frequency of verbal bullying and an improvement in classroom relationships. Students similarly described feeling safer, more respected, and more willing to communicate with both peers and teachers following the implementation of these practices.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that teachers' interpersonal communication strategies for addressing verbal bullying in elementary schools operate through three interconnected phases: preventive, responsive, and restorative communication. Through role modeling, empathic communication, and restorative dialogue grounded in Islamic values such as *uswab ḥasanah*, *rahmah*, *ukhummah*, and *mau'izah ḥasanah*, teachers not only seek to address verbal bullying but also internalize moral and spiritual values in students' social interactions. The findings suggest that Islamic values function as a communicative foundation that supports the development of a safer, more inclusive, and respectful learning environment.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of Islamic educational communication by proposing a communication cycle that integrates interpersonal communication principles with Islamic values. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening teachers' interpersonal communication competencies within both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. Future studies may examine the applicability of this model in different educational settings, including secondary education and cyberbullying prevention initiatives.

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