

Synergy between Civics and Social Sciences in Preventing Bullying Through Student Empathy and Tolerance

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Abstract

Bullying in schools remains a significant challenge in education due to its impact on students' mental health and character development. This study aims to analyze how the synergy between Civics Education (PKN) and Social Studies (IPS) can foster students' empathy and tolerance as an effort to prevent bullying. This research employed a qualitative case study approach, with data collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that thematic and reflective integration of PKN and IPS encourages students' social awareness and promotes active participation in building positive peer interactions. Teachers play a key role in connecting learning materials to students' real-life experiences, enabling values of empathy and tolerance to be not only understood conceptually but also practiced in daily behavior. Moreover, a supportive, inclusive school environment strengthens the effectiveness of this approach. This study concludes that the synergy of PKN and IPS contributes meaningfully to character formation in preventing bullying at school.

Keywords: bullying, empathy, tolerance, civics education, social studies

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Introduction

Bullying cases in schools have continued to show a worrying trend in recent years. Educational environments, which should be safe spaces for children to grow and develop, often become venues for various forms of violence, whether physical, verbal, or social. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) in 2023 recorded more than 2,000 reports of bullying in schools, indicating that this practice has not been significantly reduced. Meanwhile, a UNICEF report from the previous year revealed that one in three students in Indonesia has been a victim of bullying, either by peers or those around them. This figure illustrates the urgency of taking a more comprehensive and fundamental approach to addressing this issue, not only through disciplinary enforcement but also through character building and social attitudes in students.

Bullying prevention efforts have tended to emphasize punishment or behavioral restrictions, while the dimension of fostering social values is often overlooked. In this context, school learning actually plays a crucial role in instilling humanitarian values, particularly through Civics (PKN) and Social Studies (IPS) subjects. Both subjects explicitly contain relevant values to foster empathy, tolerance, and



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social awareness among students. Unfortunately, a learning approach that prioritizes the integration of character values like this is still not common practice. Many teachers deliver Civics and Social Studies material textually and conceptually, making it difficult for students to relate it to the realities of their daily lives, including dealing with bullying.

Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of character education in preventing bullying, but studies specifically addressing the integration of civics and social studies learning in fostering empathy and tolerance in students are still limited. Wahyuni (2021), for example, emphasizes the importance of a values-based approach to learning to prevent violence in schools, while Lestari and Nugroho (2022) highlight the role of teachers in creating a conducive learning environment through moral role models. However, these studies have not fully explored the collaborative potential between civics and social studies as two complementary subjects in strengthening student character. In other words, there remains a gap between the potential of the existing curriculum and practical implementation that could more deeply engage students' affective aspects.

In practice, social studies (IPS) learning can introduce students to the complexities of social dynamics, while civics (PKN) teaches democratic values, human rights, and civic responsibility. Strategically synergizing these two subjects creates a comprehensive character education approach that not only imparts knowledge but also builds students' moral awareness in responding to social issues in their environment, including preventing and addressing bullying.

Given this gap, this study seeks to illustrate and understand how the synergy between civics and social studies learning can be used to build empathy and tolerance in students as part of a bullying prevention strategy in schools. A qualitative approach was used to gain a deeper understanding of teacher practices, student perceptions, and classroom learning dynamics that can support the creation of a safer and more inclusive learning environment.

The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of a character education model based on integration across subjects, as well as offer a practical approach for teachers in designing learning strategies responsive to social issues such as bullying. This research also hopes to strengthen education policies that favor character development and humanitarian values, in order to create child-friendly schools free from social violence.

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study. This approach was chosen because it allowed researchers to explore in-depth how the synergy between Civics Education (PKN) and Social Studies (IPS) subjects is applied to foster empathy and tolerance in students as a strategy for preventing bullying. Case studies were deemed appropriate because they provide a contextual understanding of phenomena within complex, real-life situations.

The subjects in this study were Civics and Social Studies teachers and vocational high school students at a vocational high school in Kudus Regency. The location was selected purposively, considering the presence of teachers actively implementing values-based learning and a history of social problems among students related to bullying. Participants were selected purposively based on their roles and involvement in the learning process. They included two subject teachers, the principal, and several students with varying characteristics in terms of social engagement.

This data collection was conducted through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Researchers were directly present in the field for approximately two months, from May to June 2025. Observations were made of the classroom learning process, particularly when teachers taught material related to community life, human rights, and social values. In this process, researchers used observation sheets designed based on indicators of empathy and tolerance, such as respect, listening to opinions, and collaborative behavior of students. In addition to observations, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with teachers, principals, and students.

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher herself, as is customary in qualitative studies. However, the researcher still used supporting instruments such as observation guides, interview guides, and field notes. The researcher's presence was open to ensure students and teachers felt comfortable and social interactions proceeded naturally.

To validate the data, researchers used triangulation techniques and sources. Triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results, observations, and documentation to gain a comprehensive understanding. Member checks were also conducted, confirming findings with participants to ensure

they align with reality. An audit trail was also implemented by recording the entire fieldwork process, decision-making, and data interpretation in detail and systematically.

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process began at the beginning of data collection and continued simultaneously throughout the study. This allowed for reflective and in-depth analysis of the data to yield a clear understanding of the dynamics of learning and the values developed.

The research design is simply described in the following diagram.

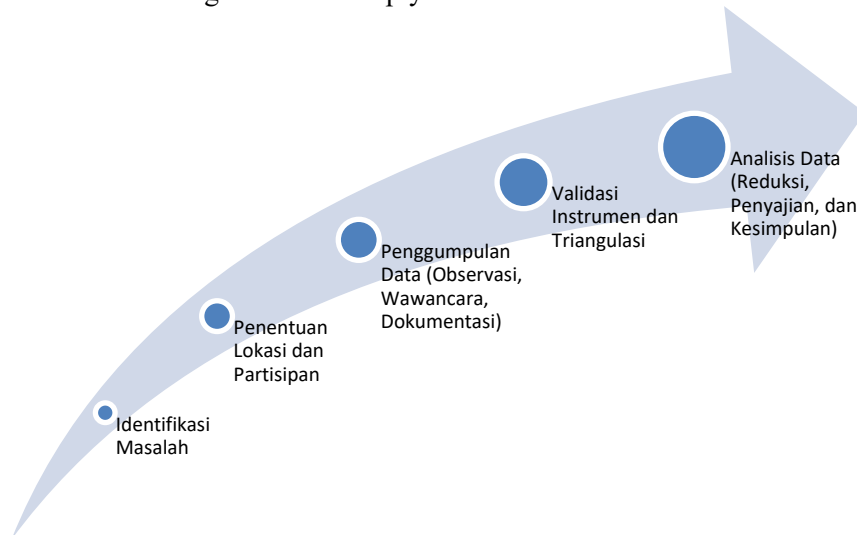


Chart 1. Research design

Results and Discussion

The results of this study were obtained through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation of the Civics and Social Studies learning process at a school in Kudus Regency. The main focus was how the two subjects were integrated to foster empathy and tolerance in students to prevent bullying. The data showed that character-building practices through the synergy of Civics and Social Studies can increase students' social awareness and encourage more positive interactions between students.

The Values of Empathy and Tolerance in Civics and Social Studies Learning

One key finding indicates that civics and social studies teachers consciously integrate material related to humanitarian values and social responsibility. In social studies, students are encouraged to understand the dynamics of a pluralistic society and the importance of respecting differences. Meanwhile, in civics, students are encouraged to reflect on constitutional values such as social justice and human rights. The interactions formed during group discussions, case studies, and social simulations provide a space for actualizing these values in real-life classroom situations.

Interviews with teachers revealed that the integration of materials was not carried out in isolation but rather designed within a thematic approach. For example, when discussing Indonesia's cultural diversity, social studies teachers linked it to the importance of tolerance, while civics teachers emphasized the importance of citizens' roles in maintaining social harmony. This combination proved effective in instilling empathetic awareness and openness to differences in students. This aligns with the findings of Chen et al. (2020), who emphasized that interdisciplinary learning can foster deeper and more applicable social understanding.

Changes in Students' Social Behavior in the Context of Bullying Prevention

Observations showed changes in students' social behavior after participating in two months of integrated civics and social studies learning. Interactions between students showed a

sense of mutual assistance, polite expression of opinions, and prevention of peers from actions that could harm others. Some students even actively intervened in minor classroom conflicts. One student stated that civics made her feel responsible for a friend who was being teased, while social studies helped her understand the background of her friend's actions.

These findings corroborate Olweus's (2013) study, which asserted that social values-based character education can prevent bullying from an early age. Students not only understand the theoretical concept of bullying but also develop the courage to reject and combat bullying practices in their environment. Thornberg (2015) also expressed a similar sentiment, stating that the success of bullying prevention is greatly influenced by the intervention of empathy values in everyday education.

Supporting Factors and Obstacles in the Implementation of PKN and IPS Synergy

Teachers revealed that the success of this approach is greatly influenced by a school climate that supports values learning and active student participation. An open and communicative classroom environment allows students to freely express their opinions and feelings without fear of judgment. The principal also provides support through character-building programs and teacher supervision in implementing values-based learning models.

However, several obstacles were also encountered. One is the limited availability of thematic materials that explicitly integrate the values of empathy and tolerance between Civics and Social Studies. Furthermore, not all teachers are pedagogically prepared to transform values-based material into contextual, reflective learning. Time constraints within learning units also hinder deepening student discussions and reflections.

This reinforces the view of Narvaez and Lapsley (2009), who stated that learning values requires strong pedagogical skills and a supportive learning environment. Meanwhile, Yus (2011) emphasized the importance of curriculum support in providing teachers with space to be creative in shaping students' character.

Implications of Findings and Comparison with Previous Research

This study confirms that integrating civics and social studies learning can be an effective strategy for developing empathy and tolerance in students, which serve as a foundation for preventing bullying. Unlike Wahyuni's (2021) study, which emphasized the importance of a disciplinary approach in combating bullying, this study demonstrates that a values-based educational approach is more effective in fostering students' internal awareness.

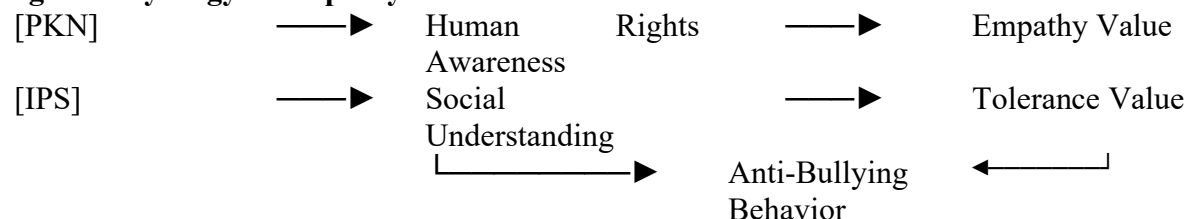
These findings also extend the research of Lestari and Nugroho (2022), which highlighted the role of teachers in creating a positive school culture. This research demonstrates that not only the role of teachers as individuals, but also the synergy between subjects can strengthen students' character. In an international context, these findings reinforce Campbell's (2014) study, which suggested the need for an interdisciplinary curriculum to develop students' social competence in the global era.

Furthermore, these results highlight the importance of developing collaborative learning models across subjects focused on strengthening humanitarian values. The synergy between Civics and Social Studies has proven effective in creating a learning ecosystem that emphasizes not only knowledge but also character development and social attitudes among students.

Table 1. Indicators of Changes in Students' Social Behavior After Integrated Learning

Indicator	Before Intervention	After Intervention
Greeting and appreciating friends	Sometimes done	Done almost every day
Stop the teasing	Passive towards bullying	Actively prevent teasing
Collaboration in groups	Less participatory	Active and helpful to each other

Empathy towards the victims	Not sensitive	More caring
Tolerance of differences	Limited	Significant increase

Figure 1. Synergy of Empathy and Tolerance Values in Civics and Social Studies Learning

Conclusion

The synergy between civics and social studies learning has proven effective in building empathy and tolerance in students as a means of preventing bullying. Through a thematic and reflective approach, students are able to understand humanitarian values contextually and internalize positive social behaviors in the school environment. These findings demonstrate the need for strengthened collaboration between character-based subjects and school support in creating an inclusive, dialogical, and child-friendly learning climate.

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