The Influence of Verbal Bullying on Self-Confidence in Fifth-Grade Students at State Elementary School

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the high number of verbal bullying cases that have a negative impact on students' self-confidence. This study aimed to examine the effect of verbal bullying on the self-confidence of fifth grade students. The method used was descriptive quantitative with a case study approach. From a total population of 86 students, 34 students were selected as a sample with considerations of representativeness and sufficient numbers for simple statistical analysis. Data were collected through a validated and tested questionnaire for reliability, then analyzed using simple linear regression. The results showed that verbal bullying (taunts, insults, and threats) had a significant effect negative relationship with students' self-confidence, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.369$; $R^2 = 0.136$; $t(32) = -2.243$; $p < 0.05$; and a 95% confidence interval. This means that verbal bullying is associated with 13.6% of the variation in self-confidence, while the rest is influenced by other factors. Although the contribution of influence is relatively small, the practical impact is quite important because victims of verbal bullying tend to hesitate to express their opinions, are afraid to speak in front of the class, and are passive in interacting. These findings align with Erikson's psychosocial theory and Bandura's self-efficacy theory, which explain that negative experiences can lower children's self-confidence. This study is limited by its sample size and limited scope of variables. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve a broader population and consider other psychosocial factors that influence students' self-confidence.

Keywords: Case Study, State Elementary School 1 Plumbon, Self-Confidence, Students, Verbal Bullying.

Introduction

Education is a key pillar in developing an intelligent, character-driven, and competitive generation. However, the school environment is not free from socio-emotional issues, one of which is bullying (Coloroso, 2013). Among its forms, verbal bullying, such as teasing, insults, and derogatory nicknames, remains prevalent and has been shown to significantly undermine students' psychological development, particularly their self-confidence (Wardiati, 2018).

Previous studies have consistently highlighted the negative consequences of bullying. Rohmah (2015) found that bullying reduced students' motivation to learn and hindered their social development, while Isnayanti (2020) reported that verbal bullying lowers self-confidence and creates fear in social interactions. Aminullah (2020) also confirmed a significant relationship between experiences of verbal bullying and reduced self-confidence among adolescents. Despite these contributions, remain scarce, particularly in the Indonesian context. This absence of a consolidated synthesis makes it difficult to fully understand the effectiveness of various intervention models for elementary school children.

To better frame this issue, it is essential to adopt a clear theoretical foundation. Constructivist learning theory and Bandura's self-efficacy framework both provide relevant perspectives. Constructivism emphasizes that children actively construct knowledge through interaction, making peer relationships central to their cognitive and emotional development. Within this framework, verbal bullying disrupts constructive learning environments, limiting opportunities for students to build self-confidence. Bandura's self-efficacy theory further explains that repeated negative social experiences, such as insults and ridicule, erode children's belief in their abilities and can lead to feelings of inferiority.

Another important aspect of this study is the integration of digital media. While various interactive tools have been introduced in education, the rationale for selecting a specific digital platform requires a clear justification. In this research, Interacty.me was considered due to its ability to gamify learning content, making classroom engagement more dynamic and interactive. Compared to traditional worksheets or static media, Interacty.me allows students to actively participate in activities that promote confidence-building through positive reinforcement and peer collaboration. However, research explicitly testing its effectiveness in reducing the negative impact of bullying on elementary school students' self-confidence is still limited.

The novelty of this study lies in addressing these research gaps. First, it focuses specifically on elementary school students, a population often overlooked in prior studies that mainly involve adolescents. Second, it integrates a theoretical framework (constructivism and self-efficacy) to explain the mechanisms by which verbal bullying undermines self-confidence. Third, it provides justification for the use of Interacty.me as a medium, emphasizing its potential to counteract bullying effects by fostering collaborative, engaging, and supportive classroom dynamics. Finally, this study contributes to the literature by bridging empirical findings with

practical implications, offering insights for teachers, counselors, and policymakers in designing interventions that both reduce bullying and strengthen students' self-confidence.

Method

This study employed a descriptive quantitative method with a case study approach to examine the effect of verbal bullying on the self-confidence of fifth-grade students at State Elementary School 1 Plumbon. The quantitative approach was chosen because it enables the measurement of social phenomena numerically and their subsequent statistical analysis.

1. **Sample and Partcipants**

From a total population of 86 students, 34 students (40%) were selected using simple random sampling. The sample size was determined by applying a minimum 40% sampling ratio to ensure representativeness of the population; however, no formal power analysis was conducted, which constitutes a limitation of this study. The sample consisted of both male and female students aged 10–11 years, representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The response rate was 100%, as all selected students returned completed questionnaires. Non-response bias was therefore not a concern

2. **Research Instrument**

The primary instrument was a closed-ended questionnaire with a 1–5 Likert scale, divided into two sections: verbal bullying (X) and self-confidence (Y). The verbal bullying section consisted of 12 items addressing experiences of teasing, insults, ridicule, and threats. The self-confidence section contained 12 items measuring courage to speak, self-assurance in abilities, and active participation. The instrument was piloted with 15 students outside the sample to assess clarity and reliability. Validity was established through Pearson Product-Moment correlations, with item-total correlations ranging from 0.42 to 0.71, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.30. Reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.81 for the bullying scale and 0.85 for the self-confidence scale, both exceeding the standard of ≥ 0.70.

3. **Ethical Considerations**

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee of Muhammadiyah University of Cirebon. Informed consent forms were distributed to the parents/guardians of all potential participants, explaining the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Only students with returned signed consent forms were included in the study. Assent was also obtained from the students themselves before questionnaire administration. Anonymity and confidentiality of participants were maintained throughout the research process by using identification codes instead of names,

and participation was voluntary with the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

4. Data Collection and Management Procedure

Data collection was conducted over a two-week period in March 2024. After obtaining permission from the school, questionnaires were administered during regular class hours, and students were guided in completing the forms to minimize misunderstandings. To enrich the quantitative findings, brief semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students who reported bullying experiences, and documentation such as school records and photographs of research activities was collected to support data triangulation. Upon completion, all questionnaires were checked for missing responses. As the response rate was 100%, missing data were minimal (<2%). In cases of incomplete answers, listwise deletion was applied to maintain data integrity before the data were coded and entered into SPSS version 22 for statistical analysis.

5. Data Analysis

The analysis consisted of two stages: descriptive and inferential. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were used to describe the prevalence of verbal bullying and the level of self-confidence among students. Inferential statistics employed simple linear regression with the model $Y = a + bX$, where Y is self-confidence and X is verbal bullying. The significance of the model was tested using a t-test with a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$). The strength of the relationship was assessed using the correlation coefficient (r), coefficient of determination (R^2), and confidence intervals. The interpretation of findings was supported by Erikson's psychosocial theory and Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Assumption tests were conducted prior to the analysis. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed the normality of the data distribution ($p > 0.05$), and a visual inspection of the scatterplot of residuals indicated that the assumptions of homoscedasticity and linearity were met.

Results

The results of this study are presented to provide an overview of the actual conditions experienced by fifth-grade students at State Elementary School 1 Plumbon regarding the phenomenon of verbal bullying and its relationship to self-confidence. Data were obtained through questionnaires, interviews, and direct observation in the school environment. Data were then analyzed using a quantitative descriptive approach supported by relevant theory. The presentation of the research results is divided into several focuses: descriptive statistics of the main variables, the forms of verbal bullying experienced by students, the self-confidence of students who were bullied, and the statistical influence of verbal bullying on self-confidence levels.

1. Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of the main research variables are presented in Table 1. The average verbal bullying score among the 34 participants was M = 36.12, SD = 5.48, Range = 25–47, while the average self-confidence score was M = 41.27, SD = 6.03, Range = 29–53. These findings indicate a relatively moderate level of verbal bullying experiences and a generally low-to-moderate level of self-confidence among the participants.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Verbal Bullying	34	36.12	5.48	25	47
Self-Confidence	34	41.27	6.03	29	53

2. Forms of Verbal Bullying

The study identified that fifth-grade students at State Elementary School 1 Plumbon experienced various forms of verbal bullying, such as name-calling, physical insults (e.g., "fat" or "black"), demeaning comments, threats, and repeated crude jokes. These forms align with the theory of (Olweus, 1993) and (Rigby, 2002), who explain that verbal bullying generally manifests as repeated demeaning remarks that are often considered trivial, yet can leave deep emotional wounds and seriously impact the victim's psychological well-being.

3. Self-Confidence of Students Victims of Bullying

Victims of verbal bullying in the fifth grade at State Elementary School 1 Plumbon showed symptoms of low self-confidence, such as hesitation in speaking in front of the class, reluctance to answer questions, reluctance to participate in discussions, and a preference for passivity in group activities. This condition aligns with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, the stage of industry versus inferiority, where elementary school-aged children can feel inferior due to negative treatment from peers. This finding is also supported by research by Lestari (2020), which confirms that experiences of verbal bullying often cause students to withdraw from social and academic interactions, thus weakening their courage to demonstrate their potential.

4. The Effect of Verbal Bullying on Self-Confidence

Research analysis shows a significant association between verbal bullying and decreased student self-confidence. The more frequently a student experiences teasing or insults, the lower their self-confidence. This aligns with (Bandura & Albert., 1997) self-efficacy theory, which states that negative social experiences can weaken a person's belief in their abilities. This finding is also in line with (Manto, Nito, & Wulandari, 2021) research, which emphasized that verbal bullying has a more serious impact on children's psychological aspects than physical bullying, because it makes them passive, anxious, and less confident in academic and social situations.

5. Statistical, Reliability, and Sample Analysis

Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha showed good internal consistency for both variables (Verbal Bullying α = 0.82, Self-Confidence α = 0.86). Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship (r = -0.369, p = 0.032, 95% CI [-0.61, -0.04]), indicating that the higher the level of verbal bullying, the lower students' self-confidence.

Regression analysis further confirmed this relationship, with a significant regression equation F(1,32) = 5.04, p = 0.032, adjusted R^2 = 0.136. The regression coefficient (β = -0.369, t(32) = -2.243, p < 0.05) shows that each increase in verbal bullying score predicted a decrease in self-confidence. Based on Cohen's (1988) benchmarks, the effect size is small-to-medium, though practically meaningful in educational settings.

Assumption tests showed no violations: the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test confirmed normality (p > 0.05), residuals were homoscedastic, and linearity was met. The sample consisted of 34 students (17 boys and 17 girls, aged 10–11), randomly selected from 86 students, with most reporting experiences of name-calling and mocking of physical appearance.

Discussion

Research at State Elementary School 1 Plumbon found that fifth-grade students experienced various forms of verbal bullying, such as name-calling, physical insults, demeaning comments, threats, and repeated rude jokes. This pattern aligns with Olweus (1993) and Rigby (2002), which emphasize that verbal bullying has a serious impact on children's psychology, particularly on self-esteem and identity. Victims showed decreased self-confidence, such as hesitation to speak in class, reluctance to answer questions, and passivity in group work. These findings are consistent with Erikson's psychosocial theory (1963) and Lestari (2020), which highlight that children can feel inferior when exposed to negative peer treatment.

The statistical results indicated that verbal bullying explained 13.6% of the variance in self-confidence (R^2 = 0.136). Based on Cohen's (1988) benchmarks, this effect size (R^2 = .136) can be considered small-to-medium. Although this effect size appears modest, in practical terms it is meaningful within an educational context because even a small decline in self-confidence at the elementary school stage can have long-term consequences for social and academic development (Bandura, 1997). Nevertheless, 86.4% of the variance was explained by other factors, suggesting that elements such as family environment, teacher support, peer acceptance, and socio-economic conditions may also play a critical role.

It is important to exercise caution when interpreting these findings. Given the cross-sectional design of this study, causal claims cannot be made with certainty. The data only demonstrate an association between verbal bullying and self-confidence, not that bullying directly causes low self-confidence. Longitudinal studies are needed to establish causal pathways. In the Indonesian cultural context, where collectivism and strong peer-group dynamics dominate, verbal bullying may

carry particularly heavy consequences. Nicknames or teasing that are socially tolerated as "jokes" can be internalized by students as stigmatization, thereby undermining their self-worth. The mechanisms likely involve repeated negative social feedback that erodes self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), leading children to avoid participation and internalize feelings of inferiority.

Unexpectedly, some students reported maintaining confidence despite frequent bullying, which may suggest the presence of resilience factors such as supportive friendships or parental encouragement. This contrasts with studies like Aminullah (2020), which found consistently negative effects. A more detailed comparative analysis reveals that while this study found an effect size of 13.6%, other studies on adolescents reported higher effects, possibly due to developmental differences in sensitivity to peer evaluation.

The findings have significant implications for interventions. Teachers and counselors should implement targeted programs such as classroom-based anti-bullying campaigns, peer-support groups, and counseling sessions aimed at rebuilding self-confidence in victims. Schools should also integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum to foster empathy and resilience among students. In conclusion, while verbal bullying accounts for a relatively small proportion of the variance in self-confidence, its practical significance in the Indonesian elementary school context is undeniable. Multi-level interventions involving schools, families, and communities are essential to mitigate its impact and strengthen students' psychosocial well-being.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study confirms that verbal bullying has a significant negative effect on students' self-confidence. Victims tend to be hesitant to speak, show anxiety in social interactions, and display reduced motivation in learning activities. These findings provide strong evidence that verbal bullying not only diminishes self-confidence but also disrupts students' psychosocial development. The practical implication is that schools, teachers, and parents must work collaboratively to implement systematic prevention and intervention strategies, ensuring a supportive and safe learning environment.

This research contributes to the growing literature on school bullying by highlighting the measurable psychological consequences of verbal bullying on elementary school students. It also underscores the urgent need for targeted guidance and counseling programs to rebuild the confidence of affected students, as well as for school-wide policies that emphasize emotional well-being alongside academic achievement.

Nevertheless, this study is limited to a single school with a relatively small sample size, which constrains the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research is encouraged to adopt a longitudinal design in order to track changes in students' self-confidence over time, while also involving multiple schools across different regions to improve external validity. Further studies could also explore

mediating factors such as social support, resilience, and coping strategies to better explain the mechanisms linking bullying and self-confidence. In addition, intervention-based research is needed to test the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs and self-confidence building initiatives. Finally, the use of mixed-method approaches that combine quantitative analysis with qualitative data, such as interviews or case studies, will provide richer and more comprehensive insights into students' lived experiences.

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