

# ENHANCING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING THROUGH STORYTELLING STRATEGIES FOR BULLYING PREVENTION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges of maintaining learning focus among a student with special needs in an elementary school in Karawang. Difficulties in sustaining attention were found to significantly affect classroom participation and academic outcomes, underscoring the need for appropriate educational support, particularly through the involvement of a shadow teacher. This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with tahfidz teachers and shadow teachers, and document analysis. The findings indicate that: (1) students' difficulties in maintaining focus are influenced by individual characteristics, the learning environment, and instructional practices; and (2) shadow teachers employ various strategies, including individualized assistance, adaptive instruction, emotional support, and structured guidance, to enhance students' focus and engagement. In conclusion, shadow teachers play a pivotal role in supporting students with special needs, particularly in improving attention and active participation within inclusive classroom settings.

**Keywords:** Shadow teacher; special needs students; learning focus; inclusive education;

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental process in developing human resources that are not only intellectually competent but also emotionally and socially mature. In the national education context, its objectives extend beyond academic achievement to include character formation, enabling students to become morally grounded, socially responsible, and capable of living in harmony with society. (Neal et al., 2022). Therefore, schools play a strategic role in fostering social and emotional values from an early stage. Elementary school is a crucial phase in students' personal development, during which they begin to recognize themselves, regulate their emotions, understand others' perspectives, and build social relationships. (Croom, 2022).

However, learning practices at this level still tend to prioritize cognitive achievement over affective and social-emotional development. This imbalance creates a gap between expected educational outcomes and reality in schools, where students often lack empathy, emotional control, and conflict-resolution skills. (Catalá et al., 2022). One of the most visible consequences of this gap is the emergence of bullying behavior. Bullying, defined as intentional and repeated aggressive behavior toward weaker individuals, remains a significant issue in elementary schools. (To et al., 2023).

It is often normalized as harmless joking, despite its serious psychological impacts, including anxiety, low self-esteem, and long-term trauma for victims, as well as the development of persistent aggressive behavior among perpetrators. This condition indicates that punitive approaches alone are insufficient and that preventive, educational, and sustainable strategies are needed. (Sparkes, 2024). In this regard, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) offers a relevant framework for strengthening students' emotional awareness, empathy, and responsible decision-making. The integration of SEL is also aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in achieving the Pancasila Student Profile, which emphasizes values such as cooperation, respect for diversity, independence, and critical thinking. (Rizzo et al., 2022).

However, a key challenge lies in how these values are effectively actualized in classroom practices that are engaging and developmentally appropriate. One promising approach is learning through storytelling, which uses narratives to convey moral and social-emotional values. Storytelling enables students to engage emotionally, understand multiple perspectives, and reflect on appropriate behavior in a non-instructive manner. (Harper & Thompson, 2025). In the context of bullying prevention, storytelling has strong potential to foster empathy, compassion, and respect, while creating a safe and inclusive learning environment. Previous studies have examined SEL and bullying prevention, as well as the effectiveness of storytelling in character education.

However, these studies tend to address these aspects separately, without integrating SEL and storytelling as a unified approach. Moreover, research focusing on the contextual application of storytelling-based SEL for bullying prevention in elementary schools, particularly in local settings such as SDN 21 Tolomundu, Bima City, remains limited. This gap constitutes the novelty of this study. It specifically explores the actualization of SEL through storytelling as an integrated, context-based strategy to prevent bullying. By combining these approaches, this study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to character education in primary schools.

The urgency of this research lies in the long-term impact of unresolved bullying on students' emotional and social development. Preliminary observations at SDN 21 Tolomundu indicate that some students still exhibit teasing behavior, low empathy, and limited conflict-resolution skills, and that social-emotional learning has not been systematically implemented. This reflects a discrepancy between the expected character outcomes and actual classroom practices. Therefore, this study aims to (1) describe the implementation of Social Emotional Learning through the learning through storytelling strategy, (2) identify the social-emotional values developed, and (3) analyze its role in preventing bullying cases at SDN 21 Tolomundu, Bima City.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a fundamental approach in contemporary education, emphasizing the development of students' abilities to understand and manage emotions, establish positive social relationships, and make responsible decisions. In primary education, SEL is particularly crucial as childhood represents a critical stage in character formation and personality development. (Bozkurt et al., 2023). According to the framework developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL encompasses five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies are closely associated with preventing negative behaviors, including bullying. Recent studies highlight that SEL can be implemented in elementary schools through various instructional strategies, such as collaborative learning, reflective activities, and structured social interactions. (Benasso et al., 2022).

These approaches enable students not only to develop cognitive skills but also to strengthen their emotional and social capacities. Integrating SEL into daily classroom practices fosters a holistic learning environment where students are encouraged to express emotions appropriately, empathize with others, and engage in constructive communication. (Alexander, 2022). Regarding bullying behavior, empirical evidence suggests that a lack of social-emotional competence is a significant contributing factor. Students who exhibit poor emotional regulation, low empathy, and limited social skills are more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors toward peers. Conversely, students with well-developed SEL competencies tend to demonstrate prosocial behavior and conflict resolution skills. (Palm et al., 2023).

Therefore, strengthening social-emotional competencies is widely recognized as an effective preventive strategy against bullying in school settings. Furthermore, research indicates

that SEL-based interventions significantly reduce bullying incidents by enhancing students' empathy, emotion regulation, and interpersonal skills (de Melo et al., 2023). Long-term implementation of SEL programs has been shown to create a positive school climate, which in turn reduces victimization and aggressive behavior. Systematic reviews of SEL interventions also reveal that programs embedded in the curriculum tend to yield more sustainable outcomes than short-term or incidental interventions (Papoutsi et al., 2022).

This underscores the importance of integrating SEL into the formal educational framework. One instructional strategy that aligns closely with SEL principles is learning through storytelling. Storytelling has long been recognized as an effective pedagogical method for conveying moral values, emotional understanding, and social norms. Through narratives, students are exposed to diverse social situations, allowing them to explore emotional experiences and moral dilemmas in a safe and engaging context. (Koehler et al., 2022). This approach is consistent with constructivist learning theory, which posits that knowledge is constructed through meaningful experiences and personal interpretation. From a psychological perspective, storytelling enhances students' emotional engagement by enabling them to connect with characters and situations within a narrative. This emotional involvement facilitates the development of empathy and social awareness, which are essential components of SEL. Studies have shown that storytelling-based learning can improve children's ability to recognize emotions, understand others' perspectives, and respond appropriately in social interactions. (Ondrušková & Pospíšil, 2023).

Compared to traditional instructional methods, storytelling provides a more immersive and impactful learning experience. In the context of bullying prevention, storytelling serves as a powerful medium to instill anti-bullying values such as empathy, respect, and tolerance. Through carefully designed narratives, students can learn about the negative consequences of bullying on victims and the importance of fostering positive peer relationships. (Qu et al., 2024). Additionally, storytelling encourages self-reflection, allowing students to evaluate their own behaviors and attitudes toward others. This reflective process is essential in promoting behavioral change and reinforcing positive social norms. Bullying in primary schools remains a significant issue that affects students' emotional well-being and social development. Victims of bullying often experience anxiety, low self-esteem, and difficulties in social interaction, which may also impact their academic performance. (Khan et al., 2025).

In the long term, exposure to bullying can lead to more severe psychological consequences, highlighting the urgent need for preventive interventions within the educational system. Based on the existing literature, it can be concluded that integrating Social-Emotional Learning through storytelling strategies has substantial potential to prevent bullying in elementary schools. The combination of SEL competencies and engaging instructional methods creates a supportive learning environment that promotes positive behavior and emotional well-being. (Ghaderi et al., 2023). However, the effectiveness of this approach depends on several factors, including teachers' pedagogical competence, institutional support, and the consistency of implementation. In conclusion, the reviewed literature demonstrates a strong alignment between theoretical frameworks and empirical findings, indicating that SEL, particularly when implemented through storytelling, is an effective strategy for character development and bullying prevention. Therefore, this study is significant for exploring how the implementation of storytelling-based SEL can be contextualized at SDN 21 Tolomundu in Bima City to address bullying issues and enhance students' social-emotional competencies.

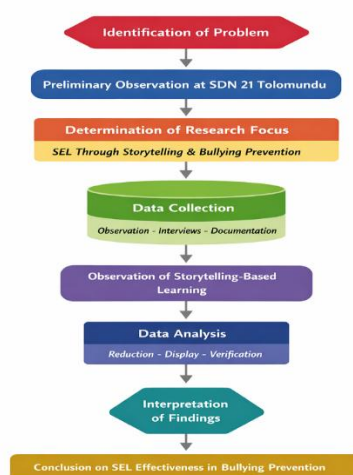
## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the actualization of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) through the learning through storytelling strategy in preventing bullying at SDN 21 Tolomundu, Bima City. This approach is used to explore students' social interactions, emotional development, and behavioral changes within a natural

classroom setting. The research was conducted at SDN 21 Tolomundu, involving classroom teachers, upper-grade students, and the school principal, who were purposively selected based on their relevance to the study.

The research began with problem identification related to students' social behavior and bullying tendencies, followed by preliminary classroom observations to understand the learning context. Based on these findings, the research focus was determined, namely, the implementation of SEL through storytelling. Data were collected through classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, with field notes used to capture contextual findings. The study focused on how storytelling is used to convey moral values, develop empathy, and foster positive social behavior among students as a preventive measure against bullying. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The process was carried out continuously to ensure the validity and consistency of the findings, leading to an interpretation of how storytelling-based SEL contributes to bullying prevention.

The overall research process is illustrated in the following flowchart:



The flowchart shows that the research begins with identifying the problem, followed by preliminary observation and determination of the research focus. The process continues with data collection and observation of storytelling-based learning implementation, then proceeds to data analysis. The final stages involve interpreting the findings and drawing conclusions regarding the effectiveness of SEL through storytelling in preventing bullying.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Storytelling-Based Learning for Social-Emotional Bullying Prevention*

The findings of this study demonstrate that implementing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) through a storytelling strategy plays a crucial role in preventing bullying among students at SDN 21 Tolomundu, Bima City. Storytelling in this context is not merely a pedagogical variation. However, it represents a transformative learning approach that translates abstract social-emotional values such as empathy, respect, emotional regulation, and prosocial behavior into concrete and meaningful learning experiences.

Classroom observations reveal that students exhibit strong emotional engagement during storytelling sessions. They actively respond to narrative content, express emotional reactions, and demonstrate empathy toward characters experiencing conflict or bullying. This indicates that storytelling facilitates an experiential learning process in which students not only understand values cognitively but also internalize them affectively. Such findings are consistent

with constructivist learning theory, which posits that knowledge and values are constructed through active engagement, interaction, and reflection (Ip et al., 2022).

Interview data further strengthen this finding. A classroom teacher explained:

*“Through storytelling, students can easily understand what is right and wrong. They feel the story, not just hear it, so they become more aware of their behavior toward friends.” (Teacher Interview, 2025)*

*Similarly, a student stated:*

*“I feel sad when the character is bullied. It makes me not want to do that to my friends.” (Student Interview, 2025)*

These responses confirm that storytelling enhances emotional resonance, which is a key element in social-emotional development theory. According to CASEL’s framework, empathy and emotional awareness are fundamental competencies that influence students’ social behavior and reduce aggressive tendencies. In this study, storytelling effectively activates these competencies by creating emotional connections between students and moral narratives.

From the documentation analysis, lesson plans and teaching modules explicitly incorporate SEL indicators such as emotional identification, moral reflection, and social decision-making. This structured integration demonstrates that storytelling is implemented systematically rather than incidentally, thereby increasing its pedagogical effectiveness.



**Figure 1. Storytelling-Based Learning in the Classroom**

The figure illustrates how storytelling creates an interactive and emotionally engaging learning environment. Students are actively involved in interpreting narratives, which supports the internalization of social-emotional values.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings align with previous studies emphasizing that narrative-based pedagogy significantly enhances empathy and moral reasoning. (Zhang et al., 2023). Compared to traditional teacher-centered approaches, storytelling provides a more immersive learning experience where students become active agents in meaning-making. This contributes significantly to character education by fostering a deeper internalization of values rather than a superficial understanding.

However, the effectiveness of storytelling is influenced by teachers’ pedagogical competence, particularly in designing engaging narratives and facilitating reflective dialogue. Without such competence, storytelling may lose its transformative potential. Therefore, teacher creativity emerges as a critical factor in maximizing the impact of storytelling-based SEL.

### ***Effectiveness of Social-Emotional Learning in Reducing Bullying***

The findings further indicate that implementing SEL through storytelling contributes to a measurable reduction in bullying tendencies among students. This effectiveness is reflected in observable behavioral changes, including improved emotional regulation, increased empathy, and more positive peer interactions.

Observational data show that students who previously engaged in teasing or aggressive behavior began to demonstrate more controlled emotional responses and respectful communication. During collaborative activities, students demonstrated increased cooperation,

active listening, and conflict-resolution skills. These behavioral changes suggest that SEL influences not only students' emotional awareness but also their social conduct.

Interview data with the school principal support this finding:

"After teachers applied storytelling in learning, we observed fewer conflicts among students. They seemed more respectful and aware of their actions." (Principal Interview, 2025)

A teacher also stated:

*"Students are now more open to discussing their feelings. When conflicts happen, they try to solve them without fighting."* (Teacher Interview, 2025)

Meanwhile, a student explained:

*"Now we say sorry when we make mistakes. Before, we often argued."* (Student Interview, 2025)

These findings indicate a shift from reactive to reflective behavior, a key outcome of effective SEL implementation. From the perspective of character education theory, this transformation reflects the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. (Lewandowska & Weziak-Bialowolska, 2022). Storytelling plays a crucial role in connecting these dimensions by providing contextual scenarios where students can practice moral reasoning and emotional regulation.

Documentation data further confirm these findings, showing a decrease in reported bullying incidents and an increase in participation in group-based learning activities. This suggests that SEL contributes to creating a positive classroom climate, which is essential for preventing bullying.



**Figure 2. Collaborative Learning as an Outcome of SEL Implementation**

The figure illustrates improved student interaction through collaborative learning activities, reflecting the successful internalization of social-emotional values and a reduction in bullying behavior.

These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that SEL programs significantly reduce aggressive behavior and improve social competence. (Stiehl et al., 2023). However, the effectiveness of SEL depends on consistency in implementation and the integration of values into daily classroom practices. Without continuity, behavioral changes may not be sustained.

### ***Challenges and Implications in Implementing Storytelling-Based SEL***

Despite its positive impact, the implementation of storytelling-based SEL faces several challenges. One of the primary challenges identified in this study is the variation in teachers' ability to deliver storytelling effectively. Not all teachers possess the same level of creativity, narrative skill, or confidence in using storytelling as a pedagogical tool.

As one teacher noted:

*"Sometimes it is difficult to create interesting stories that match the lesson. It requires preparation and creativity."* (Teacher Interview, 2025)

Another challenge concerns time constraints in the curriculum, in which teachers prioritize academic content over value-based learning. Additionally, limited access to learning media and resources may hinder the effective delivery of storytelling.

However, observational findings indicate that teachers demonstrate adaptability by using contextual stories derived from students' daily experiences. This suggests that storytelling effectiveness depends not only on resources but also on teachers' pedagogical flexibility and innovation.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with the concept of teacher agency, which emphasizes teachers as active agents in shaping learning environments. Previous studies suggest that teacher creativity can significantly enhance the effectiveness of character education. (Lai et al., 2022). Therefore, strengthening teacher capacity through professional development becomes essential.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it helps integrate SEL, storytelling pedagogy, and character education into a unified framework for bullying prevention. Practically, it highlights the importance of teacher training, institutional support, and curriculum integration in sustaining SEL implementation.

Furthermore, the findings emphasize the need for collaboration between schools, families, and communities. The internalization of social-emotional values cannot be achieved solely through classroom instruction but requires reinforcement from the broader social environment.

In conclusion, although challenges exist, storytelling-based SEL represents an effective and contextually relevant strategy for preventing bullying. With consistent implementation and adequate support, this approach has significant potential to foster students' social-emotional competencies and contribute to sustainable character development.

## DISCUSSION

To ensure analytical clarity and conceptual coherence, the Results and Discussion sections are systematically delineated while remaining epistemologically interconnected. This structural separation is essential in qualitative research, as it allows for a clear distinction between empirical description and theoretical interpretation without fragmenting the overall analytical narrative. (Erscoi et al., 2023).

The Results section presents empirically grounded findings from classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. It focuses on explicating the process of internalizing social-emotional and moral values through storytelling practices embedded within the school culture. In this context, the findings capture how students actively engage in narrative-based learning, construct meaning from moral dilemmas, and demonstrate observable behavioral transformations, particularly in bullying prevention.

This process reflects the constructivist assumption that knowledge and values are not transmitted passively but actively constructed through interaction, experience, and reflection. (Burbach et al., 2023). Moreover, the findings indicate that storytelling is an effective pedagogical medium for fostering emotional engagement, a crucial component of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL).

According to the CASEL framework, competencies such as self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills are fundamental in shaping prosocial behavior and reducing aggressive tendencies. (Featherstone et al., 2023). Empirical studies further support the finding that students exposed to SEL-based interventions demonstrate higher levels of empathy, emotion regulation, and cooperative behavior. (Raivio et al., 2022).

In this study, storytelling enables students to connect emotionally with narrative characters, thereby fostering empathy and moral sensitivity, key elements in preventing bullying behavior (Tan et al., 2022). In contrast, the Discussion section advances a deeper level of analysis by interrogating the findings' meaning, implications, and theoretical significance. It situates the

empirical results within established theoretical frameworks, including constructivist learning theory, social-emotional development theory, and character education paradigms. From the perspective of character education, the internalization of values requires the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Berghs et al., 2022).

The findings of this study demonstrate that storytelling effectively integrates these dimensions by enabling students to understand moral concepts (cognitive), feel emotional responses (affective), and apply values in real-life interactions (behavioral). Furthermore, storytelling can be understood as a form of narrative pedagogy that enhances meaning-making processes. According to Bruner (1996), narratives play a central role in human cognition by structuring experiences and shaping moral understanding. Recent studies also highlight that narrative-based learning significantly improves students' empathy, perspective-taking, and ethical reasoning. (Tamagawa, 2022).

This aligns with the findings of this study, where students demonstrate increased awareness of the consequences of bullying and a greater tendency to engage in prosocial behavior. The discussion also engages with previous empirical studies on bullying prevention, which emphasize that low social-emotional competence is a key predictor of aggressive behavior among students. (Hedderich et al., 2024). Conversely, interventions that strengthen SEL competencies have been shown to reduce bullying incidents and improve classroom climate. (e Cunha et al., 2024). The present study contributes to this body of knowledge by demonstrating that storytelling-based SEL provides a contextually relevant and pedagogically effective strategy, particularly in primary education settings.

Importantly, this dual-structured approach not only enhances interpretive rigor but also ensures methodological transparency. By maintaining consistency between the findings and their interpretation, the study avoids overgeneralization and preserves analytical precision. (Curelaru et al., 2022). The clear distinction between "empirical evidence" and "theoretical interpretation" allows for a more robust and credible knowledge construction process. Consequently, this approach reinforces the study's scientific rigor, ensuring it meets the standards of academic writing for systematic organization, analytical depth, and theoretical integration. (Urbain et al., 2026).

At the same time, it highlights the study's contribution to the field of character education by providing empirical evidence that storytelling-based Social Emotional Learning is an effective strategy for internalizing moral values and preventing bullying. This contribution is particularly relevant in the context of contemporary education, where innovative and context-sensitive pedagogical approaches are required to address complex social challenges. (Sunderland et al., 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the role of the shadow teacher is essential in addressing the difficulty of maintaining focus among students with special needs in elementary school settings. The findings demonstrate that students' attention difficulties are influenced by a combination of internal factors, such as individual characteristics, and external factors, including the learning environment and instructional approaches. Furthermore, strategies implemented by shadow teachers, such as individualized guidance, adaptive teaching methods, emotional support, and structured classroom assistance, have proven effective in improving students' focus, engagement, and participation in learning activities.

These efforts not only support students academically but also contribute to their social and emotional development within an inclusive educational environment. Overall, this study highlights the importance of professional support systems in inclusive education. The presence of a competent and responsive shadow teacher can significantly enhance the learning experience of students with special needs, particularly by helping them overcome attention-related challenges and fostering meaningful participation in the classroom.

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