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## Teachers as Restorative Agents: Unpacking the Framework of Ethical Decision-Making in Resolving Bullying in Elementary Schools

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### ABSTRACT

*Bullying cases in schools are a serious concern because they can negatively impact students' psychological and social development. This study aims to analyze the resolution of bullying cases through ethical decision-making by teachers. The study was conducted using a survey method using open-ended questions. The research subjects consisted of five teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data collection techniques used semi-structured interviews with six main questions designed to explore teachers' views and experiences in handling bullying cases. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through the processes of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results show that teachers use an ethical approach in decision-making to resolve bullying cases, including considering moral values, justice, and empathy for all parties involved. This approach helps create solutions that not only stop bullying but also encourage the formation of a safer and more inclusive school environment. This study provides insights for the development of bullying intervention strategies based on ethical decision-making*

**Keywords:** *bullying, ethical decision making, teachers, case solving*

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### ABSTRAK

Kasus *bullying* di lingkungan sekolah menjadi perhatian serius karena dapat berdampak negatif pada perkembangan psikologis dan sosial siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penyelesaian kasus *bullying* melalui pengambilan keputusan etis oleh guru. Penelitian dilakukan dengan metode survei menggunakan pertanyaan terbuka. Subjek penelitian terdiri dari lima orang guru yang dipilih secara purposif sampling. Teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan enam pertanyaan utama yang dirancang untuk menggali pandangan dan pengalaman guru dalam menangani kasus *bullying*. Analisis data dilakukan secara kualitatif melalui proses reduksi, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru menggunakan pendekatan etis dalam pengambilan keputusan untuk menyelesaikan kasus *bullying*, termasuk mempertimbangkan nilai-nilai moral, keadilan, dan empati terhadap semua pihak yang terlibat. Pendekatan ini membantu menciptakan solusi yang tidak hanya menghentikan tindakan *bullying* tetapi juga mendorong pembentukan lingkungan sekolah yang lebih aman dan inklusif. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan bagi pengembangan strategi intervensi *bullying* yang berbasis pada pengambilan keputusan etis.

**Kata Kunci:** *bullying*, pengambilan keputusan etis, guru, penyelesaian kasus

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## INTRODUCTION

Cases of violence in schools, including bullying, remain a serious problem in education. Violent behavior in children is often rooted in poor emotional control and a lack of social awareness (Noya & Kiriwenno, 2024). Schools, which should ideally be a safe and enjoyable space for students to grow and develop, often turn into uncomfortable environments due to the rise in bullying cases (Setiawan et al., 2022). Bullying, whether physical, verbal, or social, not only harms the victim, but also negatively impacts the perpetrator and the school climate as a whole (Noya & Kiriwenno, 2024). In fact, the latest data shows that in early 2024, there were 46 cases of children ending their lives due to bullying (Diagnosa.id, 2024). This situation requires the involvement of all parties, from schools that create an anti-bullying culture through character education, to parents who provide moral support for children (Karisma et al., 2024).

In such situations, teachers play a central role as role models in schools. They are required to make ethical decisions when dealing with bullying. This responsibility is not only moral but also legal, as mandated by Article 28B Paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution, which affirms children's rights to live, grow, and develop, and receive protection from violence and discrimination (Simanjuntak, 2022). In line with this, various regulations on child protection emphasize the importance of comprehensive efforts that are both preventive and repressive (Kanang, 2018).

Ethical decision making can be a strategic solution in resolving bullying cases because it takes into account moral, justice and empathy aspects (Pasaribu & Radikun, 2021). This is in line with Jones' view of moral intention as an expression of beliefs about right and wrong in ethical dilemmas, as well as the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen et al., 2009) which emphasizes that individuals act rationally based on an analysis of information and consequences. Thus, the decision-making process includes consistent stages: understanding and formulating the problem, collecting and analyzing relevant data, developing alternatives, evaluating alternatives, selecting the best alternative, implementing the decision, and evaluating the results of the decision (Maidiana, 2021). This process requires attention to ethics

that can influence decision making to produce good decisions and achieve organizational goals (Marsyela et al., 2023).

The urgency of ethical decision-making by teachers cannot be ignored, as schools are institutions tasked with shaping a generation with morals and empathy. Emotional decisions or decisions without ethical considerations have the potential to worsen the situation, while well-thought-out decisions can have positive impacts, including building inclusive schools, strengthening teacher and student trust, and preventing similar incidents from recurring. A school environment free from bullying also allows students to develop optimally (Abdillah, 2024; Tari et al., 2024). Ultimately, teachers who are able to make ethical decisions not only resolve conflicts but also serve as role models in upholding the values of justice. Therefore, this study aims to unpack the ethical decision-making framework of teachers as restorative agents in addressing bullying in elementary schools.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Bullying in Elementary School Environment**

*Bullying* psychosocial problems in the form of repeated acts of insulting and degrading other people, where the perpetrator has more power than the victim (Kartika et al., 2019). In elementary schools, bullying often manifests itself in verbal and social forms (Wang et al., 2009), the impact of which can hinder the psychosocial and academic development of the victim (Lestari et al., 2023). The developmental context of elementary school-aged children, who are still developing moral values, makes the role of teachers crucial in providing appropriate interventions.

### **Ethical Decision Making in Education**

Ethical decision making is a process that involves moral considerations in choosing the best action among several possible alternatives (Watts et al., 2020). In the context of education, teachers' ethical decisions not only consider legal and procedural aspects, but also more deeply consider the values of justice, the well-being of students, and professional responsibility (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). Rest through the Four Component Model explains that ethical decisions involve moral sensitivity, moral consideration, moral motivation, and moral character (Khursheed et al., 2019).

### **Restorative Approach in Education**

Restorative practices in education focus on repairing the damage to relationships caused by wrongful behavior, rather than simply punishing the perpetrator (Vaandering, 2010). Teachers as restorative agents play a role in facilitating dialogue, restoring trust, and building inclusive communities (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). This approach is in line with the values of Pancasila Education which emphasizes problem solving within a family and collaborative manner (Lestari et al., 2023).

## METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study aims to understand the subjective experiences and ethical decision-making processes of teachers in handling bullying cases. The research participants consisted of five teachers from five different schools in Bandung City who were purposively selected based on the criteria of having direct experience handling at least one bullying case. The data collection technique was through semi-structured interviews with six main questions designed to explore the teachers' views and experiences. The interview process was recorded and paraphrased into written notes.

The data was analyzed qualitatively using the Miles and Huberman model thematic analysis technique which includes three stages: (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, and (3) drawing conclusions/verification (Sinaga & Mustika, 2023). In the data reduction stage, interview transcripts are simplified and focused on key points. The data presentation stage involves compiling narratives and identifying emerging themes. The final stage is drawing conclusions from the presented findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on an analysis of the interview results, it was found that teachers' ethical decisions as restorative agents in addressing bullying are constructed through a four-stage, interconnected framework. This framework is illustrated in the following diagram

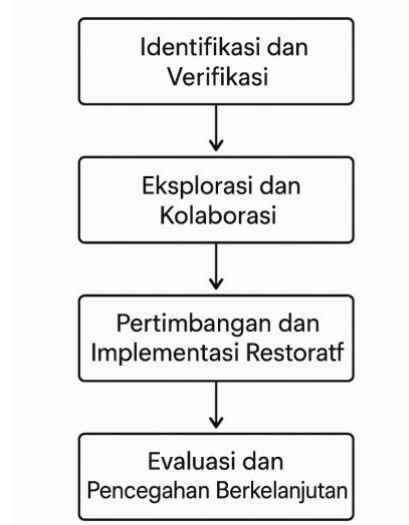


Figure 1. Ethical Decision-Making Framework for Teachers as Restorative Agents

To elaborate on each stage of the framework in more detail, Table 1 presents empirical evidence from the field supporting each phase. This table not only describes the core findings and includes direct participant quotes as evidence, but also critically examines them through the lens of relevant ethical and restorative theories, demonstrating a close integration of the data, teacher voices, and the theoretical framework.

**Table 1. Stages of Ethical Decision-Making by Teachers as Restorative Agents**

Stages	Description of Findings	Interview Quote Support	Discussion and Elaboration of Findings
1. Identification and Verification	Teachers rely on multiple sources: student reports, observations of behavior changes, and social media issues.	Teacher B: "The class atmosphere changed, some were angry... then there were rumors from the children. We then looked for facts, observed, and communicated directly."	This stage reflects moral sensitivity, where teachers are able to identify value violations. Teachers' caution is in line with the restorative principle of not immediately judging (Vaandering, 2010).
2. Exploration and Collaboration	Handling steps involve collaboration with homeroom teachers, parents, and the principal.	Teacher D: "Coordinate with the school supervisor or parents separately... seek information about parents' behavior towards their children."	Collaboration is at the heart of the restorative approach (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). This shows the teacher understands that the roots of problems are often systemic, and his moral motivation is to heal the community, not just the individual.
3. Restorative Considerations and Implementation	Teachers choose mediation, coaching, and learning projects that instill the value of tolerance. Educational sanctions are a last resort.	Teacher A: "Anti-bullying habits... semester 1: starting to be able to love yourself... semester 2: Starting to be kind to others, respecting others..."	This is the essence of moral reasoning and its implementation. Teachers' actions reflect restorative justice, which aims for reintegration and value learning (Zehr, 2003), very relevant to the context of character formation in elementary school.
4. Continuous Evaluation and Prevention	Teachers conduct behavior monitoring, reflection with the team, and preventive efforts such as repeated education.	Teacher E: "Making a case notebook... carrying out prevention such as educating students and getting them used to it..."	This stage demonstrates the teacher's moral character and long-term commitment. Ongoing monitoring is key to ensuring that restorative solutions are truly effective and that

Stages	Description of Findings	Interview Quote Support	Discussion and Elaboration of Findings
			recurrence is prevented (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011).

The findings of this study reinforce and contextualize Rest's ethical decision-making model in real-life practice in Indonesian elementary schools. The four identified stages are not solely linear but also exhibit a cyclical pattern; evaluation at the final stage often brings teachers back to the identification stage. This pattern confirms that ethical decision-making is dynamic, adaptive, and contextual. The teacher's role as a restorative agent is seen dominantly in the third and fourth stages, where the focus of resolution goes beyond incidental responses to capacity-building, namely establishing an inclusive school culture oriented toward the formation of positive student character. These findings are consistent with recent studies that highlight the importance of the teacher's role as the primary facilitator in developing students' ethical and moral values through daily interactions and learning activities, serving not only as a transmitter of material but also as a role model for behavior (Aini & Ramadhan, 2024).

A significant contribution of this study is the discovery of the collaborative dimension with parents, as expressed by Teacher D. This dimension broadens the framework of restorative practices, which has tended to focus on the internal school community. Parental involvement strengthens emotional and social support for students, creating a more comprehensive recovery process. This aligns with recent research emphasizing that family involvement is a key factor in the effectiveness of restorative-based anti-bullying programs (Dull & Reinhardt, 2014).

However, this study also revealed serious challenges. Some schools, as indicated by Teachers A and D, do not yet have structured prevention mechanisms in place. This situation highlights a gap between individual teachers' ethical capacity and the systemic support needed. This challenge reinforces the findings (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011), and updated by recent studies that emphasize the importance of organizational support and school policies in consistently implementing restorative practices (Gregory et al., 2016). Thus, the success of restorative practices in Indonesian elementary schools depends not only on the personal capacity of teachers, but also on the existence of a clear, sustainable policy framework supported by all stakeholders.

This research has important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the results broaden the understanding of the Rest model by confirming that teachers' ethical decision-making is dynamic and cyclical, while also enriching the restorative practices framework through the involvement of parents as significant external actors. Practically, these findings emphasize the need for schools to strengthen structured prevention mechanisms, build ongoing collaboration with parents, and provide evidence-based ethical training for teachers to enable them to face moral dilemmas reflectively. These implications emphasize that the success of addressing bullying in elementary schools is determined not only by the capacity of individual teachers, but also by the systemic support and participation of the entire educational community.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that teachers' ethical decision-making in handling bullying is a complex, systematic process, and based on moral values to ensure justice and the well-being of all parties. This process is characterized by teachers' sensitivity in understanding the dynamics of the case, collaborative engagement with various parties, including parents, the selection of a restorative-educational approach, and a commitment to long-term evaluation. Theoretically, this study expands Rest's ethical decision-making model by emphasizing its dynamic, cyclical, and contextual nature in elementary education practices in Indonesia. This enriches the literature by demonstrating that the model's application is not merely linear, but adaptive to the social and cultural context of the school. Practically, the findings of this study can serve as a basis for developing ethical decision-making training modules, developing operational guidelines for teachers as restorative agents, and formulating school policies that promote an inclusive and bullying-free culture. The limitations of this study lie in the limited number and location of participants, so generalization of the results requires caution. For future research, it is recommended to involve a more diverse group of participants from various regions and educational levels, and to explore the perspectives of students and parents to gain a more holistic understanding of ethical decision-making practices in schools.

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