

Madrasah Principals Leadership in Ethnopedagogy-Based Conflict Management for Bullying Prevention in Islamic Boarding School Madrasahs

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to bullying remains a form of social conflict that persists in residential educational settings, including madrasahs based on Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). Intensive daily interactions, senior-junior relations, and diverse socio-cultural backgrounds may increase the risk of bullying if they are not systematically managed. This study aims to examine: (1) madrasah principals' leadership planning for bullying prevention, (2) the implementation of ethnopedagogy-based conflict management, and (3) best practices that support sustainable bullying prevention in Islamic boarding school-based madrasahs in Bengkulu Province. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving madrasah principals, pesantren caregivers, teachers, and students across seven Islamic boarding schools designated as pilot child-friendly pesantren. Data were analyzed using an interactive model comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that bullying prevention is effectively embedded in leadership planning through the integration of anti-bullying policies into the vision, mission, and programs of child-friendly pesantren grounded in Islamic values and local wisdom. Ethnopedagogy-based conflict management is implemented through dialogical, deliberative (*musyawarah*), and restorative approaches that prioritize education, moral reflection, and relationship restoration over punitive sanctions. Sustainable bullying prevention is further strengthened by best practices such as continuous value habituation, senior-junior mentoring systems, and periodic program evaluations. Overall, the study concludes that madrasah principals' leadership grounded in ethnopedagogical and Islamic values provides an effective and contextually relevant model for preventing bullying in residential religious education settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a serious educational and social problem that continues to occur in schools worldwide, including in religious-based educational institutions (Rajiani et al., 2016; Safitri et al., n.d.). Numerous studies have shown that bullying negatively affects students' psychological well-being, academic engagement, and character development (Ramdani et al., 2025; Syam & Efita, n.d.). In residential educational environments such as Islamic boarding schools, the potential for bullying is even greater due to intensive daily interactions, hierarchical senior-junior relations, and students' diverse cultural backgrounds (Astutiani & Hidayah, n.d.). Madrasahs based on Islamic boarding schools have distinctive characteristics compared to non-boarding schools (Eksantoso, 2024). Students live together for twenty-four hours a day and engage in academic, religious, and social activities within a relatively closed community (Norhafizah, 2025). While this environment supports character education and moral development, it may also generate social conflicts if not managed properly (Salsabila & Muqowim, 2024). Consequently, effective leadership from madrasah principals is essential to ensure a safe and inclusive learning environment (Waruwu, 2024).

Conventional punitive approaches to bullying often fail to provide long-term solutions. Therefore, context-sensitive and value-based approaches are required. Ethnopedagogy emphasizes the use of local wisdom and cultural values as foundations for educational practices (Rahman & Hidayat, 2019; Ahmad Halid et al., 2025). In pesantren contexts, ethnopedagogy aligns naturally with Islamic values such as deliberation, brotherhood (*ukhuwah*), justice, and moral exemplarity (Marinu Waruwu, 2024). Integrating ethnopedagogical principles into conflict management is expected to offer a more humanistic and sustainable approach to bullying prevention. Despite its potential, empirical studies examining madrasah principals' leadership in ethnopedagogy-based conflict management remain limited, particularly in Bengkulu Province (Endang Andrian, 2024; Hilaliyah et al., 2019). This study addresses this gap by exploring leadership planning, conflict management strategies, and best practices employed by madrasah principals to prevent bullying in Islamic boarding school-based madrasahs. Educational leadership plays a central role in shaping school culture and ensuring effective learning environments (Sitepu & Albina, 2025). Madrasah principals are not merely administrators but moral and cultural leaders responsible for guiding teachers, students, and pesantren communities (Muis, 2019). Effective leadership in Islamic education is grounded in ethical values, justice, consultation, and exemplary conduct (Asfar & Nur, 2018).

Conflict management in educational institutions has increasingly emphasized restorative, culturally responsive, and value-based approaches rather than purely punitive mechanisms (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020; Halid, A., et al., 2025). Recent studies highlight that effective conflict management in schools requires leadership sensitivity to students' socio-cultural backgrounds, power relations, and emotional well-being, particularly in residential and faith-based educational contexts (Darwin et al., 2024; Rosa et al., 2025). Conflict is inevitable in organizations, including educational institutions. Differences in background, interests, and perceptions may lead to interpersonal or group conflicts. Conflict management aims to direct conflicts toward constructive outcomes through dialogue, mediation, and restorative approaches (Merritt et al., 2017). In boarding schools, conflict management must prioritize educational and moral dimensions rather than purely punitive measures (Haque & Kurniawan, 2021; Shidqon Famulaqih & Aceng Lukman, 2024).

Bullying quoting from the Indonesian Dictionary, etymologically the word bully means a bully, a person who disturbs the weak (Hastuti et al., 2020). Bullying is a negative act, where someone deliberately puts someone in a state of discomfort or hurt and usually happens repeatedly and over

time (Bowles & Carlin, 2020; Duch et al., 2001). Bullying occurs when a person attempts to psychologically or physically harm someone or a group of people who are more "weak", by someone who is more "strong". Bullying behavior does not only occur in public schools, but also occurs in Islamic boarding schools. Pondok pesantren is a traditional educational dormitory where students live together and study under the guidance of ustaz and kyai. Islamic boarding schools provide several facilities intended for students and ustaz such as mosques, classrooms, and dormitories where they stay for santri (Ummah, 2019).

Ethnopedagogy and education based on local wisdom emphasize that learning processes, disciplinary practices, and conflict resolution mechanisms should be rooted in culturally shared values and community traditions (Rahman & Hidayat, 2019; Mashud et al., 2025). Recent literature underscores that ethnopedagogical approaches enhance moral internalization, social cohesion, and students' sense of belonging, making them particularly effective for conflict management and bullying prevention in communal learning environments such as Islamic boarding schools (Wardi & Mappanyompa, 2025; Hermawan et al., 2025). Ethnopedagogy views education as inseparable from its socio-cultural context. Local wisdom and cultural values serve as learning resources and character-building foundations. In pesantren, ethnopedagogy is reflected in traditions of deliberation, respect for elders, communal living, and moral discipline. Applying ethnopedagogical principles in conflict management enables culturally relevant and sustainable solution.

2. METHODS

This research is qualitative descriptive with an ethnographic approach, with loci in Islamic Boarding Schools in Bengkulu Province, namely: (1) Makrifatul Ilmi Islamic Boarding School, South Bengkulu Regency; (2) Miftahul Jannah Islamic Boarding School, Rejang Lebong; (3) Wahyu Sholihah Islamic Boarding School, Kaur Regency; (4) Ahsanu Amala Islamic Boarding School, Seluma Regency; (5) Bintang Smilan Islamic Boarding School, Lebong Regency; (6) Darussalam Modern Islamic Boarding School, Kepahiang Regency; (7) Al Qur'an As Syakur Boarding School, Bengkulu City. The primary data sources in the study were Islamic Boarding School leaders, School Principals, Vice Principals, Dormitory Leaders (Mudir), Teachers and Students of Islamic Boarding Schools. Data collection used interview, observation, documentation, and field record techniques. Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals comprehensive insights into how madrasah principals exercise leadership in preventing bullying through ethnopedagogy-based conflict management, which aligns with recent findings on leadership-based bullying prevention in Islamic educational settings (Mustofa et al., 2025; Hermawan et al., 2025). The findings are organized into three major themes: leadership planning, conflict management strategies, and best practices across Islamic boarding school-based madrasahs.

3.1 Leadership Planning in Bullying Prevention

Leadership planning constitutes the foundation of effective bullying prevention. Madrasah principals systematically integrate anti-bullying initiatives into institutional vision, mission statements, and strategic programs of child-friendly pesantren. This planning process is not merely administrative but reflects moral leadership grounded in Islamic teachings and local wisdom. Principals formulate clear regulations, codes of conduct, and standard operating procedures that explicitly prohibit all forms of violence and bullying.

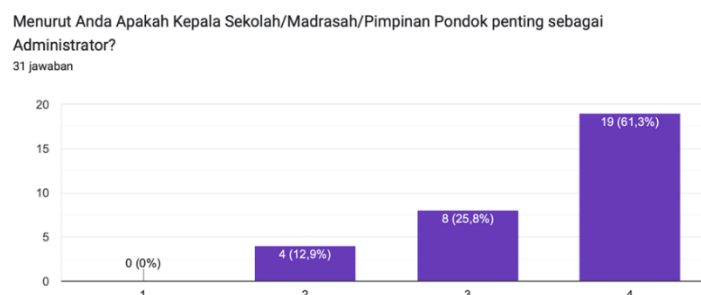


Figure 1. Leadership (Madrasah Principals) Planning as Administrator

Figure 2. Leadership (Madrasah Principals) Planning as Educator

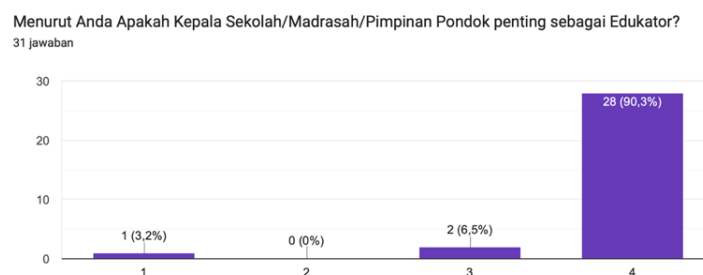
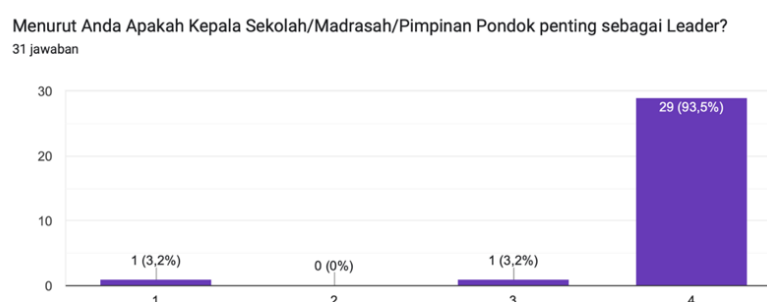


Figure 3. Leadership (Madrasah Principals) Planning as Leader



3.2 Ethnopedagogy-Based Conflict Management Strategies

In addition, planning involves participatory mechanisms. Teachers, pesantren caregivers, and senior students are actively engaged in the formulation and dissemination of anti-bullying policies. Senior students are formally assigned as mentors and role models for junior students, fostering peer-based supervision and moral guidance. Regular coordination meetings are conducted to evaluate potential risks, emerging conflicts, and students' social dynamics, ensuring that preventive measures are continuously refined.

Figure 4. Knowledge of Ethnopedagogy



Conflict management strategies implemented by madrasah principals emphasize dialogical, educational, and restorative approaches. When bullying-related conflicts occur, principals prioritize open dialogue through deliberation (*musyawarah*) involving perpetrators, victims, teachers, and pesantren caregivers. This process allows students to reflect on their actions, understand consequences, and take moral responsibility.

Restorative mediation is applied to repair social relationships rather than to impose punitive sanctions. Perpetrators receive guidance and character coaching, while victims are provided with emotional support and reassurance. This approach reduces fear, resentment, and retaliation among students. Leadership exemplarity is also critical; principals consistently demonstrate fairness, empathy, and firmness, reinforcing moral authority and trust.

Furthermore, anti-violence values are continuously habituated through daily religious activities, communal prayers, sermons, and informal interactions. These practices strengthen students’ internalization of ethical norms and foster a culture of mutual care.

Table 1. Conflict Management Strategies and Their impact

Strategy	Implementation	Observed Impact
Dialogical approach	Deliberation forum	Reduction of open conflict
Restorative mediation	Guidance and reconciliation	Decreases recurrence of bullying
Leadership exemplarity	Fair and empathetic decision-making	Increased sense of safety
Value habituation	Daily reinforcement of anti-violence norms	Conductive school culture

3.3 Best Practices in Islamic Boarding School–Based Madrasahs

Best practices identified across research sites demonstrate the contextual adaptability of ethnopedagogy-based leadership. Each pesantren develops locally grounded mechanisms while adhering to shared principles of child protection and moral education. Regular student deliberation forums enable early detection of tensions, while mentoring systems strengthen senior–junior relationships.

Periodic evaluations of child-friendly pesantren programs allow institutions to monitor progress and address weaknesses. The familial caregiving approach adopted by pesantren caregivers further reinforces students’ emotional security and sense of belonging. Collectively, these practices contribute to the sustainability of bullying prevention efforts.

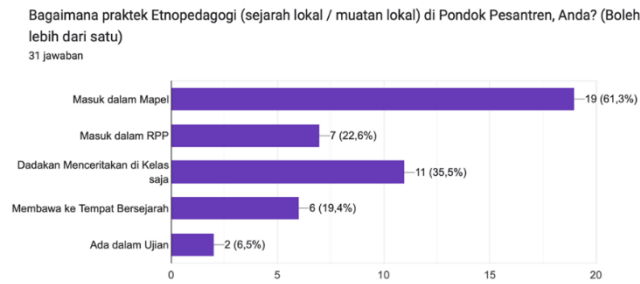
Table 2. Best Practice Across Islamic Boarding Schools

Location	Best Practice	Outcome
Bengkulu Selatan	Senior mentoring system	Harmonious senior-junior relations

Rejang Lebong	Regular student deliberation	Early conflict resolution
Kaur	Character education programs	Reduced bullying incidents
Seluma	Familial caregiving approach	Safe dormitory environment

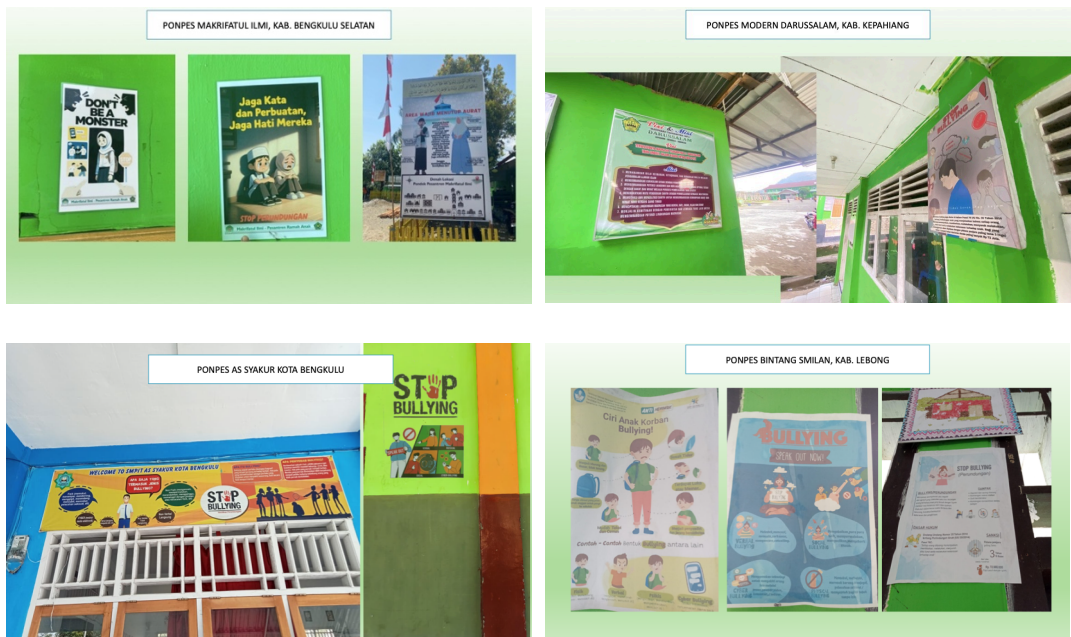
These findings indicate that bullying prevention in Islamic boarding school-based madrasahs is most effective when leadership planning, conflict management strategies, and best practices are coherently integrated within ethnopedagogical and Islamic value frameworks.

Figure 5. Ethnopedagogical Practice in Islamic Boarding Schools



This study provides strong empirical evidence that madrasah principals’ leadership grounded in ethnopedagogical values plays a decisive role in preventing bullying in Islamic boarding school-based madrasahs. The findings confirm that bullying prevention is not merely a matter of disciplinary control but a complex leadership process involving moral authority, cultural sensitivity, and sustainable conflict management.

Figure 6. Poster of Anti Bullying at Madrasah Boarding School



The integration of bullying prevention into leadership planning supports transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes vision-building, value internalization, and collective commitment. Madrasah principals who embed anti-bullying agendas into the vision of child-friendly pesantren are able to mobilize teachers, caregivers, and students toward shared moral goals. This finding aligns with Harris (2020), who argues that school leaders shape school climate through value-driven leadership rather than procedural enforcement alone.

Table 3. Leadership Planning In Bullying Prevention

Planing Aspect	Activities	Ethnopedagogy Values
Policy	Anti-Bullying regulation and codes of conduct	Justice, deliberation
Program	Socialization of child friendly Pesantren	Brotherhood, mutual aspect
Actor Involvement	Senior student as mentors	Exemplarity
Evaluation	Periodic conflict review meetings	Reflection and continuous improvement

Use of dialogical and deliberative (*musyawarah*) approaches reflects culturally responsive leadership practices, supporting recent studies that highlight restorative and dialogical conflict resolution as effective alternatives to punitive models (Rigby, 2017; Ahmad Halid et al., 2025). Unlike punitive models that often generate fear and resistance, dialogical conflict management encourages accountability, empathy, and moral reflection. This approach resonates with restorative justice perspectives in education, which emphasize repairing harm and restoring relationships instead of assigning blame. The findings corroborate Rigby's (2017) assertion that sustainable bullying prevention requires addressing underlying social and emotional needs rather than surface behaviors.

Ethnopedagogy serves as a critical bridge between leadership practices and students' lived experiences. By grounding conflict management in local wisdom and Islamic values—such as brotherhood (*ukhuwah*), justice, and mutual respect—madrasah principals ensure that anti-bullying norms are culturally legitimate and internally accepted by students. This supports previous studies on ethnopedagogy, which highlight its effectiveness in strengthening character education and social cohesion in culturally embedded learning environments.

Leadership exemplarity emerges as a central mechanism in shaping students' behavior. Principals who consistently demonstrate fairness, empathy, and moral firmness establish symbolic authority that influences students beyond formal rules. This finding reinforces Islamic educational leadership perspectives, which position leaders as moral exemplars (*uswah hasanah*) whose behavior becomes a reference point for the community.

The findings indicate that bullying prevention in boarding school contexts requires continuous habituation rather than sporadic interventions. Daily reinforcement of anti-violence values through religious activities, communal living, and informal interactions creates a preventive ecosystem that discourages bullying behavior. This supports UNESCO's (2019) argument that school-wide and culture-based approaches are more effective than isolated anti-bullying programs.

Overall, this study extends the discourse on educational leadership by demonstrating that ethnopedagogy-based conflict management is not only culturally appropriate but also pedagogically effective, reinforcing contemporary evidence on culturally grounded leadership and anti-bullying interventions (Mashud et al., 2025; Wardi & Mappanyompa, 2025). It offers a contextualized leadership model that integrates transformational leadership, restorative practices, and local wisdom, thereby contributing a distinctive perspective to the global literature on bullying prevention in faith-based and residential education.

4. CONCLUSION

From the results and discussion of the research above, the leadership of madrasah heads has a strategic role in overcoming bullying in Islamic boarding school-based madrasahs. *First*, the leadership planning of madrasah heads is carried out in an integrated manner between the formal policies of the madrasah and the values of the boarding school. The head of the madrasah designs rules, coaching programs, and madrasah culture that emphasizes conflict prevention and character formation of students. The planning is preventive and oriented towards the establishment of a safe and harmonious educational environment. The head of the madrasah performs his role as an administrator and educator. *Second*, the leadership strategy of the head of the madrasah in overcoming bullying prioritizes an ethnopedagogical approach by utilizing the values of local wisdom in Bengkulu that are

in line with Islamic teachings such as deliberation, dialogue and mediation in managing conflicts between students. So that the solution to bullying is not only repressive, but educational and transformative. The head of the madrasah in this case plays the role of leader and innovator. *Third*, best practices of the leadership of madrasah heads in overcoming ethnopedagogy-based bullying are reflected in the example of leadership, the application of restorative approaches, and the habituation of anti-violence values in the daily life of Islamic boarding schools. These practices have proven to be effective in restoring social relationships, fostering moral awareness among students, and building a madrasah culture with character. This good practice includes an ethnopedagogical approach to *soft strategies and hard strategies*. Soft strategies through insertion in typical Islamic boarding school subjects such as *ta'lim muta'alim* and the daily refraction of behavioral discipline in Islamic boarding schools. Meanwhile, *the hard strategy* is through posters / aphorisms that are anti-bullying, anti-violent and child-friendly.

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