Resolving an inherent controversy: How *pesantren's* philosophical ideals confront the reality of bullying

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Abstract

This article examines how *pesantren* leaders and educators operationalise philosophical values embedded in the *pesantren* tradition to design a contextual anti-bullying program. Using a qualitative case study of *Pesantren Nurul Yaqin* (Indonesia), the study triangulates in-depth interviews with eight key participants (a *pesantren* leader, five educators, and two students), participatory observation, and document analysis. The research team analysed the data through iterative thematic coding. The findings suggest that bullying in *pesantren* is repeated peer aggression sustained by power imbalance. At the same time, a strong moral ecology regulates institutional life and helps contain severe incidents. At *Pesantren Nurul Yaqin*, four ideals, such as *tawadhu'*, *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, *silaturahim*, and *ihsan*, function as moral anchors that restrain domination, strengthen belonging, and activate prosocial defending. However, the study also identifies the limits of informal norms; leaders and peers may apply values unevenly, and those norms often fail when victims hesitate to disclose harm. This article proposes a values-based, Whole-School Approach-aligned protocol that formalises local wisdom into safeguards, including a confidential reporting mechanism, a peer-inclusive anti-bullying team, staged restorative responses, educator role-modelling, and parent or community engagement.

Keywords: bullying prevention; *pesantren*; philosophical values; Whole-School Approach; local wisdom

Introduction

Indonesia is currently confronting a persistent bullying problem across educational settings, including faith-based institutions that are normatively committed to cultivating character and mutual respect. Bullying is not a marginal phenomenon, but a systemic challenge that undermines students' psychosocial well-being (Baharun et al., 2025). The urgency is reflected in the 2018 PISA report, where 44.1% of Indonesian students experienced bullying, positioning the country as the fifth highest globally at that time (Abdurrohim et al., 2024). This crisis manifests strongly in *pesantren* as a survey reported that 59% of *pesantren's* students (*santri*) experienced peer bullying (Suryadi et al., 2023), while national data shows that physical bullying is the most frequent form (55.5%),

followed by verbal (29.3%) and psychological (15.2%) bullying (Abdurrohim et al., 2024). These indicators demonstrate a fundamental contradiction between the peaceful educational ideals of *pesantren* and the reality of daily social interaction, signalling the need for more context-sensitive prevention strategies.

Existing studies have advanced the field by documenting prevalence patterns, causal drivers, and psychological harms of bullying among *santri* (S. Ramli et al., 2024; Wisudariani et al., 2024). In response, several general interventions have been implemented, including prevention and handling models, campaigns, and the strengthening of character education and the internalisation of general Islamic values (Abdurrohim et al., 2024; Rijal, 2025; Suryadi et al., 2023). However, these approaches tend to apply universal solution frameworks and have not systematically excavated the distinctive philosophical values of a particular *pesantren* tradition, translating them into a structured, operational anti-bullying program. As a result, anti-bullying initiatives may fail to root themselves in the institution's lived moral ecology, which can undermine their credibility and weaken consistent uptake in everyday student behaviour.

This study aims to offer a bottom-up intervention model that revitalises the philosophical values of *Pesantren Nurul Yaqin* as the basis for bullying prevention. Specifically, it identifies pesantren's core values, such as humility (*tawadhu'*), Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*), and benevolence (*ihsan*). It organises them into a practical framework for anti-bullying campaigns and programs in the *pesantren*. This article translates institutionally legitimate values into actionable program components and aligns them with contemporary best practices in school-wide prevention through a culturally adapted Whole-School Approach (WSA) (Hidayati et al., 2025; Sanusi et al., 2025).

This article argues that a durable anti-bullying strategy in pesantren is one rooted in the institution's own normative infrastructure. It contends that the internalisation of *tawadhu'*, *ukhuwah*, and *ihsan* can generate a protective socio-spiritual ecosystem that discourages aggression and strengthens collective responsibility. *Tawadhu'* restrains domination; *ukhuwah* builds inclusive belonging that prevents exclusion; and *ihsan* encourages prosocial action and bystander defending. When formalised through institutional support, these values can function as a collective defence mechanism that complements disciplinary measures, thereby addressing the tension between *pesantren's* moral ideals and the persistence of bullying in practice.

Literature Review

Bullying is intentional and repeated aggressive behaviour enacted by individuals or groups against a target who is relatively unable to defend themselves, thereby producing an asymmetrical relation of domination (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). A defining feature of bullying is power imbalance, which may be grounded in physical strength, social status, seniority, or psychological leverage, and which sustains cycles of fear and vulnerability

among victims while reinforcing perpetrators' sense of control (Andrews et al., 2023; Nielsen et al., 2022). This conceptualisation is particularly relevant for *pesantren*, where communal living intensifies peer contact and can amplify the social visibility of hierarchy and influence within daily interactions (Hidayah & Wahyudi, 2025). Here, educators should treat bullying as a patterned practice that institutions can embed in routines and informal hierarchies.

Analytically, bullying in educational institutions, including *pesantren*, can be categorised into physical, verbal, and relational forms (Hidayah & Wahyudi, 2025). Physical bullying often appears as the most frequent form, followed by verbal and psychological bullying, signalling that prevention efforts must address both overt violence and less visible relational harms (Abdurrohim et al., 2024). The consequences are likewise multi-layered, such as beyond immediate distress, bullying correlates with lowered academic functioning, psychosocial disruption, and longer-term mental health risks (S. Ramli et al., 2024). At the institutional level, persistent bullying corrodes trust, damages the learning climate, and normalises fear as a social condition, making the problem not only individual but decisively communal (Kadir & Umiarso, 2023).

To explain why bullying persists in institutional settings, Social Learning Theory provides a foundational lens: aggressive behaviour can be acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within peer and authority structures (Khadka, 2024). From this perspective, bullying becomes more likely when students see others reward intimidation or allow it to go unchecked, and when no one models or reinforces prosocial behaviour. The theory emphasises the strategic importance of role modelling by teachers, caregivers, and institutional leaders, who serve as behavioural exemplars whose responses shape perceptions of what is acceptable within the community (De Luca et al., 2019). Hence, prevention is about the visible enactment of norms by legitimate authorities.

The ecological perspective conceptualises bullying as a product of interlocking systems, peer groups, institutional routines, family contexts, and broader cultural expectations, suggesting that bullying is sustained across multiple levels rather than by individual traits alone (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Empirically, this translates into recurring institutional pathways, including permissive climates, status hierarchies (such as seniority-based dominance), peer reinforcement, and weak protective efficacy when reporting mechanisms are unclear or perceived as unsafe (Rozi et al., 2025; Bussey, 2023). Here, effective prevention must be multi-level, involving the reshaping of peer norms, strengthening adult modelling and accountability, and building institutional safeguards that reduce opportunities for domination while increasing collective protection (Hong & Espelage, 2012; De Luca et al., 2019).

In *pesantren*, prevention resources are not limited to formal regulation; they also include an internally legitimate moral repertoire grounded in Islamic ethical formation and longstanding communal pedagogy (Suwendi et al., 2024). Pesantren leaders and

educators ground student conduct in humility (*tawadu'*), Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*), benevolence (*ihsan*), ethics (adab), and tolerance (*tasamuh*), and they draw on these norms to shape interpersonal behaviour and resolve social conflicts. (Mala et al., 2024). Conceptually, these values constitute a moral–social ecology as a shared normative environment that legitimises care, respect, and responsibility while delegitimising domination, humiliation, and exclusion. For anti-bullying design, this framing is crucial because it locates prevention within an institution's moral authority; interventions grounded in the community's own normative infrastructure are more likely to be recognised as credible and consistently enacted in daily life (Mujahid, 2021).

Pesantren articulate the internal architecture of their values through structured ethical frameworks such as *Panca Jiwa Pesantren*, which emphasises sincerity, simplicity, self-reliance, *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, and freedom as pillars of character formation. (Zarkasyi, 2020; Aziz et al., 2025). These values can be categorised in ways directly relevant to bullying prevention of anti-dominance ethics (*tawadhu'* restraining arrogance and status abuse), belonging and inclusion mechanisms (*ukhuwah* countering exclusion and relational bullying), and prosocial obligation and moral courage (*ihsan* motivating protection of the vulnerable) (Mala et al., 2024). Such categorisation shows how pesantren can move beyond moral discourse; leaders and educators translate *pesantren* ideals into behavioural standards, peer expectations, and institutional routines that actively reduce the conditions that enable power abuse.

In terms of intervention design, anti-bullying efforts in *pesantren* function as planned, systematic initiatives to prevent, detect, and respond to bullying through coordinated educational and institutional instruments. (Abdurrohim et al., 2024). Sustainable prevention requires broad participation from students, teachers, administrators, and (where relevant) parents and community stakeholders, because bullying is embedded in social relations and institutional climates rather than in isolated individual pathology (Rofiki et al., 2025). Within *pesantren*, intervention proposals frequently include campaigns, workshops, special anti-bullying teams, safe reporting systems, and the integration of Islamic ethics and local wisdom as sources of legitimacy and motivation (Baharun et al., 2025; Rijal, 2025). This logic converges with the Whole-School Approach (WSA), a comprehensive framework for bullying prevention that actively addresses policy, culture, relationships, and coordinated procedures across the institution (Hidayati et al., 2025).

Operationally, WSA is commonly described in terms of layered intervention levels, ranging from individual to classroom or dormitory climate and whole-institution governance, each with distinct mechanisms and measurable outcomes (Sanusi et al., 2025). At the individual level, interventions develop character, empathy, and social skills; at the classroom or dormitory level, they shape inclusive norms and peer climates; and at the institutional level, they require clear policies, safe procedures, monitoring, and a

culture that rejects violence (Nuryadi et al., 2025; Margas, 2023; Azizah & Sa'adah, 2025). Crucially, integrating WSA with *pesantren* philosophical values grounds prevention in both structural comprehensiveness and culturally authoritative norms, increasing the likelihood of acceptance and sustainability (Malik, 2017). This synthesis operationalises the specific philosophical ideals cultivated within *Pesantren Nurul Yaqin* as the normative engine of a WSA-aligned, values-based anti-bullying protocol.

Method

This study examines bullying within *Pesantren Nurul Yaqin*, treating the *pesantren* as a bounded socio-educational setting in which everyday interactions, informal hierarchies, and value-habituation practices shape students' conduct. The unit of analysis, therefore, includes bullying dynamics in the *pesantren* environment, as well as the philosophical values cultivated within the institution that may serve as internal normative resources for prevention. This study employs a qualitative case study design to enable an in-depth, context-sensitive interpretation of how these values are understood, practised, and potentially operationalised for bullying prevention.

The study utilises primary and secondary data, selected through purposive sampling, to ensure that participants and sources have relevant institutional roles, sustained engagement with the *pesantren*, and knowledge or experience related to bullying issues. This study collected primary data through in-depth interviews with eight key participants: one *pesantren* leader, five educators (*ustadz/ustadzah*), and two students (*santri*) from different academic levels, combined with participatory observation to document daily interactions and value-habituation practices in the *pesantren*. For secondary data, this study obtained from internal *pesantren* documents and relevant literature on Islamic philosophical values and *pesantren*-based anti-bullying initiatives. Data collection proceeded in stages, beginning with a literature review, followed by interviews and observation, and complemented by documentary analysis of institutional materials relevant to culture, routines, and programmatic practices.

All qualitative materials (interview transcripts, observational field notes, and documents) were analysed using thematic coding in an iterative process: transcription, initial coding, aggregation of codes into themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming of final themes, and writing the analytical report. The analytic process involved continuous comparison between emerging themes and new data to strengthen consistency and interpretive depth (Huberman & Miles, 2002). This study supported credibility through triangulation across interviews, observation, and document analysis.

Results and Discussion

Bullying Dynamics and Power Imbalance in *Pesantren Nurul Yaqin*

Bullying in *Pesantren Nurul Yaqin* is a patterned form of peer aggression sustained by a power imbalance, not as incidental misbehaviour. Bullying involves repeated and intentional harm under asymmetrical relations of domination, where unequal power (physical, social status, seniority, or psychological leverage) produces fear and vulnerability for victims while reinforcing control for perpetrators (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Andrews et al., 2023; Nielsen et al., 2022). This lens is relevant in *pesantren* because communal living intensifies peer contact and can amplify the visibility of hierarchy and influence within daily routines (Hidayah & Wahyudi, 2025). However, within this structural risk setting, interviews at *Nurul Yaqin* indicate a relatively low occurrence of severe bullying incidents, suggesting that the institution's lived norms may already function as a practical constraint on escalation.

Empirically, the central dynamic that determines whether bullying becomes entrenched is an imbalance of authority and social leverage that enables its conversion into domination. In *pesantren*, such leverage can emerge through informal hierarchies, group reputations, and everyday micro-practices that legitimise exclusion or silence. However, participants described *Nurul Yaqin's* relational ethos as actively resisting the logic of exclusion that typically enables social hierarchy to harden into abuse. One teacher explained that *ukhuwah* and *silaturahim* relate to treating peers as siblings, thereby rendering the isolation of a peer normatively illegitimate within the community (Interview, July 2024). In practical terms, this moral grammar reduces the social distance required for power to be exercised as domination, limiting the conditions that can normalise bullying.

At the same time, the results do not imply that the pesantren is immune, but rather that a cultural architecture contains bullying by discouraging harmful conduct before it consolidates. This containment repeatedly stemmed from the internalisation of four institutional principles (*tawadhu'*, *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, *silaturahim*, and *ihsan*) that foster inclusion and strong interpersonal bonds, thereby disrupting conditions favourable to bullying. This pattern aligns with the view that thoroughly habituating character development and embedding values as lived practice can reduce harmful behaviours (A. Ramli et al., 2023; Warsah et al., 2024). As one teacher stated, "bullying is fundamentally contradictory to the values at *Pesantren Nurul Yaqin*," indicating that anti-bullying is already present as a normative boundary within the institution's moral order (Interview, July 2024).

Philosophical Ideals as Moral Anchors: *Tawadhu', Ukhuwah Islamiyah, Silaturahim,* and *Ihsan* in Practice

Pesantren Nurul Yaqin's anti-bullying capacity is grounded in a set of internally legitimate moral anchors that regulate everyday interactions. The findings indicate that

four ideals (*tawadhu', ukhuwah Islamiyah, silaturahim,* and *ihsan*) function as a values infrastructure that shapes what is socially acceptable, morally praised, and collectively sanctioned within the community. In this sense, the *pesantren* community constrains bullying because it contradicts their lived ethical identity, which they cultivate through habituation, example, and communal expectations. This values-based logic resonates with Islamic psychology arguments: character formation requires deep internalisation, and the community reduces harmful behaviours by sustaining moral dispositions through practice rather than instruction alone (A. Ramli et al., 2023; Warsah et al., 2024).

Table 1.

Philosophical Values as Anti-Bullying Resources in Pesantren Nurul Yaqin

No	Value	Operational meaning	Enactment/ habituation	Anti-bullying function
1	Humility (*Tawadhu'*)	Ethical self-restraint that counters egoistic superiority and domination	Internalised through lived example and daily relational practice	▪ Reduces status-based aggression; ▪ Weakens motives to dominate or humiliate peers.
2	Brotherhood (*Ukhuwah Islamiyah*)	Communal belonging and sibling-like ties that delegitimise exclusion	▪ Treating peers like siblings; ▪ Cultivating strong brotherhood bonds as a normative baseline	▪ Prevents social exclusion; ▪ Reduces relational violence; ▪ Builds protective social capital.
3	Relational bonding (*Silaturahim*)	Sustained interpersonal/familial-like relationships that strengthen connectedness	▪ Maintaining close relational ties; ▪ Strengthening familial relationships across members	▪ Increases connectedness and peer monitoring; ▪ Makes exclusion socially costly; ▪ Supports early informal correction.
4	Benevolence/ prosocial virtue (*Ihsan*)	Dispositional compassion expressed as proactive care and moral courage	▪ Encouraging defending behaviour and active protection; ▪ Mobilising community members from passive bystanders to protectors	▪ Promotes bystander intervention; ▪ Strengthens protection for victims; ▪ Fosters a climate that rejects victimisation.

Note. This table synthesises the qualitative findings on four *pesantren* ideals; *tawadhu', ukhuwah Islamiyah*, *silaturahim*, and *ihsan* by mapping their operational meanings, everyday enactments, and their functions in constraining domination, exclusion, and victimisation. Entries were derived from the iterative thematic coding of interviews, participatory observations, and institutional document data. Data processed by the authors (2024).

More specifically, *ukhuwah Islamiyah* and *silaturahim* operate as inclusion mechanisms that directly negate the social logic of exclusion and relational domination. Both ideals frame community members as moral kin, creating a strong presumption of belonging and rendering social isolation and peer humiliation normatively deviant.

Empirically, informants emphasised that *ukhuwah* and *silaturahim* entail building strong bonds of brotherhood in which each student is treated as a sibling, making exclusion inconsistent with the *pesantren's* core relational norms (Interview, July 2024). In evaluative terms, this is significant because relational bullying often relies on social boundary-making and group-based status hierarchies. By institutionalising belonging as a moral duty, *ukhuwah* and *silaturahim* weaken the cultural permission structure that enables exclusion to appear normal or justified (Asrin et al., 2024; Kirom, 2025).

The next philosophical ideal, *tawadhu'*, functions as an anti-dominance ethic that restrains the motivations and symbolic performances that typically sustain bullying in hierarchical settings. The reason is straightforward; bullying thrives under conditions of power imbalance and status leverage, while humility delegitimises arrogance, superiority claims, and the social rewards of humiliation. When *pesantren* communities treat *tawadhu'* as a core virtue, they morally discredit domination rather than celebrate it, which reduces the likelihood that students can turn seniority, popularity, or physical strength into socially acceptable coercion. Participants' insistence that bullying is fundamentally incompatible with *Nurul Yaqin's* values reinforced this moral stance, indicating that anti-bullying norms are embedded in the *pesantren's* moral self-understanding rather than appended as an external campaign (Interview, July 2024).

Ihsan provides the prosocial activation principle, which shifts students from passive bystanders to moral agents who protect peers and interrupt victimisation. This ethical framing matters because prevention fails when community members recognise harm but remain socially inactive. *Ihsan* reframes intervention as a religious-ethical obligation grounded in compassion and responsibility. Here, empirical studies show that affective empathy predicts defending behaviour more strongly than cognitive empathy (Deng et al., 2021; Garandeau et al., 2022). Furthermore, compassion-related dispositions promote helping behaviour and the courage to stand up against bullying (A. Ramli et al., 2023). At *Nurul Yaqin*, *ukhuwah* bonds strengthen affective concern, and *ihsan* turns that concern into action. They produce a protective socio-spiritual ecology in which the community actively resists victimisation rather than silently tolerating it.

**Between Ideals and Reality: Limits of Informal Values and the Case for Formalisation**

Despite the apparent strength of *Pesantren Nurul Yaqin's* value-based culture, the findings suggest that informal moral norms remain structurally vulnerable when they are not translated into explicit institutional safeguards. Interviews with teachers and students indicate a relatively low occurrence of severe bullying incidents, which participants attributed to the deep internalisation of *tawadhu'*, *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, *silaturahim*, and *ihsan* as a cohesive socio-spiritual ecology that discourages aggression and reinforces belonging (Interview, July 2024). However, this very reliance on what is implicitly understood exposes a critical limitation; informal norms can be unevenly applied, inconsistently enforced, and insufficiently protective in situations where power

imbalances intensify, relational exclusion becomes normalised, or victims hesitate to disclose harm.

The decisive vulnerability is not simply whether values exist, but whether the institution provides clear, trusted, and consistent channels that enable those values to operate when bullying risks escalate. Effective prevention depends on students' confidence that disclosures will be handled seriously, fairly, and without retaliation. Consequently, there is a need for a secure, confidential reporting mechanism supported by explicit, phased intervention procedures (Kent et al., 2020). In this logic, the move toward formalisation is not a shift away from *pesantren* ideals; it is the mechanism through which ideals become actionable protections, particularly by reducing underreporting, preventing silent endurance by victims, and ensuring that responses do not rely solely on ad hoc moral persuasion.

Figure 1.

Conceptual Logic Model: From Pesantren Values to a Contextual Anti-Bullying Program
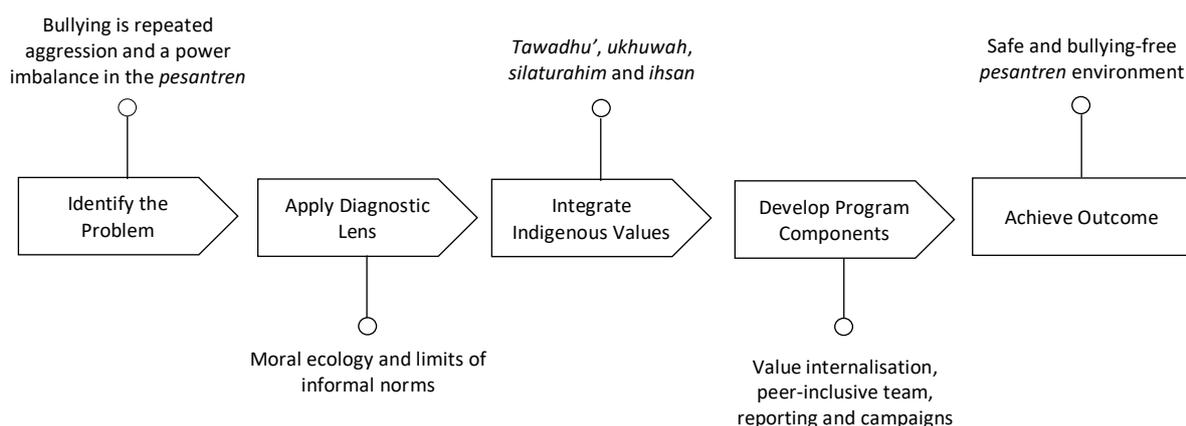
Note. The figure summarises the study's analytic synthesis from problem identification to program formulation. It visualises how *pesantren* philosophical ideals (*tawadhu'*, *ukhuwah*, *silaturahim*, and *ihsan*) are translated into operational components (value internalisation, peer-inclusive team, confidential reporting, and campaigns) to achieve a bullying-free *pesantren* environment.

Therefore, the study's results indicate that formalisation institutionalises *Pesantren Nurul Yaqin's* informal values, which set the normative direction, while structures ensure their implementation. In operational terms, the formal elements that translate ideals into practice include a proactive Special Anti-Bullying Team with peer involvement to strengthen trust and ownership, a tiered response model prioritising restorative conversations and mediation, and a zero-tolerance policy with clarity from leadership (Kent et al., 2020). Beyond the *pesantren* boundary, the program's logic also depends on teacher role-modelling and the sustained involvement of parents and the community, consistent with evidence that whole-school prevention becomes more effective when stakeholders beyond students are actively engaged (Shim & Ye, 2024; Harte & Barry, 2024; Podiya et al., 2025).

Why Values Need Institutional Support to Disrupt Bullying Systemically

The results indicate that *Pesantren Nurul Yaqin's* philosophical ideals already protect the community: *tawadhu'* restrains domination, *ukhuwah–silaturahim* reinforces belonging, and *ihsan* activates prosocial defence, thereby narrowing the social space in which bullying can take root. However, the same reliance on an implicit healthy communal ethos can also generate a structural vulnerability when harm occurs. In communities that highly value connectedness and moral fraternity, victims may experience victimisation as a more profound betrayal of what the institution claims to embody, which scholars describe as the "healthy context paradox" (Lehmann et al., 2025). This paradox helps explain why values alone may be insufficient in a crisis: victims may hesitate to report because disclosure threatens communal harmony, bystanders may avoid escalation to preserve social cohesion, and responses may depend on ad hoc moral persuasion rather than predictable safeguards.

For that reason, institutional support functions as the mechanism that translates moral commitments into reliable protection. A key institutional lever is a trusted reporting that is secure, confidential, and socially legitimate, because prevention depends on whether *ustadz/ustadzah* take disclosures seriously and handle them without retaliation (Kent et al., 2020). Once reporting is enabled, values can operate as more than private virtues; they become enforceable institutional expectations. *Tawadhu'* becomes an anti-dominance standard in social relations, *ukhuwah–silaturahim* becomes an inclusion mandate that actively discourages exclusionary peer practices, and *ihsan* becomes an obligation of protection that legitimises defending behaviour and adult intervention. In short, formal procedures provide the consistency that informal norms cannot guarantee under stress.

At the level of underlying structure, bullying persists not only because individuals lack values but because institutions enable and reinforce aggression through their affordances and reinforcement patterns. Social Learning Theory explains that bullying behaviours can stabilise when students observe peers reward aggression, particularly senior aggression, or when authority figures tolerate it and fail to enforce clear consequences (Khadka, 2024; Rozi et al., 2025; Bussey, 2023). Bronfenbrenner's ecological lens further suggests that prevention must operate across interacting systems, such as peer groups, teachers, routines, and institutional climate, rather than focusing narrowly on individual attitudes (Hong & Espelage, 2012). These social-learning dynamics explain why values require institutional scaffolding, with educator role-modelling operating as a deliberate prevention mechanism (De Luca et al., 2019; Shim & Ye, 2024), while formalised procedures, such as a secure reporting system and phased, restorative-first interventions, ensure that the institution consistently interrupts reinforcement cycles and communicates a credible zero tolerance boundary (Kent et al., 2020).

Locating Pesantren within Global Discourse: A Critical Dialogue with the Whole-School Approach

The findings position *Pesantren Nurul Yaqin's* model as conceptually consistent with the Whole-School Approach (WSA), but with a distinctive normative foundation rooted in the moral authority of *pesantren*. WSA scholarship treats bullying prevention as an institution-wide responsibility that spans policy, culture, relationships, and coordinated procedures, rather than focusing solely on individual attitudes (Hidayati et al., 2025). Operationally, WSA is commonly articulated as a layered intervention across personal development, classroom or dormitory climate, and whole-institution governance (Sanusi et al., 2025; Nuryadi et al., 2025; Margas, 2023; Azizah & Sa'adah, 2025). Within this framework, Nurul Yaqin's philosophical ideals already provide a strong cultural and relational layer by narrowing the social space in which students can normalise domination and exclusion. However, the results also indicate that durable prevention still requires institutional mechanisms, such as value socialisation routines, a peer-inclusive mediation or support team, and a trusted reporting channel, to translate ideals into consistent protective routines (Rofiki et al., 2025; Kent et al., 2020).

A further alignment with WSA emerges at the level of stakeholder coherence. Bullying reduction becomes more sustainable when educators model prosocial behaviour deliberately and when institutions strengthen the school climate through collaboration with families and community actors (Shim & Ye, 2024; Harte & Barry, 2024; Podiya et al., 2025). WSA's emphasis on coordinated governance is particularly relevant for *pesantren* because continuous social interaction and daily supervision shape students' moral formation as much as formal instruction does. In this context, WSA's emphasis on coordinated governance provides a functional architecture that clarifies responsibilities, standardises procedures, and prevents institutions from treating prevention as episodic counselling or disciplinary responses. When combined with the *pesantren's* internal normative resources, the WSA architecture strengthens consistency by supporting the early identification of risks, credible reporting, restorative-first resolution pathways, and collective accountability that does not depend solely on individual virtue.

At the same time, a critical dialogue with the WSA framework is necessary, as it is not a culturally neutral, plug-and-play solution. Global prevention frameworks become more effective when they are culturally adapted and anchored in an institution's legitimate moral authority. In this sense, indigenous wisdom is not an add-on but a prerequisite for successful implementation (Malik, 2017; Harte & Barry, 2024). The contribution of this study is therefore to present a WSA-aligned scaffold infused with *pesantren*-specific philosophical values, rather than a generic WSA transfer, so that internalised norms and faith-based motivational resources sustain procedures such as reporting, mediation, and stakeholder coordination (Meroni & Velasco, 2023; Bernardi & Steyn, 2023). The implication for transferability is significant; other *pesantren* may

adopt the logic of whole-institution coordination, but they cannot simply copy the content; they must first excavate their own moral ecology and then institutionalise it through context-sensitive mechanisms that are legitimate within their respective traditions.

Revitalising Tradition through Policy: Towards a Values-Based Anti-Bullying Protocol

A values-based anti-bullying protocol in *pesantren* should be understood as policy-enabled revitalisation, not as a bureaucratic replacement of tradition. The core implication of this study is that *tawadhu', ukhuwah Islamiyah, silaturahim,* and *ihsan* already operate as moral anchors that restrain domination, strengthen belonging, and activate protection. Nevertheless, these ideals will disrupt the bullying systemically only when translated into predictable institutional safeguards that reduce underreporting, clarify responsibilities, and standardise response. WSA's emphasis on coordinated governance matters because community members may enact values unevenly under stress, whereas formal procedures provide reliability precisely when incidents escalate. In the prevention literature, a secure and confidential reporting mechanism, paired with a staged response protocol, functions as a decisive institutional lever for safeguarding victims and ensuring consistent handling (Kent et al., 2020). When institutions codify *pesantren* ideals in policy, they turn them into enforceable commitments; *tawadhu'* becomes an anti-dominance standard, *ukhuwah–silaturahim* becomes an inclusion mandate, and *ihsan* becomes an obligation to protect.

Figure 2.

WSA-Aligned Governance Package for a Values-Based Anti-Bullying Protocol in Pesantren
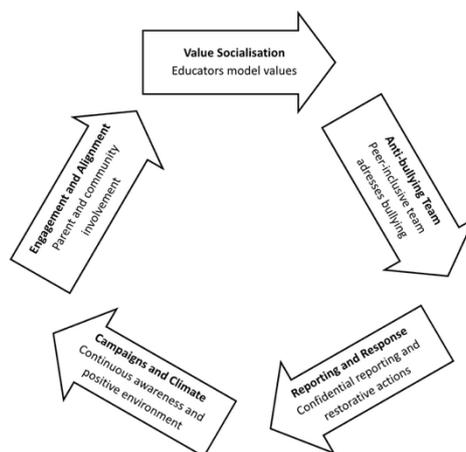
Note. The figure summarises the program's governance components and role coordination. It highlights the institutional mechanisms required to operationalise *pesantren* values into reliable safeguards, including role-modelling, a peer-inclusive team, confidential reporting linked to a staged restorative response, sustained campaigns and stakeholder engagement.

Operationally, institutional leaders should organise the protocol as a WSA-aligned, *pesantren*-specific governance package with clearly defined components and role

allocation. First, the *pesantren* formalises value internalisation through routine practices, such as daily reminders, *halaqah* or *adab* sessions, and value-based behavioural standards, while ensuring educator role-modelling, since modelling and reinforcement are central to disrupting learned aggression patterns (De Luca et al., 2019; Shim & Ye, 2024). Second, it establishes a Special Anti-Bullying Team with peer participation to strengthen trust and legitimacy, coupled with a confidential reporting channel and a restorative-first, phased intervention, such as early mediation, supervised reconciliation, and escalation where necessary, to make responses consistent and non-retaliatory (Kent et al., 2020; Rofiki et al., 2025). This architecture ensures that the institution does not merely preach values; it operationalises them into protective routines that *ustadz/ustadzah* and *santri* representatives can activate regardless of who is involved or how sensitive the incident becomes.

Beyond internal governance, pesantren leaders should extend the protocol across the home–institution continuum, because aligned supervision and social reinforcement shape the *pesantren* climate. Evidence from prevention research suggests that sustained bullying reduction is more likely when educator role-modelling is supported by parent engagement and community collaboration, producing consistent expectations and reducing normative gaps between school and home environments (Harte & Barry, 2024; Podiya et al., 2025). In *pesantren* settings, this matters because students live and learn in close-knit communities where reputational dynamics and conflict narratives can circulate quickly across peer groups and family ties. Therefore, parent and community involvement strengthens legitimacy, reduces resistance to reporting, and supports restorative reintegration when *pesantren* uses mediation.

Finally, to ensure sustainability, the protocol should include minimal monitoring indicators that connect moral goals to institutional learning. Practical measures can include reporting on uptake, recurrence patterns, bystander intervention, and climate perceptions, enabling the *pesantren* to assess whether procedures are trusted and whether relational norms are shifting over time. This monitoring aligns conceptually with evidence that affective empathy and prosocial orientation strengthen *ihsan*-driven defending behaviour. Educators can cultivate these dispositions through habituation and assess them through repeated observation and feedback loops (Deng et al., 2021; Garandeau et al., 2022). Through this design, tradition is not merely celebrated rhetorically but converted into a coherent policy architecture that is culturally authoritative, operationally actionable, and institutionally sustainable (Malik, 2017; Meroni & Velasco, 2023; Bernardi & Steyn, 2023).

Conclusion

This study shows that bullying in *Pesantren Nurul Yaqin* is a relational and institutional phenomenon sustained by power imbalance. The findings indicate that the pesantren's internal moral ecology, anchored in *tawadhu', ukhuwah Islamiyah,*

silaturahim, and *ihsan*, already functions as a practical constraint on domination, exclusion, and victimisation by shaping everyday interaction norms, strengthening belonging, and encouraging prosocial defending. At the same time, the results underscore a key boundary; informal values alone remain vulnerable when protective responses depend on ad hoc moral persuasion and when victims or bystanders hesitate to disclose harm. Therefore, the study concludes that a sustainable prevention strategy requires translating philosophical ideals into explicit institutional safeguards, particularly a trusted reporting mechanism and a consistent, staged response pathway, so that values operate reliably at the point of escalation.

This article contributes a values-based intervention logic that bridges *pesantren* tradition and contemporary prevention architecture. It advances an interpretive claim that *pesantren* philosophical ideals are not merely moral rhetoric or teaching materials; they can serve as institutional resources that structure a coherent anti-bullying programme. The study positions the proposed model as a Whole-School Approach (WSA)-aligned approach, while insisting that effectiveness depends on cultural adaptation. Global prevention frameworks become durable by being embedded in locally legitimate norms and sustained through role modelling, peer participation, and institution-wide coordination. In this sense, the study reframes local wisdom as the normative engine that strengthens institutional ownership, credibility, and long-term sustainability of anti-bullying governance in *pesantren* settings.

This study has limitations that shape the scope of its claims. First, this study bases its analysis on a single institutional case and qualitative evidence, which supports the depth of interpretation but limits broad generalisation across *pesantren* with different cultures and governance structures. Second, the findings derive from a bounded set of informants and observations, and we have not yet tested the proposed protocol through longitudinal implementation or outcome evaluation. Future research should therefore pilot the proposed protocol and assess its effects on reporting uptake, recurrence patterns, bystander defending, and climate perceptions; undertake comparative multi-*pesantren* studies to map variations in moral ecology and governance capacity; and integrate mixed-method designs to link qualitative mechanisms with measurable prevention outcomes. These directions would strengthen both the evidence base and the transferability of values-based, culturally grounded anti-bullying interventions for *pesantren* and related faith-based educational institutions.

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