IMPLEMENTING CLASSROOM AGREEMENTS TO FOSTER TOLERANCE AND REDUCE BULLYING

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Abstract. This study was motivated by the prevalence of verbal and social bullying in elementary schools, which is closely linked to low tolerance among Grade V students at SD Negeri Sukorejo 01, Sutojayan District, Blitar Regency. The background of this research is the persistence of verbal and social bullying in elementary schools, which is closely associated with low levels of tolerance among students. The study aims to analyze: (1) the implementation of tolerance habituation through classroom agreements, (2) forms of bullying behavior that emerge in the classroom, and (3) teachers' perceptions of the role of classroom agreements in fostering tolerance and minimizing bullying. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and the school principal, and documentation. The findings indicate that classroom agreements developed through a participatory process between teachers and students function not only as behavioral guidelines but also as an effective medium for internalizing values of tolerance, such as mutual respect, appreciation of differences, and polite interaction. Bullying behaviors identified were predominantly verbal and social in nature. Teachers perceived classroom agreements as significantly contributing to the development of students' tolerance and to the reduction of bullying, provided that they are supported by teacher role modeling, consistent implementation, and ongoing guidance. Overall, classroom agreements have been shown to be an effective strategy for creating a safe, inclusive, and conducive learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

Schools, as formal educational institutions, play a vital role in internalizing moral values and fostering tolerance within the educational process. Beyond academic instruction, schools are responsible for preparing students to function ethically and socially within society (Nugroho, 2020). This role is institutionally reinforced through Permendikbud No. 21 of 2016 on Content Standards for Primary and Secondary Education, which emphasizes Character Education Strengthening (CES). The CES framework integrates Pancasila-based values, including tolerance, honesty, discipline, social responsibility, and respect for diversity, as core elements of character formation (Nurlaela et al., 2024). In addition, Permendikbudristek No. 47 of 2023 mandates that educational institutions foster inclusive, safe, and supportive learning environments that promote tolerance and cultural diversity, positioning character education, particularly tolerance, as a fundamental dimension of educational quality (Prasetyo & Hayya, 2023).

At the macro level, national education quality reflects the effectiveness of character education in schools. Education is essential for developing a competent generation and ensuring equitable access to quality learning opportunities (Fitri, 2021). However, Indonesia's educational quality remains relatively low, as reflected in international assessments that ranked Indonesia 67th out of 203 countries in 2023, and in data indicating that only 6.41% of the population attained higher education in 2022 (Maulida & Bektiningsih, 2024). In response, the government introduced the Merdeka Curriculum through Permendikbud No. 12 of 2024 to improve learning quality from early childhood through secondary education, supported by professional educators (Nurholiyah et al., 2023). Nevertheless, low educational quality affects not only academic achievement but also students' social attitudes and behaviors in school settings.

One tangible consequence of weak character development is the persistence of bullying among students. Bullying is defined as deliberate acts of aggression or intimidation by individuals

or groups toward those perceived as weaker (Andriyani et al., 2024). Such behavior is often driven by factors including dysfunctional family environments, negative social surroundings, and exposure to violent media, which may foster aggressive tendencies (Haslan et al., 2022). Bullying disrupts the learning atmosphere and impedes students' social and emotional development, highlighting the urgency of preventive interventions within classrooms.

Effective classroom instruction and management are crucial to fostering positive character development and preventing bullying. Ineffective learning processes can reduce educational quality and hinder the achievement of learning objectives (Abdulah et al., 2022). Teachers play a central role in regulating classroom dynamics, requiring strong managerial competencies to manage student behavior (Pangestika, 2025). Inadequate classroom management may allow deviant behaviors, including bullying, to emerge and persist during student interactions.

Tolerance is a key value in minimizing bullying behavior. It represents respect for diversity in beliefs, opinions, and behaviors, as well as the ability to accept differences without coercion or domination. In daily practice, tolerance is reflected in respectful communication and the acceptance of differing perspectives, even when these conflict with personal views (Mega & Hermanto, 2020). Cultivating tolerance enables students to build harmonious relationships, prevent conflict, and develop empathy, serving as a foundation for peaceful and respectful social life (Ramadandy et al., 2023).

Empirical findings at SD Negeri Sukorejo 01 indicate ongoing bullying-related issues among fifth-grade students. Interviews with a classroom teacher revealed frequent verbal teasing, conflicts, low levels of cooperation during group activities, and the formation of exclusive peer groups, resulting in feelings of marginalization. These behaviors are influenced by limited awareness of diversity, environmental and familial factors, and negative communication patterns observed in social media. Although efforts to instill tolerance through classroom agreements and teacher guidance have been implemented, their effectiveness remains limited, posing challenges to creating a conducive learning environment.

To address these challenges, the fifth-grade teacher at SD Negeri Sukorejo 01 employs classroom management grounded in collaboratively developed classroom agreements to regulate student behavior and reduce bullying. This approach encourages students to internalize shared values and comply with agreed-upon norms, thereby supporting orderly learning processes (Ilmi, 2025). Effective implementation of classroom agreements has been shown to promote student skill development, reduce learning barriers, and improve classroom organization (Fernandez, 2024).

Previous studies support the relevance of this approach. Maulida & Bektiningsih (2024) found that positive discipline through jointly formulated classroom rules effectively addressed deviant behavior and fostered a conducive learning climate. Fernandez (2024) demonstrated that comprehensive classroom management strategies enhanced student engagement and learning outcomes, while Garini et al. (2023) reported a decline in bullying cases following effective character education programs emphasizing empathy, tolerance, and positive communication. Based on these considerations, this study examines the implementation of tolerance habituation through classroom agreements to address bullying behavior among fifth-grade students at SD Negeri Sukorejo 01, Sutojayan District, Blitar Regency.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study approach grounded in the postpositivist paradigm to explore social phenomena in their natural context (Rofiah & Bungin, 2021). This research was conducted at Sukorejo 01 Public Elementary School in Sutojayan District, Blitar Regency, in November 2025. Research participants, treated as data sources rather than statistical samples, included one school principal, one fifth-grade teacher, and one fifth-grade student (Ahmed, 2024). Qualitative data were collected in descriptive and narrative forms, comprising observations of classroom activities, participants' explanations of tolerance habituation through classroom agreements, and relevant school documents, such as the vision and mission, school profile, and teacher records (Prihatiningsih et al., 2024).

Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, structured observation, documentation, and literature study to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Muallif, 2023). Data credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking, while transferability, dependability, and confirmability were addressed through detailed reporting and auditing of the research process (Ahmed, 2024). Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, comprising data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions and verifying them (Miles & Huberman, 2014). Ethical principles, including informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly applied throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Tolerance Attitude Habituation through Classroom Agreements in Grade V Elementary School

Based on the findings, the implementation of tolerance attitude habituation through classroom agreements in Grade V elementary school demonstrated positive outcomes in shaping students' character. The school consistently implemented various habituation activities in its daily routines, including morning greetings, flag ceremonies, pre-reading literacy activities, and the morning cheer program, which consisted of physical exercises, singing the national anthem, Indonesia Raya, and collective prayers. In addition, students were accustomed to carrying out classroom duties, queuing in an orderly manner, disposing of waste properly, speaking politely, apologizing and expressing gratitude, participating in Clean Saturday activities, and performing congregational prayers. These activities were conducted consistently, becoming part of the school culture that instills in students values of discipline, responsibility, social awareness, and spirituality.

In line with Kamal (2023), tolerance attitudes should be instilled and developed in elementary school students from an early age to foster positive character. Through cultivating tolerance, students learn to appreciate and respect differences in their surroundings, including those related to religion, race, nationality, culture, language, and social groups. The development of tolerance at the elementary education level also plays a crucial role in equipping students with harmonious social skills, enhancing empathy, and building awareness of the importance of peaceful coexistence in a diverse society.

The process of formulating classroom agreements was participatory, involving all students. Students were invited to imagine their ideal classroom, write their ideas on paper, group similar ideas, and formulate them into agreements using simple and positive statements. These agreements were then displayed in the classroom as reminders for all students. This participatory approach made students feel valued, actively involved, and more motivated to comply with the agreements because they understood the moral values underlying them. The implementation of classroom agreements was also supported by the teacher's role as a role model, feedback provider, and facilitator of daily or weekly reflections to evaluate their implementation.

This is consistent with the research conducted by Florentia et al. (2023) which states that the initial stage of drafting classroom agreements begins by engaging students in discussions about an ideal and enjoyable classroom. Each student writes expectations or positive behaviors to be applied, after which similar ideas are combined into short and positive statements without using prohibitive language. For example, the phrase "respect each other" is used instead of "do not fight." Once agreed upon, the agreements are written prominently and displayed as daily reminders. Active student involvement helps reduce disciplinary violations resulting from a sense of injustice.

The habituation outcomes indicated significant changes in students' attitudes. Students became more respectful, tolerant of differences in opinions, habits, and personal characteristics, and demonstrated greater care and responsibility toward the classroom. They became accustomed to helping peers who faced difficulties, speaking politely and honestly, and showing concern for classroom cleanliness and orderliness. The school principal observed a shift from selfish attitudes toward empathy, the emergence of a sense of belonging to the classroom, and a reduction in

behaviors that demeaned peers.

This finding aligns with Mukhlisin & Puspitasari (2022), who emphasize that tolerance attitudes are essential in students' self-development for several reasons. First, based on field observations, students' tolerance character remains relatively low. Second, tolerance is necessary to prepare students for the global era, in which they will interact with multicultural and diverse societies undergoing rapid change. Third, tolerance is both necessary and developable to address differences encountered in daily life, both in the present and in the future.

Supporting factors for the success of this habituation included teacher role modeling, a safe classroom environment, open communication, and alignment between school and family cultural values. In contrast, inhibiting factors included selfish attitudes, excessive competition, and covert bullying. Overall, the implementation of habituation practices and classroom agreements effectively fostered students' tolerance attitudes, as reflected in daily interactions and compliance with classroom rules, thereby creating a comfortable, orderly, and respectful learning environment. Students experienced tangible positive impacts, such as refraining from disturbing peers who had not completed their tasks, indicating an increased sense of mutual respect in the classroom.

Forms of Bullying Behavior Observed in Grade V Elementary School

Bullying behavior was still observed in Grade V elementary school, although its frequency began to decline following the implementation of classroom agreements. The forms of bullying identified included interrupting peers while they spoke, laughing at others' opinions, mocking, student conflicts, and low levels of cooperation in group work due to some students' fear of expressing their ideas. In addition, students tended to form groups based on shared interests or similar backgrounds, which potentially fostered exclusivity and hindered the development of tolerance. Factors contributing to the emergence of bullying included students' limited awareness of respecting differences, the influence of peer environments, habits formed at home, and exposure to social media that normalizes negative communication. Students themselves acknowledged that excessive mobile phone use and interaction with older peers also influenced bullying behavior.

The relationship between tolerance and bullying was evident: higher levels of student tolerance were associated with a lower likelihood of bullying. Classroom agreements played a significant role in reducing bullying by establishing clear boundaries for acceptable behavior, thereby increasing students' awareness of the rules and the consequences of their actions for others. Students reported that after implementing classroom agreements, classroom interactions became more orderly, harmonious, and respectful, with a noticeable reduction in mocking and conflict. When violations occurred, students tended to respond by advising one another, offering apologies, and committing not to repeat the behavior, thereby fostering responsibility and maintaining classroom harmony.

Bullying remains a persistent phenomenon, particularly during adolescence, and its impact cannot be considered trivial. While some adolescents are able to cope relatively well with negative experiences related to bullying, many experience significant emotional distress. Feelings of anxiety, sadness, and low self-esteem often emerge as direct consequences of bullying, leading to long-term effects on psychological well-being and social development. Moreover, such negative experiences may affect peer relationships, self-confidence, and learning motivation, making bullying an issue that requires serious attention from both schools and families (Ajibewa et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the roles of teachers and school principals are crucial in ensuring the effectiveness of bullying reduction through classroom agreements. Teachers act as role models by demonstrating respectful attitudes, fairness, and consistent enforcement of rules, while principals ensure the creation of a safe, comfortable, and supportive classroom environment. These efforts are strengthened through daily habituation practices, such as cultivating a culture of smiling, greeting, and courtesy, randomly arranging seating or learning groups, and implementing heterogeneous group work that encourages interaction among students from diverse backgrounds. Such practices promote empathy, cooperation, and a sense of belonging to the classroom as a

shared learning space.

Mardhiyah et al. (2025) emphasize that teachers play dual, multifunctional roles in addressing bullying in schools, serving as guides, supervisors, role models, and mediators between perpetrators and victims. In carrying out these roles, teachers do not focus solely on corrective actions but also implement preventive measures to deter bullying. These measures include educating students about the dangers and consequences of bullying, consistently monitoring interactions within the school environment, fostering positive character and behavior, and applying fair and appropriate sanctions when violations occur. Through this combination of roles, teachers can create a safe classroom environment, support students' social-emotional development, and cultivate students' awareness of and responsibility for maintaining healthy and respectful relationships.

Teachers' exemplary role in addressing bullying is a key factor in creating a safe, comfortable, and conducive school environment for all students. Teachers function not only as supervisors or disciplinarians but also as role models who consistently demonstrate tolerance, empathy, and effective communication in all school interactions. By modeling positive behavior, teachers can significantly reduce bullying incidents, as students tend to emulate observed behaviors. In practice, teachers emphasize several important indicators, including demonstrating respect for differences, consistently enforcing classroom rules, adopting wise approaches to conflict resolution, and habituating mutual respect and care among students. These indicators contribute to building an inclusive classroom culture and minimizing the risk of future bullying behavior.

Consistent with the findings of Laurent & Susanto (2025), teachers play an active and comprehensive role in handling bullying cases in schools, ranging from prevention to post-incident follow-up. These roles include preventive actions; immediate intervention during bullying incidents; behavioral guidance; motivation; guidance toward appropriate behavior; evaluation of the effectiveness of implemented measures; and the provision of advice, both individually and in groups. All of these roles are carried out through an educational approach that emphasizes understanding, awareness, and character development. In addition, teachers involve parents and the entire school community to create synergy in building a safe, inclusive learning environment that supports the development of tolerance and students' social responsibility.

Beyond internal school factors, external influences such as home environments and exposure to digital media remain significant challenges in preventing bullying. Students who are frequently exposed to negative behavioral models through social media or interactions with older peers tend to imitate behaviors that lack respect for others. Therefore, the development of tolerance and behavioral self-regulation through classroom agreements must be supported by open communication between schools and parents, as well as by guidance on the responsible and prudent use of digital media.

Furthermore, implementing classroom agreements positively affects students' social skill development. Through collectively agreed-upon rules, students learn to respect their peers' opinions, collaborate in groups, and assist classmates who encounter difficulties. Behaviors such as helping peers, demonstrating politeness and honesty, and adapting within heterogeneous groups reflect the growth of empathy, tolerance, and responsibility. This indicates that classroom agreements function not only as mechanisms for behavioral control but also as instruments for character formation and the reinforcement of social values within the school environment.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Role of Classroom Agreements in Fostering Tolerance and Reducing Bullying Behavior in Grade V Elementary School

Teachers' perceptions of the role of classroom agreements indicate that their implementation significantly contributes to fostering tolerance and reducing bullying behavior in Grade V elementary classrooms. Teachers emphasized that classroom agreements are more effective than formal school rules because they prioritize students' internal self-regulation; compliance arises from students' own awareness and commitment rather than from fear of punishment. This is reflected in teachers' observations of more orderly student behavior, more structured interactions, and reduced teacher stress, allowing greater instructional focus and the

sustainable development of character education and positive discipline.

In line with Syahfitri et al. (2025), teachers play a more crucial role than other factors in influencing student engagement and the quality of the learning environment. This role is evident in their ability to create a conducive classroom climate, encourage active participation, and foster learning motivation. Specifically, the teacher's role encompasses three main aspects: teacher control, involving classroom management to maintain order and learning focus; teacher support, including academic, emotional, and social assistance to ensure students feel safe and valued; and teacher–student interaction, which involves two-way communication, the cultivation of positive relationships, and the establishment of trust that strengthens student engagement. This integrated approach underscores that teachers function not only as instructors but also as facilitators, mentors, and role models who holistically shape students' behavior and learning experiences.

Schools also support the implementation of classroom agreements through teacher socialization and participatory student involvement. The principal acts as a facilitator and role model by providing necessary resources and guiding teachers to actively involve students in formulating agreements through deliberation or class forums. Through this process, students learn to participate in decision-making, respect peers' opinions, and understand the consequences of their behavior. This approach reflects the principles of positive discipline by replacing physical or psychological punishment with restitution, thereby enabling students to internalize the values of responsibility and empathy.

The principal is primarily responsible for designing and determining the most appropriate and effective educational management strategies for all students. As an instructional leader, the principal evaluates students' learning needs, understands their characteristics and potential, and develops plans that emphasize not only academic achievement but also social, emotional, and character development. In this central role, the principal directs educational policy and ensures that all programs and approaches align with school goals and support an inclusive, safe, and conducive learning environment (Rivana et al., 2024).

Furthermore, routine monitoring and evaluation conducted by teachers through daily reflection and monthly discussions with students ensure that classroom agreements remain relevant and effective. Teachers observe daily interactions, assess students' comfort levels, and adjust agreements according to classroom needs. This approach fosters a supportive learning environment, strengthens mutual respect, and reinforces tolerance, thereby directly reducing the frequency of bullying behavior.

The handling of agreement violations and bullying cases is also conducted through structured, nonviolent strategies. Teachers separate the parties involved, ensure that victims feel safe, engage in private discussions with perpetrators to understand motives and the impact of their actions, and require concrete restorative actions as a form of accountability. Parental involvement is aligned with home-based parenting practices to support students' development of tolerance and responsibility. These strategies demonstrate that classroom agreements function not merely as formal rules, but as an effective character education tool in creating a safe, inclusive, and harmonious classroom environment.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings indicate that the implementation of tolerance habituation through participatory classroom agreements in Grade V at SD Negeri Sukorejo 01 has played an important role in shaping students' character and creating a more conducive classroom environment. Classroom agreements function not only as behavioral guidelines but also as a medium for internalizing values of tolerance, such as mutual respect, acceptance of differing opinions, and polite interaction. Consistent habituation in daily learning activities has increased students' awareness and willingness to comply with shared rules. Nevertheless, bullying behaviors predominantly verbal and social forms such as teasing, belittling peers, and social exclusion were still identified and were closely linked to low levels of tolerance, particularly in appreciating differences in character, ability, and background among students.

From teachers' perspectives, classroom agreements significantly contribute to fostering

tolerance and reducing bullying, as student involvement in their formulation strengthens collective responsibility and mutual respect. However, the effectiveness of classroom agreements depends on continuous teacher guidance, role modeling, and consistent implementation to ensure that tolerance values are fully internalized and sustainably suppress bullying behavior. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to apply classroom agreements consistently, provide positive reinforcement, and conduct regular evaluations; schools are advised to support character education policies through collaboration among teachers, principals, and parents; and future researchers are recommended to expand the scope of study and employ mixed-method approaches to more comprehensively assess the effectiveness of classroom agreements and other factors influencing tolerance and bullying.

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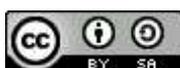
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