

Bullying at School and Impact of Empathy Training

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Abstract

Bullying at school creates of an insecure, and uncomfortable academic environment. It can lead to violence, antisocial behavior, and other negative behaviors. This study is aimed at examining the effectiveness of empathy training to decrease bullying behavior. This research method was quasi-experimental which was conducted between the group/pretest-posttest control group design. The subject were students of State Junior High school. The result showed that empathy training helped in decreasing bullying behavior among perpetrators, by educating them on the unpleasant conditions faced by victims of this inhumane act. This research also reveals that perpetrators can maintain a peaceful and conducive learning environment through empathy training, thereby, cohabitating and socializing better with their friends.

Keywords: Bullying; Empathy; Perpetrator; Training; Junior high school.



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1. Introduction

Adolescence is a long transitional period from childhood into adulthood that occurs in the span of human life (Papalia *et al.*, 2008). Adolescence is also a transitional stage in which humans experience lots of biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes. Changes from childhood to adulthood is usually associated with unrest in Adolescents within the family, community, and school problems (Papalia *et al.*, 2008). According to Santrock (2007), these problems ranges from alcohol usage, delinquency, crime, and other forms of unethical behaviors. These problems created by these adolescents can lead to the emergence of other issues one of which is bullying (Aluede, 2011). Furthermore, Milsom and Gallo (2006) also reported that bullying occurs in men and women at the end of their early childhood.

Bullying increases every day and occurs in all parts of the world (Craig *et al.*, 2009). In America, bullying has become a common problem in schools. Wang *et al.* (2009), analyzed that in a school of 7,182 adolescents (level 6 to 10), about 20.8% of students engage in physical bullying, 53.6% in verbal bullying, 51.4% involved in relational bullying, and 13.6% in cyberbullying within a space of 2 months. A cross-sectional study was also conducted in Nigeria, West Africa, using grades 10 and 11 students. The research showed that more than half of the sample (56.8%) had been bullied in the past month (Adeosun *et al.*, 2015).

Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) recorded that bullying amongst children in Indonesian schools increased from 67 cases in 2014 to 79 cases in 2015 (Republika, 2015). KPAI also recorded that instances of harassment topped public complaint between 2011 to August 2014, with 369 complaints. That number is about 25% of the total number of claims associated with the educational institution with as many as 1480 cases. Bullying also known as KPAI, is the use of superior strength to intimidate, torment, oppress and coerce someone. It results in violence in schools, brawls, educational discrimination, or fraudulent charges (Setyawan, 2014). KPAI is also known to increase the number of children who become bullies (Sulis, 2016).

It is common in educational institutions, where students tend to intimidate others to get what they need and desire. Lines (2008) beams that bullies tend to use mistakes, criticisms and false accusations to subject their victims, because they are unwilling to take responsibility for their actions, and because of their thirst for attention. Bullies are also unable to cohabit with the opposite sex because they are emotionally immature, careless, irritable, remorseless, have low social sensitivity, less able to cooperate, and lack empathy (Rigby, 2007). In addition, they have a larger and stronger body structure compared to their age-mates, aggressive, impulsive, have low empathy levels and care less about their partners Rigby (2007). Some of these studies show that bullies have less empathy.

Warden and Mackinnon (2003) stated that children with good social behavior have higher empathy scores. A person who has high emotional empathy will be able to anticipate the negative impact that arises from their behavior

towards others before acting. However, children with poor social behavior, fail to anticipate the negative impact of behavior.

According to [Murphy and Banas \(2009\)](#), bullies have less empathy towards their victims, therefore, they are unable to understand their feelings. Furthermore, these set of kids also see violence as a good thing; hence they continue dealing in the act. [Jolliffe and Farrington \(2006\)](#) found bullying a relationship between low empathy and high levels of antisocial behavior. The association was stronger in adolescents and young adults.

Empathy can reduce aggressive behavior using two components. The first is cognitive that is ability to take the perspective of others to appreciate, understand and tolerate their stand ([Davis, 1994](#)). Individuals can analyze the reasons and motives of others and in doing this they will be able to understand and accept the person's behavior. Furthermore, [Davis \(1994\)](#) reported that the second component of empathy makes an aggressive offender to feel the pain of the victim, thereby, causing emotional stress. Other researchers also agree that tyrants have "cold cognition" which suggests that they are less able to understand the feelings of others with less empathy ([Kaukiainen et al., 1999](#)). [Velki \(2012\)](#) found that students between the ages of 10 to 16 years showed a significant difference in empathy levels. [Gini et al. \(2006\)](#) also found a lower level of empathy associated with youth. According to [Rivers et al. \(2007\)](#), to reduce bullying, an intensive program capable of increasing understanding with others, especially, should be carried out.

[Sahin \(2012\)](#) examined the effectiveness of empathy training as an intervention to reduce bullying in 6th-grade children. The results showed a significant decrease in the experimental group when compared with the control group. [Sullivan \(2000\)](#) also recommends empathy training to increase understanding in bullies. [Macklem \(2003\)](#) reported that in order to help these set of kids, they need some emotional control tips from themselves. [Happ and Melzer \(2014\)](#) reported that to increase empathy, perpetrators are asked to be able to imagine what others feel in certain situations. They are asked to place themselves in the victim's shoes. At the end, those that received empathy training could empathize and understand the feelings (emotions) and thoughts of others who are victims of bullying ([Davidson et al., 2006](#)).

This study focuses on training adolescences (perpetrators) with the aim of improving their ability to react to the feelings of others with positive emotional response. By increasing their empathy level, they will be able to feel the emotions of people who were victims of bullying.

2. Material and Method

This research method was quasi-experimental which was conducted between the group/pretest-posttest control group design. The subjects were 30 students of Junior high school who were equally divided between the experimental and control group. Data collection was conducted using Empathy Scale and worksheet. Students in the experimental group followed empathy training, which was conducted within four meetings. The total time spent in carrying out the experiments is 600 minutes (10 hours). The method used is a discussion, review of previous material, presentation, material evaluation, and home duty. Overall empathy training teaches self-empathy, accepting others, accurate listening, and perspective taking.

3. Results

The result of Mann-Whitney test analysis posttest score in the experiment and control group obtained $Z = -3.435$; $p = 0.001$ ($p < 0,05$). There was a difference score between the posttest in the experimental group and that in the control group. It means that empathy was increased in the experimental group after given training. The Result is shown in table.1.

Table-1. Statistical analysis posttest in experimental and control group

Statistical analysis	Result
<i>Mann-Whitney U</i>	30.000
<i>Wilcoxon</i>	150.000
<i>Z</i>	-3.435**

** $p < 0.01$

The result also showed the difference in empathy score between the experimental and control group. The experimental group showed a significant empathy score difference between pretest and posttest. It's confirmed by the mean posttest score (Mean = 53.13) and mean score pretest (Mean = 48.8). While in the control group there was no difference in empathy score between pretest and posttest. The mean posttest score (Mean = 45.53) and mean pretest score (Mean = 46.33). The result confirms that training significantly increases empathy. The result can be seen in Table. 2.

Table-2. Comparative test experimental and control group

Group	Mean Pretest	Mean Posttest	Z	p
Experimental	48,8	53,13	-2,218	0,027*
Control	46,33	45,53	-1,841	0,066

* $p < 0.05$

4. Discussion

The training interventions are designed to improve empathy in adolescents. It found that training was adequate to promote compassion. There is a difference of understanding in the experimental and the control group which was as a result of some factors. The first factor is empathy training applied by involving the subject in the discussion, review of previous material, activity, presentation, material evaluation, and home task. According to Sahin (2012), implementing various activities, interactions, and lectures will assist participants in identifying their emotional experiences. Home tasks are given to encourage and engage the subject. It was also proven that the empathy training program was effective in reducing bullying behavior.

The second is that its implementation improves the empathy of the subject. Through worksheet, all students can know if their colleagues in training were bullies. Subject experiences shared with friends through group discussion make them help each other to understand the given material, become more open, and encourage each other to improve themselves. According to Corey (2003), each member will realize that they are not alone in dealing with the problem. Also, each member can also support each other and be a source of inspiration. They can also give and receive advice, opinions, and feedback from other members (Ellis and Bernard, 2007). The application of group empathy training can also help the participants to practice their empathy skills.

The third factor is the level of subject intelligence. To learn empathy, the individual is expected to be able to manipulate abstract concepts, while understanding it requires an average IQ (Coplan and Goldie, 2011). The characteristics of subjects in this study have an age range of 12 to 15 years. According to Piaget, these ages is a formal operational stage. At this stage, thinking ability will increase (Santrock, 2007). However, early teenage development stages were also included to enable them to learn to think abstractly.

It's clear that Bullying can make an individual feel anxious and humiliated and the inability to cope with it may trigger feelings of anger and frustration. Some people may try to retaliate in some way. Others may become frightened and demotivated (Zulkarnain *et al.*, 2017).

5. Conclusion

Studies have shown that increasing empathy will reduce bullying behavior in adolescents who participate in this act owing to their low empathy skills. The inability of the bully to empathize makes them be unable to see from the perspective of others, recognize the feelings of others and adjust their concerns appropriately. Lack of sensitivity prevents them from understanding their victim's pains. They fail to think of how they felt when they were being bullied. The bullying is usually as a result of the difference in the characteristics of the victims and the perpetrators, their inability to cohabitate with their age grade, and the tradition or culture of bullying behavior in schools which are environmental factors in generating bullying behavior.

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