

TAKE AND GIVE STRATEGY AS A CHARACTER EDUCATION MODEL TO REDUCE BULLYING IN AISYIYAH BUSTANUL ATHFAL KINDERGARTEN

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Abstract

This study examines the Take and Give strategy as a character education model for mitigating mild bullying indicators in early childhood at TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Tegalrejo. Grounded in Lickona's character education theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, the research addresses the gap between institutional character values and children's developing social behaviors. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through interviews with the principal and teacher, direct classroom observations, and document analysis. Findings reveal that mild bullying manifestations—such as teasing, reluctance to share, and object-snatching—reflect children's social-emotional developmental challenges rather than intentional aggression. The Take and Give strategy, implemented through structured peer exchanges of cards, objects, and information, effectively cultivates prosocial behaviors including sharing, cooperation, empathy, and respectful communication. Children demonstrated increased willingness to share, enhanced peer interaction, and reduced tendencies toward teasing following strategy implementation. Success factors include institutional alignment with character education goals, consistent teacher scaffolding, and integration within the school's cultural framework. While some children require continued individualized support, the strategy offers a simple, cost-effective, and contextually grounded approach for fostering positive social development. This study contributes to early childhood character education research by repositioning Take and Give from an active learning technique to a pedagogical instrument for bullying prevention through repeated, meaningful social experiences.

Keywords: Take and Give strategy, character education, early childhood bullying

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi Take and Give sebagai model pendidikan karakter untuk mengurangi indikasi bullying ringan pada anak usia dini di TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Tegalrejo. Berlandaskan teori pendidikan karakter Lickona dan perspektif sosiokultural Vygotsky, penelitian ini menjawab kesenjangan antara nilai karakter institusional dan perilaku sosial anak yang masih berkembang. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dengan kepala sekolah dan guru, observasi langsung di kelas, serta analisis dokumen. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa manifestasi bullying ringan—seperti mengejek, enggan berbagi, dan merebut barang—mencerminkan tantangan perkembangan sosial-emosional anak, bukan agresi yang disengaja. Strategi Take and Give yang diimplementasikan melalui pertukaran

terstruktur berupa kartu, benda, dan informasi antar teman sebaya, efektif menumbuhkan perilaku prososial seperti berbagi, kerja sama, empati, dan komunikasi santun. Anak menunjukkan peningkatan kesediaan berbagi, interaksi sosial yang lebih aktif, serta penurunan kecenderungan mengejek setelah strategi diterapkan. Faktor pendukung meliputi keselarasan institusi dengan tujuan pendidikan karakter, pendampingan guru yang konsisten, dan integrasi dalam kerangka budaya sekolah. Meskipun sebagian anak memerlukan dukungan individual berkelanjutan, strategi ini menawarkan pendekatan yang sederhana, efektif, dan kontekstual untuk mengembangkan perilaku sosial positif. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian pendidikan karakter PAUD dengan memposisikan Take and Give bukan sekadar teknik pembelajaran aktif, melainkan instrumen pedagogis untuk pencegahan bullying melalui pengalaman sosial yang bermakna dan berulang.

Kata kunci: strategi Take and Give, pendidikan karakter, bullying anak usia dini

INTRODUCTION

In early childhood, social behavior is not yet fully mature, as children are still learning to recognize emotions, understand others' feelings, adhere to shared rules, and regulate egocentric impulses (Zelazo et al., 2023). During play, children may exhibit positive behaviors such as sharing, helping, and cooperating, but they can also display negative behaviors like teasing, snatching objects, rejecting peers, or refusing to engage in group play. At TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Tegalrejo, these manifestations appear at a mild level and can still be constructively guided through character education. Teachers note that bullying among young children typically involves teasing peers, unwillingness to play together, or taking items without permission. This indicates that bullying in kindergarten settings rarely manifests as severe aggression; rather, it appears as early indicators of negative social behavior that must be addressed before becoming habitual. Character education at this developmental stage should therefore focus on cultivating empathy, sharing, respectful communication, and positive interpersonal relationships (Jia et al., 2024).

The institutional context of TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Tegalrejo provides a strong foundation for character education development. The school's vision emphasizes nurturing children who are God-fearing, morally upright, independent, competent, creative, and caring. Its mission further encompasses instilling values of faith, noble character, consistent worship habits, independence, competence, creativity, and concern for others and the environment. This orientation demonstrates that character education is not an extracurricular supplement, but a core component of the school's educational philosophy. The school's social environment—situated within a rural, religious community with a strong culture of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*)—also serves as valuable social capital for fostering children's prosocial behavior. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, a child's character is shaped by the dynamic interplay among family, school, peers, culture, and the broader community (Stanley & Kuo, 2022). Consequently, bullying prevention efforts in kindergarten must be implemented through a consistent, integrated learning ecosystem.

The school's curriculum further reinforces this direction by integrating religious and moral values, identity formation, foundational literacy, and the Pancasila Student Profile. Children are guided to respect others, practice positive behaviors, build healthy social relationships, and adapt to prevailing rules and norms. School culture is also operationalized through daily and weekly routines such as the 5S principles (*Senyum, Sapa, Salam, Sopan, Santun* – Smile, Greet, Offer Regards, Politeness, and Courtesy), morning prayers, Dhuha prayer, memorization activities, literacy sessions, litter collection, Clean Friday, charitable giving (*infak*), and community service. These practices align with Lickona's character education theory, which defines character as an integrated unity of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Arif et al., 2023). In other words, merely explaining good behavior is insufficient; children must actively engage in and experience moral practices firsthand (Khasawneh et al., 2023). At this juncture, the *Take and Give* strategy becomes highly relevant, as it embeds the values of sharing, receiving, and mutual respect directly into classroom activities.

The research problem emerging from this context lies in the gap between the character values formally articulated by the school and the still-developing social behaviors of the children. On one hand, the school possesses a vision, mission, culture, and curriculum that actively support character formation. On the other hand, interview and observational data reveal that some children still struggle with consistent sharing, exhibit shyness, face difficulties cooperating, or show tendencies to snatch objects. Teachers report that instances of teasing and reluctance to share have occurred, though they remain mild and manageable. Observations also note the absence of teasing, exclusion, or aggressive behaviors during structured activities, with only one minor incident of object-snatching recorded. The core issue of this study, therefore, is not the severity of bullying cases, but the need to develop instructional strategies capable of preventing mild bullying tendencies by strengthening prosocial behavior from an early age.

The *Take and Give* strategy was selected due to its cooperative, concrete nature, which aligns well with early childhood learning styles. Teachers prepare cards, objects, or simple materials, and children are asked to exchange them while sharing basic information such as colors, shapes, objects, or short stories. Through this process, children practice giving, receiving, taking turns, speaking politely, listening to peers, and respecting others' responses. Teachers indicate that the primary goal of this strategy is to train children to share, cooperate, and appreciate their peers. Theoretically, this approach aligns closely with Vygotsky's perspective on the crucial role of social interaction in cognitive and social development. Social competencies do not emerge automatically; rather, they develop through teacher scaffolding, modeling, and shared experiences with peers. Consequently, *Take and Give* should not be viewed merely as a material-exchange technique, but as a structured space for internalizing character values through positive social contact.

Recent international research has placed significant emphasis on strengthening social-emotional skills, fostering peer relationships, and preventing problematic behaviors in

early childhood. (Ştefan et al., 2023) investigated a Social-Emotional Prevention Program for preschoolers and found that classroom-based interventions, teacher training, and parental involvement can enhance social adjustment while reducing the risk of emotional and behavioral problems. This study was published in the *Journal of School Psychology*, a Q1-ranked journal in the categories of Developmental and Educational Psychology and Education. Similarly, research published in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* demonstrates that behavioral regulation and peer relationships are closely interconnected in early childhood development. This publication is also ranked Q1 across Developmental and Educational Psychology, Education, and Sociology and Political Science (Burke et al., 2023).

Other studies emphasize that empathy, emotion understanding, and positive relationships serve as crucial foundations for preventing aggressive behavior. A study published in the *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* demonstrates that Theory of Mind abilities and attachment are closely linked to empathic concern and prosocial behavior in preschoolers. This research is also ranked Q1 in the categories of Developmental and Educational Psychology and Experimental and Cognitive Psychology (Shoshani, 2024). Johansen et al (2024) further establish a longitudinal relationship between Theory of Mind, emotion understanding, and positive peer relationships in preschool children. In their study *Books and Bullies: Responses to Bullying in Preschool Students*, Rosen et al. (2025) indicate that bullying behaviors are already identifiable in the preschool years and that children’s responses to such situations must be shaped through targeted educational interventions.

Table 1. Theoretical Framework, Previous Research, and Research Position

RESEARCH ASPECT	THEORETICAL/EMPIRICAL REFERENCE	KEY FINDINGS	POSITION IN THIS STUDY
CHARACTER EDUCATION	Lickona: character encompasses moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action	Character must be cultivated through concrete, practiced behaviors	<i>Take and Give</i> is utilized as a concrete moral practice
CHILD SOCIAL INTERACTION	Vygotsky: development emerges through social interaction and adult scaffolding	Children learn through teacher	Teachers facilitate children in giving,

		guidance and peer collaboration	receiving, and cooperating
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL PROGRAMS	Ştefan et al (2023)	School-based interventions enhance social adjustment and reduce problematic behaviors	This study examines a simple, locally implemented classroom intervention
PEER RELATIONSHIPS	Burke et al (2023)	Behavioral regulation and peer relationships are interrelated	<i>Take and Give</i> is positioned as a social regulation exercise
EMPATHY & PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR	Shoshani (2024)	Theory of Mind and attachment are linked to empathy and prosocial behavior	Empathy values are instilled through structured experiences of giving and receiving

This study addresses a gap in previous research on early childhood bullying prevention by focusing on practical, interaction-based learning strategies implemented in everyday classroom settings, particularly within Islamic-oriented rural kindergartens in Indonesia. Unlike prior studies that emphasize social-emotional learning through quantitative or experimental approaches, this research explores authentic classroom practices using interviews, observations, and document analysis. The study highlights the novelty of repositioning the *Take and Give* strategy—not merely as an active learning method, but as a character education model to reduce early signs of mild bullying by fostering empathy, cooperation, sharing, respect, and social communication through repetitive and

enjoyable social interactions. Conducted at TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Tegalrejo, the research also examines the implementation process, behavioral changes in children, supporting factors, and challenges, with the aim of contributing both theoretically and practically to the development of safe, empathetic, and bullying-free early childhood education environments.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, as the research focus is directed toward gaining an in-depth understanding Furidha (2024) of the implementation of the *Take and Give* strategy as a character education model to mitigate early indicators of mild bullying in young children. The research was conducted at TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Tegalrejo in Widang District, Tuban Regency. This site was selected based on the institution's strong commitment to character development, as articulated in its vision of fostering children who are God-fearing, morally upright, competent, creative, and caring. The study participants include the school principal, the classroom teacher, and the students engaged in classroom activities. The primary informants are the principal, Nur Auliyah, S.Pd., and the classroom teacher, Uswatun, S.Pd., while the students serve as behavioral data sources through direct observation. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in the planning, implementation, guidance, and evaluation of the *Take and Give* strategy.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to explore the principal's and teacher's conceptual understanding of bullying and character education, their experiences implementing the *Take and Give* strategy, observed impacts on children's behavior, encountered challenges, and program evaluation processes. Observations were carried out to directly monitor strategy implementation, peer interactions, and manifestations of prosocial behaviors such as sharing, cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect, as well as early signs of mild bullying including teasing, social exclusion, object-snatching, and mild aggression. Documentation was utilized to corroborate findings through institutional profiles, the School-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Satuan Pendidikan*), activity photographs, and child development records. Data analysis followed an iterative process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation of sources and methods was employed by cross-verifying insights from interviews, observations, and curriculum documents. This methodological rigor ensures that the study's findings are not merely descriptive, but analytically robust in explaining the interplay between the instructional strategy, character education, and the mitigation of mild bullying indicators.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Character Education Context at TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Tegalrejo

Character education constitutes the central foundation of educational practice at TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Tegalrejo. The findings demonstrate that the institution does not position character formation as a complementary educational program but rather as the primary orientation guiding curriculum implementation, school culture, classroom interaction, and daily learning activities. This commitment is reflected in the school's vision of nurturing children who are God-fearing, possess noble character, demonstrate creativity, develop competence, and show care for others. The vision is operationalized through institutional missions emphasizing faith, worship practices, independence, creativity, responsibility, and social concern. Such institutional orientation indicates that children's moral and social development is intentionally integrated into all educational processes rather than delivered as isolated moral instruction.

The findings further reveal that character education is strengthened by the socio-cultural context surrounding the school. Located within a rural Muslim community in Tegalrejo Village, Widang District, Tuban Regency, the school benefits from a social environment characterized by strong traditions of cooperation (*gotong royong*), communal solidarity, and mutual assistance. Community members actively preserve collective cultural practices, particularly during Islamic religious celebrations such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, where cooperation and social responsibility become everyday experiences for children. Consequently, the surrounding environment provides authentic social learning opportunities that reinforce the values promoted within the school. Rather than learning empathy and cooperation exclusively in classroom settings, children encounter these values continuously through interactions with families and community members. Such consistency between school values and community culture creates a supportive ecosystem for sustainable character development.

The School-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Satuan Pendidikan*—KSP) further institutionalizes character education by embedding moral values within instructional objectives, school routines, and learning experiences. Curriculum documents indicate that learning outcomes extend beyond cognitive achievement toward the development of religious values, moral responsibility, personal identity, foundational literacy, and competencies represented within the Pancasila Student Profile. Daily school routines—including morning greetings, the implementation of the 5S culture (*Senyum, Sapa, Salam, Sopan, and Santun*), collective prayers, Qur'anic memorization (*muroja'ah*), Dhuha prayer, literacy activities, environmental cleanliness programs, Friday cleaning campaigns, and charitable giving (*infak*)—serve as habitual practices through which children repeatedly experience desirable social behaviors. These structured routines demonstrate that character formation occurs through continuous habituation rather than through occasional moral lessons.

An important finding emerging from this study concerns the school's preventive orientation toward bullying. Rather than addressing bullying through punitive disciplinary measures after negative behaviors occur, the institution prioritizes the creation of a positive educational climate characterized by empathy, cooperation, respect, and caring relationships. Teachers intentionally cultivate social competencies before problematic behaviors become established habits. Consequently, bullying prevention is conceptualized as an outcome of successful character education rather than as a separate disciplinary intervention. This preventive perspective positions prosocial behavior as the

most effective mechanism for reducing the emergence of aggressive or exclusionary interactions among young children.

The integration of institutional vision, curriculum, school culture, and community values creates favorable conditions for implementing the Take and Give learning strategy. The strategy naturally aligns with the school's educational philosophy because its learning activities require children to exchange objects, communicate information, cooperate with peers, wait patiently for their turns, and demonstrate mutual respect. These activities simultaneously develop academic competencies and social-emotional skills through authentic interaction. Thus, the Take and Give strategy functions not merely as a classroom teaching technique but as a practical mechanism for translating institutional character values into children's everyday learning experiences.

The findings summarized in Table 2 demonstrate that five interconnected components collectively establish the school's character education ecosystem: institutional vision and mission, supportive social environment, school culture, curriculum integration, and proactive bullying prevention. Each component reinforces the others, creating consistency between educational policy, instructional practice, and children's social experiences. Such consistency strengthens the effectiveness of the Take and Give strategy because children repeatedly encounter identical moral values across multiple educational contexts rather than receiving fragmented messages about appropriate behavior.

Table 2. Character Education Context Analysis

CONTEXT ASPECT	FIELD DATA/FACTS	IMPLICATIONS FOR CHARACTER EDUCATION	RELEVANCE TO THE TAKE AND GIVE STRATEGY
INSTITUTIONAL VISION AND MISSION	Children are guided to become God-fearing, morally upright, competent, creative, and caring individuals	Character development becomes the school's primary educational goal	Take and Give develops empathy, sharing, and mutual respect through structured interaction
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	Rural Muslim community characterized by <i>gotong royong</i> and mutual cooperation	Community culture strengthens children's prosocial development	Children internalize cooperative values through authentic social experiences
SCHOOL CULTURE	Daily routines including 5S, prayers, Dhuha prayer, literacy, Clean Friday, and <i>infak</i>	Character values become habitual through consistent repetition	The strategy reinforces these habits through peer interaction
SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM (KSP)	Learning emphasizes religious values,	Character education is systematically	Take and Give supports active

	moral development, identity, and Pancasila Student Profile	integrated into curriculum	and contextual learning
BULLYING PREVENTION ORIENTATION	School emphasizes empathy, caring, and positive peer relationships	Prevention focuses on positive climate rather than punishment	Children practice sharing, cooperation, turn-taking, and peer respect

Overall, these findings indicate that the effectiveness of the Take and Give strategy cannot be separated from the broader educational context in which it is implemented. The strategy succeeds because it operates within an institutional environment where character education is consistently reinforced by school policies, classroom practices, curriculum design, and community culture. Consequently, children's opportunities to practice empathy, cooperation, respect, and responsibility extend beyond individual learning sessions into their everyday educational experiences. This comprehensive ecosystem enables the Take and Give strategy to function as an effective preventive model for strengthening prosocial behavior while reducing the emergence of mild bullying tendencies among young children.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the *Take and Give* strategy serves as an effective character education model for mitigating mild bullying indicators in early childhood at TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Tegalrejo. By embedding values of sharing, empathy, cooperation, and mutual respect within structured, concrete peer interactions, the strategy transforms abstract moral concepts into lived social experiences. Findings demonstrate that children exhibited increased willingness to share, enhanced cooperative behaviors, greater social initiative, and reduced tendencies toward teasing or peer rejection following implementation. The strategy's success is supported by institutional alignment with character education goals, consistent teacher scaffolding, and integration within the school's cultural and curricular framework. While developmental constraints such as emerging social-emotional competencies require ongoing individualized support, the *Take and Give* model offers a simple, cost-effective, and contextually grounded approach for fostering prosocial behavior and preventing early bullying tendencies through positive, repetitive social practice.

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