

The Role of Teacher-Student Relationships in Minimizing Cyberbullying Behavior in the School Environment

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Keywords: <i>Cyberbullying, Teacher-Student Relationship, School Environment, Adolescent Behavior, Preventive Intervention</i>	ABSTRACT: Cyberbullying severely impacts adolescent mental health, academic performance, and social development. This study investigates the role of teacher-student relationships (TSR) in minimizing cyberbullying among middle and high school students in East Java, Indonesia. Utilizing a convergent mixed methods design, quantitative data were gathered from 385 students across eight schools using the Cyberbullying Questionnaire (CBQ) and Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS). Qualitative data were obtained via semi structured interviews with 24 purposively selected students and 12 teachers. Structural equation modeling revealed that TSR quality was a significant negative predictor of cyberbullying perpetration ($\beta = -0.471$, $p < 0.001$) and victimization ($\beta = -0.389$, $p < 0.001$). Three TSR dimensions emotional support, academic encouragement, and trust-based communication demonstrated distinct protective mechanisms. Qualitative findings illuminated how teachers' empathetic responsiveness, digital mentorship, and consistent boundary setting shaped students' online behavioral norms, moderated by school climate and peer group composition.
Received: 2026-May-10 Rev. Req: 2026-May-20 Accepted: 2026-June-22 *corresponding author: fahruhirgy@gmail.com	

I. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of digital communication technologies and social media platforms has fundamentally altered the social landscape of adolescence, creating new arenas for interpersonal interaction that extend far beyond the physical boundaries of the school. While these digital environments offer significant opportunities for social connection, creative expression, and collaborative learning, they have simultaneously given rise to a troubling phenomenon known as cyberbullying the deliberate, repeated use of digital technologies to harass, intimidate, humiliate, or harm others. Unlike traditional forms of bullying, cyberbullying is characterized by its pervasiveness (occurring anytime, anywhere), its potential for wide audience reach, the relative anonymity of perpetrators, and the permanence of digital content, all of which amplify its psychological impact on victims.

Global epidemiological data indicate that cyberbullying affects approximately 15-35% of school age adolescents, with Indonesian data reflecting similarly concerning prevalence rates. According to the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI, 2023), cyberbullying incidents reported among Indonesian school students have increased by 38% over the preceding three years, with social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp identified as the primary venues. The consequences of cyberbullying are well documented and severe: victims exhibit elevated rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, social withdrawal, and academic disengagement, while perpetrators themselves face increased risk of antisocial behavior, conduct disorders, and long-term relational difficulties (Kowalski et al., 2014) [1].

Within the ecological systems framework first articulated by Bronfenbrenner (1979) [2], the school microsystem represents a critical arena in which protective factors against cyberbullying can be cultivated. Among the various school based protective resources identified in the literature, the quality of teacher and student relationships (TSR) has emerged as a particularly salient variable. Positive teacher and student relationships characterized by warmth, trust, mutual respect, and open communication have been associated with a wide range of beneficial student outcomes including enhanced academic motivation, reduced antisocial behavior, improved emotional regulation, and greater willingness to seek adult support when confronted with problems (Pianta, 1999) [3]. However, the specific mechanisms through which TSR quality influences students engagement in cyberbullying as either perpetrators or victims remain

insufficiently theorized and empirically underexplored, particularly within Indonesian educational contexts.

Existing research on school based cyberbullying prevention has predominantly focused on policy interventions, peer mediation programs, and digital literacy curricula, with comparatively less attention devoted to the relational dimensions of the school environment as preventive resources. Studies that have examined adult relationships as protective factors have largely focused on parental relationships (Navarro et al., 2015) [4], leaving the specific contribution of teacher-student relationships relatively underinvestigated. This gap is particularly significant given that adolescents spend a substantial proportion of their waking hours within school environments where teacher relationships constitute a primary source of non parental adult connection.

Furthermore, the cultural context of Indonesian schooling introduces specific dimensions to the TSR cyberbullying relationship that are not fully captured by frameworks developed in Western educational research traditions. Indonesian educational culture is characterized by strong respect hierarchies, emphasis on group harmony (gotong royong), collectivist value systems, and distinctive patterns of teacher authority that collectively shape how students experience and respond to teacher relationships. The extent to which these cultural factors amplify or attenuate the protective function of TSR against cyberbullying represents an understudied dimension of the broader phenomenon.

The present study addresses these gaps by empirically investigating the role of teacher-student relationship quality in minimizing cyberbullying behavior among middle and high school students in East Java, Indonesia. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) describe the prevalence and characteristics of cyberbullying behaviors in the sampled school population, (2) examine the relationship between TSR quality dimensions and cyberbullying perpetration and victimization, (3) identify the specific mechanisms through which positive teacher-student relationships exert protective effects against cyberbullying involvement, and (4) explore moderating factors that shape the TSR cyberbullying relationship within the Indonesian school context. The findings are intended to inform the development of culturally responsive, relationship centered anti cyberbullying interventions that leverage teachers unique preventive potential.

II. METHOD

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) [5], wherein quantitative and qualitative data strands were collected concurrently, analyzed independently, and subsequently integrated to generate comprehensive meta inferences. The quantitative strand established the statistical parameters of the TSR cyberbullying relationship across a representative school sample, while the qualitative strand provided interpretive depth by illuminating the subjective experiences, contextual processes, and relational mechanisms underlying the quantitative patterns.

The study was conducted across eight public middle and high schools in East Java Province, Indonesia, selected through purposive criterion sampling to ensure variation in urbanicity (urban, peri urban, and rural), school size, and socioeconomic profile of the student population. Quantitative participants comprised 385 students (54.3% female, 45.7% male; Mage = 14.7 years, SD = 1.83; grade range: 7-12) recruited through stratified random sampling within each school. Sample size was determined through a priori power analysis (G*Power 3.1) to detect medium effect sizes with 80% power at $\alpha = 0.05$ in structural equation modeling, requiring a minimum of 350 participants (Hair et al., 2019) [6].

For the qualitative strand, 24 students and 12 teachers were purposively selected from the quantitative sample and their respective schools, ensuring diversity across cyberbullying involvement status (perpetrators, victims, bystanders, uninvolved), gender, grade level, and school setting. Teacher participants included guidance counselors (n=4), subject teachers (n=6), and homeroom teachers (n=2) with varying levels of experience with cyberbullying cases.

Cyberbullying behaviors were assessed using the Cyberbullying Questionnaire (CBQ) developed by Calvete et al. (2010) [7] and adapted for the Indonesian context. The CBQ comprises two parallel subscales measuring cyberbullying perpetration (15 items) and victimization (15 items) across six behavioral subtypes: harassment, denigration, exclusion, impersonation, outing, and cyberstalking. Items are rated on a 4 point frequency scale (0 = never, 3 = many times). Indonesian adaptation procedures included forward backward translation, expert panel review (n=6 educational psychologists), cognitive interviewing with 20 students, and confirmatory factor analysis demonstrating acceptable fit (CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.055, SRMR = 0.048). Internal consistency was satisfactory for perpetration ($\alpha = 0.87$) and victimization ($\alpha = 0.89$) subscales.

Teacher-student relationship quality was measured using an adapted version of the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) developed by Pianta (1999) [3], modified for secondary school contexts and self reported student perspective. The adapted scale comprised 28 items across three subscales: Closeness (9 items, measuring warmth and open communication), Conflict (10 items, reversed scored), and Dependency (9 items). Additionally, a Digital Mentorship subscale (5 items) was developed specifically for this study to capture TSR dimensions specific to the digital context, including teachers' guidance on online behavior and responsiveness to digital concerns. Validity was established through exploratory factor analysis, and reliability was acceptable for all subscales (α range: 0.78-0.86).

Sociodemographic variables including age, gender, grade level, school type, internet usage hours per day, and parental monitoring of internet use were assessed through a structured questionnaire. School climate was measured using the Revised School Climate Survey (Brand et al., 2008) [8], and peer group belonging was assessed using the Peer Acceptance subscale of the Social Skills Rating System.

Semi structured interviews were conducted individually with student participants (duration: 40-55 minutes) and teacher participants (duration: 50-65 minutes). Student interview protocols explored: personal experiences with cyberbullying (as victim, perpetrator, or bystander), perceptions of teacher responsiveness to cyberbullying situations, the nature of their relationships with specific teachers, and the role of teacher relationships in their decisions about online behavior. Teacher protocols explored: awareness and handling of cyberbullying cases, relational strategies employed to address online aggression, perceptions of their role in digital behavior formation, and institutional support received. All interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia by trained research assistants, audio recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim.

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS 29 for descriptive statistics and preliminary analyses, and AMOS 24 for structural equation modeling (SEM). The measurement model was first evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis, followed by structural model testing examining direct paths from TSR subscales to cyberbullying perpetration and victimization outcomes, controlling for sociodemographic variables and internet usage. Moderation analyses tested the moderating role of school climate and peer group belonging on the TSR cyberbullying relationship using Hayes' (2018) [9] PROCESS macro (Model 1). Bootstrapped confidence intervals (5,000 samples) were used for all indirect

effect estimates.

Qualitative data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) [10] six phase framework, facilitated by NVivo 14 software. An inductive coding approach was initially applied to generate granular codes from participant accounts, which were subsequently organized into broader themes and subthemes through iterative review and team discussion. Trustworthiness was established through member checking (8 participants), peer debriefing (external researcher reviewer), negative case analysis, and thick description. Mixed methods integration was achieved through convergence coding matrices (O'Cathain et al., 2010) [11] comparing quantitative and qualitative findings to identify areas of confirmation, elaboration, and divergence.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Prevalence and Patterns of Cyberbullying

Descriptive analysis revealed that 41.3% (n=159) of respondents reported involvement in cyberbullying in some capacity during the preceding six months. Specifically, 18.7% (n=72) reported cyberbullying perpetration only, 12.5% (n=48) reported victimization only, and 10.1% (n=39) reported involvement as both perpetrator and victim (bully victims). These prevalence rates are consistent with and slightly higher than those reported in Indonesian national surveys (KPAI, 2023) and comparable to rates documented in regional East Asian studies by Hase et al. (2015) [12], who found 35-45% overall cyberbullying involvement rates among adolescent samples in similar socioeconomic contexts. Among the behavioral subtypes assessed, harassment (deliberate, repeated offensive messaging) was most prevalent (reported by 71.4% of perpetrators), followed by exclusion from online groups (58.3%), denigration (posting harmful content about a person) (52.8%), and impersonation (creating fake accounts) (31.9%).

Gender differences were evident, with male students reporting significantly higher perpetration rates than females (23.7% vs. 14.2%, $\chi^2(1) = 7.84$, $p = 0.005$), while female students reported marginally higher victimization rates (14.8% vs. 10.2%), consistent with patterns documented by Barlett and Coyne (2014) [13] in their meta-analysis of gender differences in cyberbullying. Internet usage duration was positively correlated with cyberbullying perpetration ($r = 0.347$, $p < 0.001$) and victimization ($r = 0.289$, $p < 0.001$), replicating findings by

Festl and Quandt (2013) [14] on the dose response relationship between digital exposure and cyberbullying risk.

Teacher-Student Relationship (TSR) Quality, Cyberbullying, and Mechanism of TSR Protection: Qualitative Insight

Structural equation modeling demonstrated adequate fit for the proposed model ($\chi^2/df = 2.34$, CFI = 0.936, TLI = 0.921, RMSEA = 0.059, SRMR = 0.052). TSR Closeness was the strongest negative predictor of both cyberbullying perpetration ($\beta = -0.471$, SE = 0.063, $p < 0.001$) and victimization ($\beta = -0.389$, SE = 0.071, $p < 0.001$), explaining 22.2% and 15.1% of variance in these outcomes respectively, after controlling for age, gender, internet usage, and parental monitoring. TSR Conflict was a significant positive predictor of perpetration ($\beta = 0.312$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that adversarial teacher-student relationships were associated with increased cyberbullying aggression. The Digital Mentorship subscale demonstrated a significant unique negative association with perpetration ($\beta = -0.218$, $p = 0.003$) and victimization ($\beta = -0.174$, $p = 0.021$), above and beyond the effects of general TSR quality, suggesting that teachers' specific engagement with students' digital lives constitutes a distinct protective mechanism.

These findings converge with and extend the foundational work of Deci and Ryan's (2000) [15] Self Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence is fundamental to adaptive self regulation and prosocial behavioral orientation. Within the SDT framework, high quality teacher-student relationships serve as primary sources of need relatedness satisfaction within the school context, thereby supporting the internalization of prosocial values and behavioral norms including those governing online conduct. Students whose need for relatedness is satisfied through meaningful teacher connections may be less motivated to engage in the social dominance and status seeking behaviors that frequently drive cyberbullying perpetration, as documented by Volk et al. (2014) [16] in their evolutionary framework of bullying.

The specific predictive strength of the TSR Closeness dimension over Conflict and Dependency subscales aligns with Hamre and Pianta's (2006) [17] theoretical model distinguishing the unique contributions of emotional support, instructional support, and classroom organization to student development. The Closeness dimension capturing warmth, trust, and open communication appears to function as a 'safe base' from which students can

navigate social challenges, including those encountered in digital environments. This conceptualization resonates with attachment theory applications to teacher-student relationships, wherein teachers who provide secure attachment representations enable students to approach threatening social situations with greater regulatory capacity and prosocial orientation (Verschuere & Koomen, 2012) [18].

Thematic analysis of qualitative data generated five primary themes describing the mechanisms through which teacher-student relationships minimize cyberbullying involvement: (1) Emotional Containment and Validation; (2) Digital Behavior Socialization; (3) Trust as a Help Seeking Enabler; (4) Moral Norm Transmission; and (5) Early Identification and Responsive Intervention.

The theme of Emotional Containment and Validation described how teachers who demonstrated consistent empathic responsiveness to students' emotional states created relational conditions that reduced the emotional dysregulation commonly implicated in cyberbullying perpetration. Multiple perpetrator-identified participants described how unmanaged anger, social rejection, or feelings of inadequacy served as proximal antecedents of aggressive online behaviors, and how conversations with empathically attuned teachers provided regulatory relief that disrupted this behavioral pathway. A male ninth-grade participant articulated this mechanism: "When I'm angry at someone, usually I want to say something bad online. But if I've talked to my teacher and she understood what I felt, I don't need to do that anymore." This mechanism corresponds to theoretical accounts of emotional regulation as a mediator between social relationships and aggressive behavior proposed by Kowalski et al. (2014) [1].

Digital Behavior Socialization emerged as a theme describing teachers active role in shaping students digital behavioral norms through direct guidance, modeling, and dialogue. Teachers who explicitly discussed appropriate online conduct, illustrated the real world consequences of cyberbullying through case examples, and invited students' perspectives on digital ethics were perceived by students as credible digital mentors whose guidance influenced online decision making. This finding extends research by Hinduja and Patchin (2018) [19] on the importance of adult digital guidance for adolescent online safety, suggesting that the relational quality of the teacher student dyad significantly amplifies the effectiveness of such guidance.

Trust as a Help Seeking Enabler described how students trust in specific

teachers enabled disclosure of cyberbullying victimization that would otherwise remain unreported. A persistent barrier to cyberbullying intervention is victim silence, driven by fear of retaliation, adult misunderstanding, or loss of digital privileges. Participants who had disclosed cyberbullying experiences to teachers consistently attributed their willingness to report to the perception that the teacher genuinely cared about their wellbeing and would respond helpfully rather than punitively. This finding reinforces the critical role of approachability and non-judgmental responsiveness in teacher-student relationships for enabling early intervention, consistent with findings by Cassidy et al. (2012) [20] on barriers and facilitators to cyberbullying disclosure.

Moral Norm Transmission captured the process through which students' identification with respected teachers facilitated the internalization of prosocial values that extended to online behavior. Students who expressed strong relational identification with specific teachers described consciously referencing their internalized image of the teacher's ethical standards when navigating online social situations. This mechanism is theoretically grounded in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) [21] and its contemporary extensions to digital behavior formation, wherein admired adult figures serve as behavioral models whose observed and communicated standards are internalized as self regulatory guides.

Finally, Early Identification and Responsive Intervention described teachers capacity to detect early warning signs of cyberbullying involvement through attuned relational knowledge of individual students. Teachers with close, trusting relationships reported greater ability to notice behavioral changes increased social withdrawal, mood deterioration, or changes in peer interactions that signaled cyberbullying victimization. This early detection capability, enabled by relational closeness, allowed for more timely and appropriately tailored interventions than could be achieved through formal reporting mechanisms alone.

Moderating Factors and Cultural Dimensions of TSR Protection Against Cyberbullying

Moderated regression analyses revealed that school climate significantly moderated the TSR cyberbullying perpetration relationship (β interaction = -0.193, $p = 0.012$). Specifically, the protective effect of positive TSR on cyberbullying perpetration was stronger in schools characterized by positive

climate (defined by safety, social inclusion, and respectful norms) than in schools with negative climate profiles. This moderation effect suggests that TSR operates most effectively as a preventive resource when embedded within a supportive institutional ecology, consistent with ecological perspectives on school bullying proposed by Swearer and Espelage (2011) [22], who emphasize the interdependence of individual, classroom, school, and community-level factors in shaping bullying dynamics.

Peer group belonging also moderated the TSR victimization relationship (β interaction = -0.167, $p = 0.034$), with students reporting low peer belonging showing stronger TSR protective effects against victimization than those with high peer belonging. This differential moderation pattern suggests that for socially marginalized students who are at heightened cyberbullying victimization risk due to limited peer social support teacher relationships assume particular compensatory protective significance, functioning as a primary social buffer in the absence of robust peer support networks. This finding aligns with the social buffering hypothesis in stress research (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and its educational applications articulated by Roorda et al. (2011) [23] in their meta-analysis of TSR effects on student engagement and achievement.

The qualitative data revealed culturally specific dimensions of the TSR cyberbullying relationship that nuance the quantitative findings. Indonesian teachers in the sample frequently described their roles in relation to cyberbullying in terms of *pengasuhan* (nurturant care) and *keteladanan* (exemplary moral modeling), concepts rooted in Indonesian educational philosophy that conceive of the teacher role as extending beyond academic instruction to encompass holistic character development. Students, correspondingly, described particularly strong deterrent effects from teachers they perceived as embodying moral authority through character consistency, not merely through formal role authority.

The collectivist cultural orientation of the student population also shaped the relational mechanisms through which TSR protective effects operated. Several participants described cyberbullying decision making as strongly influenced by considerations of group approval and face saving, with teacher conferred social status and recognition functioning as powerful motivators for conformity to anti cyberbullying norms. In this cultural context, teachers public acknowledgment of prosocial online behavior and their visible disapproval of cyberbullying within classroom communities carried

particular preventive weight, mediated through the collective social currency of teacher approval. These culturally specific mechanisms extend the predominantly individualistic frameworks that have characterized Western TSR research (Hendrickx et al., 2016) [24] and highlight the importance of culturally informed approaches to relationship centered anti cyberbullying programs.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The convergent findings from both research strands carry substantial implications for school based cyberbullying prevention policy and teacher professional development. First, the demonstration that TSR quality is a robust predictor of cyberbullying involvement independent of internet usage and parental monitoring argues for the systematic integration of relationship-building competencies into teacher professional standards and pre service education curricula. Teacher education programs should equip prospective teachers with evidence based relational skills including empathic listening, culturally responsive communication, digital mentorship competencies, and restorative approaches to conflict, which have been identified as core components of effective TSR for cyberbullying prevention.

Second, the identification of Digital Mentorship as a distinct protective TSR dimension suggests that school based cyberbullying prevention frameworks should move beyond digital literacy curricula delivered in isolation toward models that embed digital guidance within ongoing teacher-student relational contexts. Teachers engagement with students digital experiences not merely their formal instruction about digital safety appears to constitute a substantively distinct and meaningful protective resource. School based intervention programs should therefore support teachers in integrating discussions of online ethics, digital wellbeing, and cyberbullying consequences into their ongoing relational interactions with students, rather than relegating these topics to discrete instructional events.

Third, the moderation findings indicating that TSR protective effects are amplified within positive school climates argue for whole school anti cyberbullying approaches that simultaneously attend to building relational quality at the dyadic teacher-student level and cultivating inclusive, respectful social norms at the school community level. The KiVa School antibullying program developed in Finland (Salmivalli et al., 2011) [25] provides a model for such multilevel intervention that could be adapted for the Indonesian cultural and institutional context, incorporating culturally specific elements

such as the *keteladanan* principle of teacher moral exemplarity and *gotong royong* frameworks for collective responsibility in creating safe online environments.

Fourth, the finding that socially marginalized students with low peer belonging derive particularly strong protective benefits from positive TSR against cyberbullying victimization has important equity implications. Anti cyberbullying policies should prioritize resources for strengthening teacher-student relational quality with identified high risk students, including those who are socially isolated, academically struggling, or members of stigmatized groups. Guidance counselors and homeroom teachers in Indonesian schools are particularly well-positioned to develop targeted relational support for at risk students, given their structured roles in student welfare monitoring.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has provided comprehensive empirical evidence for the significant protective role of teacher-student relationship quality in minimizing cyberbullying perpetration and victimization among Indonesian middle and high school students. Across quantitative and qualitative findings, teacher-student relationships emerged as a robust, multidimensional preventive resource operating through distinct mechanisms including emotional containment, digital behavior socialization, trust enabled help seeking, moral norm transmission, and early identification of at risk students.

Three principal conclusions are advanced. First, the quality of teacher-student relationships particularly the dimensions of closeness, trust based communication, and digital mentorship constitutes a significant and practically meaningful protective factor against cyberbullying involvement among adolescents, exerting effects that are statistically significant and educationally substantial independent of established risk factors such as internet usage and parental monitoring. Second, the mechanisms through which TSR protection operates are qualitatively diverse and culturally situated, with Indonesian contextual factors including collectivist values, *keteladanan* traditions, and teacher moral authority shaping the specific pathways through which relational quality influences online behavior. Third, TSR protective effects are moderated by school level ecological factors, particularly school climate and peer belonging, highlighting the importance of multilevel ecological approaches to cyberbullying prevention that simultaneously strengthen individual teacher-student bonds and cultivate positive school community norms.

For Indonesian educational policymakers and school leaders, these findings argue for the repositioning of teacher-student relational quality from a peripheral soft skill consideration to a central priority within school based cyberbullying prevention systems. Investments in teacher professional development for relational competency, structural supports for meaningful teacher-student interaction time, and school climate improvement initiatives should be regarded as evidence based anti cyberbullying interventions, not merely general educational quality measures. Future research should examine the longitudinal sustainability of TSR protective effects, investigate the specific teacher training components that most effectively build digital mentorship competencies, and conduct randomized controlled trials of relationship centered anti cyberbullying intervention programs within Indonesian school contexts.

Several limitations of the present study merit acknowledgment. The cross sectional design limits causal inference, and the reliance on self reported cyberbullying data may introduce recall and social desirability biases. The confinement of the study to East Java schools limits geographical generalizability, and the absence of direct behavioral observation data represents a methodological constraint. Nonetheless, the study's convergent mixed methods design, validated instrumentation, and culturally embedded qualitative analysis collectively represent a methodological advance over prior single method investigations of TSR and cyberbullying in Indonesian educational contexts.

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