

The Effects of Group Study Activities on the Reduction of Bullying Behaviors among Islamic Private School Students in Songkhla Province

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to explore the effects of group study activities on the reduction of bullying behaviors among Islamic private school students in Songkhla Province. This experimental study was conducted with 200 students divided into two groups: 100 students in the experimental group and the other 100 students in the control group. They were selected through simple random sampling. The experimental group participated in group study activities while the control group participated in religious activities of their schools. The study employed a true experimental pretest-posttest design. The data collecting instrument was a risk bullying behavior screening form, and the data were analyzed by finding the mean, standard deviation, and using a t-test.

The results of the study revealed that students who participated in group study activities and those participated in school religious activities were not different in their bullying behaviors. The students participating in group study activities had statistically less bullying behaviors than those participating in Islamic religious activities.

Keywords: group study activities, school religious activities, students, bullying behavior, Islamic private schools

1. Introduction

Bullying behaviors among students are considered a serious and worrying problem for not only students but also parents, guardians, teachers and educational personnel. It is also a problem that affects students who bully others and students who are bullied. Bullied students are usually injured physically and psychologically; they are suffered, afraid, frightened and dare not go to school, or resign from school, carry weapon for self-defense or for taking revenge (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Craig, 1998). They are mad, insomnia, talk in their sleep or have nightmares (Kalitjala-Heino & Rimpela, 1999), and these feelings become scars that remain in their memory until they are grown up (Rigby, 1996). Students who bully others usually do it for fun, to get attention, and to show power (Besag, 1989). They tend to have aggressive behaviors in society and in their family such as quarrels and fights with their spouse and family members and punish their children severely, etc. (Laeheem, Kuning, McNeil, & Besag, 2008; Laeheem, Kuning, & McNeil, 2009). They also tend to commit serious crimes such as quarrels, brawls, injuring others physically, and being hired as a gunman, etc. (Farrington, 1993; Marano, 1995; Junger-Tas, 1996). Nevertheless, bullying behavior in schools, even though happens widely and affects children severely, society usually overlooks and takes it as normal or as part of normal behaviors among children. Therefore, people do not pay attention to it, and do not try to solve the problem as much as they should (Tapanya, 2006; Laeheem, Kuning, & McNeil, 2009).

Bullying behaviors are behavioral expressions of students who are stronger or belong to a group with more members. They usually physically bully weaker students or physically impaired students and students who belong to a group with less members. They injure others physically, emotionally, and psychologically. As it is said that bullying behavior is behavior of roguish children who begin their misbehavior by unfairly controlling others physically, emotionally, and psychologically; such misbehaviors are undesirable, pungent, alarming, scary and hurtful (Coloroso, 2004; Astor et. al., 2005). These are parts of behavior of people who have abnormal mind, like to annoy other people and cause troubles to people around them physically, mentally, emotionally, and psychologically (Beane, 2003). They are behaviors of students who are physically larger, stronger, and are not good at studying but like to bully students who are smaller, weaker but better at studying and have no way to

fight back or to protect themselves (Preble, 2003). They also threaten, agitate, mimic, condemn, and harm others. These behaviors are disgusting behaviors expressed by students who violate rules and regulations as well as deviate from social norms (Adams, 2003).

From a study on the prevalence of bullying behaviors among Islamic private school students and Thai Muslim youth, it was found that bullying behavior among Islamic private school students in Songkhla Province was at a moderate level (Laeheem & Sungkharat, 2012a) which is the same level as that among Islamic private school students in Pattani Province (Laeheem, 2013). It was also found that 22.3 percent of Thai Muslim youth in the three southern border provinces had aggressive behaviors (Laeheem & Baka, 2011); 20.7 percent of the youth had violent behaviors (Laeheem & Baka, 2009); youth had violent behaviors because of being insulted and wanting to take revenge by using three-inch rods or wooden rods as weapons resulting in severe injuries on the opponents who had to be hospitalized (Laeheem & Baka, 2012); and 23.0 percent of students in Pattani Province were found to have bullying behaviors (Laeheem, Kuning, & McNeil, 2009). This indicates that bullying behaviors among Islamic private school students is a worrying problem that all related personnel and organizations must attach importance and pay special attention to solving in order to help and improve students' behaviors to prevent the problem from becoming more violent. In Thailand, there have not been concrete studies about how to reduce or stop bullying behaviors among students. Most studies have been about reducing aggressive behaviors by training students to do Hatha yoga (Sonchan, 1999), play Thai classical music, self-control (Comwatjanung, 2001), learn about learning techniques from the Kama of the role models (Kriangsri, 2004), and group advisory techniques (Tragulsuppachai, 2004), etc. However, in other countries, there have been many studies on how to correct bullying behaviors. Some of the example are: Participant role approach to school bullying: Implications for interventions (Salmivalli, 1999), The Seville anti-bullying in school project (Ortega & Lera, 2000), Olweus' core program against bullying and antisocial behavior: A teacher handbook (Olweus, 2001), Bullying prevention program: Excerpted from time to act and time to react (Evers, 2010), etc. All these studies found that students in the experimental groups had significantly less bullying behaviors.

The researcher, therefore, became interested to investigate the effects of group study activities on reduction of bullying behaviors among Islamic private school students in Songkhla Province by exploring whether or not and how participation in group study activities could reduce bullying behaviors among students participating in such activities. The results of this study would be useful for all related parties to utilize in preventing and reducing bullying behaviors among students before the problem becomes more severe and turns into social problems in addition to helping each other to timely solve the problem.

2. Hypothesis

The students participating in group study activities had statistically less bullying behaviors than those participating in Islamic religious activities.

3. Methods

3.1 Subject Group

The subjects of this study were 200 Islamic private school students in Songkhla Province studying in the second semester of the academic year 2011. Twenty subjects were recruited from each of the 10 target schools that participated in the project from the first year to the second year of the program. These students had high scores on doing the risk bullying behavior screening test. The 20 students from each target school were divided into two groups of 10 using a simple random sampling method by drawing lots, for the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group participated in group study activities while the control group participated in Islamic religious activities organized by their schools.

3.2 Research Instruments and Instrument Development

1) A risk bullying behavior screening form for Islamic private school students in Songkhla Province was developed by the researcher from the first year of the project. The screening form consisted of two sets with different types of questions. Set 1 consisted of 26 question items asking about the student's behavior in different situations or circumstances such as when I quarrel with my classmates, it usually ends up with boxing, and I would ask my friends to go with me to physically hurt the person that I don't like or that I get angry with, etc. Set 2 consisted of 28 question items asking whether or not the student has displayed or has had that behavior and how often has he/she done it such as kicking, punching, teasing, etc. The two sets of the screening form had the same process of development. The students with risk bullying behaviors were students who were classified by both of the two sets of the screening form to have risk bullying behaviors (Laeheem, & Sungkharat, 2012b).

2) The group study activities that were used to change and to reduce bullying behaviors were developed through

brainstorming meetings and improved from group activities developed by Chatsupakul (2003) Wattanapong (2005) and Ritnetikul (2009). After that, a critique meeting was held to assess and consider the characteristics, types, and contents of the group study activities so that they were clear, effective and integrated with Islamic principles and concepts. The group study activities were used in the experiment that lasted 15 weeks, in each week the activities were organized two times, and lasting 60 minutes each time, totaling 30 times altogether.

3) The Islamic religious activities organized by the schools were ways to change and reduce bullying behaviors as designated by the schools. All the ten schools used the same activities, namely, warning and advising words activities after praying, weekly listening to religious teaching, participating in the monthly Kiyamullai activities (the students stayed overnight at a mosque and woke up at around 2.00 a.m. to do activities together such as thinking or considering about sin that they had done and asking Allah to forgive, and praying Kiyamullai, etc.). These activities lasted 15 weeks.

3.3 The Experiment

This study is true experimental research assigning the experimental group to participate in group study activities, and the control group to participate in Islamic religious activities. The operations of the two groups were true experiments with the pretest-posttest design (Campbell & Rosso, 1999).

3.4 The Data Collection

1) A pre-test was given to the experimental and control groups to measure the level of bullying behaviors before participation in group study activities and Islamic religious activities. For this pre-test, the risk bullying behavior screening form was used. Then the pre-test papers were marked.

2) The group study activities were held according to plan for the experimental group. Teachers who had been trained on group study activity techniques and who were research assistants ran these activities. The researcher was an observer; however, sometimes the researcher also participated in the activities. The experiment lasted 15 weeks. The activities were held two times a week and 60 minutes for each time of the total of 30 times. The activities were held every Monday and Thursday evenings (after Asri praying which is an evening praying after school). The control group participated in Islamic religious activities planned and organized by the schools for 15 weeks.

3) A post-test was given to the subjects of both the experiment and the control groups to measure the levels of their bullying behaviors after the participation in the group study activities and the Islamic religious activities. The post-test using the risk bullying behavior screening form was given about four months after the experiment ended (because the question items in the screening form asked about the subjects' behaviors six months before the test date).

3.5 Protection of the Subjects

The researcher took into consideration the rights of the subjects in terms of their consent and their rights as well as their parents or guardians' consent and rights. Thus, letters of permission request was made to directors of the schools and letters of consent request were sent to the schools and parents or guardians of the subjects. In the letters, the researcher introduced himself, informed the schools and parents about the objectives of the research, and gave explanation about the type, characteristics, and contents of the group study activities, the dates and time of the activities so that the students understand before voluntarily participated in the activities. The emphasis was placed on participation from the beginning to the end of the experiment. Moreover, emphasis was also placed on the following: the fact that the information obtained from the experiment was to be kept confidential; that information and data obtained from the experiment would be presented as an overall results; all the real names and surnames would be kept unrevealed; and the subjects were free to withdraw from the research project any time before it was ended without them having to give any information or explanation.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the R program to analyze descriptive data by finding arithmetic mean and standard deviation, comparing the differences in bullying behaviors between the experimental group and the control group using independent samples t-test, and comparing differences in bullying behaviors of the experimental group between before and after participating in the group study activities using paired samples t-test.

3.7 Criteria for Interpretation of the Average Values

The researcher used the criteria for interpretation of the average values according to the concept of Laeheim (2010) where "0.00-0.49" means the least; "0.50-1.49" means a little; "1.50-2.49" means moderate; "2.50-3.49" means much; and "3.50-4.00" means the most.

4. Results and Discussion

In this research, students with bullying behaviors participated in the group study activities sitting in a circle to study together and to help each other reduce bullying behaviors emphasizing knowledge about Islam to socialize their mind, teach themselves, and exchange knowledge among themselves. The objectives of doing this were to understand, remind and change students' behaviors using religious principles as the main process. This was in accordance to the theory that says group study management is a process of transferring knowledge, thought, attitude, ideology, culture, and personality; and it is a process that makes people behave and lead their life the way the society desires (Popenoe, 1993); and changes people's behaviors to be in accordance with social norms (Adivatanasit, 2002; Thitiwattana, 2004). It is a process that is necessary and very useful to society as it is a process that enables members to be disciplined and to behave according to social norms and to live with others happily. Moreover, it gives members inspiration, ideology, attitude and belief to have unity and makes society progress, and it also builds knowledge and skills necessary for living in society (Adivatanasit, 2002; Thitiwattana, 2004). Religious principles are regarded as an important factor influencing youth's behavior because it is a process that gives knowledge, trains, and socializes them. Religious principles and teachings socialize youth and render themselves as something to which youth can hold on mentally when they believe and practice according to religious morality and ethics that teach them right from wrong (Thepsitha, 1998). Socialization in Islam is mostly conducted by providing knowledge, understanding, experience or skills about the teachings; it is a process that trains and cultivate to provide man with a high level of intelligence and soul that lead to developing them socially, physically, emotionally and intelligently so that they are good members who have moral, ethics, and good discipline in their living (Mahama, 2009; Narongraksakhet, 1997). Furthermore, a socialization process in Islam aims for humans to seek Allah's favor for their lives in the future to meet the needs of society and to develop their behavior, personality and character in line with the religious principles so that they can live in society peacefully and happily (Mahama, 2009). Therefore, the more we can lead youth to be attached to the religious institution, the more we can control their behavior to be the way expected by society and in accordance with Islamic principles.

In this study, a risk bullying behavior screening form for students that the researcher had developed to screen students participating in this study was used in 10 schools to screen for 20 students from each school. The twenty students were then divided into two groups of ten. One group was a control group whose bullying behavior was to be reduced using the normal method of the school. The other group was an experimental group whose bullying behavior was to be reduced by group study activities. The students in the experimental group were those who were willing to participate in the group study activities run by teachers of the school. (These teachers were research assistants who had been trained about group study activities techniques.) The author was an observer and sometimes participated in the group study activities. The entire experiment lasted 15 weeks; in each week the group study activity was held twice; each time the activity lasted 60 minutes. Thus, the group study activities were held 30 times altogether. The group study activities were held every Monday and Thursday evening after the Asri praying which took place after school while the control group participated in religious activities as designated by all the ten schools, and the activities were all the same in all the ten schools. These activities were: warning and advising words activities after praying, weekly listening to religious teaching, participating in the monthly Kiyamullai activities (the students stayed overnight at a mosque and woke up at around 2.00 a.m. to do activities together such as thinking or considering about sin that they had done and asking Allah to forgive, and praying Kiyamullai, etc.) The activities were run for 15 weeks.

Before participating in the project, the students answered questions in the risk bullying behavior screening form. It was found that the students in both the control group and experimental group were not different in their bullying behaviors. However, when considering the mean scores, it was found that students in the control group had a little higher level of bullying behavior than the students in the experimental group. That is, the students in the control group had the highest level of bullying behavior (mean=3.64), and the students in the experimental group also had the highest level of bullying behavior (mean=3.60), (see Table 1). However, after the experiment using group study activities and Islamic religious activities according to the school plan for about four months, the students in both the control and the experimental groups answered the questions on the risk bullying behavior screening form again (because the form consisted of questions asking about their behaviors six months before this test date). The results were that bullying behaviors among Islamic private school students in Songkhla Province who were in the control and the experimental groups were significantly different at .001. The students who participated in the group study activities had less bullying behaviors than those students who participated in the Islamic religious activities. The students participating in the group study activities had a low level of bullying behaviors (mean=1.84) while those participating in the Islamic religious activities had a moderate level of

bullying behaviors (mean=2.68), (see Table 2). Moreover, the level of bullying behaviors of the students participating in the group study activities after their participation in the activities was statistically lower than that before their participation in the activities at .001 (see Table 3).

Table 1. Comparisons bullying behavior between control group and experimental group; before participating in the project

Group	Mean Score	S.D.	n	t-test	p-value
Experimental group	3.64	0.26	100	1.458	0.147
Control group	3.60	0.19	100		

P> .05

Table 2. Comparisons bullying behavior between control group and experimental group; after participating in the project

Group	Mean Score	S.D.	n	t-test	p-value
Experimental group	2.68	0.26	100	16.929***	0.000
Control group	1.84	0.42	100		

***P< .001

Table 3. Comparisons bullying behavior of experimental group between before and after participating in the project

Experimental group	Mean Score	S.D.	n	t-test	p-value
Before participating	3.59	0.19	100	62.421***	0.000
After participating	1.84	0.42	100		

***P< .001

The results of the study indicated that using group study activities and Islamic religious activities held by the schools could reduce bullying behaviors among students. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that using group study activities could reduce the problem of bullying behavior more than using the normal method used by the schools. Thus, this confirms that using group study activities can actually solve the problem and can solve the problem better. Furthermore, using group activities can reduce bullying behaviors better than the normal method used by the schools. This is because group study activities make use of a process where students with bullying behaviors can see the effects of bullying others and understand the sin according to Islamic principles in addition to using the religious technique of Hallakah as the main way of correcting bullying behavior. In this technique, religious knowledge and principles are discussed and exchanged among group members (Abu Ibanah, n. d.; Al-bulyan, n. d.). This corresponds with the aim of organizing group study activities that requires participants to analyze their own behaviors and other participants' behaviors in order to apply the results of the analysis in developing and changing their attitudes to be in a desirable way. The emphasis of doing this is on the process of enhancing their skills and putting them into real practice as it is said that group study activities make behavioral changes in the way that is needed to meet the goal that has been set (Amarin, 2000). Group study activities are a way of organizing experience and implementing it together in order to solve the problem by acquiring skills and self-learning to apply in self-development as well as in changing people's own attitude and behavior (Khemmanee, 2002; Lhamlert, 2009; Ritnetikul, 2009).

Furthermore, the group study activities enable students who participate in them understand the feeling and the effects on students who are bullied and those who bully others, and as a result, they change their attitude and behavior as it is said that group study activities enable participants to be aware, understand, and realize their own feeling and others' feeling more, and enable them to be able to control themselves, change their attitude and behavior as set in the goal (Roger, 1970). Organizing group study activities also enhance development in terms of emotion, society, attitude, character, personality and behavior; participants learn how to behave themselves in society, control their emotional expression, respect others, adapt themselves to other group members, and display suitable behaviors (Chatsupakul, 2003). Moreover, group study activities enable participants to have social skills,

outspoken, rid of internal conflict, self-control, know when and how to be a giver or a taker, be responsible for their own duty, know their own rights and others' rights, and adapt to others (Nelson-Jone, 1992). Group study activities reinforce discipline, morality, ethics and values that are socially acceptable, are practiced according to the rules, and help solving their own problem (Department of Mental Health, 2000).

Organizing group study activities is a method and a process to instill awareness of good thinking through socialization and to instill good awareness according to the Islamic way of life. That is a process that promotes students to know what is right or wrong, what is proper or improper, and promotes students to be ashamed of their sins or bad doings or wrong doings morally and deviating from social norms. This is in accordance with the concept that a process of socialization of mind and self-awareness can influence individuals' behavioral development so that they become socially desirable. It is a process that trains people about social organization to instill in them discipline and life expectations that are acceptable to the group and to increase their life skills (Broom & Selznick, 1981; Cohen & Orbach, 1990; Thitiwattana, 2004; Sereetrakul, 2009). It is a process that applies Islamic principles in building knowledge and understanding as well as realization for students who participate in group study activities. Every Muslim must be aware and realize at all time that studying Islamic principles is an obligation for Muslims to know and understand the principles of faith, practice, morality and ethics. They are to hold on to these principles as the system of life to be prosperous in knowledge, skill, process, continuous good attitude, and to be able to practice in their daily life correctly. The purposes are to have self-development to be perfect humans according to Islamic principle, beliefs, and methods that emphasize humans to possess good characters, values, attitudes, behaviors, and religious practice in their daily life (Narongraksakhet, 1997; Mahama, 2009). Knowledge and understanding of Islamic principles are important for Muslim youth as they can protect themselves from problems because knowledge can help them not to be misled by the environments and social currents, and makes Muslim youth polite and humble, and lead their life in accordance with the frame set by Islam (Laeheem & Baka, 2010). Individuals who have the right behavior according to social ethics are all influenced by their knowledge and understanding, acceptance of social values and norms (Thitiwattana, 2004; Sereetrakul, 2009). Muslim youth whose behaviors are in accordance with social norms and Islamic principles are usually Muslim youth who have knowledge and understanding of Islamic teachings and strictly practice religious activities, are instilled with Islamic morality and ethics, and have been trained with a personality development process and morality specified by Islam (Khagphong, 2004; Mahama, 2009). The level of knowledge about the religion, the level of upbringing the Islamic way, participation in Islamic religious activities, and participation in training about Islam have significant relationships with Islamic behaviors. Thai Muslim youth who behave according to the Islamic way in a higher proportion than other groups are: the group of youth who have knowledge of Islam at a high level, the group of youth who have been brought up in the Islamic way at a high level, and the group of youth who have regularly been trained about Islam (Laeheem, 2013). Moreover, promotion for youth to have opportunities to participate in potentiality development activities with emphasis on Islamic morality and ethics can prevent and correct the problem of aggressive behavior among youth in the three southern border provinces (Laeheem & Baka, 2012).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Organizing group study activities is a method that can prevent and reduce bullying behaviors among students. It is a systematic operation that requires cooperation from all related parties. It is also a solution to unsuitable behavior that utilizes various methods and is systematically operated to enable students to be trained correctly. Group study activities provide behavior of a good role model, incorporate Islamic principles and Islamic ethics that attach importance to the socialization process of the mind, emotion, intelligence, and the soul of Islam. This is because bullying behavior among students is partly a result of the connection between children and society that has been weakened or broken. Therefore, connections in terms of feeling of attachment, dedication, and belief should be employed in solving the problem. That is to say feeling of attachment or feeling of right or wrong which is feeling that takes into account benefits of the public more than personal benefits can reduce opportunities or stop individuals from doing wrongs.

The results of this study can be useful as one of the methods of solving, preventing and reducing the problem of bullying behaviors among students. Therefore, related personnel and organizations should use the program to concretely solve the problem of bullying behaviors among students as one theory states that the more the students are attached and hold on to the religious principles, the more they can stop their wrong doings.

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