



A Systematic Review: What's Kindness in School and How to Grow It?

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Abstract. Cases of bullying are still high in schools even after implementing moral lessons to teach students about being kind to others. This phenomenon shows that further studies on the concept of kindness are still needed, especially in the school environment. A deep understanding of the concept of kindness in schools can help schools to develop appropriate programs or interventions to improve student kindness in schools. The purpose of this research is to understand the concept of kindness in school. A systematic review has been carried out to gain a better understanding of the concept of kindness in schools. This research examines 150 articles collected from 3 databases (Google Scholar, Science direct, and Ebsco). A total of 26 relevant articles were used for review after the selection process based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Finally, 4 themes emerged after reviewing relevant articles about kindness in school, namely definitions, concepts, impacts, and interventions that can be applied in schools. Kindness in school means activities performed by a person to help others and show respect, which can impact students and teachers at school. Teachers can increase the kindness of students by reading out folklore, illustrated storybooks, acts of kindness, intentional acts of kindness, counting kindness, and loving-kindness meditation.

Keywords: Kindness · Kindness in School · Systematic Review

1 Introduction

Cases of bullying are still frequent in schools. Based on data from KPAI (Indonesian Child Protection Commission), there were 37,381 reports of bullying and 2,473 cases allegedly occurring in the world of education reported from 2011 to 2019. Meanwhile, according to data from the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in the 2018 Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) research, it shows that 41.1% of students in Indonesia have experienced bullying [1]. Cases of bullying that occur in schools demonstrate that some students are still unable to treat their classmates with kindness.

Kindness is defined as a series of behaviors and speech that can favor personal development as well as healthy relationships characterized by the presence of respect, understanding, and emotional support [2]. Kindness also represents emotions, cognitions, and circumstances within the self that bring a certain tenderness and generosity

[3]. Furthermore, applying moral lessons, such as character education, is one of the efforts undertaken to foster student kindness. Character education aims to instill good morals and character in students resulting in students showing good behavior [4]. Although character education has been applied, bullying is still experienced by many students in Indonesia. This shows that kindness has not been applied by all students even though they have received character education.

Given this phenomenon, a greater knowledge of kindness is needed, particularly in the educational setting. In addition to incorporating current character education, a deeper understanding of kindness might give important information for schools to build programs or treatments that can increase students' kindness. Therefore, systematic reviews were carried out to gain a deep understanding of kindness in schools.

2 Method

A qualitative systematic review was carried out to gain a deep understanding of kindness in schools. Furthermore, some scientific articles have been collected from several databases such as Google Scholar, Science Direct, and Ebsco. Several keywords were used in the article collection process, including "school kindness", "kindness at school", "kindness in school", "student kindness", and "teacher kindness".

After the articles were collected, some of them were chosen based on the relevance of the research theme. File selection was done by taking into account the inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria that have been determined. The inclusion criteria in this study were files from full-text articles published from 1970 to 2022, passed the peer-reviewed stage, based on original research, and discussed kindness in schools. Exclusion criteria in this study were files that were from book chapters, theses, or conference articles and not in the form of full-text, files that were from articles of meta-analysis or systematic reviews, and files that only discussed kindness but not kindness in schools.

3 Findings

150 articles have been collected from three databases namely Google Scholar, Science Direct, and Ebsco. Following the file selection procedure that took into consideration inclusion and exclusion criteria, 26 papers relevant to the study were gathered. Those articles were further analyzed to gain a comprehensive grasp of kindness in schools. Following the analytical process, four themes arise in explaining kindness in schools: definitions, concepts, impacts, and kindness interventions that may be used in schools. The results of the systematic review analysis are summarized below:

3.1 Definition

Kindness in schools can be described in a variety of ways, ranging from broad to narrow. A basic definition focuses on an activity performed by a person to help others. For example, the definition conveyed by Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui & Fredrickson focused on an action that a person performs for another person [5]. Baldwin & Baldwin

focused on one's motivation to give others an advantage [6]. Layous, Nelson, Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, & Lyubomirsky focused on activities that support positive relationships [7].

More complex definitions begin to include an element of priority in the interests of others and an emphasis on not expecting benefits from a given action [8], as well as self-development and healthy relationships with some indicators such as respect, understanding, and emotional support [2]. In a more specific definition, the definition is viewed from the perspective of students and teachers. From the student's perspective, kindness is defined as an act that builds relationships with others in the presence of emotional support and physical support [9]. Meanwhile, in the teacher's perception, kindness is defined in more detail in the form of caring for others, showing empathy, respecting others, helping, and strengthening others [10].

According to the definition that has been conveyed, kindness in school can be defined as a motivation to behave well in others even if it does not benefit from the good deeds done to help personal development, build and improve healthy and positive relationships with others that are characterized by the presence of social, emotional, caring, empathy, respect, strengthening, and the ability to understand.

3.2 Concept

In concept, Binnet & Enns stated that there are three types of kindness by students, namely random act (spontaneous kindness done to others), intentional act (kindness that is planned to be done), and quiet kindness (a silent kindness that is often only realized by the person who does) [11]. Meanwhile, there are differences in assessing kindness between children and adult students. Younger children perceive kindness differently than adults, however as they grew older, the judgment of kindness has grown to be similar to that of adults [6]. In school, girls feel more kindness than boys, with the largest kindness felt in grade 4 and the least kindness felt in grade 8 [12]. Some of the themes that emerge when characterizing student kindness are maintaining friendship bonds, physically helping others, and showing respect. Meanwhile, when it comes to teacher kindness, students view teaching and physically assisting others as forms of teacher kindness [13]. One of the factors deemed significant in shaping the personality of the student and the interaction between the student and the instructor is the teacher's kindness [9]. Students also believe that teachers and principals are the greatest agents of kindness and that classrooms and playgrounds are the most important places to do kindness [14].

3.3 Impact

Kindness in schools has some impact on students and teachers. It also has a relationship with school attachment [15], academic engagement (agentic, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement) [16], psychological and emotional well-being [17], and school belonging [18]. Furthermore, there were some experiments conducted by Layous, Nelson, Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, & Lyubomirsky which showed that the group of students who said three acts of kindness might boost life satisfaction, happiness, and positive affect. Furthermore, students who said three kindnesses had 1.5 times more friends than

students who visited three places [7]. Qualitatively, kindness has a meaningful impact as an intervention in students with social interaction anxiety although statistically were not significant [19]. The desire to help and friendship bonds are also connected to teachers' and students' kindness [20]. When teachers show a warm, caring, and helpful environment, students are more likely to form positive relationships with teachers and show a good improvement in school [21].

3.4 Kindness Interventions that Can Be Applied in School

Based on the research, several kindness interventions can be carried out in schools, including:

Read Out Folklore. Reading folklore in class with follow-up actions such as practicing in activities may be utilized as a medium to teach kindness and unite ethnic differences in the classroom. Observations after practicing folklore revealed that groups of children from various cultures respect one other better, speaking to one another in a pleasant tone of voice, and playing with a kid from a culture distinct from his or her own [22].

Illustrated Storybook. According to the findings of Retnowati, Salim, and Saleh, there was an increase in all kindness behaviors in the post-test following two weeks of intervention by reading an illustrated storybook [23].

Act of Kindness. Several studies have shown that after intervening in the Act of Kindness, several positive impacts occur including improving the ability of school staff in recognizing kindness, raising awareness that kindness is a positive human behavior, and receiving kindness in the form of giving appreciation to the giver of kindness [24], showing that students in grades 6 to 8 who applied high-category interventions reported the least negative effects and reported higher status of being kind to people [25]. According to Datu, Wong, and Rubie-Davies, interventions with performing acts of kindness can promote critical presumption, self-confidence, and the ability to develop strong interpersonal connections [26].

Intentional Act of Kindness. The application of the intentional act of kindness has potential advantages not only for students and recipients of kindness but also for teachers, classes, and school communities [27].

The Counting Kindness. The employment of counting kindness significantly increased subjective happiness which showed an increase in post-test compared to pre-test [5].

Mindfulness-based Kindness Curriculum (KC). The study's findings revealed that the group that received the kindness curriculum treatment improved their social competence and scored higher in the domains of learning and social-emotional development, whereas the control group exhibited higher selfish behavior [28].

Loving Kindness Meditation. According to the findings of the study, practicing loving-kindness meditation can promote empathy and lower stress levels [29].

4 Conclusion

Kindness in schools may be defined simply, broadly, and explicitly. Furthermore, kindness in schools can be concluded as a motivation to behave well toward others even though it does not beneficially. In doing so, students and teachers can help personal development, and build and improve healthy and positive relationships with others which are characterized by the presence of social, emotional, caring support, empathy, respect, strengthening, and the ability to understand. Additionally, students' acts of kindness include random, intentional, and quiet kindness. In assessing kindness, children's kindness differs from that of adults. Moreover, female students feel greater kindness than male students. In schools, the teacher is regarded as the major agent of kindness and the party who can form the personality of the student and establish a positive connection between the student and teacher. Furthermore, kindness in school also has a positive impact on teachers and students. It also has a relationship with school attachment, academic engagement, psychological and emotional well-being, school belonging, students can get more friends, and has a meaningful impact as an intervention on students with social interaction anxiety. The kindness of teachers and students is also related to the desire to help and friendship relationships. Some of the kindness interventions that can be applied in schools include reading folklore with follow-up actions, reading illustrated storybooks, the act of kindness, intentional act of kindness, counting kindness, mindfulness-based kindness curriculum, and loving-kindness meditation.

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