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Students' Views on Cyberbullying in Indonesian Schools

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying has become a growing concern in Indonesian schools due to the rapid increase in adolescents' use of digital technologies and social media platforms. This study addresses the limited understanding of how Indonesian students perceive, experience, and interpret cyberbullying in school contexts. A qualitative descriptive design was employed involving 210 students from junior and senior high schools across 10 provinces in Indonesia. Data collection involved open-ended online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that students generally recognize cyberbullying as harmful online behavior, although their understanding varies across different forms of online interaction. However, many participants still perceive some forms of cyberbullying as normal jokes among peers. Participants reported that experiences of cyberbullying were associated with anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal. In addition, cyberbullying may affect academic performance by reducing students' concentration, motivation, and school engagement. Participants identified peer pressure, emotional factors, limited digital literacy, and inadequate parental supervision as factors associated with cyberbullying. Students emphasized the need for stronger school-based prevention programs, counseling support, and digital literacy education. The findings contribute to a better understanding of students' perspectives on cyberbullying and highlight the need for coordinated preventive strategies involving schools, families, and policymakers.
Keywords: Cyberbullying; Students' Perspectives; Qualitative Study; Indonesian Schools; Digital Literacy

INTRODUCTION

The growing use of digital technologies has substantially reshaped students' social interactions, creating new forms of peer conflict that increasingly extend beyond the physical school environment. Social media platforms, online games, instant messaging applications, and digital learning environments have become integral parts of students' daily lives. In Indonesia, the increasing use of smartphones among adolescents has created both positive and negative impacts in educational settings. One significant concern associated with students' increasing digital engagement is the occurrence of cyberbullying in school-age populations. Cyberbullying refers to aggressive and intentional behavior carried out repeatedly through electronic media to harm others who have difficulty defending themselves (Danisholehudin et al., 2024). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can extend beyond school hours and physical settings, potentially exposing Indonesian students to persistent online harassment.

The extensive use of digital platforms among Indonesian adolescents provides an important context for examining the occurrence and perception of cyberbullying in schools. According to recent studies, Indonesian students frequently experience online harassment through social media comments, rumor spreading, mocking, threats, and the dissemination of embarrassing content (Bukhori et al., 2024). The

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anonymity provided by digital platforms often encourages perpetrators to attack others without considering the emotional consequences faced by victims. This condition creates an unsafe digital environment for students and may negatively influence their emotional well-being, academic performance, and social relationships.

Several studies have shown that cyberbullying has significant psychological impacts on adolescents. Victims often experience anxiety, depression, fear, low self-esteem, stress, and social isolation. In severe cases, cyberbullying may even lead to self-harm and suicidal thoughts among students (Fitriani & Jamilah, 2025). Furthermore, students who are repeatedly exposed to online bullying may lose motivation to attend school and participate in learning activities. The emotional burden caused by cyberbullying can interfere with concentration and academic achievement, ultimately affecting students' educational development.

In Indonesia, the phenomenon of cyberbullying continues to increase along with the expansion of internet access and social media use among teenagers. Research conducted among Indonesian adolescents revealed that cyberbullying behavior is influenced by factors such as peer conformity, parenting style, religiosity, and self-control (Bukhori et al., 2024). Adolescents who lack emotional control and receive little parental supervision are more likely to engage in cyberbullying activities. Additionally, peer pressure often encourages students to participate in harmful online behavior in order to gain social acceptance within their groups.

An important unresolved issue is the normalization of certain harmful online behaviors as jokes or entertainment, which may influence how students recognize and respond to cyberbullying. This perception causes victims' experiences to be ignored or underestimated by peers and sometimes even by teachers and parents. Sitinjak and Hurriyati (2022) found that students' awareness and understanding of cyberbullying remain relatively low, despite the increasing number of cyberbullying cases in schools. Many students do not fully understand the long-term psychological consequences of online harassment. As a result, preventive efforts in schools are often ineffective because students themselves do not recognize cyberbullying as a serious problem.

Understanding students' perceptions of cyberbullying is particularly important because their interpretations of online harassment may shape how they respond to its psychological and social consequences. Adolescents are in a developmental stage characterized by emotional instability and identity exploration, making them more sensitive to negative social interactions online. Cyberbullying may damage students' confidence and sense of security, especially when humiliating content spreads widely on social media platforms. Recent studies in Indonesia reported that students who experience cyberbullying are more likely to suffer from emotional distress and social withdrawal (Masrufah & Indah, 2021). This condition highlights the urgent need for schools, parents, and policymakers to provide stronger support systems and digital literacy education for students.

Although schools have a central role in addressing cyberbullying, limited attention has been given to how students themselves understand, experience, and interpret these forms of online behavior. However, many Indonesian schools still focus primarily on academic achievement and pay limited attention to students' online behavior and mental health. Teachers often have difficulty identifying cyberbullying incidents because such activities occur outside the classroom and through private digital communication channels. Moreover, some victims are reluctant to report cyberbullying because they fear retaliation, embarrassment, or disbelief from adults. Consequently, understanding students' perspectives and experiences regarding cyberbullying becomes essential for developing effective prevention programs and intervention strategies.

Accordingly, this study seeks to extend previous research by examining students' understanding, experiences, and perceptions of cyberbullying across diverse school contexts in Indonesia. By exploring students' perspectives, researchers can identify the social and psychological factors that contribute to cyberbullying in Indonesian schools. In addition, students' experiences may help educators and policymakers design educational programs that

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promote empathy, digital ethics, and responsible internet use among adolescents.

Therefore, this study, entitled "Students' Views on Cyberbullying in Indonesian Schools," aims to explor students' perceptions, experiences, and understanding of cyberbullying in school settings. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the development of more effective anti-cyberbullying policies and educational strategies in Indonesia.

METHODS

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive design was employed because the study sought to capture students' own descriptions and interpretations of their understanding and experiences of cyberbullying. Qualitative research is appropriate for examining social phenomena through participants' perspectives and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2021). The descriptive approach was used to identify and understand students' perceptions, emotional responses, and experiences related to cyberbullying within school environments.

Cyberbullying has become a growing issue among adolescents due to the increasing use of digital communication and social media platforms. Previous studies have shown that qualitative methods are effective in exploring students' personal experiences and psychological responses toward online harassment (Bukhori et al., 2024). Therefore, this study aimed to obtain in-depth information regarding how students perceive cyberbullying, the forms of cyberbullying they encounter, and its impact on their academic and social lives.

Participants

The study involved 210 students from junior and senior high schools across 10 provinces. The adequacy of the sample was determined based on the richness and recurrence of information relevant to the research objectives, namely West Java, Central Java, East Java, Banten, DKI Jakarta, South Sumatra, North Sumatra, South Sulawesi, Bali, and West Nusa Tenggara.

Participants were purposively selected based on predefined criteria, including their school level, age, active use of digital platforms, and relevant experience or awareness of cyberbullying. This sampling method was chosen because the researcher specifically targeted students who actively use social media and digital communication platforms, as they were considered to have relevant experiences related to cyberbullying (Campbell et al., 2020). Participants were aged 13–18 years and included male and female students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

The selection of students from different provinces was intended to provide broader perspectives regarding cyberbullying experiences in diverse educational and cultural contexts in Indonesia. Previous research has indicated that cultural and environmental factors may influence students' online behavior and responses toward cyberbullying incidents (Sitinjak & Hurriyati, 2022).

Table 1. Characteristics of the Study Participants

Participant characteristic	Description
Total participants	210 students
School level	Junior high schools and senior high schools
Geographical coverage	10 provinces in Indonesia
Age range	13–18 years
Gender	Male and female students
Sampling technique	Purposive sampling

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Participant characteristic	Description
Selection criterion	Students who actively use social media and digital communication platforms

Data Collection

Data were collected through open-ended online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews conducted from January to March 2026. The online questionnaires were distributed through Google Forms to facilitate data collection from participants located in different provinces. Online data collection methods have become increasingly common in educational research because they allow researchers to reach wider participant populations efficiently (Archibald et al., 2019).

The open-ended questionnaire was developed based on the research objectives and reviewed prior to data collection to ensure that the questions were clear, relevant, and appropriate for the participants' age and context. Open-ended questions were used to encourage participants to express their opinions and experiences freely (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to obtain deeper information regarding their experiences and perceptions of cyberbullying. Interviews were conducted online using video conferencing and chat applications. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore participants' responses more flexibly while maintaining focus on the research objectives (Kallio et al., 2020).

Because the participants were minors, informed consent was obtained from their parents or legal guardians, while the students provided assent before participating in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process to protect participants' identities and ensure honest responses. Ethical considerations are essential in studies involving adolescents and sensitive issues such as cyberbullying (Weller et al., 2020).

Table 2. Data Collection Procedures and Instruments

Component	Description
Data collection period	January–March 2026
Instrument 1	Open-ended online questionnaire
Instrument 2	Semi-structured interviews
Questionnaire topics	Understanding; forms experienced/witnessed; emotional impacts; contributing factors; prevention strategies
Interview mode	Online video conferencing and chat applications
Ethics	Informed consent; confidentiality; anonymity

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed thematically through systematic coding, categorization, theme development, theme review, and interpretation. Codes were repeatedly compared with the original responses to ensure that the final themes remained grounded in the data. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research to identify patterns and themes within participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The analysis process consisted of several stages: familiarizing with the data, coding significant statements, categorizing codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, and interpreting the findings. The researcher

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repeatedly reviewed participants' responses to ensure consistency and accuracy during the coding process. Themes emerging from the data included students' understanding of cyberbullying, emotional effects, peer influence, online behavior patterns, and prevention efforts in schools.

The study assessed the trustworthiness of the findings through data triangulation and systematic documentation of the research process. Gunakan hanya jika prosedur tersebut benar-benar dilakukan of the research procedures (Nowell et al., 2021). Comparing questionnaire responses with interview data helped strengthen the validity of the identified themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings indicate that participants encountered multiple forms of cyberbullying across social media, online gaming, messaging applications, and school-related digital groups. Based on responses from 210 participants across 10 provinces in Indonesia, students reported experiencing various forms of cyberbullying through social media platforms, online games, messaging applications, and digital learning environments. The thematic analysis identified five major themes: (1) students' understanding of cyberbullying, (2) forms of cyberbullying experienced by students, (3) psychological and academic impacts of cyberbullying, (4) factors contributing to cyberbullying behavior, and (5) students' expectations regarding cyberbullying prevention in schools.

Table 3. Summary of Key Themes and Findings on Students' Cyberbullying Experiences

Theme	Key finding from the study
1. Understanding	Students generally recognize harmful online behavior, but some still regard insulting jokes, memes, or embarrassing posts as normal peer interaction.
2. Forms	Mocking comments, rumors, embarrassing images/videos, body shaming, exclusion, impersonation, and verbal harassment were reported.
3. Impacts	Psychological effects included anxiety, fear, stress, sadness, low confidence, and social withdrawal; academic effects included reduced concentration, motivation, and participation.
4. Contributing factors	Peer influence, limited parental supervision, emotional factors, and low digital literacy were identified.
5. Prevention expectations	Students requested digital-ethics education, counseling, clearer school regulations, anonymous reporting, and stronger parent communication.

Students' Understanding of Cyberbullying

Most participants described cyberbullying as harmful online behavior, although some accounts revealed differing interpretations of what constitutes cyberbullying intended to humiliate, threaten, mock, or intimidate others through digital platforms. However, many students still perceived certain cyberbullying actions, such as insulting jokes, spreading memes, or posting embarrassing photos, as normal social interactions among peers. This finding suggests that the normalization of harmful online interactions may contribute to uncertainty among students in distinguishing cyberbullying from ordinary peer interaction.

Several participants stated that cyberbullying often begins as "just a joke" among

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friends but eventually causes emotional harm to victims. This finding aligns with previous studies showing that adolescents frequently normalize harmful online interactions due to peer culture and social acceptance (Bukhori et al., 2024). Similarly, Anggraeni and Sari (2023) found that many Indonesian students fail to recognize repeated online humiliation as a form of violence because such behavior has become common within digital communication.

Participants also explained that anonymity on social media encourages students to behave more aggressively online. Students reported that perpetrators often feel safer insulting others through fake accounts or anonymous comments. This finding supports research conducted by Fauziyah and Rahmawati (2021), which concluded that low digital ethics awareness contributes significantly to cyberbullying behavior among adolescents.

Forms of Cyberbullying Experienced by Students

The study identified several forms of cyberbullying commonly experienced by participants. The most frequently reported forms included mocking comments on social media, spreading rumors, sharing embarrassing photos or videos, body shaming, exclusion from online groups, impersonation, and verbal harassment through messaging applications.

Body shaming was frequently mentioned by female participants; however, further evidence is needed to determine whether this pattern reflects a broader gender difference in cyberbullying experiences. Participants reported receiving insulting comments regarding physical appearance, skin color, body shape, and fashion style through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. This finding is consistent with research by Maulidina and Putra (2021), which found that appearance-related cyberbullying significantly affects adolescents' self-esteem and emotional well-being.

Several male participants described cyberbullying experiences in online gaming communities, particularly involving insults, aggressive language, and humiliation. Insults, aggressive language, and humiliation during multiplayer games were commonly mentioned by participants. Similar findings were identified by Kurniawan and Setiawan (2022), who reported that online gaming environments often expose adolescents to toxic communication patterns and aggressive peer interactions.

Another significant finding was the occurrence of cyberbullying within school-related online groups. Several participants explained that cyberbullying frequently occurred in class group chats where students mocked classmates, spread rumors, or excluded certain individuals from conversations. This indicates that cyberbullying is closely connected to students' everyday social relationships in school settings.

Table 4. Forms of Cyberbullying Reported by Student Participants and Their Contexts

Category	Examples reported by participants	Context noted in the study
Mocking / verbal harassment	Insults, aggressive language, humiliating comments	Social media, messaging applications, online gaming
Rumor spreading	Sharing rumors about classmates	Social media and class group chats
Image/video-based harassment	Sharing embarrassing photos or videos	Digital/social media platforms
Body shaming	Comments on appearance, skin color, body shape, fashion	Reported especially among female students
Online exclusion	Excluding individuals from online groups or conversations	School-related group chats

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Category	Examples reported by participants	Context noted in the study
Impersonation	Using another person's identity/account	Digital communication

Psychological and Academic Impacts of Cyberbullying

Participants reported experiencing psychological difficulties, including anxiety, fear, embarrassment, stress, and reduced self-confidence following cyberbullying experiences. Many participants described experiencing sadness, anxiety, fear, embarrassment, stress, anger, and low self-confidence after becoming victims of cyberbullying. Some students admitted avoiding social media platforms because they feared receiving negative comments or harassment.

Several participants also reported sleep disturbances and emotional instability after experiencing repeated online bullying. These findings support previous studies demonstrating that cyberbullying contributes significantly to adolescent mental health problems, including anxiety and depression (Fitriani & Jamilah, 2025). Likewise, Yuliana and Hartono (2022) found that prolonged exposure to online harassment increases emotional vulnerability among adolescents.

In more severe cases, participants explained that cyberbullying caused social withdrawal and feelings of isolation. Victims often felt unsupported by peers and reluctant to share their experiences with teachers or parents due to fear of judgment or retaliation. This finding aligns with the study by Putri and Saputra (2024), which emphasized that victims of cyberbullying frequently hesitate to seek help because they fear worsening the situation.

Academic impacts were also identified in this study. Many participants stated that cyberbullying negatively affected their concentration, motivation, and classroom participation. Students who experienced cyberbullying often found it difficult to focus on assignments and learning activities due to emotional stress. Some participants admitted skipping school or avoiding online learning groups after experiencing harassment from classmates.

This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that cyberbullying reduces academic motivation and engagement among adolescents (Kurniawan & Setiawan, 2022). Similarly, Nugroho and Wibowo (2025) reported that students exposed to online harassment frequently experience decreased academic confidence and lower school participation.

Factors Contributing to Cyberbullying Behavior

Participants identified peer influence, parental supervision, emotional factors, and digital literacy as contextual factors associated with cyberbullying behavior. Peer influence was repeatedly mentioned by participants as an important factor associated with involvement in cyberbullying. Participants explained that students often engage in cyberbullying to gain acceptance within friendship groups or to avoid becoming victims themselves. This finding supports the study by Lestari and Yusuf (2023), which found that peer conformity strongly influences adolescents' online aggression behavior.

Another contributing factor identified was the lack of parental supervision regarding students' online activities. Many participants stated that parents rarely monitor social media use or discuss responsible internet behavior with their children. Consequently, students often use digital platforms without understanding ethical communication boundaries. Previous studies have similarly emphasized that limited parental involvement increases adolescents' vulnerability to cyberbullying behavior (Bukhori et al., 2024).

Participants also highlighted emotional factors such as anger, jealousy, revenge, and boredom as motivations behind cyberbullying. Some students admitted engaging in online harassment impulsively when experiencing negative emotions. This finding is supported by research conducted by Hidayati and Prasetyo (2024), which concluded that emotional instability

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among adolescents contributes to aggressive online interactions.

Additionally, low digital literacy was identified as a major factor contributing to cyberbullying incidents. Several participants reported that students often share harmful content without fully understanding the psychological consequences for victims. Fauziyah and Rahmawati (2021) similarly found that insufficient digital literacy education in schools contributes to irresponsible online behavior among adolescents.

Table 5. Factors Contributing to Cyberbullying Behavior and Student Expectations

Area	Findings / student expectations
Peer influence	Students may participate in cyberbullying to gain acceptance or avoid becoming targets themselves.
Parental supervision	Limited monitoring and discussion of responsible internet behavior were reported.
Emotional factors	Anger, jealousy, revenge, and boredom were identified as possible motivations.
Digital literacy	Some students share harmful content without fully understanding its consequences.
School programs	Students requested education on digital ethics, responsible social media use, and emotional awareness.
Counseling	Students emphasized counseling support for victims.
Reporting systems	Students suggested safer and anonymous reporting mechanisms.
Parent involvement	Students recommended more open communication about internet safety and emotional well-being.

Students' Expectations for Cyberbullying Prevention

Participants expressed strong expectations for schools to become more actively involved in preventing cyberbullying. Many students believed that schools should provide educational programs regarding digital ethics, responsible social media use, and emotional awareness. Students also recommended that teachers discuss cyberbullying openly in classrooms to increase awareness and encourage empathy among peers.

Several participants emphasized the importance of counseling services for victims of cyberbullying. Students believed that psychological support from school counselors could help victims cope with emotional distress and rebuild self-confidence. This finding aligns with research by Putri and Saputra (2024), which highlighted the importance of school-based intervention programs for supporting cyberbullying victims.

Participants also recommended stricter school regulations regarding online harassment involving students. Some students suggested implementing reporting systems that allow victims to report cyberbullying anonymously without fear of retaliation. Similar recommendations were identified in studies by Campbell et al. (2020), which emphasized the importance of institutional support in addressing cyberbullying cases.

Furthermore, students highlighted the role of parents in preventing cyberbullying behavior. Participants believed that parents should communicate more openly with children regarding internet safety and emotional well-being. Previous studies have similarly concluded that positive parent-child communication reduces adolescents'

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involvement in cyberbullying activities (Weller et al., 2020).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that cyberbullying is not only a technological issue but also a social and psychological problem affecting students' well-being and educational experiences. The findings suggest that cyberbullying is associated with peer culture, emotional factors, limited digital literacy, and inadequate adult supervision. The findings support a coordinated prevention approach involving schools, families, and communities, particularly through digital-ethics education, counseling, reporting mechanisms, and parental communication.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored students' views on cyberbullying in Indonesian schools by involving 210 students from 10 provinces across Indonesia. The findings indicate that students experience cyberbullying across multiple digital contexts, with reported consequences for their psychological well-being, social relationships, and learning experiences. Students experienced various forms of cyberbullying, including mocking comments, body shaming, spreading rumors, online harassment, exclusion from digital groups, and verbal abuse through social media and online gaming platforms. The study also found that many students still perceive certain cyberbullying behaviors as normal jokes or entertainment, indicating limited awareness regarding the harmful consequences of online harassment.

Participants reported emotional impacts associated with cyberbullying, including anxiety, stress, fear, sadness, reduced self-confidence, and social withdrawal. In addition, cyberbullying negatively influenced students' concentration, learning motivation, and participation in school activities. The findings suggest that students' experiences of cyberbullying are shaped by interconnected social, emotional, and digital factors, particularly peer influence, limited digital literacy, and inadequate adult supervision.

The findings highlight the need for coordinated prevention involving schools, parents, and communities, particularly through digital-literacy education, counseling, and accessible reporting mechanisms. Students expected schools to provide stronger digital literacy education, counseling services, anti-cyberbullying programs, and safer reporting systems for victims. Parents were also expected to supervise children's online activities more actively and maintain open communication regarding internet safety and emotional well-being.

Overall, this study contributes to understanding how Indonesian students perceive and experience cyberbullying and provides evidence for developing context-sensitive prevention strategies in school settings. Effective prevention strategies are essential to create safe digital environments and support students' mental health and educational development in Indonesia.

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