

Exploring teacher's role as motivators and role models in cultivating children's safe behavior: a qualitative study

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ABSTRACT

Children are vulnerable to injuries and accidents in school environments due to cognitive limitations. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping children's safe behavior by transferring knowledge and acting as motivators and role models. This study aims to explore how teachers influence children's safe behavior using a qualitative descriptive approach. Data was collected through observations and focus group discussions (FGDs) and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings indicate that 67% of children's behavior at school was categorized as safe, while 33% was unsafe. Observations were conducted across the play area, learning spaces, and the street in front of the school. Teachers have actively encouraged safe behavior by providing support and motivation. However, some students continue engaging in unsafe practices despite these efforts. Teachers also attempt to model safe behavior, such as walking calmly in hallways and sitting properly in classrooms. However, FGD findings revealed that half of the teachers did not fully practice safe behavior, notably by failing to wear helmets when riding motorcycles to school. In conclusion, teachers at SD Negeri Krajan have effectively acted as motivators, encouraging students to adopt safe behavior. However, their role as role models remains inconsistent, highlighting the need for greater self-adherence to safety practices. Strengthening teachers' commitment to modeling safe behavior could enhance the effectiveness of safety education in schools.

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1. Introduction

Development is a cumulative process, meaning the previous development will be the basis for further development. So, if there are obstacles in the previous development, it will affect the subsequent development [1]. Each stage of growth and development comes with specific developmental tasks. Elementary school children aged 6-11 fall into middle childhood. During this period, children aged 6-12 must accomplish eight key developmental tasks: acquiring physical skills, developing self-awareness, engaging in peer interactions, understanding gender roles, mastering basic skills (reading, writing, and arithmetic), developing concepts, fostering moral growth, and forming attitudes toward groups. In developing self-awareness, children are expected to cultivate healthy living habits, such as maintaining personal and environmental cleanliness, prioritizing health and safety, and understanding the consequences of their actions [2].



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However, because children have cognitive limitations, they become vulnerable to potential hazards and accidents. Limited understanding of children causes children to be less able to anticipate and overcome dangerous conditions that arise [3]. Children are still often victims in cases of injuries and accidents in the school environment, including highways around the school [4]. Many child accidents were caused by children's impatience in playing and queuing so that children were less aware of the dangers around them [5] so the types of injuries experienced by children also vary from dental injuries to brain injuries [6].

The Ministry of Transportation reported that in 2020, the number of road accidents in Indonesia reached 100,028 cases, with 73% involving motorcycles. Among these motorcycle accidents, 4,657 cases were caused by university students. Meanwhile, the highest number of accident victims were high school students, accounting for more than 80,000 cases, followed by junior high school students with 17,000 cases, and elementary school students with 12,000 cases [7]. In Indonesia, traffic accidents are attributed to several factors: 55.3% are caused by driver-related factors, 13.3% by vehicle conditions, 20.3% by road conditions, and 11% by environmental factors [8]. Among these, human behavior is Indonesia's leading cause of traffic accidents and globally. Risky behaviors that contribute to accidents include violating traffic rules, unsafe overtaking, driver fatigue, drowsiness, driving under the influence, and failure to maintain proper vehicle control [9].

According to Lawrence Green's theory, human behavior is influenced by two main factors: behavioral and non-behavioral factors. Behavior itself is determined by three key elements: predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors. Reinforcing factors refer to elements that strengthen or encourage individuals to adopt safe behavior, such as support from others [10]. Therefore, education on children's behavior is very important because it affects the sustainability of generations in the future [11]. The role of teachers is fundamental in education. The quality of education is largely influenced by how effectively teachers convey knowledge and instill life values [12]. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping student behavior, with a long-term impact on their development. Beyond delivering subject matter, teachers are responsible for fostering positive behavioral growth in students [13].

As educators, teachers are not only responsible for transmitting knowledge but also for shaping their students' personalities and moral values [14]. Additionally, teachers must act as listeners who understand their students' needs and respect individual differences. By creating a warm and supportive learning environment, teachers can motivate students to participate actively in their education [15]. Therefore, a teacher's role extends beyond academic instruction; they also motivate students to adopt safe and responsible behavior. Research suggests that students with higher motivation are more likely to exhibit safer behavior compared to those with little or no motivation [16].

In addition to being motivators, teachers also serve as role models, which is equally important in shaping children's safe behavior. The Javanese proverb "*Digugu lan ditiru*" highlights the idea that teachers should be respected and imitated. This means that teachers must set a positive example, especially for elementary school children, who tend to mimic their teachers' behavior at school [17]. Therefore, the role and responsibilities of teachers are strategic in helping students develop strong character and positive behavior through consistent guidance and role modeling [18].

In Indonesia, the role of families and teachers in teaching children about personal safety remains insufficient. Although self-safety is recognized as an important issue, there is a lack of reliable data on children's safety awareness and practices in the country. Therefore, research on self-safety is essential to obtain comprehensive and objective data on children's safety in Indonesia [19]. This study builds upon previous research that examined the factors influencing the development of children's safe behavior at school. Various elements contribute to fostering safe behavior in children.

Beyond knowledge and awareness, teachers play a crucial role in shaping children's safety habits. This study explicitly explores how teachers, as motivators and role models, influence children's safe behavior development.

Through this research, teachers and schools are expected to gain a deeper understanding of their critical role in fostering a safety culture in elementary schools. The study highlights how teachers' guidance and examples shape students' attitudes and behaviors toward adopting safety principles. A better understanding of this role can enable schools to design structured and effective learning programs that enhance students' awareness and adherence to safety rules. Furthermore, the findings of this study can serve as a valuable reference for schools in developing safety policies and implementing teacher training programs. These initiatives will help optimize teachers' roles in instilling safe student behavior, ultimately fostering a safer learning environment.

2. Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. Qualitative research involves data collection in a scientific setting to interpret occurring phenomena, with the researcher serving as the key instrument [20]. Descriptive research methods are used to address questions about current phenomena or events [12]. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the teacher's role as a motivator and role model in shaping children's safe behavior.

This study employs triangulation techniques to enhance data validity by comparing the results of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), observation checklists, and documentation. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how teachers influence children's safe behavior. The study involved 12 participants, including six classroom teachers, five subject teachers, one principal, and all the students of Elementary School Krajan. Data was collected using two primary methods: FGDs and observations.

FGDs were conducted to gather in-depth insights into participants' views, opinions, and experiences regarding children's school safety behavior. The FGD session took place on August 29, 2024, at 12:30 WIB, in one of the classrooms at SD Negeri Krajan. Twelve teachers participated, and an experienced moderator facilitated the session. The session was recorded with participants' consent to ensure accurate data collection. Data from the FGDs were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used method in social science research, including library and information science, to identify patterns and themes. [21]. Transcriptions of recorded discussions were carefully analyzed to extract key findings about the teacher's role in shaping children's safe behavior.

In addition to FGDs, observations were conducted to assess children's safe behavior in school. Observations were carried out across three key activity areas: 1) Play areas, such as courtyards and classroom hallways; 2) Study areas, specifically classrooms; and 3) Other activity areas, including the street in front of the school. Observers used pre-designed observation checklists to document students' behavior and determine whether they practiced safe habits. The study employed a non-participatory observation approach to avoid influencing students' behavior. Observation data were then categorized based on children's activity areas for further analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

Child Safe Behavior

In this study, researchers focused on observing student behavior in 3 activity areas at school: play area, learning area, and other activity areas. The observations of the three activity areas at SD Negeri Krajan school show that students carry out 67% of activities by applying safe behavior, and the other 33% have not.

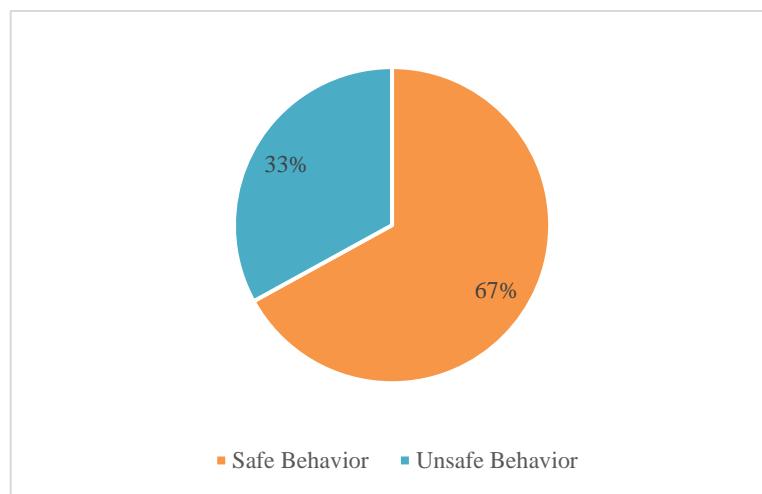


Figure 1. Observation results of student safety behavior at SD Negeri Krajan 2024

Based on the results of the observation checklist shown in the image above, the researchers categorized the data according to student activity areas. In the play area, 67% of activities were conducted with safe behavior, while the remaining 33% did not adhere to safe practices. In the learning area, 50% of activities incorporated safe behavior. Meanwhile, in other activity areas, 100% of observed behaviors were conducted safely.

Table 1. Child Behavior by Activity Area at SD Negeri Krajan 2024

Activity Area	Child Behavior	
	Safe Behavior	Unsafe Behavior
Play activity Area	67%	33%
Learn activity area	50%	50%
More activity area	100%	0%

Data on children's safety behavior was collected using an observation checklist. Safety behavior was categorized into three activity groups: learning, playing, and other activities. The detailed results of behavior measurement for each activity group are presented in Table 1. In the play area, 67% of children's behavior was classified as safe, while 33% was considered unsafe. One example of safe behavior observed in this area was avoiding playing with fire and sharp objects. During the observation, no students were seen playing with sharp objects or fire; however, approximately five students were observed playing with soil.

Then, one example of unsafe behavior in the play area by students is running around in risky or hot areas. As said by one of the teachers' FGD participants.

“The teacher's mothers never let go of always reminding, always advising. In fact, after praying, ee after ablution, whether it's dzuhur prayer or duha prayer, the children sometimes run around. Even though wearing sandals on a floor like this is dangerous... (R8)”.



Figure 2. Picture of SD Negeri Krajan Students Running in The Hallway In 2024

The image above serves as documentary evidence that supports and reinforces the findings obtained from student observation checklists and teacher statements presented during the FGD activities. This visual documentation provides a clearer and more concrete depiction of the dynamics observed during the activity, aligning with the data collected through observations and group interviews. Additionally, a statement from one of the respondents further emphasized:

“Later, during the break time, I will walk. Quiet. But the children keep running, ma'am. Even though I have given an example of just walking. No need to run (hehehe)...(R10)”.

In addition to running around in the hallway, unsafe behavior is also carried out by students, namely climbing trees around the school, as stated by the following respondent:

“Then the 4th-grade children also like to climb trees. This is a guava tree. The guava tree behind the south. Yes, during the break sometimes some still climb trees. There are 3 children, sometimes 4 children. The others who want to go to class are still there: Mangke's mom, mangke. Some say that. Want to play still because it's shady. And maybe they feel when they take a break, especially. It feels good there, in the tree...(R7)”

In learning activities, children's behavior in school is evenly divided, with 50% exhibiting safe behavior and 50% displaying unsafe behavior. These findings are based on observations, which indicate that half of the students engage in safe behavior by participating in classroom activities quietly.

“So, If I am in grade 3, thank God there is no fighting. So far, there hasn't been any, which I hope there won't be. The fights in my class, thank God, so far there is none... (R10)”.

However, the observation also cannot be used as the main benchmark because during the FGD other subject teachers complained that students still like to run around to fight for seats.

“The computer is ours, see what. there is something that we just got me what is the new PC. So, the children are scrambling, scrambling for the new PC. When it's finished, they will fight over “I'm this one, I'm this one, I'm this one”. Don't run around, there are cables, lots of them. If you trip over the cables, you might fall. But the children often insist...(R6)”.

Then, for unsafe behavior in the learning area, for example, running around or crowding when entering or leaving the classroom.

Teacher Roles

According to the results of FGDs with teachers at SD Negeri Krajan, teachers have provided advice and motivation to encourage safe behavior. However, some students—typically two or three—occasionally do not listen and disregard these reminders.

“The name of the child is sometimes already given an example, told and explained, some sometimes respond but there are also those who sometimes don't listen, talk to themselves, sometimes even badmouth others, so what the teacher says or what the teacher exemplifies sometimes does not enter the child himself... (R1)”. Other FGD participant also said, “Yes, with students because they have been advised many times, they don't want to listen even though they have been advised many times ... (R11)”.

However, even if some students do not listen to the teacher's advice, it does not mean the teacher stops reminding them. The teacher remains patient and continues to encourage students to behave appropriately:

“...for me as a second-grade teacher, if there is a fight in my class, it happens that my class is super great, often fighting. One of the students who fought then I embraced, then I said that pious children should not be like that; let's make, I said. I persuaded him, then I told him to shake hands and then he got along well... (R2)”.

The respondent's statement shows that the teacher must remind the student even though the student often repeats the same mistake. This shows that the teacher has tried to motivate students to behave well by giving awards and praise. In addition to rewards and praise, punishment can also be a tool to motivate students to behave safely,

“...well one of the school strategies to overcome bullying in particular is that we make school rules. Even the teachers in the class have an agreement...each class agreement, one of the rules in this school is related to bullying...we apply a point system too... (R8)”.

The application of the point system is expected to be able to motivate students not to repeat unsafe behavior. Not only the role as a motivator that teachers need to have, the role as a role model is no less important in shaping safe behavior in children. One of the teachers did this by teaching how to overcome dangerous situations with real examples.

“...if you fall, it's normal because this is a soccer class, it's also normal if you cry, you don't have to get angry with other friends because we play sports with a ball. It's normal to hit the ball in class, and it's the same in the classroom. If the lesson is just giving the theory, some run here and there; I also remind them to be careful; if they want to run around outside, don't run inside, I said. If they fall inside, they will hit the table...it hurts (said student), so don't run around... (R05)”.

Providing examples of safe behavior in the classroom and also reminding students of the dangers or risks of unsafe behavior are other efforts to get students to behave safely.

“Then, over time, my strategy is to give aphorisms. For example, if children nowadays know Instagram and TikTok. Have you ever seen TikTok? Have you ever seen Instagram? You know, Mom, you know. Have you seen the news about the child who fell from the chair and was paralyzed? What do you know about paralysis? Can't walk, mom. Well, that's one example of the fatality of playing with a chair. No need to linger because you can't be told at first and it's dangerous, so it's just like that... (R10)”.

In addition to various efforts made by teachers to instill safe behavior in students, wearing a helmet when commuting to school is also an example of teachers serving as role models for traffic safety. A humorous moment occurred during the final session of the discussion when the facilitator

asked about teachers' habits when riding motorcycles to school. The facilitator jokingly inquired whether teachers wore their helmets or hung them on the rearview mirror. In response, 50% of the FGD participants stated that they wore helmets, demonstrating their awareness of the importance of setting a good example for students in practicing safe driving behavior.

3.2. Discussion

Teachers play a strategic role in education, as their presence is closely linked to the success and quality of learning. Given the significant impact of teacher-student relationships on learning outcomes, teachers are expected to foster positive relationships with their students [22]. Teachers must uphold certain personal standards to fulfill this role effectively, including responsibility, authority, independence, and discipline. There are nine key roles that teachers must perform: educator, instructor, mentor, trainer, advisor, creator, performer, emancipator, and evaluator [22]. This study focuses on two particularly crucial roles: teachers as motivators and role models.

Children's Safe Behavior, Portrayal of Teacher's Role as Motivator

A teacher as a motivator plays a crucial role in fostering students' enthusiasm and passion, both internally and externally. As a motivator, a teacher must stimulate, encourage, and nurture students' potential [23]. In shaping safe behavior, teachers act as motivators by continuously encouraging students to practice safety. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) results revealed that nearly all teachers provide motivation or reminders to students, advising them against running in hallways, climbing trees, or engaging in other potentially harmful activities. However, despite these efforts, some students still fail to follow safety guidelines, which has been a common concern among teachers.

This challenge may be attributed to differences in students' listening skills. Listening is not merely a physical act but also an intellectual and emotional process [24]. As one respondent stated, two or three students still do not pay attention even after guidance is provided. Respondents also noted that each child has a unique way of processing and understanding information. Listening involves integrating physical, emotional, and intellectual inputs to interpret messages and meanings. Students with strong listening skills tend to have better comprehension, acquire information more efficiently, and achieve higher academic performance [24].

Motivation plays a strategic role in learning because, without motivation, effective learning cannot occur. Therefore, as a motivator, a teacher must employ various strategies, including the use of rewards and punishments, to encourage students to learn and develop positive behaviors [25]. This approach aligns with the ABC Model, which explains behavior as a result of the interaction between three components: Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence [26]. The ABC Model is an effective tool for understanding why behaviors occur and how to reinforce desired behaviors. It emphasizes the use of consequences to encourage positive behavior [27]. These consequences can be internal (students understand the impact of their actions) or external (rewards and punishments) [28].

This study implements consequences as a strategy to improve children's safe behavior through rewards and punishments. At SD Negeri Krajan, a point system has been established as part of school regulations introduced at the beginning of the school year. One punishment includes summoning students who engage in fighting or violent behavior to the principal's office. However, while punishments are in place, a system of rewards has not yet been implemented.

Punishment alone is insufficient to prevent students from repeating unsafe behaviors; positive reinforcement, such as praise or tangible rewards, is equally necessary. Individuals naturally seek attention, appreciation, and recognition, reinforcing positive behavior. Thus, reinforcement in the classroom aims not only to motivate students but also to shape and maintain safe behavior [29].

According to B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning theory, rewards and punishments play a significant role in behavior formation. However, Skinner argued that punishment is not always effective in eliminating undesirable behavior, as individuals may learn to avoid punishment rather than change their behavior. Instead, positive reinforcement, such as rewards or praise, is a more practical approach in fostering long-term behavioral change [30].

Children's Safe Behavior, Portrayal of Teacher's Role as Role Model

"*Digugu Lan Ditiru*" is a Javanese philosophy that embodies the essence of the word "teacher." It highlights one of the fundamental roles of a teacher—as a role model. A teacher with strong character serves as an example for their surroundings, especially for their students, through speech and daily actions, whether within the school environment or in society. This philosophy aligns with the educational principles of Ki Hajar Dewantara, whose motto states: "*Ing Ngarso Sung Tuladha, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, Tut Wuri Handayani.*" In particular, "*Ing Ngarso Sung Tuladha*" emphasizes that a teacher, when in front of students, must serve as a role model through their attitudes, words, and actions [31].

During the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), the teachers said they had already practiced and modeled safe behavior. For instance, one basic example of safe behavior at the teacher level is not running in the hallway. Another simple yet impactful safety practice is wearing a helmet while riding a motorcycle, even for short distances. However, despite recognizing the importance of this habit, only half of the teachers participating in the FGD wore helmets when commuting to school, while the other half admitted to not doing so. This contradiction suggests that teachers' role modeling of safe behavior remains insufficient.

Role models play a crucial role in character and behavioral education, as people learn more from what they see than from what they are told. Exemplification holds a significant position in education—teachers must first embody the values they wish to instill in students. Students tend to imitate what a teacher does rather than what a teacher says [32]. This statement aligns with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which asserts that most human behavior is acquired through observation and modeling. According to Bandura, individuals form mental representations of behaviors by watching others and later use these observations as guides for their own actions [33]. In character education, teacher modeling is essential because students are more likely to absorb and replicate the behaviors they witness daily rather than simply following verbal instructions or advice.

4. Conclusion

Children are particularly vulnerable to accidents due to their limited understanding compared to adults. Therefore, fostering safe behavior from an early age is crucial so that children grow into individuals naturally accustomed to practicing safety. Teachers play a significant role in education, carrying numerous responsibilities, particularly in shaping students' character and behavior. Two of teachers' most essential roles are acting as motivators and role models.

The study results indicate that almost all teachers at SD Negeri Krajan have actively taken on the role of motivators by encouraging students to practice safe behavior. However, despite their efforts, a few students still do not follow their guidance, which may be attributed to differences in students' listening and comprehension abilities. On the other hand, in their role as role models, teachers at SD Negeri Krajan have not yet fully demonstrated safe behavior. This is evident from the fact that half of the teachers who participated in the FGD admitted to not wearing helmets while commuting to school. To address this issue, schools need to implement stronger policy enforcement strategies to reinforce safety culture within the school environment.

Some effective strategies include schools can enhance safety by implementing clear regulations that require all members, including teachers, to practice safe behavior consistently. This includes mandatory helmet use when riding motorcycles and adherence to designated safe walking paths within the school premises. Additionally, integrating safety education into the curriculum and conducting regular activities, such as safety campaigns and emergency drills, can help reinforce safe behavior as a habitual practice among students and teachers. By implementing these strategies, schools can foster a safer learning environment and ensure that teachers serve as motivators and effective role models in shaping safe behavior among students.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no potential personal conflict of interest in this article

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