

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Physical diversity remains the underlying framework for every instance of discrimination against a particular group. Sowell (2019) states that discrimination is defined as the act of unfairly distinguishing an individual's qualities based on aspects such as race, religion, or gender, thereby causing conflict between groups. The discriminatory behaviors that occur to this day are typically rooted in various social differences, which ultimately give rise to many incorrect and deviant perspectives from the ideology currently in use—namely Pancasila—where the fifth principle clearly advocates that society should always act justly in conducting social life without distinguishing between the differences possessed by each individual or group. However, the reality on the ground presents a different picture, as many practices deviating from the Pancasila ideology are still prevalent, leading to numerous discriminatory cases in Indonesian society.

Racism stands as one of the most evident and prevalent forms of discriminatory behavior in social life. Fredrickson (2015, p. 8) defines racism as comprising two main components: difference and power. This difference serves as the motive or justification for individuals to exploit their advantages and power to treat other groups—perceived as inferior—cruelly and unfairly. To this day, the phenomenon of racism remains a primary root cause of many negative events in human social life. This is evident in the prevalence of false stigmas, rampant acts of violence occurring everywhere, and its role as the primary cause of divisions within a region. Racist behavior itself arises from perceptions that demean or elevate a particular group, thereby creating harmful and discriminatory stigmas that disadvantage a certain group in various aspects.

In the 19th century, Charles Darwin proposed a theory regarding the evolution of living beings, particularly humans, in his book titled *'The Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life,'* which remains one of the roots of discriminatory behavior to this day. The theory of natural

selection—where the strong survive—was later misinterpreted and became known as Social Darwinism. (O’Connell & Ruse, 2021) explain in their book that Social Darwinism is an application of Darwin’s theory of evolution—specifically the concept of “*survival of the fittest*”—which was subsequently applied to human social life as an effort to correct social inequality but was instead misinterpreted and became a root cause of discriminatory behavior.

Manifestations of racism have been widespread in Indonesian society; for instance, many indigenous Indonesians believe that the Chinese, often referred to as “*Chindo*,” are always more advanced in every aspect, from academics to the economy. On the other hand, there are also some derogatory perceptions regarding the Chinese race, suggesting that they are typically stingy and reluctant to be generous. If such perceptions are constantly passed on through word of mouth, they will create a stigma that makes others feel inferior and inadequate in every way. Naturally, this stigma affects not only adults but also children, who, in their learning process, still mimic the behavior of adults. Thus, in the context of bullying, such stigmas often manifest through labeling based on skin color, body shape, or specific physical traits that differ from the norm, leading to demeaning behavior toward the victim. This can be seen in the perception that Papuan communities face academic limitations in their home regions; consequently, many people view Papuans as still in a primitive phase—or, more crudely, as backward. Beyond academic issues, a racist incident drew public condemnation when someone openly used racial slurs against Papuans. In a Kompas news report (October 25, 2023), a TNI officer used racial slurs against OAP (Orang Asli Papua) soldiers, with referring to them as “monkeys.” The video of this officer subsequently went viral and sparked widespread public condemnation of his offensive behavior toward Papuans.



Figure 1.1 Case of TNI Officer Uttering Racist Remarks Against OAP, 2022

(source: <https://regional.kompas.com/> and TikTok)

This constitutes a form of racist behavior because it elevates or demeans a particular group, causing other groups to feel unequal. Therefore, treating all groups fairly and without discrimination can serve as a solution to reduce the likelihood of discriminatory behavior stemming from racist practices. Additionally, it is important to ensure that such harmful stereotypes are kept away from children, as they absorb everything around them and may perceive it as valid, even when the reality is far from the truth. Examining these issues sufficiently demonstrates that humans are beings who form their understanding through various social interactions and dynamics within their environment, not merely based on objective reality.

Humans are entities that undergo various phases of growth and development within social life. From birth, humans are endowed with a variety of emotions that continue to develop and branch out over time, serving as a foundation for navigating social dynamics. In this rapidly evolving modern era, humans have experienced diverse forms of social life—children are no exception. Children generally have a simple emotional development pattern that is not as complex as that of adults, who possess many layers. Meanwhile, children's emotional development can be observed through how they manage the emotions they experience.

Emotions are essentially an immediate impulse to act in accordance with what has been ingrained in human evolution, where each type of emotion prepares the body and mind to respond to every social interaction in diverse ways (Goleman, 2020). Thus, emotions are psychological reactions that help humans survive and adapt to the dynamics of life. Given the existence of these various types of emotions, humans possess unique and diverse mechanisms in each individual for regulating these emotions. Emotional regulation is a mechanism for managing feelings so that each emotion can be appropriately utilized in relevant situations to foster self-awareness, thereby preventing harm to oneself or others. People with this ability typically recover more quickly when facing life's pressures (Goleman, 2020). However, children possess varying levels of emotional regulation skills; due to their simple emotional development patterns, they are more vulnerable to being swept into unhealthy emotional trajectories because they have

not yet developed effective emotional regulation. In light of this, if a person lacks good emotional regulation, emotions can override rational judgment, often making it difficult for them to think clearly, plan effectively, or even leading them to engage in harmful behaviors (Goleman, 2020). In the same context, emotional regulation is also closely linked to empathy because it relates to how a person can understand the feelings of others.

“Empathy builds on self-awareness; the more open we are to our own emotions, the more skilled we will be in reading feelings” (Goleman, 2020)

According to this quote, empathy is something that stems from self-awareness. It can be said that the more open a person is to their own emotions, the better they become at understanding others’ feelings. In other words, empathy is a capacity in which a person possesses self-awareness to comprehend the emotions of others. Empathy can also be said to be part of what constitutes interpersonal intelligence because it directly has a positive impact on a person’s social life. For this reason, children need to be in an environment that can effectively cultivate their empathy.

Goleman adds in his book that *“They also found that children’s empathy is shaped by observing how others react when someone is distressed; by imitating what they see, children develop a repertoire of empathetic responses, especially in helping others who are distressed.” (Goleman, 2020)*

In other words, children’s empathy is more easily formed through what they observe in their surroundings. Moreover, when they see someone in distress, they will instinctively put themselves in that person’s shoes and offer an empathetic response to help those in need. With good empathy, children can respond to every social interaction they encounter with genuine feeling, without discriminating against anything. Thus, the importance of providing emotional regulation education to children serves as an early foundation to help them express their emotions more stably.

The environment in which children grow up is becoming increasingly diverse due to advancements in media, technology, and various forms of daily interaction, all of which directly impact their emotional development. These factors indirectly expose them to

various differences, such as physical differences, backgrounds, and lifestyles. Physical diversity is one of several factors shaping a child's attitude, as differences—such as body shape, hair type, and skin color—are tangible realities in their surroundings. Consequently, how children accept these conditions significantly influences their future social behavior, since every child fundamentally has a unique way of responding to differences.

Data from psychologists specializing in child, adolescent, and adult development indicate that children's have not yet fully grasped the existence of diversity and differences due to their limited knowledge of emotional regulation; this often leads to the development of discriminatory attitudes toward others, ultimately resulting in *bullying* behavior. Olweus (1993) in Praptanto (2023) explains that *bullying* is negative behavior that causes someone to feel uncomfortable or hurt, and this is typically carried out repeatedly as a sign of an imbalance of power between the two parties—the perpetrator and the victim. This behavior is generally driven by a desire for power and to be someone feared within the school environment. This underscores that *bullying* is a practice intentionally and repeatedly carried out by an individual by exploiting the power imbalance held by the other party to inflict harm, whether physically or verbally. Furthermore, *bullying* encompasses various forms, ranging from physical to verbal. (Praptanto, 2023) categorizes *bullying* into two forms: *direct bullying* (physical *bullying*) and *indirect bullying* (non-physical *bullying*).

Various factors that trigger *bullying* cases—ranging from seniority, social caste differences, to physical differences—present an additional responsibility for parents at home and in school to provide education regarding these triggering factors as a preventive measure against further *bullying* incidents.

Bullying remains a national issue, with case numbers continuing to rise rapidly. Data from the Jaringan Pemantau Pendidikan Indonesia (JPPI) indicates that in 2025, cases of violence in educational settings reached 614. This figure represents a significant increase from the 2024 data, which totaled 573 cases. Meanwhile, in 2023 there were 285 cases, 194 cases were recorded in 2022, 142 cases in 2021, and 91 cases of violence were identified in 2020. These data show that sexual violence in educational settings accounts for 42 percent of the cases. *Bullying* accounts for 31 percent, physical violence 10 percent,

psychological violence 11 percent, and discriminatory policies 6 percent (Gautama & Yasir, 2025). These case numbers are quite significant as they continue to rise annually. Moreover, 31 percent of violence cases involve *bullying* in educational settings, which has made the educational environment unsafe for students due to the prevalence of violent practices that can disrupt their focus and mental health.

In addition, JPPI also provided data on the regions with the highest percentage of bullying cases in educational settings. According to the JPPI 2025 Monitoring Results E-book, West Java has the highest rate of bullying cases at 14.82 percent, followed by Central Java at 14.50 percent, Banten at 11.73 percent, and East Java at 9.77 percent (JPPI, 2025). Although East Java does not hold the highest percentage, these data still place it among the four regions with the highest number of bullying cases, indicating a level of vulnerability that is considered serious within the elementary school educational environment. This is evidenced by the discovery of several bullying cases in East Java.



Figure 1.2 Surabaya Deputy Mayor Armuji during a visit to SDN Ketabang, 2025

(Source: <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2025/09/20/161756178/kasus-perundungan-siswa-sd-di-ketabang-surabaya-wakil-wali-kota-saya-yang?page=all>)

Kompas (2025) reported a case of *bullying* at an elementary school in Surabaya that caused such severe mental distress to the victim that they became reluctant to return to school. The victim claimed *to have been bullied* by three classmates, ranging from being forced into the bathroom to suffering various forms of physical violence, including having their glasses broken. Despite being aware of these facts, ironically, school officials dismissed the matter as insignificant and even blamed the victim with various accusations, such as having poor grades, being prone to hitting others, and running around. (Safrina & Dennys, 2025). This demonstrates how indifferent the school

environment is to *bullying* incidents that are highly likely to harm children's mental health. Furthermore, hitting the victim until their glasses broke also constitutes a form of disrespect toward physical diversity, as glasses are an essential necessity for individuals with vision impairments.

Worse still, if such *bullying* is continuously inflicted on a child, their interpersonal intelligence will decline over time. Gardner (1983) in Goleman (2020) explains that interpersonal intelligence is the ability to understand others, including their motivations, thought patterns, and the capacity to collaborate with them. In other words, interpersonal intelligence is a trait that refers to an individual's ability to understand and distinguish the people around them, particularly in recognizing their moods, emotions, motivations, and intentions. Generally, this intelligence becomes evident when children can distinguish what those around them are feeling and pick up on changes in their moods. This also implies that children with such traits possess high self-awareness. According to interviews with psychologists, a child with high self-awareness will also exhibit strong self-monitoring and self-control. Such children are usually better at adapting their thoughts, feelings, or desires. On the other hand, children affected by *bullying* who have low interpersonal intelligence will find it harder to express themselves in public, leading to personalities that are withdrawn, shy, socially awkward, and avoidant of social interactions with others. Furthermore, due to their increasingly low interpersonal intelligence, children who are victims of *bullying* become reluctant to develop their own potential.

Children are at the ideal age to receive education because, during this period, they absorb new knowledge very quickly; therefore, it is important to guide their learning process so they develop in the right direction. Education about physical diversity needs to be instilled as early as possible as a preventive measure to ensure children do not grow up to be arrogant or discriminatory, so they can develop strong interpersonal skills and empathy. According to research conducted by Ramdhan & Sholeh (2025), multicultural education for children from an early age has proven effective, as students not only experience a positive shift in awareness regarding diversity but also demonstrate changes in social behavior, such as sharing, helping one another, and collaborating with children from diverse backgrounds. By providing education on various forms of diversity,

including physical differences, children can understand that everyone possesses unique qualities worthy of respect and appreciation. Furthermore, this education influences children's empathy, which fundamentally contributes to character development over time.

The application of empathy can be seen, for example, when a boy has a friend who has just been in an accident and has an injury to his right hand, preventing him from writing down the material explained by the teacher. Because this boy has been taught emotional intelligence from an early age, he understands and puts himself in his friend's shoes if he were to experience such a tragedy. Consequently, the boy understands that his friend needs physical assistance to take notes on the material provided by the teacher, as well as emotional support to continue encouraging and helping him until his hand heals. From this example, the importance of this education becomes a critical priority for shaping children's character to possess optimal empathy and emotional intelligence. However, based on observations and an interview with one of the teachers at SDN Ketabang on October 7, 2025, it was found that education regarding physical diversity is rarely taught in elementary schools. SDN Ketabang has a character-building education program for children called "Child-Friendly School," which addresses issues commonly encountered in children's social environments, such as *bullying* and sexual violence. However, the effectiveness of this program has not yet yielded significant impact on the children, as the practical implementation has not utilized an approach that effectively engages children's understanding of the material being presented. Furthermore, although there are many depictions of physical differences in textbooks found in the school's library, no books or textbooks have been found that specifically provide education on physical diversity.



Figure 1.3 Textbooks at SDN Ketabang, 2025

(Source: Personal Documents, 2025)

Thus, appropriate media is needed to convey education regarding physical diversity to elementary school students, with content presented in an engaging manner that is easy to understand and apply in daily life.

Printed books are one of the many media used to provide education. Although the existence of printed books in this digital age is considered conventional, they remain highly relevant as an educational medium. From a health perspective, printed books can serve as a solution for eyes constantly exposed to radiation from various gadgets. Additionally, printed books are very practical to carry anywhere without requiring power, unlike today’s digital media. However, children in this digital age tend to show resistance when they hear the word “book” because what comes to mind is inevitably a stack of paper filled with text.

Data from the National Literacy Trust reports that *“In 2025, reading enjoyment is at its lowest point in two decades. Over the past year, the decline has been most pronounced among primary-aged children and boys, particularly teenage boys: Just 1 in 3 (32.7%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 reported enjoying reading “very much” or “quite a lot” in 2025”* (Bone et al., 2025, p. 1)

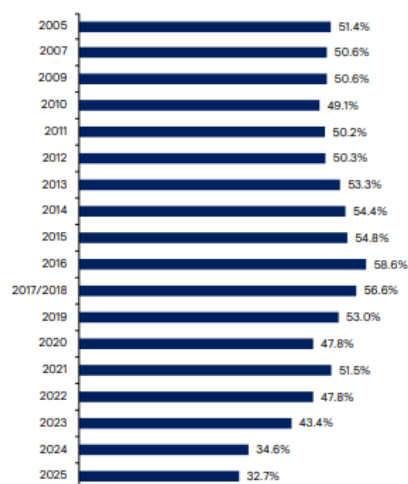


Figure 1.4 Graph of Reading Interest Among US Children and Adolescents, 2025

(Source: Bone, J. K., Bu, F., Sonke, J., & Fancourt, D. (2025). The decline in reading for pleasure in the US: analyses of 20 years of the American Time Use Survey.

https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/pfmxz_v1)

The data highlights that by 2025, children’s interest in reading books in the United States (US) had reached its lowest point in two decades. The report also noted that the majority of this decline in reading interest was observed among elementary school-aged children and boys. At least only 1 in 3 (32.7%) of them will have moderate or high reading interest by 2025. Along with these low figures from the United States (US), Disway Malang (2025) reports that Goodstats conducted a survey from January to February 2025 involving 1,000 respondents.



Figure 1.5 Graph of Indonesian Public Reading Interest Data, 2025

(Source: Personal document)

The survey revealed that only 20.7% of the Indonesian population reads regularly every day, including children. The remainder includes 22.3% who read books once a week, 24.6% once a month, 17% only occasionally, and 15.4% who almost never read books. This data indicates that reading interest among the Indonesian public, including children, remains very low, as 15.4% of people have never even read a book (Zalzabillah, 2025). This figure warrants more serious attention to explore how books can be made more appealing to various groups, particularly children who prefer interactive elements in books over those that are purely text-based. Therefore, to provide an enjoyable educational experience for children who are overwhelmed by books filled with text, the content must be presented in a more engaging way to foster a strong interest in reading and a high level of engagement with the material being conveyed. To address this, illustrations can serve as an alternative to create a *memorable* learning experience. Generally, illustrated books do not have many pages and feature a clear, easily understandable core message, ensuring children do not quickly lose interest in reading

the book's content. Consequently, this book will be designed using illustrations as the primary medium to present material on celebrating physical diversity as a preventive measure against *bullying* for elementary school students.

To date, there have been many illustration-based educational media with engaging content, one of which is children's books. There are also quite a few textbooks that incorporate elements of physical diversity through the characters of elementary school children in textbooks and other educational materials, although their representation is very limited. Nevertheless, children's books that specifically address physical diversity to prevent *bullying* are still rare. This book is designed with content focused on character development for *bullies*; thus, this design serves as an effort to introduce a fresh approach to conveying an understanding of respect for physical diversity through a novel perspective and creative, enjoyable delivery methods.

1.2. Problem Identification

Based on the background described above, the following issues were identified:

- a. Based on an interview with Mr. Muhammad Mahrus Hibatullah, S.Pd. (Mr. Mahrus), a problem was identified regarding the challenges in delivering education on physical diversity and *bullying*, which is perceived as still lacking in effectiveness because the materials are insufficient to fully reach the understanding of the students at SDN Ketabang.
- b. Based on an interview with Ms. Qurrota Ayuni Fitriana, S.Psi., M.Psi., a psychologist, it was found that children have not yet fully grasped the concept of physical diversity, leading to frequent instances of verbal *bullying* stemming from these differences.
- c. Students at SDN Ketabang lack a proper understanding of ethical behavior in friendships, so they are still unable to distinguish between what is appropriate and inappropriate—such as making fun of a classmate's height as a joke.
- d. Based on several bookstores visited by the author, there are at least a few books that depict physical diversity, particularly differences in skin color on their covers and among their characters. However, the researcher did not find any illustrated books that specifically address understanding physical diversity within the context of *bullying*.

- e. Based on observations conducted at SDN Ketabang, there is a school program that facilitates education on student misconduct (*bullying* and sexual violence), but there are no adequate, specific materials regarding physical diversity. As for books that include physical diversity, they are limited to illustrations featured on the covers of textbooks.

1.3. Problem Statement

Based on the background and problem identification above, the research question that can be identified is: How can a picture storybook be designed as an educational tool on physical diversity to prevent *bullying* behavior among elementary school students?

1.4. Scope of the Study

Based on the background presented, as well as the identified issues and problem statement, this design focuses on a single objective: to reduce the incidence of *bullying* by educating students about its triggers. Therefore, the scope of this study is as follows:

- a. The design of this picture book will focus solely on physical diversity education to prevent *bullying* in the social lives of elementary school children.
- b. The primary target audience for this book is elementary school students, specifically those in grades 4–6

1.5. Design Objectives

The objectives of this book design are:

- a. To design a picture book as an educational medium for elementary school children regarding the importance of respecting physical diversity, presented in an engaging and easy-to-understand format.
- b. To educate children about the diversity commonly encountered in daily life.
- c. To improve children's interpersonal intelligence in navigating social dynamics, particularly regarding physical diversity.
- d. To foster a better social environment for children by improving the quality of their thinking patterns.
- e. Building awareness in every child about the importance of respecting fellow human beings without discriminating against any of their characteristics, thereby fostering optimal empathy from an early age.

1.6. Benefits of the Design

a. For Elementary School Students

Serves as an educational tool to foster understanding of physical diversity through an engaging approach, thereby cultivating empathy and refining existing interpersonal intelligence.

b. For Teachers/Schools

Provides supporting materials for educational tools for elementary school children through character-building learning media that address real-world issues, and helps teachers convey an understanding of physical appreciation in an engaging and practical way.

c. For Parents/Guardians

Provides a learning tool that is easily accessible at home so that parents or guardians can support their children in their educational journey regarding physical appreciation.

d. For Visual Communication Design

Providing the latest information and practices regarding education using design and illustration for elementary school students. The results of this design are expected to serve as solutions to educational challenges through approaches rooted in visual communication design. Additionally, this design is intended to establish new guidelines for applying visual communication design elements—including color, character, typography, and illustration style—across various communicative designs tailored for elementary school students.

1.7. Framework

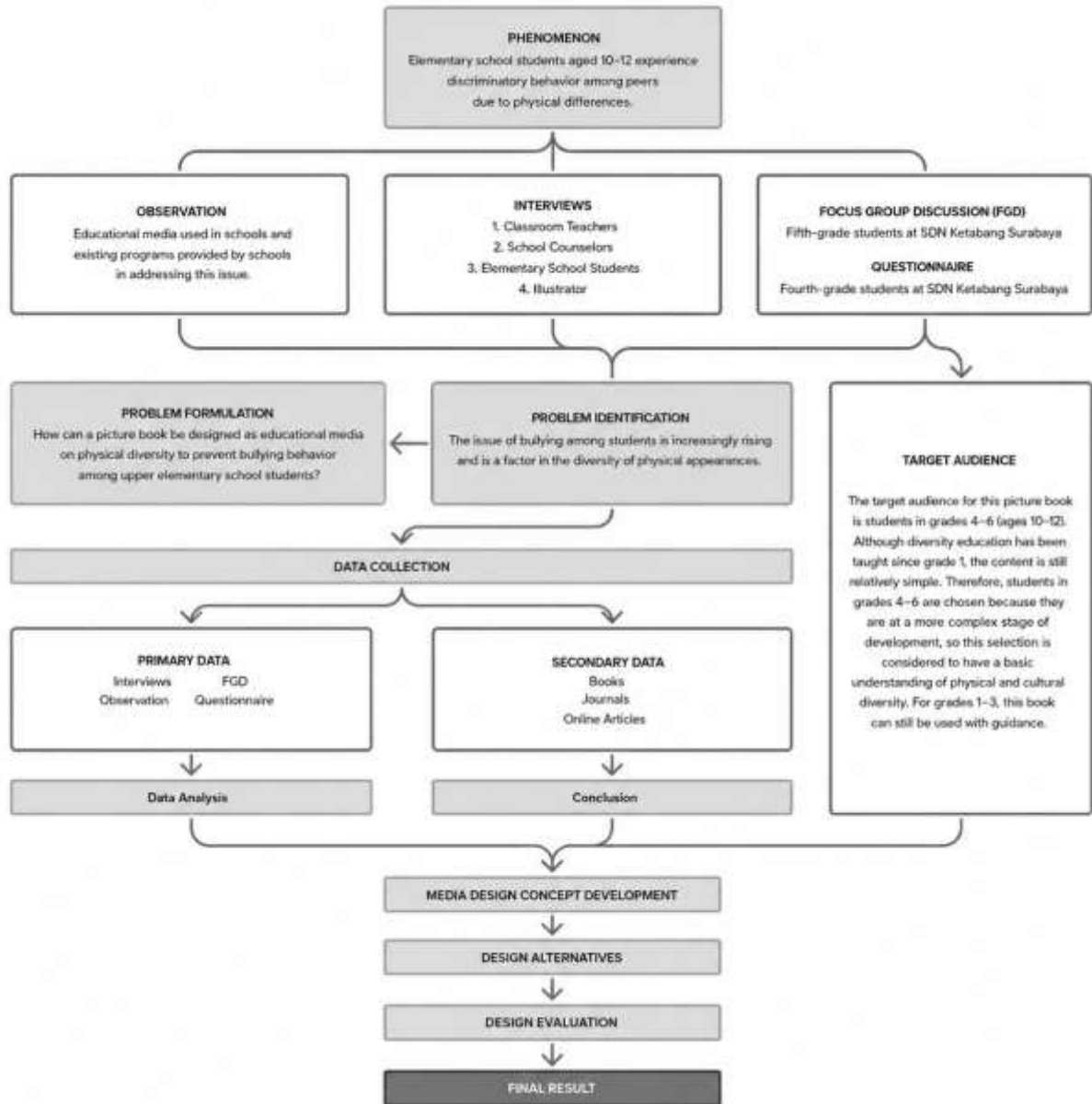


Figure 1.6 Conceptual Framework

(source: Personal Document, 2025)