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## Preparing future educational psychologists to prevent school bullying

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### Abstract

**Relevance.** School bullying is a widespread problem that requires effective prevention strategies. However, many teachers and educational psychologists lack sufficient knowledge and skills to address bullying. There is a need to better prepare future educational psychologists to prevent and intervene in bullying situations.

**Purpose.** The purpose of the research article is to develop and test an elective course for training future educational psychologists in bullying prevention in Kazakhstan schools.

**Methodology.** An elective course titled “Prevention of school bullying: from theory to practice” was developed and implemented with third-year bachelor's students in Pedagogy and Psychology at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. The course included theoretical and practical components. Students' knowledge and skills were assessed before and after the course using tests and case studies.

**Results.** Prior to the course, most students demonstrated low levels of knowledge and skills related to bullying prevention. After completing the course, students in the experimental group showed significant improvements, with 64% reaching a high level of competency compared to 0% in the control group. The course helped students acquire both theoretical knowledge and practical skills for addressing bullying.

**Conclusions.** The elective course was effective in developing future educational psychologists' professional competencies for bullying prevention. Recommendations are provided for improving bullying prevention efforts in Kazakhstan schools, including raising awareness, providing training for teachers and psychologists, and maintaining communication with parents. The study demonstrates the importance of practice-oriented training in preparing educational psychologists to address school bullying.

**Keywords:** bullying; bullying prevention; school violence; educational psychologist; educational environment; anti-bullying course.

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## Introduction

Currently, the problem of school bullying is widespread in developed and developing countries. Scientists and the pedagogical community are having heated discussions about who should own the function of managing and preventing bullying. Obviously, they agree that this problem requires an immediate solution, because bullying provokes suicidal behavior, leads to an increase in aggression and violence in adolescent groups, to a decrease in academic performance, psychological and behavioral problems. According to UNICEF statistics, two thirds of schoolchildren in Kazakhstan experience or witness violence from students or teachers [1].

There are two types of bullying: traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Traditional bullying is cruelty to the well-being and health of the victim, which can manifest itself in verbal form, social isolation, aggressive attitude towards the victim, as well as physical actions [2; 3]. Digitalization has led to a new type of bullying, cyberbullying, which manifests itself in aggressive behavior by an individual or group through electronic or digital media.

The importance of the problem of bullying is confirmed by a UNESCO [4] study, which was conducted in 144 countries. The data revealed that millions of schoolchildren, or rather every third student (32%), are bullied, boys are more susceptible to it than girls. In all regions except Europe and North America, physical bullying is the most common and sexual bullying is the second most common type of bullying. In Kazakhstan, verbal bullying is more common; boys and girls are equally exposed to it. Kazakh society is more susceptible to bullying because from childhood children are taught to respect elders, as a result they become psychologically dependent on the opinions of others.

The purpose of this article is to develop and test an elective course for future educational psychologists on the prevention of bullying in Kazakhstan schools. The need to develop and implement this course is due to the fact that many teachers and psychologists have insufficient knowledge and do not always know how to respond and what measures to apply in cases of school bullying.

The relevance of this study is that despite the fact that bullying is the focus of numerous studies around the world, in Kazakhstan this topic has not yet been sufficiently studied. Moreover, educational programs for the training of educational psychologists do not address the problem of school bullying, which makes it difficult to provide high-quality assistance to a student [5; 6].

## Literature review

The concept of school bullying differs from country to country. For example, in Eastern cultures bullying is understood as the isolation of the victim from the group, in Western cultures bullying has a broader concept that includes verbal, physical impact on the victim using aggression [7]. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, bullying is “the behavior of a person who hurts or frightens someone smaller or less powerful, often forcing that person to do something they do not want to do”.

In Europe and North America, psychological bullying is the most common form of bullying. Cyberbullying affects one in ten children. More than one in three students

(36%) have been involved in fights with another student, and almost one in three (32.4%) have been physically attacked at least once in the past year [4]. The study found that in the United Kingdom 22 % of those surveyed had been victims of bullying, 22 % had witnessed bullying, and 2 % had been the aggressors themselves. In the United States of America, approximately 20% of students aged 9 to 12 have experienced bullying, 70.6% have witnessed it, and 30% of those surveyed confirmed that they themselves were the initiators of bullying. In Russia, according to TASS, the leading state news agency of the Russian Federation, every third child has experienced bullying at school [8]. According to the statistics of the National Center for Public Healthcare [9], in the Republic of Kazakhstan, every fifth schoolchild aged 11-13 and every tenth teenager aged 15 become a victim of bullying. The survey showed that about 17% of schoolchildren aged 11-15 were bullied at school one or more times a month, and about 20% participated in bullying. Among boys, this indicator significantly decreased by the age of 15 (14%); 8.3% of children and adolescents were involved in bullying other people at school at least 2-3 times a month (a two-month survey). Cyberbullying is less common, 5% of teenagers have become victims of cyberbullying or have themselves been engaged in cyberbullying other people 2-3 times or more per month. This indicator is more common among boys as they get older [9].

Researchers offer various ways to solve this problem: programs, projects, preventive work to prevent situations associated with bullying in the student body. Scientists have proven that regardless of the type of bullying, it has negative effects on the health of schoolchildren. It mainly leads to an increase in aggression, anxiety, feelings of loneliness and violence among students, a decrease in academic performance, and provokes suicidal behavior. Researchers argue that the abuser also experiences health problems by exerting pressure and various types of aggression on the victim [10; 11]. Quantitative data from Croatia showed that children who bully their peers are neurotic, obnoxious, and lack affective empathy [12]. Bullying also has negative consequences in the adult life of the victim. Experienced psychological pressure, the desire to be unnoticed at school, and the resulting academic failure subsequently led to difficulties in finding employment [13].

Teachers, educational psychologists also experience difficulties in determining the act of bullying / whether the intention to harm the victim is intentional if the offender does not directly state his intentions [14].

It should be noted that the educational program for the training of a psychologist and an educational psychologist does not provide for the formation of professional competencies in the prevention of school bullying, only some aspects of this problem are covered in elective or special courses such as “Deviantology”, “Psychological support for persons in closed institutions”, “Psychology of a teenager” [15]. Scientists believe that it is necessary to conduct training activities for teachers and class teachers on the methods of bullying prevention [8]. Teachers who have attended anti-bullying trainings feel responsible and willing to help and support a bullying student [16]. The literature review confirms the need for a course to train future educational psychologists in the prevention of

bullying in the school environment. It is important to understand that a well-trained and qualified teaching staff is the key to a healthy and prosperous educational environment for the younger generation.

### Methods

Due to the fact that the problem of bullying is one of the most urgent problems that needs to be addressed, it became necessary to train psychologists who have the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to help students who are bullied. In order to prepare educational psychologists to work on bullying prevention, we developed and implemented an elective course “Prevention of school bullying: from theory to practice”. The specificity of this course is that it has a theoretical and practical focus.

The purpose of the course: the formation of professional competencies of future educational psychologists in the field of bullying prevention in the school environment. Course objectives: to acquaint future educational psychologists with theoretical knowledge about bullying, to do some practical tasks to prevent bullying; to develop the readiness of future educational psychologists to solve the problem of bullying, to provide assistance to victims of aggression, to form the ability to empathize, to sympathize with others. The course was implemented at the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. It was attended by the third-year bachelors of the educational program “Pedagogy and Psychology”. The study was conducted in the 2021-2022 academic year, 1 semester.

The experiment was carried out in three stages. At the first stage, the students passed a test to determine the level of knowledge about bullying (25 questions), and solved a case. Evaluation was carried out on a 100-point system: testing 50% for each correct answer, 2 points, and solving the case 50%. The case was evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. The quality of the analysis carried out and the validity of the conclusions drawn (10%);
2. Logic and structure of presentation (10%);
3. Use of theoretical concepts and theories of pedagogy and psychology (10%);

4. Non-standard thinking when developing a solution (10%);

5. Taking into account modern psychological and pedagogical features and conditions (10%).

We also developed criteria for evaluating the theoretical and practical components. (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Criteria for evaluating the information components by levels

Levels			
initial	low	average	high
0-49	50-69	70-89	90-100

The following methods were used during the study: theoretical (analysis, synthesis, generalization, deduction, induction); empirical (observation, testing); experimental (stating, developing and diagnostic experiment); statistical (statistical analysis of data, quantitative and qualitative analysis of research results). The main sources of the study were state educational documents, Kazakh and foreign literature, materials of scientific and practical conferences and articles.

### Results and Discussion

On the basis of the tasks we set, we distinguished two blocks: theoretical and practical. In the theoretical block we consider the concept of bullying, its varieties, existing programs on prevention of bullying, consequences on health and further life, well-being of the victim as well as work with victims and parents. In the practical block, we study methods, cases and organize training sessions for future educational psychologists. In diagnosing students’ knowledge and readiness to prevent bullying, we obtained the following results.

The analysis of Table 2 shows that future educational psychologists do not have enough knowledge and skills to prevent bullying. The highest percentage in the control group and the experimental group was low level, 63% and 71%, respectively. The high-level indicator in both groups was 0%.

**Table 2.** The content of the course

№	Topic	Content
<b>Theoretical block</b>		
1.	Bullying as a psychological and pedagogical category	The concept of bullying. Types of bullying. Direct and indirect bullying. Components. Participants of bullying. Causes. The difference between bullying and conflict. Peculiarities of bullying in children. The necessity of legalizing the discussion of bullying in an educational institution.
2.	Impacts of bullying on schoolchildren	The negative effects of bullying on victims, persecutors, witnesses and teachers. Effects of bullying on the psychological health of the student.
3.	Models of bullying prevention programs	Olweus Anti-bullying program; SAVE/ANDAVE (Spain); Bulli & Pupe (Bullies and Dolls) (Spain); The Donegal и ABC (Ireland); Viennese Social Competence (Austria); School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS): Expect Respect (USA);

		Steps to Respect (USA); GRIN (USA); The Friendly Schools Project (Australia).
4.	Organizational, institutional, and regulatory actions to prevent, identify, and intervene in bullying cases	Prevention of violence in educational institutions, UNESCO. Roadmap for strengthening the protection of children's rights, combating domestic violence and addressing suicidality among adolescents for 2020 - 2023 Fifth and sixth consolidated periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the Republic of Kazakhstan. The policy of the educational organization in relation to violence.
5.	Working with children and parents in bullying situations	Recommendations for parents and children in bullying situations. Helping a child with bullying.
6.	The role of the school psychologist in identifying and helping with bullying	Methods of bullying prevention. Diagnostics. Education. Correctional and developmental work with children. Counseling. Improvement of school safety.
7.	Algorithms for the work of an educational psychologist on the facts of school bullying.	Technologies for preventing bullying in the school environment.
<b>Practical block</b>		
8.	Discussion "How bullying affects our lives"	Stories of famous people. Sharing personal experiences.
9.	Case studies on bullying prevention	Pedagogical situations, cases, video cases.
10.	Bullying prevention training	A sense of safety in the school environment, the ability to respond to negative emotions, the ability to stand up for oneself.
11.	Watching the film "Scarecrow" (1983), "Class" (2007)	Case solution to the film.
12.	Bullying prevention games and exercises	Exercise "Love and anger", "Getting rid of anger and aggressiveness", "Show the situation" and others.
13.	Case studies on bullying prevention	Pedagogical situations and cases.
14.	Project work «Stop bullying»	Working on a project in groups.
15.	Assessing the readiness of educational psychologists to prevent bullying	Test, case solution.

During the formative experiment, we noticed that the students had some experience with bullying, having been a victim, witness, or abuser. These experiences helped students to take a more responsible approach to the course, as well as show a willingness to share their experiences.

It should be noted that the theoretical block of the course was given to students well. However, students had some difficulties in finding a solution to a case that would satisfy all participants of the situation. The students had insufficient knowledge of the application of theoretical material to solve a particular case. Future educational psychologists tried to offer a suitable method for providing psychological assistance to the victim, as well as to suggest topics for discussion with the abuser.

During the practical block, we could feel the cohesion of the future educational psychologists in their readiness and desire to manage bullying. The students willingly participated in discussions, games, trainings, project work, and even offered their own ways to deal with teenage aggression. Taking into account the fact that schoolchildren are full of energy and they need to throw it away, the students suggested organizing various sports clubs, in which students will not only improve their health, but also get rid of negative emotions, make new friends and improve communication skills. Korean scientists believe that sport also helps to increase students' self-esteem [17]. During the course, the teacher acts as a facilitator. He

guides and helps students achieve their goals. At the third stage, the future educational psychologists passed the test again to determine the level of knowledge about bullying and the ability to provide professional assistance to victims of bullying.

Having analyzed the educational programs for training educational psychologist in Kazakhstan, we came to the conclusion that there is no program-content component for preventing bullying types. For example, the analysis of our practical experience of students of the educational program "Pedagogy and Psychology" at the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University allows us to state that during such courses as "Psychology", "Psychology of deviant behavior", "Victimology", future educational psychologists get acquainted with the topic "school bullying", "the essence and types of this negative phenomenon", "its differences from other forms of violence", but they do not master the practical tools to prevent bullying in real school environment. In this regard, our course filled the gap in the training of future educational psychologists to prevent various forms of bullying in the modern educational environment.

Comparing the results before and after the experiment, we can conclude that this course had a positive effect because it had a practice-oriented focus (Tables 3, 4). This course helped the future psychologists acquire theoretical knowledge and practical skills, prepare future educational

psychologists to deal with bullying problems, and gain self-confidence.

**Table 3.** Diagnosis of the information components at the initial stage of the experiment

Groups	Levels			
	initial	low	average	high
KG	16	63	21	-
EG	11	71	18	-

Table 4 shows that the indicators in the experimental group increased significantly. The indicator of high level was 64%, average-23%, low level-13% and initial level - 0%. The indicators of the control group practically remained at the same level: high level – 0%, average level – 25%, low level – 61%, and initial level – 14%.

**Table 4.** Diagnosis of the information components at the final stage of the experiment

Groups	Levels			
	initial	low	average	high
KG	14	61	25	0
EG	0	13	23	64

The results of the study confirm the necessity of introducing the course “Prevention of school bullying: from theory to practice” in the preparation of the future educational psychologist. One of the significant advantages of this course is its practical focus – the integration of theory and practice to solve the tasks.

Prevention programs have been shown to reduce school violence by up to 20 percent [18; 19]. H. Gaffney, D.P Farrington and M.M Ttofi [20] analyzed various anti-bullying programs used in different countries and found that the most effective anti-bullying program is the Olweus Anti-bullying Program, which was introduced in Norway in 1983. This program is aimed at understanding the phenomenon of bullying, involving teachers and parents, developing clear rules against school violence, as well as supporting and protecting victims of bullying [21]. This program has been widely used in Austria, Sweden, Finland, Germany, and Iceland.

Many countries are making significant efforts to counter bullying. For example, in 2012, Taiwan’s Ministry of Education announced a national anti-bullying policy, “Regulations on the Prevention of School Bullying.” In addition, the Ministry of Education provides subsidies to combat school bullying [22].

Kazakhstan also uses attempts to combat bullying. For example, the information and educational campaign

against bullying in Kazakhstan schools “Ainalaiyn SOS” is aimed at discussing trends in modern education, parenting and school bullying. Street Law Kazakhstan, a project for schoolchildren, the main goal of which is to teach legal literacy, as well as the fight against violence against children. The Teens suicide prevention project helps schoolchildren understand themselves, their uniqueness, learn to be responsible, and also assists in solving psychological problems.

Restrictions and opportunities for future research. One restriction of this study is that the future educational psychologists did not apply what they learned about bullying prevention to real schoolchildren. Nevertheless, future educational psychologists have acquired knowledge of how to behave when confronted with this phenomenon. This study may have important implications for educational policy and the development of future anti-bullying programs.

**Conclusions**

To summarize, we can conclude that Kazakhstan schoolchildren, like schoolchildren from other countries, are subject to bullying. Moreover, future educational psychologists do not have sufficient knowledge to prevent bullying in the school environment, which confirms the necessity of introducing our elective course “Prevention of school bullying: from theory to practice”. This elective course forms the professional competencies of the future educational psychologist in the context of the prevention of school bullying.

Based on the results of the study, we offer the following recommendations for the prevention of school bullying in the Republic of Kazakhstan:

- perceive bullying as a serious problem of modern education;
- it is necessary to raise awareness about bullying among children and teachers by holding special educational lectures and events;
- conduct preventive conversations with schoolchildren, parents, introduce them to the concept of bullying and give recommendations on helping the child;
- maintain constant contact with parents;
- introduce a training course for teachers, psychologists on the prevention of school bullying;
- teachers should be role models for students in following the rules in order to avoid cases of bullying.

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**Conflict of Interest**

None.

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## **Підготовка майбутніх освітніх психологів до запобігання шкільному булінгу**

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### **Анотація**

**Актуальність.** Шкільний булінг — поширена проблема, яка потребує ефективних стратегій запобігання. Однак багатьом вчителям та шкільним психологам бракує знань та навичок для протидії булінгу. Існує потреба в кращій підготовці майбутніх освітніх психологів до запобігання та втручання в ситуації булінгу.

**Мета.** Метою наукової статті є розробка та апробація факультативного курсу для підготовки майбутніх освітніх психологів до профілактики булінгу в казахстанських школах.

**Методологія.** Розроблено та впроваджено елективний курс “Профілактика шкільного булінгу: від теорії до практики” зі студентами третього курсу бакалаврату педагогіки та психології Євразійського національного університету ім. Л.Н. Гумільова. Курс включав теоретичну та практичну складові. Знання та навички студентів оцінювалися до та після курсу за допомогою тестів та кейсів.

**Результати.** До початку курсу більшість учнів демонстрували низький рівень знань і навичок, пов'язаних із запобіганням булінгу. Після завершення курсу студенти експериментальної групи продемонстрували значні покращення: 64% досягли високого рівня компетентності порівняно з 0% у контрольній групі. Курс допоміг учням здобути як теоретичні знання, так і практичні навички протидії булінгу.

**Висновки.** Елективний курс виявився ефективним у розвитку професійних компетенцій майбутніх практичних психологів щодо запобігання булінгу. Надано рекомендації щодо покращення роботи з попередження булінгу в казахстанських школах, включаючи підвищення обізнаності, проведення тренінгів для вчителів і психологів, а також підтримку комунікації з батьками. Дослідження демонструє важливість практико-орієнтованого навчання у підготовці освітніх психологів до протидії шкільному булінгу.

**Ключові слова:** булінг; запобігання булінгу; шкільне насильство; практичний психолог; освітнє середовище; курс протидії булінгу.