

BULLYING IN PRIMARY CLASSES AND WAYS TO COMBAT IT

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Abstract. The article discusses bullying, one of the primary problems faced by general education schools. It provides information about bullying and refers to the opinions of several researchers who have studied bullying to clarify its nature. The article primarily focuses on bullying incidents in primary grades. It lists the factors contributing to bullying in primary schools, examines the negative effects of bullying on the physical and psychological health of primary school students, and investigates ways and means to combat bullying. It is stated that developing communication skills and empathy among students, creating a positive climate in schools, and emphasizing moral education will help to eliminate bullying.
Keywords: bullying, primary school, physical, psychological, teacher, ways to combat bullying.

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İBTİDAİ SİNİFLƏRDƏ BULLİNQ VƏ ONUNLA MÜBARİZƏ YOLLARI

Günay Məmmədzadə

ARTİ-nin fəlsəfə doktoru proqramı üzrə doktorantı,
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Annotasiya. Məqalədə ümumtəhsil məktəblərinin qarşısında duran problemlərdən biri olan bullinq hallarından bəhs edilmişdir. Burada bullinq haqqında məlumat verilmiş, onun mahiyyətinin açılması üçün bullinq hallarını tədqiq edən bir sıra alimlərin fikirlərinə müraciət edilmişdir. Məqalədə əsasən ibtidai siniflərdə baş verən bullinq hadisələrinə diqqət yetirilmişdir. Burada ibtidai siniflərdə bullinqə səbəb olan faktorlar sadəlanmış, bullinqin ibtidai sinif şagirdlərinin fiziki və eləcə də psixoloji sağlamlığı üzərindəki mənfi təsirləri araşdırılmış, bullinqlə mübarizə aparmaq yolları və imkanları tədqiq edilmişdir. Bildirilmişdir ki, şagirdlər arasında kommunikasiya bacarıqlarının inkişaf etdirilməsi və empatiya hissinin formalaşdırılması, məktəblərdə müsbət iqlimin formalaşdırılması, əxlaq tərbiyəsinə önəm verilməsi bullinq hallarının aradan qaldırılmasına dəstək olacaqdır.

Açar sözlər: bullinq, ibtidai məktəb, fiziki, psixoloji, müəllim, mübarizə yolları.

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Introduction / Giriş

Human beings are social creatures who, throughout their lives, seek to communicate with others, live in a safe environment, be loved and cared for, belong to a group, and assert themselves within that group. To achieve this, individuals must fulfill the need for communication with their peers in a specific group. Communication is a social necessity and is crucial for the development of student relationships. Students develop and enhance their knowledge through communication. Students with communication problems with their peers often experience delays in their personal development. L. Vygotsky emphasized the importance of communication, stating that it is the main driving force behind a child's psychological development [Vygotsky, L., 2005].

School, after the family, is one of the most important places where children adapt to society. It is not only a place where students acquire academic knowledge, but also where they realize their communication needs. Not all students fulfill their communication needs in the same way. While some students try to communicate amicably, others prefer aggression and violence, and some may struggle to establish relationships with peers due to shyness. Unfortunately, bullying prevents some students from fulfilling their communication needs and from being accepted into any peer group. Students who are frequently subjected to bullying often feel isolated [OEC., 2020].

Research shows that bullying negatively affects students' socialization and acceptance by their peers [UNESCO., 2015].

Bullying, an aggressive form of behavior among students, is prevalent in most countries and is considered one of the most serious problems in the educational field. The increase in bullying incidents in schools has prompted the need to thoroughly investigate this issue and explore possible solutions.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) report, 35% of children worldwide experience different forms of bullying. The report also indicates that bullying negatively affects not only students' mental health but also their emotional and psychological well-being, leading to a decline in academic performance [WHO., 2024].

One of the organizations that investigates the negative effects of bullying on students, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), reports in its 2023 Student Assessment Report from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) that many students with poor academic results are also victims of bullying. OECD statistics on academic performance in education indicate that countries with low bullying rates have higher academic

outcomes, while countries with higher bullying rates have lower results. It is important to note that among students with poor academic performance, there are both bullies and victims. This suggests that bullying negatively impacts the development of at least two individuals involved in the process [OECD., 2023].

The increase in bullying incidents in schools has placed the task of thoroughly investigating this issue and finding ways to prevent it at the forefront.

After the suicide of Elina Hacıyeva, an 8th-grade student at School No. 162 in 2019, the bullying problem became more prominent in Azerbaijan, and interest in this topic has grown significantly. Since 2019, in accordance with the "Action Plan on Additional Measures for Ensuring a Favorable Learning and Development Environment in General Education Institutions" by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, steps have been taken to address the bullying problem in Azerbaijani schools. To protect students from bullying and ensure a healthy moral and psychological environment in schools, a social campaign called "Talk to Me" has been launched. The project's aim is to ensure a healthy moral and psychological environment in schools and, thereby, protect students from bullying. As part of the project, teachers and parents are also being informed about the bullying problem. In addition, to prevent the problem, the "Hotline" service (146-2) for emergencies has been made available. Since 2023, the "Student Behavior Rules in General Education" have been developed and are being piloted in several schools, with attention being paid to bullying issues.

A number of articles have been written in the Azerbaijani scientific sphere regarding the research of this problem, with the Institute of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan particularly focusing on scientific investigations of the issue. Scholars such as C. Yahyalı, C. Hasanova, R. Mahmudov, and A. Rahimova have written various articles on bullying. Furthermore, the analytical report titled "Aggressive Behavior Among Juveniles: Detection of Bullying" published by the State Committee for Family, Women, and Children Affairs in 2024 is also a commendable study in this field.

Main part / Əsas hissə

In educational institutions around the world, students are exposed to various forms of bullying and become victims of bullies. Bullying weakens students' connection to school, creates feelings of fear and mistrust, and ultimately leads them to distance themselves from their educational life. This, in turn, violates students' right to receive an education in a safe environment.

Bullying is classified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a negative behavior pattern that harms students' physical and psychological health, as well

as their social development [WHO., 2012].

Bullying began to be studied in Scandinavian countries starting in the 1970s. After suicides in Norwegian schools in 1982 attributed to bullying, Norwegian-Swedish psychologist Dan Olweus began to investigate instances of violence among students and conducted a thorough study of the issue for over 20 years [Allanson, P., Lester, R., Notar, C., 2015].

Researchers who have conducted studies on bullying have provided various definitions for it:

According to Dan Olweus, "Bullying is a form of aggressive behavior and exploitation deliberately inflicted by a stronger student on a weaker one (verbal, physical, and psychological harm) repeatedly" [Olweus, D., 1993].

Bullying is violence committed by a group or individual against a person with low self-defense capabilities, aimed at causing harm [Peters, D., 2012].

When a student subjects another, who is physically or mentally weaker, to repeated negative behaviors through physical or verbal pressure, it is also considered bullying. These behaviors have a serious impact on the psychological development of the victimized student [Gülgez, Ö., Gündüz, B., 2018].

According to Sharp and Smith, bullying occurs when one student targets another, selecting them as a victim and deliberately exhibiting distressing behavior towards them [Smith, P., Sharp, S., 1994].

According to Roland and Thormod, bullying is the repeated and deliberate use of physical, verbal, and emotional pressure by a student against another who lacks the ability to defend themselves [Roland, E., Thormod, I., 2001].

Based on my research, I have concluded that bullying is violence-based and involves a negative behavior pattern, directed repeatedly by one or more individuals from the same or different age groups, aimed at a person who cannot defend themselves or struggles to do so. This behavior encompasses physical, psychological, sociological, and verbal pressure. It involves negative emotions such as aggression stemming from family conflicts, jealousy, irritation, envy, the desire to be a leader, the desire to feel powerful, the intention to become famous, the pleasure of causing harm to someone, etc.

When discussing bullying in general education schools, certain nuances should be considered, such as: from which grade bullying begins, at which age group it increases or decreases, the direct and indirect relationship between students' psychological and physical development and bullying, the extent of bullying among girls and boys, and whether bullying occurs more often between peers, classmates, or in interactions between older and younger students. To address this, it is essential to initially study bullying in primary grades and its effects on students' psychological and physiological development.

Bullying is initially observed among primary school students in schools. According to a report by the Education Review Office (ERO), an independent state agency assessing the quality of education in New Zealand, 46% of primary school students reported being victims of bullying, while 61% stated they were either directly involved or witnesses to bullying incidents [Bullying Prevention and Response in New Zealand Schools., 2019].

For students who begin their educational journey in primary school, their initial interactions with school are at the level of student-to-student and student-to-teacher relationships. Primary education covers the age range of 6-10 years and is characterized by the transition from play to learning. Students who cannot adapt well to the learning environment, remaining attached to the play-based environment, often struggle with sitting still, following rules, staying quiet, and maintaining order. This can sometimes lead to aggression in some students, making them the targets of bullies—those who follow the rules and are often praised for their calmness.

Another challenge for primary school students is the establishment of new friendships and the development of proper communication with teachers, as they may want to become the teacher's favorite. Being liked and accepted by their peers is crucial for primary school students; however, negative behaviors like bullying can hinder this process and negatively affect the student's psychological and physiological development.

Research by Glover and Roland on the impact of bullying on students has found that bullying victims experience a decrease in self-confidence and self-esteem, which leads to a decline in their academic performance [Glover, D., Gough, G., Johnson, M., Cartwright, N., 2000].

Factors contributing to bullying among primary school students

There are several factors that contribute to bullying among primary school students. These factors can be categorized as follows:

- **Parental mistakes in child rearing:** Violence within the family may lead children to adopt harmful behavior, as they may model the negative examples they observe at home. [Bowes, L., Arseneault, L., Maughan, B., Taylor, A., Caspi, A., Moffit, T., 2009, "School, neighborhood, and family factors are associated with children's bullying involvement: A nationally representative longitudinal study," *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 48, pp. 545-553].
- **Children exposed to domestic violence becoming bullies:** Children who experience violence at home may later become perpetrators of bullying [Nixon, Cl., and Watson, Ac., 2001].
- **Peer group selection:** The formation of specific peer groups among

students can influence bullying behavior, with some students becoming victims or perpetrators based on their group associations [Barboza, G., Schiamberg, L., Oehmke, J., Korzenievski, S., 2009, "Individual characteristics and the multiple contexts of adolescent bullying: an ecological perspective," *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, Vol. 38, pp. 101–121].

- **Character differences among students:** Variations in students' personalities, temperaments, and behavior can contribute to the emergence of bullying.
- **Underdeveloped moral understanding due to age characteristics:** Younger students may not have fully developed moral reasoning, which may lead to bullying behavior as they navigate social interactions.
- **Underdeveloped socialization skills:** Students who have not fully developed their social skills may struggle with forming positive peer relationships, which can result in bullying.
- **Underdeveloped empathy:** A lack of empathy or an underdeveloped ability to understand the feelings of others may lead some students to engage in bullying.
- **Physical development:** Physical differences among students can contribute to bullying, with students who are perceived as physically weaker or different often becoming targets.
- **Low socioeconomic status:** Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may face additional challenges, which may increase the likelihood of bullying [Gkatsa, T., et al., 2015].
- **Jealousy among students:** Competition and jealousy among peers can lead to bullying behaviors, as students may target those they feel threatened by [Jan, A., Husain, S., 2015, "Bullying in primary schools: Its causes and effects on students," *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol. 6, pp. 43-56].
- **Struggles for leadership among students:** The desire to attain leadership or status within a peer group can lead to bullying behavior as students vie for dominance [Kepenekci, Y., Çinkır, S., 2006].
- **Academic Success or Failure:** A student's academic performance, whether successful or struggling, may impact their involvement in bullying, either as a victim or a perpetrator.
- **Lack of cultural exposure:** Students who are not exposed to diverse cultural environments may lack understanding and acceptance of differences, which can contribute to bullying behavior.
- **Influence of social media and mass media:** Negative content found on social media, in the mass media, and on television—especially foreign

TV channels—may promote aggressive behavior among children.

- **Influence of movies and TV characters:** Violent or aggressive characters in movies or TV shows may shape children's behaviors, leading them to emulate these actions in real life.
- **Violence in video games and mobile apps:** Exposure to violent events in video games and mobile applications can contribute to aggressive behavior and bullying tendencies in children.

Psychological and Physical Health Effects of Bullying

Bullying has significant psychological and physical effects on students. The psychological distress experienced by victims of bullying negatively impacts their physical health, leading to various health issues. These effects can manifest as follows:

The Impact of Bullying on the Physical Health of Primary School Students:

Bullying can have several detrimental effects on the physical health of primary school students, including:

- **Various pain issues:** Students may experience chronic headaches, nausea, and general fatigue.
- **Sleep-Related problems:** Bullying victims may suffer from sleep disturbances, sometimes even resorting to sleeping during class.
- **Weight issues:** Bullying can lead to rapid weight loss or weight gain. [Kapçı, E., 2004].

Based on research on the physical health effects of bullying on primary school students, it is crucial to note that students who frequently complain of headaches, nausea, and fatigue should be closely monitored by teachers. If a student is being bullied, the psychological distress they experience can manifest in the aforementioned symptoms. In such cases, discussions should be held with the student's parents, and based on the doctor's assessment, if no physical problems are observed, the student should be included in the risk group of students most likely to be bullied and continuously monitored.

Students who are unable to report bullying to their teachers or parents might resort to sleeping during lessons as a coping mechanism. Furthermore, the disruption to their sleep patterns caused by the bullying may cause the student to sleep during class. In some cases, students struggling to cope with their distress may either increase their food intake or, conversely, stop eating altogether as a way to manage stress. As a result, the weight of the bullied student may fluctuate significantly, either increasing or decreasing rapidly. Having an unusually high or low weight may, in turn, make the student a new target for bullying [Kapçı, E., 2004].

Bullying negatively affects not only the physical health of students but also

their psychological well-being.

The Psychological impact of bullying on primary school students:

Bullying has significant psychological effects on primary school students, including:

- **Increased aggression:** Bullying victims may display heightened aggression as a response to their experiences.
- **Antisocial behavior and withdrawal:** Victims may become socially withdrawn, avoid forming friendships, and develop a fear of socializing, leading to a tendency toward loneliness [Sourander, A., Jensen, P., 2007].
- **Sadness and depression:** Bullying often causes emotional distress, resulting in feelings of sadness and depression.
- **Decreased self-confidence:** The victim's self-esteem may significantly drop as a consequence of bullying.
- **Desire to skip school:** Victims may begin to avoid school as a means of escaping the bullying situation.

When discussing the effects of bullying on the physical health of primary school students, it is equally important to recognize the psychological harm it causes.

A student who is bullied by classmates may start to believe that they are unloved and worthless, which can hinder their desire to form new friendships. As a result, they may grow into antisocial individuals with low self-esteem.

In some cases, bullying victims may show increased aggression and hostility. This may occur because a student who has been subjected to pressure might attempt to restore their self-confidence by exerting pressure on a weaker student, attempting to distance themselves from the negative feelings by targeting others.

Another common behavioral issue in primary school students who experience bullying is the desire to avoid school in order to escape the problems they face. Unlike older students, younger students often fabricate health-related excuses to skip school in response to bullying.

The large number of students in primary classes can create challenges in teaching and discipline, making it difficult for teachers to monitor and address negative behaviors effectively. The absence of consequences for such behaviors may lead students to engage in new, undesirable actions.

The Role of Primary School Teachers in the Emergence and Prevention of Bullying:

Primary school students, who approach their teachers with special affection, respect, and love, often strive to imitate them. Receiving attention and care from their teacher and becoming their favorite can be one of the greatest desires of primary school students. Considering all of these factors, we can understand the

immense influence that primary school teachers have on their students.

According to Smit and Thompson, teachers are indeed individuals with the skills to manage incidents of violence, as they play a crucial role in establishing healthy teacher-student and student-student relationships within the school. The teacher's approach is significant in the prevention and intervention of violent behaviors, highlighting the importance of the teacher's role in effectively addressing such issues [Smith, P., Sharp, S., 1994].

A teacher's behavior is closely monitored by students. If a teacher reprimands a student outside of ethical behavior guidelines or gives a nickname due to a negative characteristic, the student becomes an immediate target for bullying in the class. Therefore, when reprimanding a student, the teacher must be cautious and should offer their criticism privately. Additionally, overly praising a particular student may provoke feelings of jealousy among other students, potentially turning that student into a target for bullying.

Teachers must be highly attentive in their approach to students, ensuring their behavior is in harmony with the class atmosphere. A teacher's attitude toward violent behaviors can significantly influence the future actions of both victims and perpetrators of bullying [Huesman & Eron., 1984].

Given the developmental characteristics of primary school students, it is important to note that sometimes students may not be able to articulate unpleasant experiences. They may fear being labeled as a "tattletale" or worry about facing a reprimand from the teacher if they report instances of bullying.

How Can These Issues Be Prevented?

Measures against bullying should not be limited to the classroom where bullying occurs.

To achieve positive results, the issue must be addressed school-wide. Seminars organized on bullying and its harms can help prevent the issue and make victims realize they are not defenseless. Watching films and cartoons suitable for the topic and the students' age can also significantly aid in preventing bullying by fostering understanding of the problem and empathy. Establishing a positive school climate is another critical strategy to prevent bullying in schools [Özdemir, S., Sezgin, F., et al., 2010]. According to research by Thapa A., Cohen J., and Guffey S. involving 3,687 students, a positive school climate reduces risky behaviors among students [Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., 2013].

To address the problem, seminars should also be organized for parents to raise awareness, and they should be taught how to deal with any form of bullying they may encounter.

In the book *Best Practices for Preventing and Intervening in School Problems* by Howe E. and Haymes E., several strategies are proposed to address the prob-

lem. These include developing school-wide intervention programs, involving the entire school staff and parents in the implementation of these programs, making adjustments to the curriculum to address the underlying issues, carefully monitoring student behavior, encouraging students to seek help, and teaching them how to deal with bullying behaviors [Howe, et al., 2006].

In the UK, schools propose three solutions to tackle bullying: building friendships, resolving conflicts through communication, and fostering empathy [Cowie, S., 2000].

Conclusion / Nəticə

Primary education is the first stage of students' academic journey, a critical period during which teachers and parents must pay close attention. Students transitioning from a play-based environment to a school setting may face difficulties in adapting to school life. Bullied students may experience issues such as family violence, personal characteristics influencing behavior, underdeveloped social skills, and an inability to adjust to school rules, leading to bullying incidents. Bullying hinders students' psychological, physiological, and sociological development, causing a drop in academic performance, a desire to avoid school, future anxieties, and creating significant obstacles in their personality formation.

To address bullying, it is essential to strengthen moral education, promote proper relationships, enhance communication skills, and educate both students and parents about bullying. Teaching students how to say "no" to violence and how to combat bullying, ensuring teachers provide continuous oversight, and responding promptly to even the smallest complaints are crucial. Additionally, separating younger and older students in school buildings and other preventative measures can significantly reduce bullying in primary schools.

The following strategies can be employed to fight bullying in primary schools:

1. Strengthening moral education, forming correct relationships, and teaching students to respect each other, understand empathy, and the importance of friendship and help.
2. Developing students' communication skills to help them build better relationships and express themselves clearly, which can prevent bullying.
3. Informing parents about bullying, teaching them how to identify signs their children might be experiencing bullying, and providing them with solutions.
4. Teachers should monitor students' behavior, promote healthy communication, and intervene promptly in any negative incidents.

5. Teachers should not ignore students' complaints, as dismissing them could make the bullied student feel more helpless, while bullies might become emboldened.

6. Teaching students about bullying and its consequences helps them understand the situation and seek solutions.

7. Teaching students to say "no" to violence empowers them and helps them feel more confident in dealing with bullying.

In schools with large student populations, separating primary students from upper-grade students (including separate bathrooms and cafeterias) can reduce their risk of bullying. One notable project is the "Big Talks for Little People" program in South Australia, which successfully helped reduce bullying levels by fostering communication skills, conflict resolution abilities, emotional regulation, and empathy among students.

In my opinion, implementing such successful initiatives in Azerbaijan's educational institutions could play a significant role in preventing bullying.

Relevance of the Article: Bullying is a serious barrier in the development of student personalities and a form of violence that is actively researched and addressed. In Azerbaijan, efforts are being made to prevent bullying in schools.

Scientific Innovation: This research explores bullying in primary schools and ways to combat it, offering ideas that may be of interest to the academic community. The systematic investigation of bullying and its prevention in primary schools represents the scientific novelty of this study.

Practical Significance: Primary school teachers, subject teachers working in primary education, and parents wishing to protect their children from bullying can benefit from the findings of this study.

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