OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT TEACHERS' COMPETENCE TO CARRY OUT THE PREVENTION OF BULLYING AMONG PUPILS AT SCHOOL

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Abstract
Republic of Lithuania Law on Education (2011) indicates that one of the school's goals - to ensure a safe environment for its pupils. However, the number of bullying at schools remains quite high. Regarding the number of pupils, experiencing bullying, Lithuania is in first place (HBSC 2014) among other countries. The purpose of the article - to reveal teachers' competence as a factor, ensuring the prevention of bullying among peers at school. The results of qualitative research, which reflects the teachers' attitude to their competence to deal with cases of bullying among peers at school, are presented in the article. The results of qualitative research reveal the attitudes of social pedagogues and class masters towards teachers' ability to carry out the prevention of bullying at school. The results of the survey show that the majority of teachers have the knowledge about bullying, its expression, however, some teachers state that they lack the ability to deal with cases of bullying among peers at school. Teachers experience difficulties mostly when they try to interfere in bullying situations among peers. The results of the research allow to make an assumption that seeking for the quality in preventing the bullying among peers, it is necessary to improve teachers' competences.

KEYWORDS: teachers' competence, pupils, bullying prevention at school.

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Introduction

One of child's inborn needs is to feel safe in the close environment, however, various pupils' surveys show that a large number of children at schools become victims of aggression, which occur in a form of bullying (Wolke D. et al., 2001). Republic of Lithuania Law on Education (2011) states, that school's responsibility is to ensure friendly and safe education and learning environment for its pupils. This means that school delegates a function to carry out the prevention of violence, including bullying at school. The researches, accomplished both abroad and in Lithuania, show that the number of bullying manifestations at schools is still high. Bullying is an international phenomenon which is common to all countries: bullying is experienced by pupils from Scandinavia and Great Britain, Germany, Greece and other countries. Only the extent of bullying of different countries varies. In Belgium 23 per cent of primary school pupils experience bullying, in Greece 14.7 per cent are frequently bullied, while the rest are mocked by 6.3 percent of children (Pateraki et al., 2001). The results of accomplished survey in Canada reveal that 5 per cent of boys and 7 per cent of girls, aged 4-11 often experienced bullying and 14 per cent of boys and 9 per cent of girls mocked at others (Robichaud et al., 2007).

In Lithuania the bullying problem is even more relevant than in other countries. Although in Lithuania applied researches are conducted and programs are carried out, bullying at school is one of the most pressing problems for many pupils (Jonynienė et al., 2011). According to the study results of HBSC (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children), accomplished in 2014, the rate of bullying at Lithuanian schools remains the highest, in comparison with other countries. Both in Lithuania and all over the world researches on bullying among peers are carried out. The frequency of bullying at schools is being investigated. (Olweus, 2008; Robichaud, 2007; Valeckienė, 2007), forms of bullying, experience of a victim and an offender (Olweus, 2008 Zaborskis 2014), the consequences of this phenomenon are being delved into (Smokowski et al., 2005; Robichaud, 2007; Gumuliauskienė et al., 2010). There is still an intensive search for ways, enabling to reduce bullying at schools (Povilaitis et al., 2006; Olweus, 2008). Lithuania is currently highly focused on cyberbullying analysis (Valeckienė, 2011; Gedutienė et al., 2012). Although scientific researches have already answered to many issues regarding bullying prevention or implementation, but basically, looking at the situation in Lithuania, there is a lack of research, which would scientifically justify teachers’ competence to carry out bullying prevention program.

The issue of teachers’ competence is also important for the compulsory implementation of bullying prevention at school. Lithuanian Seimas Committee on Education, Science and Culture has approved to the proposed project, which offers the Government to ensure that in all Lithuanian schools at least one of
The bullying and violence prevention program (optional) would always operate. So, schools will have to carry out bullying prevention compulsorily, however, not all teachers are prepared for it, because these problems were normally solved by educational assistance specialists together with class teachers. Therefore, this article seeks to answer to the issues that are important to Educational Science: what competencies are required for teachers and which of them must be improved in solving the bullying cases at school.

**The object of research:** the competence of teachers to carry out bullying prevention program among pupils at school.

**The aim of research:** to identify teachers' opportunities for improvement their competence to carry out the bullying prevention program among pupils at school

**The methods of research:** analysis of scientific literature; interviews; questionnaire in writing; the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the obtained data.

Quantitative research (survey method in writing) is selected in order to find out teachers’ competence to carry out the bullying prevention program among pupils at school. The written survey for teachers involved the following areas: assessment of teachers ‘competence to deal with bullying problems among pupils at school and ways of improving teachers’ competence to deal with bullying problems at school. 113 teachers from Klaipeda mainstream schools participated in the quantitative research. 87.6 % of them were women and 12.4 % of men (from 25 to 66 years old). The data of quantitative research was processed using the 16.0 version of statistical data processing computer program SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) package. The following statistical methods were applied for the analysis of data: the Mann-Whitney, Kruskal-Wallis criteria.

By means of qualitative research (interview method) it was sought to investigate which competencies teachers lack in dealing with the problems of bullying among pupils at school. 16 teachers (6 social pedagogues and 10 class teachers), working in mainstream schools qualitative research. The sample of researched was formed according to the *Snowball Principle* (Snowball sampling). The data was processed by the analysis method.

**The methodological provisions of research:**

*Humanistic education.* This trend emphasises learning as a cognitive process, which is strongly associated with motivation, choice and responsibility. While investigating the improvement of teachers' competence, humanistic psychology provisions were being referred to. A teacher, who is planning to improve his competence, firstly, draws attention to the competences, he has already possessed, assesses them in the contexts of the quality of education, including bullying prevention among pupils. The need for the improvement of teacher's competence arises from a desire to help children, by satisfying their security needs and developing their moral values. According to the representatives of humanistic trend (Maslow, Rogers), the most important feature of a mature personality is to release their powers freely. Therefore, teachers need for the improvement of their competence is not just an end in itself, but also helping to unfold pupils' powers By following the ideas of humanistic education, teacher will be able to get to know his pupils, to meet their needs, by providing them with knowledge, the right values, by shaping their worldview.

*D. Olweus bullying prevention concept.* D. Olweus (2008) states that successful a factor of successful bullying prevention is teachers' responsibility for the solution to the problem of bullying at school. The basis of bullying prevention is not a work with children but with adults at school. As D. Olweus marks, the main purpose, of bullying prevention – to provide teachers with competencies to recognise bullying, respond to it and to offer assistance to pupils in bullying situations. The core competencies that each teacher should possess while performing bullying prevention are: the ability to recognise, spot bullying and respond to it properly, to deal with cases of bullying, to manage conflict situations, to change pupils and parents' attitudes towards bullying as a phenomenon. While analysing the improvement of teachers' competence in carrying out bullying prevention at school, the following theoretical provisions of D. Olweus are very important: adults’ responsibility for the safety of children at school, self-assessment of competences in the context of bullying prevention and continuous development of teachers’ competence seeking for pupils' safety.

### Theoretical Assumptions of Teachers' Competence to Carry out the Bullying Prevention Program

The prevalence of bullying at school disrupts the educational process, complicates pupils and teachers’ activities, complicates relations among pupils, endangers fundamental human rights, all of
which have long-term consequences to the socialisation of pupils. D. Olweus (2008) also defines bullying as: a deliberate, unprovoked, permanent physical or verbal abuse of one person or a group on another person, in order to hurt or humiliate him. K. Rigby and P. Smith (2011) define bullying as a systematic abuse of permanent and recurring power – the dominance which aims to intimidate, manipulate and hurt the other person, and they distinguish three types of bullying: rough physical gestures (pushing, hitting, deprivation of money and personal belongings, etc.); verbal abuse (verbal bullying related to disability, nationality, appearance, social and cultural environment, etc.); social separation (isolation from the group, slander, gossip, etc.). Often, not only parents, but also teachers assume that bullying can help children gain appropriate social skills, becomes more stronger. As various studies show (Rigby, Smith, 2011; Jonynienė et al., 2011) the bullying effect on children is always negative. The impact of bullying highly depends on adults' response to this phenomenon, their support and assistance. As proven by scientists, bullying is a risk factor for a wide range of mental health and behavioral disorders to occur. And only in the presence of protective factors (which may include family’s support, teachers’ assistance) we can expect that the consequences of bullying will not be so painful (Povilaitis et al., 2008).

As it was mentioned, whether protection factors against bullying at school will be strengthened usually depends only on the adult's position. One of the protection factors - positive social interaction among teachers and children. Interaction among teachers – one of the major behavioral models for children, as according to the social learning theory, children are constantly observing adults and apply the learned communicative behavior while communicating with peers (Povilaitis et al., 2008). Class teachers frequently communicate with their pupils in an informal environment, they have all opportunities to observe a child in other than school’s environment. Therefore, class teachers firstly notice bullying, ongoing at the class level (Braslauškiéné, Jonutytė, 2005). While implementing bullying prevention program, the role of class teacher is very important, as by constantly communicating with a group of children, he can discuss appropriate and inappropriate behavior; encourage to create class rules against bullying and apply them to the class level; explain to his pupils what bullying is, its reasons, discuss the roles of pupils in bullying situations and pupils’ feelings, arising in selected roles. Moreover, class teacher can also discuss these issues not only with pupils, but also with their parents, by including them in bullying prevention performance at school.

The majority of scientists (Olweus, 2008 Zaborskis 2014, Povilaitis, et al., 2008.) emphasise teacher’s key role in dealing with the problems of bullying among pupils and analyse teacher’s functions, carrying out bullying prevention at school. If teacher seeks to perform his functions properly, he must possess appropriate competencies, i.e. knowledge of the phenomenon of bullying, his expression, methods of assistance; as well as important skills that would help to identify bullying situation and deal with it. In addition to knowledge and skills, a teacher must also have the adequate attitude towards the bullying phenomenon, its participants and, foremost, responsibility and willingness to act in bullying situations. Thus, one of the successful assumptions of bullying prevention among pupils at school – development of teacher’s competencies.

Recently, a considerable attention towards investigation of teachers’ competence is paid. The significance of competence was investigated by P. Jucevičienė, D. Lepaitė (2000), R. Adamoniénė (2001) and others. While dealing with the issues of teachers' competence development in carrying out bullying prevention at school, it is important to analyse what is included in teachers' competence in the context of bullying prevention, how to assess it and what are the necessary conditions for competence development.

Competition, according to P. Jucevičienė, D. Lepaitė (2000), L. Jovaiša (2003), is an expression of professional qualification, an ability to act, determined by an individual's knowledge, abilities, skills, attitudes, personality traits and values. P. Jucevičienė, D. Lepaitė (2000) state that competence is an expression of person’s qualification or an ability to act, determined by knowledge, abilities, skills, attitudes, personality traits and values. In other words, competence represents employee's ability to apply knowledge gained in a particular situation. The article follows P. Jucevičienė and D. Lepaitė (2000) provision that it is enough to possess skills, abilities and knowledge in order to raise professional qualification, however, not only qualification, but also personality traits, values and attitudes are also significant to be included into the structure of competence. Thus, referring to the scientific concepts of competence, discussed in the article, the following competence structure is being followed: knowledge, abilities, skills, attitudes, values. So, teachers will be able to implement bullying prevention among pupils at school successfully, if they have adequate knowledge of bullying phenomenon, will be able to recognise it, to deal with bullying cases, to carry out intervention in bullying situations and etc.. However, as the scientists indicate, it is not enough to provide teachers with knowledge about bullying phenomenon.
and improve the capacity to intervene in bullying situations, one of the most important components of competence are teachers' attitudes towards the phenomenon of bullying. Teachers’ intolerance towards bullying and the right approach to a child who experiences bullying are important to a successful implementation of anti-bullying activities. Thus, while implementing effective bullying prevention programs among pupils at school, firstly, appropriate conditions for a teacher to gain an appropriate competence and improve it continually must be created.

**The results of the research**

One of the components of teachers' competence to carry out bullying prevention among pupils at school is knowledge about the phenomenon of bullying, its expression, methods for the assistance of pupils who have experienced bullying situations and etc.. The research aimed to assess teachers' knowledge of bullying among pupils in the context of prevention. The replies are presented in Fig. 1.

The data in the figure shows that the majority of teachers (66.30%) have the knowledge on how to handle bullying situations. Almost the fifth of respondents have indicated that they always know how to deal with bullying situations among pupils, 12.4% of respondents have answered that they only sometimes know, and 1.8% of them do not know how to deal with bullying situations among pupils. Referring to the research results it can be assumed that the majority of teachers have knowledge about the phenomenon of bullying and methods of assistance in the bullying situations among pupils. Comparing the results of teachers' responses according to the socio-demographic indicators, statistically significant differences, referring to teachers' age, have been observed. Most often teachers, aged 46 years and more (Kruskal-Wallis = 13.304, p = 0.001), know how to handle bullying situations among pupils; the ranking average of this groups' answers (70.00) was the highest, compared to the ranking averages of answers from respondents of other age groups. Also, statistically significant differences, comparing the answers of teachers according to their work experience, were established: teachers with longer work experience mostly know how to deal with bullying situations among pupils (the ranking average of their answers according to the Mann-Whitney test (63.57) was higher compared to the other groups).

During the research it was pursued to find out whether teachers have enough skills in solving problems of bullying among pupils at school. The answers are presented in Fig. 2.
The results of analysis’ data have revealed that only 21.2 per cent of teachers are fully confident in their abilities in solving various bullying situations, the half of teachers believe that they have enough capacities to deal with the problems associated with bullying situations among pupils at school. However, the rest of teachers say that they lack skills in dealing with different situations of bullying among pupils. Also, a small part (2.7%) of teachers stated that they have completely insufficient capacity to deal with bullying issues at school.

After applying Kruskal-Wallis criterion, the relationship between teachers' work experience and ability to solve problems of bullying at school was established. The research has revealed that the huger work experience they have, the more able to solve problems of bullying at school they are.

Self-assessment of each teacher’s competence in carrying out bullying prevention program and pursue to improve it constantly are very important. Therefore, the following question was asked: what competences teachers lack in order to deal with issues related to bullying among students successfully. The research findings were distributed as follows (see. Fig. 3).

![Fig. 3. Competences, which teachers lack while dealing with bullying situations](image)

(1 – hardly notice bullying; 2 – lack skills to properly stop the bullying; 3 – are unaware of how to punish the offender; 4 – do not know how to help the bullying victim; 5-other).

The research has revealed that, mostly, teachers lack skills, how to stop bullying properly (31.90%). More respondents i.e. 20.40% have indicated that they are not aware of how to work with the offender, who mocks at other pupils, 16.80% - do not know how to help the bullying victim.

Qualitative research has also revealed that teachers lack competence to carry out bullying prevention program qualitatively. Class teachers and social pedagogues were asked a question, ,What skills and knowledge you lack while providing assistance for children who experience peers bullying at school?". This category revealed 4 subcategories: knowledge and practical skills, how to deal with bullying situations, skills working with parents, organisational skills, abilities recognising bullying phenomenon.

Class teachers and social pedagogues have pointed out that in order to deal with the problems of bullying at school successfully, the update of knowledge is necessary („While providing assistance, it would be great to have some kind of seminar about so called generation „ Z "... generations are changing, what was a few years ago, really does not exist anymore (SP1); „... there psychological knowledge are missing a bit ... (K3); „ definitely, psychological knowledge - how to make this child change ”). In addition, class teachers have expressed that they lack practical skills in solving bullying situations („There is a lack of practical skills (K2) ... "Some skills how I can behave in a concrete situation are missing..K4"), („ there is a lack of competence, because everything changes .. .. ”). Moreover, some informants would like to improve the competence of working with parents („...lack of competence, how to incorporate those parents, that they will not be indifferent for their children (K5) ;" I would like to gain more skills on how to communicate with different parents, because I encounter with all sorts of (SP4). Social pedagogues have especially emphasised the lack of managerial competence in carrying out bullying prevention at school, providing assistance to children who experience bullying at school from their peers („... There is a lack of organizational skills, maybe, because you need everything. When you do such kind of job you need everything, - also to be able to write those projects (SP2), „... the ability to control the whole school, I mean that the whole school would work as it is foreseen in our school agreements (SP3), „... there is a lack of capacity to prove everyone that this is useful. If we all did in a way we should, then everything would be fine (SP1); „... there is a lack of ability to inspire others so that all would react in the same way and would be able to name it, because sometimes, you know, the
teacher notices that by himself, “dear” thinks that I will turn away and will not see. Here, maybe I do not have an ability to inspire all to work equally (SP5). Social pedagogues note that the class teachers lack not only the competence of providing support, but also skills of identifying bullying phenomenon itself: “class leaders, who fail to perceive the cases of bullying, who react only to physical bullying and " blind " for the psychological and emotional pupils' bullying" (S2), “class teacher often does not distinguish between bullying and what is normal (S4).

To sum up, it can be assumed that teachers do not have sufficient competence to deal with all problems related to bullying among pupils.

The research revealed in what ways teachers develop their competencies to deal with bullying issues among pupils at school. The data obtained are depicted in Fig 4.

![Fig. 4. Development techniques of teachers' competence to deal with bullying problems among pupils at school](image)

After analysing research results it has turned out that the most effective way of improving teachers’ competence in solving bullying situations at school is participation in the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP). The majority of teachers, i.e. 41.6%, that participated in this program, have improved their competencies. Others (26.5%) are independently developing bullying prevention competencies, by reading literature; 28.3% - by taking part in special courses, seminars, and 14.2% improve their competencies by sharing best practices among colleagues.

So, in conclusion, it can be stated that the majority of teachers, by solving bullying problems among pupils at school are mainly improving their competences in several ways: by participating in the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and by attending specialised courses and/or by reading literature.

Conclusions

The results of the survey show that the majority of teachers have the knowledge about bullying, its expression, however, some teachers state that they lack the ability to deal with cases of bullying among peers at school. Teachers experience difficulties mostly when they try to interfere in bullying situations among peers. Moreover, some teachers do not know how to provide assistance to pupils who have experienced bullying from peers. Teachers, especially class tutors, lack skills, not only how to stop the bullying, how to work with the offender, but also how to recognise the bullying itself. In conclusion, it can be assumed that teachers do not have sufficient competence to deal with all the problems, associated with bullying among pupils.

The results of qualitative research have highlighted the difficulties faced by social pedagogues and class teachers while carrying out bullying prevention at schools: indifference of parents and teachers towards prevention activities at school, lack of social and educational competences for supporting pupils, who have experienced bullying, etc.. The results of the research allow to make an assumption that seeking for the quality in preventing the bullying among peers, it is necessary to improve teachers' competences.

Mostly, teachers develop their competence by participating in The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and specialised courses. The results of qualitative research have revealed that, in order to carry out high quality prevention of bullying at school, social pedagogues and class teachers would like to gain
more psychological and professional skills, how to deal with bullying situations and develop the competence of communicating with parents. Social pedagogues would mostly like to improve the managerial competence, which would enable to bring together school community more effectively in bullying prevention activities.

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PEDAGOGŲ KOMPETENCIJOS VYKDYTI PATYČIŲ PREVENCIJĄ MOKYKLOJE TOBULINIMO GALIMYBĖS

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Santrauka


Kiekvienas tyrimas (apklausos rasta metodas) pasirinktas siekiant išsiaiškinti pedagogų kompetencijas vykdyti mokinių patyčių prevenciją mokyklose. Apklausos rasta pedagogams apėmė šias sritis: pedagogų kompetencijos spręsti mokinių patyčių problemas mokyklose vertinimas, pedagogų kompetencijos tobulinimo būdai spręsti patyčių problemas mokyklose. Kiekvienas tyrimas dalyvavo 113 pedagogų iš Klaipėdos bendrojo ugdymo mokyklos. Kiekvieno tyrimo duomenys apdorojami naudojant statistinių duomenų apdorojimo kompiuterinės programos SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) paketo 16.0 versiją. Analyzuojant duomenis taikyti šie statistiniai metodai: