

**Self-efficacy and its relationship to school bullying among middle school students
Field study in Tizi Ouzou middle schools**

Boudinar Lynda *

Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi Ouzou Algeria
lynda.boudinar@ummto.dz

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Abstract:

This study aimed to explore the relationship between self-efficacy and school bullying, as well as the differences in self-efficacy and school bullying between male and female secondary school students. The study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the terms 'self-efficacy' and 'school bullying', a phenomenon that has become prevalent and dangerous in society. A total of 100 male and female students were randomly selected from several middle schools in Tizi Ouzou to participate in the study. The self-efficacy scale by Mahmoud Kazem Mahmoud (2008) and the school bullying scale by Magdy Mohamed El-Desouki were used to test the study hypotheses. The results indicated a statistically significant inverse relationship between self-efficacy and school bullying among middle school students, and statistically significant gender differences in self-efficacy and school bullying.

Keywords: self-efficacy, school bullying, middle school students.

* Corresponding author

Introduction:

Schools are social institutions that play a crucial role in educating young people and instilling good habits and behaviours. Schools implement programmes and activities aimed at nurturing and developing various aspects of students' personalities. Education is not just about delivering lessons; it is a constructive process that contributes to students' character development, fosters a sense of social responsibility and helps them to find balance in all areas of their lives, including enhancing their self-efficacy. This can help to reduce negative behaviours such as violence, aggression and bullying in the school environment.

To clarify the concept of self-efficacy, Bandura proposed the idea that individuals have expectations that enable them to successfully perform specific actions. Those with a high level of perceived self-efficacy tend to perform better in many tasks than those with lower self-efficacy. Furthermore, researcher Mariam Slim supports this definition, stating that self-efficacy is the belief that we can achieve our goals and overcome challenges. This belief is fundamental in shaping self-esteem and self-confidence; of course, this feeling only arises after successful experiences (Mariam, 2003, p. 63).

In this context, the study by "Bakshiti" and "Majlilo" (2003) examined self-image and perceived self-efficacy, aiming to assess the perceived self-image throughout the various stages of adolescence. The results indicated that adolescents often describe themselves with positive attributes. Additionally, male students in vocational schools have a better self-image compared to high school students. The findings also revealed statistically significant differences in self-efficacy between females and males, favoring males.

Furthermore, Mohamed Sami Mohamed's (2005) study, titled 'School Activities and Their Relation to Self-Efficacy', aimed to identify the relationship between school activities and self-efficacy among second-year middle school students, as well as determining gender differences in self-efficacy. The results showed a significant correlation between school activities and self-efficacy, with significant differences favouring males (Abu Suleiman, 2007, p. 8). Belief in self-efficacy influences students' thinking, emotions, behaviour and actions. High levels of self-efficacy are manifested by an increased interest in performance, indicating that a student's behaviour is influenced by their belief in their own self-efficacy.

Cognitive theory is based on the concept of an interaction between what individuals think, how they feel and how they act. Thus, these beliefs determine academic behaviour and interactions with peers, which can be positive, as reflected in good relationships, or negative, such as aggressive behaviour. Some students may feel superior to their peers, leading them to bully others to demonstrate their capability and self-efficacy.

Students often experience negative behaviours from their peers in the school environment, with school bullying becoming one of the most prevalent and dangerous phenomena. Incidents of bullying are increasing in both frequency and methodology, especially in light of the rise in domestic violence and child abuse. Bullying is a form of aggression that occurs when an individual is subjected to negative behaviour that causes harm due to power imbalances. The person who exhibits this behaviour is referred to as the 'bully', while the person who is subjected to it is referred to as the 'bullied'. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological.

Bullying behaviour in the school environment can lead to severe educational, psychological and social problems, which have negative repercussions for the school environment, particularly during the middle school years. This period is considered one of the most critical and challenging phases of education for students, both academically and behaviourally. It can create tensions among students, affecting their academic progress and integration. Consequently, victims may experience low self-esteem and a loss of self-confidence. Numerous studies have demonstrated that exposure to violence and danger impacts students in all aspects of their lives. For example, Kirk and Skinner's (2006) study

revealed varying degrees of bullying prevalence among students, with physical bullying being the most common form and verbal bullying the second most common. The study also revealed significant gender-based differences in bullying, favouring males (Nazmi Hassan Alaa, 2019, p. 175).

Additionally, a study by researcher 'Khough' (2011) titled 'School Bullying and Its Relationship to Social Skills Among Elementary School Students' found a significant negative correlation between school bullying and social skills (Mohamed Awad Bachir, 2018, p. 5).

Given the importance of self-efficacy and the need to foster self-esteem in students, as well as mitigate the dangers of school bullying while safeguarding the mental health of secondary school pupils, we propose the following research questions concerning self-efficacy and bullying, based on reality and previous literature:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between self-efficacy and school bullying among middle school students?
2. Are there statistically significant differences in self-efficacy among middle school students attributed to gender?
3. Are there statistically significant differences in self-efficacy among middle school students according to gender?

Study hypotheses:

- There is a statistically significant relationship between self-efficacy and school bullying among secondary school students.
- There are statistically significant differences in self-efficacy among middle school students attributed to gender.
- There are statistically significant differences in school bullying among middle school students attributed to gender.

Significance of the study:

This study is important because it explores the nature of school bullying and clarifies the role of various influencing factors. Consequently, the study aims to identify ways to support middle school adolescents during this critical developmental stage, both educationally and emotionally. The study also seeks to understand the concept of self-efficacy and its role in the emergence of bullying behaviour in the school environment, with the aim of alleviating adolescents' feelings of low self-efficacy. Effective self-efficacy is a desirable trait for decision-makers at an individual level because it enables students to positively engage with their surroundings, thereby contributing to overall harmony between the individual and their environment.

Objectives of the study:

The study aims to reveal whether there is a relationship between self-efficacy and school bullying among middle school students, and to investigate whether there are differences in self-efficacy and school bullying based on gender

1 .Definition of concepts operationally:

1.1 Definition of self-efficacy: Bandura (1977) defines it as a set of judgements made by an individual that express their beliefs about their ability to perform certain behaviours, their flexibility in dealing with difficult and complex situations, their ability to overcome obstacles and their persistence in completing assigned tasks (Albert Bandura, 1977, p. 190). Operationally, it is the score obtained by a student in the middle school phase of education on the self-efficacy scale used in this study.

1.2 Definition of school bullying: it is deliberate and repeated behaviour against one or more students involving physical or verbal abuse, humiliation or destruction of property resulting from a power imbalance (Al-Zghoul et al., 2016, p. 6). Operationally, it is the total score obtained by a middle school student on the school bullying scale.

1.3 Middle school student: a student aged between 13 and 16 who studies in certain middle schools in the Tizi Ouzou region and is a victim of school bullying.

2. Field aspect:

2.1 Pilot study

2.1.1: Purpose of the pilot study

The pilot study aims to:

- control the variables;
- verify the reliability and validity of the research tools.
- Confirm the existence of the sample.
- Verify the psychometric properties of the study tools.

2.1.1.1 Procedures of the Pilot Study:

We commenced the field application of this study in April, during which we explored the study area and distributed the study scales to a pilot sample of 20 male and female students to verify the existence of the study sample and the clarity of the scale items as perceived by the students. To recalculate the reliability of the scales in the current study, we selected 100 male and female students as a secondary pilot sample from an original population of 1,023 students.

2.2 The main study:

2.2.1 Methodology of the study:

The methodology of a study varies based on the research objectives and the tools used. Considering the nature of the topic and the above, we adopted a descriptive methodology to describe the phenomenon as it exists in reality. According to this methodology, data will be collected, organised, presented and analysed statistically, and then interpreted in light of theories that explain the phenomenon and previous studies.

2.2.2 Limitations of the study:

- Spatial limitations: To complete the field study, we selected certain secondary schools in Tizi Ouzou.
- Temporal limitations: After obtaining approval from the institutions' administrations, we conducted the fieldwork from 23 February to 19 April 2022.

2.2.3 Sample of the study:

- Population of the study: This is the group of individuals from whom the research sample is taken. The statistical population consists of 1,023 students, including 490 females and 599 males.

- Sample of the study: modern research relies on studying a selected or calculated sample from the statistical population. Rather than studying all units of the research population, sampling methods examine a small part of the research community after selecting it systematically. In our study, the sample consisted of 100 male and female students from the original population of 1,023, after the pilot study sample was excluded. The sample was selected at random to ensure that all individuals in the population had an equal chance of being included.

2.2.4 Characteristics of the sample: After collecting the data, the characteristics of its members were described as follows:

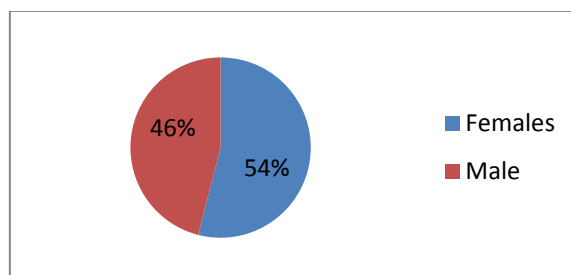
- Sample characteristics by gender:

Table No. (01): Distribution of sample members by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	46	46%
Females	54	54%
Total	100	100%

Table No. 01 shows that there are 46 males, accounting for 46% of the total sample. In contrast, the number of females was 54, representing 54% of the total sample, indicating that females comprise the majority. The following pie chart illustrates this:

Figure No. (01): Pie chart showing the distribution of sample members by gender.



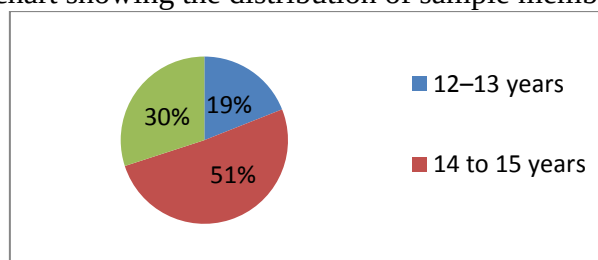
- Characteristics of sample members by age:

Table No. 02: Distribution of sample members by age.

Age group:	Frequency	Percentage (%)
12–13 years	19	19%
14 to 15 years	51	51%
16 years and over	30	30%
Total	100	100%

As can be seen from the table above, the majority of the sample members are aged between 14 and 15 years, accounting for 51% of the total. The next largest group is aged 16 years and over, accounting for 30% of the sample, followed by the 12–14 age group, which accounts for 19%. The following pie chart illustrates this:

Figure No. (02): Pie chart showing the distribution of sample members by age.



2.2.5 Data Collection Tools:

To collect data on the research topic, we used the following tools:

- Self-Efficacy Scale by Mahmoud Kazem Mahmoud (2008): This scale was designed for use in the Iraqi context with middle school students. The final version of the scale consists of 33 items, 17 of which are positive and 16 of which are negative. The following table shows this:

Table No. 03: Distribution of positive and negative items of the self-efficacy scale.

Number:	Statement	Statement numbers	Number of statements
01	Positive	6, 4, 29, 28, 27, 25, 14, 23, 22, 21, 20, 19, 18, 12, 11, 8, 7	17
02	Negative	33, 32, 31, 30, 26, 17, 16, 15, 14, 13, 10, 9, 5, 3, 2, 1	16

The researcher employed three response alternatives ('applies to me completely', 'applies to me slightly', 'does not apply to me at all'), assigning weights of 3, 2 and 1 to the positive items, while scoring the negative items inversely. The researcher assessed validity through expert judgement and internal consistency reliability to calculate the characteristics, while reliability was measured using the test-retest method and Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Scoring the scale:

Respondents receive the following points based on their responses to the items: a high score of 3 points, a moderate score of 2 points and a low score of 1 point. Therefore, the minimum score a student can achieve is 32. Students scoring between 32 and 48 are classified as having low self-efficacy. Those who score between 48 and below 80 are classified as having moderate self-efficacy, while those who score between 80 and below 96 are considered to have high self-efficacy. These categories (low, moderate and high self-efficacy) are based on a criterion that divides the maximum possible score on the self-efficacy scale into quartiles. The lowest quartile represents low self-efficacy, the highest quartile represents high self-efficacy and the two middle quartiles represent moderate self-efficacy.

Calculating the validity of the scale:

➤ **Calculating the internal consistency validity of the self-efficacy scale.**

The internal consistency validity of the scale's items was assessed to identify those that significantly correlated with the total score. The calculated correlation coefficients ranged from 0.22 to 0.62. Compared to the critical value of r , these values indicated significant internal consistency between the items and the total scale score for 32 items. Item 33 was therefore eliminated due to its inconsistency with the scale.

➤ **Calculating reliability of the scale:**

The scale's reliability coefficient was calculated using the split-half and test-retest methods, involving the computation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient and the corrected Spearman-Brown formula. The reliability coefficient values were 0.91 and 0.71 respectively, indicating the reliability and stability of the self-efficacy scale results.

2.2.6 School Bullying Scale:

Scale description:

This scale, developed by Magdy Mohamed El-Desouki, consists of 40 items distributed across five dimensions: psychological bullying, verbal bullying, social bullying and physical bullying. The table below illustrates this.

Table No. 4: Distribution of dimensions of the school bullying scale.

Number	Dimensions	Statement numbers	Number of statements
01	Psychological Bullying	10, 6, 7, 3, 8, 38, 33, 30, 17, 16, 21, 2, 25, 24	14
02	Verbal Bullying	11, 19, 12, 20, 39, 23, 36, 40, 32, 9, 15, 1, 5	13
03	Social bullying	35, 4, 14, 31, 18, 27, 13	7
04	Physical bullying	37, 28, 29, 34, 22, 26	6

To ensure the scale's validity and reliability, the researcher undertook the following procedures:

- **Expert judgment validity:** the scale in its preliminary form was presented to several psychology and mental health experts to assess the suitability and validity of the scale items in estimating bullying behaviours among children and

adolescents. This procedure did not result in any items being excluded; however, the wording of some items was modified based on feedback from the expert judges. Thus, the final version of the scale consists of 40 items.

- **Re-scoring:** Simple instructions were provided for the scale, outlining how to respond to each item according to one of five alternatives: 'This behaviour never occurs', 'This behaviour occurs sometimes', 'This behaviour occurs somewhat frequently', 'This behaviour occurs often', and 'This behaviour occurs very often'. These responses were assigned descending weights of (5, 4, 3, 2, 1). The total score for a dimension or sub-scale is the sum of the items in that dimension. The overall score is the sum of the scores obtained by the respondent on the scale's items or sub-scales' cumulative scores. A high score indicates bullying behaviour, while a low score indicates the opposite.

Calculating the validity of the scale:

- **Concurrent validity:** The concurrent or experimental validity of the scale was verified by calculating the correlation coefficient between the scores obtained by members of the norming sample for each age group and their scores on the scale assessing symptoms of conduct disorder. The resulting correlation coefficients were positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a high level of concurrent validity for the scale.
- **Factor validity:** Factor analysis was used to verify the scale's structural or construct validity. This method helps to reduce many factors to a limited number of components. The correlation matrix derived from the responses of a sample of secondary school students was analysed.
- **Internal consistency:** The internal consistency validity of the scale was verified through two methods.
 - **Method One:** calculating the correlation of each item with the total score on the remaining items after excluding the value of the item in question from the total score. The results for middle school students ranged from 0.42 to 0.79, which were statistically significant at the 0.01 level.
 - **Method Two:** Calculating the correlation coefficients between the total score and the total score, as well as between the factors themselves. The correlation coefficients among the factors for middle school students ranged from 0.54 to 0.83, and the correlations of the factors with the total score ranged from 0.66 to 0.76. All of these coefficients were positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Reliability of the scale:

The scale's reliability was calculated using the following methods:

Test-retest method: the scale was administered to a sample of the norming group, then re-administered after a one-month interval. Correlation coefficients were calculated between members of each age group in the first and second applications for the sub-dimensions and total scale score. The resulting correlation coefficients (reliability coefficients) were statistically significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that the scale is highly reliable.

Cronbach's alpha: The scale was applied to a group in the norming sample and the Cronbach method was used to verify the scale's reliability. The resulting reliability coefficients were high, indicating that the scale is reliable.

Reliability of the scale in the current study:

Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha): The reliability of the self-efficacy and school bullying scales was calculated by assessing the correlation rates among the test items. The

reliability coefficient for the self-efficacy scale was found to be 0.52, while that for the school bullying scale was 0.74.

2.3 Statistical Methods:

To statistically test the research hypotheses, several methods were employed.

2.3.1 Percentages: to calculate specific frequency rates.

2.3.2 Arithmetic mean: one of the most commonly used measures of central tendency for describing data and frequency distributions.

2.3.3 Pearson correlation coefficient: used to calculate the relationship between two variables.

2.3.4 T-test: used to assess differences in self-efficacy and school bullying between males and females.

3. Presentation and Analysis of Results:

3.1 Presentation and analysis of results based on descriptive statistics.

After collecting the questionnaires for both scales, we processed the data and calculated each individual's score according to the axes of the scales. The results are summarised in the following tables:

Table No. 05: Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation of Self-Efficacy Scores.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Self-efficacy	71.61	7.14

From the above table, the estimated arithmetic mean of the sample members on the self-efficacy scale is (71.61), with a standard deviation of (7.14). This indicates that the sample members are classified as having a high level of self-efficacy.

Table No. 06: Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation of Self-Efficacy Scores According to Gender.

Sample	Gender	Frequency	Mean	Standard deviation
100	Male	46	73.82	8.42
	Females	54	69.72	5.20

As can be seen in Table 6, the mean score for males on the self-efficacy scale is 73.83, with a standard deviation of 8.42. In contrast, the estimated arithmetic mean for females is (69.72), indicating that males exhibit a higher level of self-efficacy than females.

Table No. 07: Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation of School Bullying Scores.

Sample	Variables	Mean	Standard deviation
100	School Bullying	81.83	11.28

From Table 7, it is evident that the estimated arithmetic mean of the sample members on the school bullying scale is 81.83, with a standard deviation of 11.28. This indicates that sample members exhibit a high level of school bullying.

Table No. 08: Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation of School Bullying Scores According to Gender.

Sample	Gender	Frequency	Mean	Standard deviation
100	Male	46	84.41	9.51
	Females	54	79.62	12.25

As can be seen from the above table, the estimated arithmetic mean for males on the school bullying scale is (84.83), with a standard deviation of (9.51). The estimated arithmetic mean for females is (79.62), with a standard deviation of (12.25). This indicates a significant difference in the level of school bullying between males and females, favouring males.

3.2 Presentation and Analysis of Results Based on Inferential Statistics:

3.2.1 Presentation and analysis of the results of the first hypothesis:

The first hypothesis states that there is a statistically significant relationship between self-efficacy and school bullying among secondary school students.

Table No. 09: Inferential Statistics Results for Calculating the Relationship Between the Two Variables’.

Sample	Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Pearson value	Sig Value	Significance level	Statistical decision
100	Self-efficacy	71.61	7.14	-0.52 **	0.00	0.01	Significant
	School Bullying	81.83	11.28				

Table No. 09 shows that the estimated Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.52, indicating a negative relationship between self-efficacy and school bullying. This value is statistically significant, as the calculated significance level (sig = 0.00) is less than the adopted level of significance (0.01). Therefore, we can conclude that the first hypothesis is validated, i.e. that there is a statistically significant relationship between self-efficacy and school bullying among middle school students.

3.2.2 Presentation and analysis of the results of the second hypothesis:

The second hypothesis states that there are statistically significant differences in self-efficacy attributed to gender among middle school students.

Table No. (10): Inferential Statistics Results for Calculating Differences in Self-Efficacy According to Gender’.

Gender	Frequency	Mean	Standard deviation	T value	Sig. Value	Significance level	Ddl	Statistical decision
Male	46	84.41	9.51	2.15	0.03	0.05	98	Significant
Females	54	79.62	12.25					

From the table above, we observe that the value of (T) is estimated at (2.15), which is statistically significant since the value of $(sig = 0.03)$ is less than the adopted significance level (0.05). This confirms the validity of the third hypothesis, indicating that there is a statistically significant difference in school bullying between males and females, favoring males.

3.3 Discussion of results:

3.3.1 Discussion of the results of the first hypothesis:

After presenting the results of the first hypothesis, which indicate a statistically significant inverse relationship between self-efficacy and school bullying among secondary school students, it can be concluded that as self-efficacy increases, bullying behaviour decreases, and vice versa.

This can be explained by considering that self-efficacy is how students cope with obstacles and difficulties that arise on their path to achieving their goals. Therefore, the higher the level of self-efficacy, the better students can confront bullying behaviours. For students who bully,

higher self-efficacy can help regulate behaviour and reduce aggression towards peers, thus enabling them to manage the emotions that lead to bullying in the school environment.

This result can also be interpreted in terms of several social and familial factors, particularly parents' evident concern for their children. Parental support in academic and behavioural aspects is considered a form of education and discipline, as well as part of developing their children's personalities and boosting their self-confidence to make sound decisions and behave in ways that are free from violence, aggression and peer bullying.

Thus, this result aligns with previous studies that have explored school bullying and personal traits. For example, Khouj's study of school bullying and social skills among secondary school students in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, revealed a significant negative correlation between bullying and social skills.

3.3.2 Discussion of the Results of the Second Hypothesis:

The results of the study indicated statistically significant differences in self-efficacy among middle school students, favouring males. This can be explained by the fact that males tend to be more self-confident and better at planning for the future than females. This can be attributed to the psychological nature of males, which is characterised by a tendency to confront difficulties and obstacles with flexibility and effectiveness. During adolescence in particular, they experience an increased sense of responsibility and a desire for self-assertion and freedom in decision-making. In contrast, females often exhibit introverted and isolated traits during this stage and experience difficulty in decision-making, although they do demonstrate some calmness and organisation compared to males.

These results also align with those of the study by Bakshiti and Majlilo (2003), which revealed statistically significant differences in self-efficacy between males and females, favouring males. This finding is also consistent with Mohamed Sami Mohamed's study on the relationship between school activities and self-efficacy among middle school students, which found significant differences in self-efficacy among the sample, again favouring males.

3.3.3 Interpretation of the Results of the Third Hypothesis:

The results of the third hypothesis indicated statistically significant differences in school bullying among middle school students, favouring males. This can be attributed to males' naturally stronger body structure compared to females, as well as socialisation practices that encourage such behaviours under the pretext that they indicate males' prowess and superiority in leading and dominating their peers, thus achieving differentiation in any place and at any time in the future.

The stage of adolescence can also influence students' behaviour, particularly among males who exhibit higher levels of physical and emotional energy than females, potentially driving them to bully their peers as a means of asserting power and control.

This finding is consistent with the results of several studies on school bullying, including the study by Paldy and Frenton (1999), which found that boys exhibit more bullying behaviours than girls. Another study by Poltan and Androud also indicated that males are more inclined to engage in bullying behaviour than females (Ghasaq Ghazi Abasi, 2016, p. 10).

School bullying can take various forms and may be caused by several factors, including dysfunctional parenting styles from childhood, using violence to cope with difficult situations such as divorce or the absence of a parent, family disintegration, negative family habits, peer group pressure (especially among males), parental neglect, favouritism among siblings or a lack of acceptance. Furthermore, factors such as low socioeconomic status and unfulfilled desires in children may contribute to their bullying of peers.

Conclusion:

This study aimed to reveal the nature of the relationship between self-efficacy and bullying in secondary school students. Self-efficacy is one of the most important psychological concepts that influence human behaviour. People who believe in their abilities tend to be more active, have a higher self-esteem and feel capable of controlling their environment. Self-efficacy also plays a crucial role in motivating individuals to engage in any action or activity, helping them to cope with stress and influencing the behaviours they exhibit towards others, whether positive or negative. School bullying, a form of aggression, arises from power imbalances and occurs when an individual is repeatedly subjected to negative behaviour that causes them harm.

Following the field study and statistical analysis, the following results were revealed:

- There is a statistically significant relationship between self-efficacy and school bullying among middle school students.
- There are statistically significant differences in self-efficacy among middle school students attributed to gender.
- There are statistically significant differences in school bullying among middle school students attributed to gender.

Based on these results, the following suggestions can be made to help educational institutions and families address bullying behaviour and utilise self-efficacy positively in education and upbringing:

- Students should be encouraged to develop their social skills within the school environment to promote the positive utilisation of self-efficacy.

Awareness campaigns should be conducted for families and the community across all media channels and social media to promote understanding of bullying and how to deal with cases in a psychologically and educationally sound manner.

It is essential to employ a school psychologist to develop preventative programmes to reduce bullying and prevent it from spreading among students.

Efforts should be made to provide a safe and healthy school environment based on respectful, organised and disciplined classroom relationships.

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