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The Competencies of Teaching Staff in Managing School Bullying

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Abstract

Bullying is still an issue worldwide; therefore, there is a constant need to carry out theoretical analyses and empirical research as detailed as possible to understand it and develop successful interventions. In a 2024 UNESCO report, it is mentioned that approximately one billion children aged 2 to 17 experienced some form of violence in the previous year, and a significant portion of these incidents occur within the educational environment. Regarding bullying, one in three students is victimized monthly globally. More than one in three students has been involved in a fight with a peer, and nearly one in three has been physically assaulted at least once in the past year. Therefore, the ongoing focus on detailed theoretical analyses and empirical research to understand this phenomenon and develop effective interventions is understandable. Starting from the significant role that teachers have in the prevention of and intervention in bullying, our study aims to highlight the role of teachers and the skills they need to intervene effectively in school bullying situations, drawing on an analysis of two internationally recognized anti-bullying programs: the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program developed in 1983 and the KiVa program developed in 2006. Accordingly, the objectives of our study are as follows: (1) to present and comparatively analyze the two programs; and (2) to analyze the skills profile of teaching staff in bullying situations, based on comparative analyses of the two programs.

Keywords: Anti-bullying programs; bullying; comparative analysis; competencies profile of teaching staff

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1. Introduction

Bullying in the school environment has been a concern for many researchers in the last half century. Global statistics compiled by various organizations recently are far from reassuring. In addition to a 2024 UNESCO report, the World Health Organization conducted the *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children* (HBSC) study, which involved 279,117 adolescents aged 11, 13, and 15 from 44 countries and regions. Data collection occurred primarily between October 2021 and June 2022 (Cosma et al., 2024, p. 18).

Approximately 11% of the adolescents reported being victims of bullying at school at least 2–3 times a month in the preceding months. Another 6% reported bullying their peers with the same frequency (8% of boys and 5% of girls) (Cosma et al., 2024, pp. 3–4). The prevalence of traditional bullying has remained relatively stable since 2018, with victimization showing only a slight increase among younger girls. In contrast, cyberbullying increased between 2018 and 2022. The proportion of adolescents who bullied their peers online reached 12% (14% of boys and 9% of girls), while the proportion of victims increased slightly across nearly all age and gender groups, except among 15-year-old girls (Cosma et al., 2024, pp. 5–6, 9). These data suggest that traditional forms remain relatively constant, while the phenomenon of cyberbullying is becoming increasingly frequent. In the case of Romania, the 2025 PISA report indicates that 21% of students have been victims of at least one form of bullying, occurring a few times a month or more often. Unlike most participating countries, where the phenomenon has intensified, its prevalence in Romania has not changed significantly since 2022 (OECD, 2026, p. 9). The groups most at risk are boys, students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, and, in particular, those attending schools in rural areas (Noveanu et al., 2023, p. 60).

Only 3% of students reported that distressing information about them had been posted online without their consent; these students scored, on average, 48 points lower in science (OECD, 2026, p. 9). The HBSC 2021/2022 data point to a specific vulnerability during early adolescence. Regarding cyberbullying, they show that 13-year-old girls in Romania report the highest prevalence of online harassment directed at others among girls across the 44 participating countries, at 24% (Cosma et al., 2024, p. 19). Overall, traditional bullying decreased between 2018 and 2022 and stabilized in 2025, yet it remains an issue for approximately one in five students. Online harassment continues to be a concern, particularly for students aged 11–13.

However, the prevalence of bullying varies considerably across countries**.** These differences have been linked to factors such as socioeconomic inequality, with higher levels of inequality being associated with greater bullying rates, as well as family and school support, which is associated with lower levels of bullying. Variation in how bullying is defined and measured may contribute to differences in reported prevalence, yet the persistently high prevalence of bullying behaviors underscores the need for appropriate measures to protect children's right to feel safe at school (Gaffney et al., 2019).

Bullying came to the attention of researchers in 1973, when Heinemann described group aggression directed at a deviant individual as a phenomenon that emerges unexpectedly and then suddenly disappears. In 1993, Dan Olweus initially took over and used this concept, and then he carried out research in which he explained bullying behavior and proposed a definition that is universally used today. Therefore, "a pupil is bullied or victimized when he or she is repeatedly exposed to negative actions by one or more fellow pupils" (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). From this perspective, bullying differs from other forms of pupil violence in three aspects: intent, repetition, and power imbalance (Olweus, 1999, p. 10-11). Because of these contributions, Olweus is recognized in the scientific literature as the first researcher to study and explain this behavior and its multiple dimensions (Farrington, 1993).

The definition originally proposed by Olweus has guided numerous studies in this field. Currently, there is a need for an updated definition of bullying that focuses on a unifying theory that includes ecological and evolutionary contexts (Volk et al., 2014). Thus, bullying is defined as

"a goal-oriented aggressive behavior that harms another individual in the context of a power imbalance" (Volk et al., 2014, p. 327). As can be noted, repetition of aggressive acts, one of the characteristics of bullying that has often been highlighted and has played an important role in guiding research to date, has increasingly been questioned as an essential criterion for classifying a behavior as bullying. In this respect, even a single incident of cyberbullying can have long-term harmful consequences for the victim (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Although at a theoretical level, the problem of bullying is well documented and abounds in studies investigating various prevention programs, in educational practice, it is found that teachers have some difficulty in reporting it and taking appropriate action against it. These challenges highlight the importance of professional competencies in managing bullying. Regarding educational practice in Romania, the training and development of competencies for managing bullying are governed by regulatory acts that establish both professional standards and the responsibilities of teaching staff. A significant legislative reference is the Order of the Minister of Education no. 7,386/2024, which approves the *Profile and Professional Standards for Teaching Staff in Pre-University Education*, organized by career stage and educational level. Specifically, competency D4.6 explicitly addresses the prevention and combating of violence within the school environment, including bullying and cyberbullying. These professional standards outline the competencies of teaching staff in a progressive manner, corresponding to their specific career stage. For instance, for beginning teachers, the standards include competencies related to identifying instances of violence and applying basic intervention strategies in collaboration with families. For teachers holding the *"Teaching Rank II" (gradul didactic II)* qualification, the standards encompass sharing best practices with colleagues, preventing and addressing dangerous behaviors, using feedback, and adapting intervention strategies to specific situations. For teachers who have attained *"Teaching Rank I" (gradul didactic I),* the competencies focus on proposing solutions to optimize institutional procedures for preventing and combating violence, in collaboration with colleagues and specialists from other organizations (Ministry of Education, 2024, Annex, competency D4.6).

2. The effectiveness of prevention and intervention programs at the school level

In the global context presented above, efforts to identify the factors that contribute to the prevention of and intervention in bullying are a natural response. Although research on various aspects of bullying has been conducted for more than four decades (Borualogo et al., 2022), in recent years, efforts have been directed toward finding answers to questions concerning the dynamics of various factors and identifying conditions conducive to reducing the incidence of violence in schools. A recent comprehensive umbrella review examined 4,740 original studies, including 30 meta-analyses, on interventions aimed at preventing bullying among children and adolescents (Li et al., 2026). Synthesizing research conducted over four decades, the review generally confirmed the benefits of these interventions, including improvements in behavior, changes in attitudes, and better mental health. The authors also argue that interventions focusing on broader context and interpersonal relationships are more effective than those targeting individuals, given that bullying is a complex phenomenon shaped by multiple social determinants.

However, another meta-analytic study that involved the evaluation of 100 anti-bullying programs in schools revealed that, on average, the frequency of bullying acts decreased by 19-20% and victimization by 15-16%, even if there were variations among countries and programs, as the criteria for assessing this effect were diverse. In a list of the most well-known programs of this kind, there are: the Olweus program in Norway (1993), the Be-Prox program in Switzerland, the KiVa program in Finland, the Kia Kaha program in New Zealand, and the Stay Safe program in Ireland (Gaffney et al., 2019). The components of the programs that achieved high scores in reducing aggression were a whole-school approach, anti-bullying policies, classroom rules,

informing parents, informal peer involvement, working with victims, cooperative group work, and mental health approaches (Gaffney et al., 2021b). The main factors linked to decreases in bullying were the implementation of intensive programs, meetings with parents in which they are informed about this phenomenon, improved supervision on the playground, the use of certain discipline methods, school conferences, videos, activities with the fellow pupils of those involved, and the frequent and proper use of class rules and class management (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). In this context, Taneri, Özbek, and Akduman (2021) argue that an effective response to bullying behavior calls for a sustained effort on behalf of teachers, school administrators, and parents. Borualogo, Kusdiyati, and Wahyudi (2022) argue that the effectiveness of several anti-bullying programs has been scientifically demonstrated. These include the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) and the KiVa anti-bullying program.

2.1. The Olweus bullying prevention program

In the early 1980s, Olweus developed the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) because of the anti-bullying campaign initiated by the Norwegian Ministry of Education. The OBPP is based on four principles: teachers and parents must be positive role models, show warmth and interest in children, set clear boundaries regarding unacceptable behaviors, and consistently apply sanctions without physical violence and without hostility when rules are broken (Olweus & Limber, 2010a, 2010b; Smith, 2016). The original longitudinal study evaluating this program involved 2,500 pupils who were observed for 2.5 years. Eight months after the implementation of the OBPP, victimization decreased by 62%, while acts of aggression decreased by 33%. After 20 months of intervention, the victimization had decreased by 64%, while the aggressive acts had decreased by 52% (Olweus & Limber, 2010b). The results obtained indicate the reduction of the antisocial behaviors and the optimization of the school environment, an increased degree of pupil satisfaction, a more positive attitude toward school, and a better discipline (Olweus & Limber, 2010b; Borualogo et al., 2022).

The main components of the OBPP can be organized into four levels: individual, classroom, school, and community (Olweus & Limber, 2010b; Limber, 2011). *At the individual level*, the program aims to monitor students' activities, guarantee immediate staff intervention in the case of bullying, organize one-on-one meetings with the students involved, communicate with their parents, and develop personalized intervention plans when necessary. *At the classroom level*, the priority is to define and consistently apply rules against bullying, hold regular class meetings to address bullying and related problems, and involve parents when appropriate. *At the school level,* the program includes the formation of a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee (BPCC), professional bullying training for committee members and school staff, administration of the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, regular staff discussion meetings, adoption of school-wide anti-bullying rules, review and strengthening of the school's supervision system, organization of a school-wide launch event, and parental involvement in discussions and prevention activities related to bullying. *At the community level,* the program encourages community members to get involved in the BPCC, developing school-community educational partnerships to support the program, and engaging the community as advocates for the principles and best practices of bullying prevention.

2.2. The KiVa anti-bullying program

KiVa is a program implemented in Finland in 2006 and addresses children aged 7 to 15 who are given the opportunity to learn to recognize bullying and to react appropriately when they witness such a situation. The empirical premise of this study is that the bullies tend to behave aggressively out of a desire to achieve higher social status and to feel stimulated by the apathy or the support of bystanders. The effectiveness of the KiVa program was demonstrated in a controlled study involving approximately 8,000 children aged 9–12 from 78 schools in Finland. The findings showed that the program reduced internalizing negative feelings of participants,

improved participants' perceptions of their peer group, and alleviated anxiety and depressive symptoms (Williford et al., 2012).

The program is intensive and systematic and aims to combat bullying at the whole-school level through activities designed to teach all pupils how to take appropriate action in such situations. It also carries out focused interventions in the case of pupils involved (victims or bullies) in the bullying situation and monitors the entire school environment (Sainio et al, 2019). The first type of intervention addresses all the components of the school, teachers, and parents, and it involves lessons for primary school pupils and thematic days that take the form of discussions, watching videos, and exercises in groups or dyads for secondary school pupils. The lessons aim at raising awareness of the manifestation of intimidation and the need to take responsibility in such situations.

The program includes three modules each with specific content that address topics such as: diversity, inclusion, understanding emotions, dynamics of group interactions, formation of attitudes of empathy, respect and responsibility toward others, conflict resolution skills, recognition and support of victims, and developing an active attitude toward aggression when in the role of a witness (Green et al., 2019). The methods used to go through these contents are as follows: discussion, role-playing, watching videos, physical exercises, online video games appropriate for the age of each participant, and an Internet forum for middle school pupils. Teachers are informed about the program online and have access to a web forum. They are recommended to attend regular meetings with other teachers and school staff to discuss the implementation of the program. They are also prepared to implement the program through various activities, such as group discussions, role-playing, and watching short anti-bullying videos (Kärnä et al., 2013). The parents are informed about the program through printed leaflets or online. They are counseled on bullying to support and guide children to avoid bullying behavior (Boroulogo et al., 2022).

This is how the program works: at the school level, there is an intervention group consisting of three adults who deal with reported incidents, and at the class level, the teacher collaborates with pupils of high social status whom he asks to support the victims of bullying.

3. The competences of teaching staff in preventing and intervening in bullying

Teachers play a key role in bullying prevention, and their involvement in the implementation of anti-bullying programs can strongly influence the success of these interventions. Most studies have examined the effects of such programs on bullying behavior and the well-being of students involved in bullying situations, whereas relatively few have investigated their effects on teachers. One such study (Van Verseveld et al., 2019) found a moderate positive effect on teachers' attitudes, subjective norms, self-efficacy, and knowledge, whereas another study (Jantzer et al., 2023) reported a small to moderate effect on teachers' intervention practices in bullying situations. The competence of teaching staff to act effectively within anti-bullying programs requires skills drawn from the general professional categories described by Apostolache (2022), namely, intrapersonal competencies (e.g., self-control, self-reflection, and self-analysis), as well as interpersonal, psycho-pedagogical, scientific, and managerial competencies. The latter includes the ability to cooperate with various partners, such as colleagues, parents, and representatives of the school administration. We can talk about skill clusters that integrate and interconnect skills that are important for the performance of professional tasks. Thus, Bocoș et al. (2017, p. 208) defined the skills cluster as "an integrative, complex and significant set where a range of skills are organized, structured and (inter)related."

At a general level, competence is a set of skills that a person possesses to be able to satisfactorily perform a task in a given context (Boyatzis, 2008 apud Apostolache, 2022). The main elements of competence are the knowledge that a person possesses, the skills to perform a

certain task, the values that a person abides by, the ability to perform work tasks in that particular field, and the emotions, desires, and needs that lead him to act (Apostolache, 2022, p. 20). In fact, the knowledge that the teaching staff must possess in the action against bullying is aimed at how aggressive behaviors of this type are hypothesized; who, when, where, why, and how are questions to which the teacher must have clear, proper, coherent, and nuanced answers. A second category of knowledge relates to educational policies, laws, and methodologies of action against bullying. The category of skills can include: identifying and evaluating bullying behavior, producing appropriate behaviors in intervention situations, as well as communicating with various categories of people directly involved (bully, victim) and/or indirectly involved (witnesses, parents, teachers). From an attitude standpoint, the teacher must demonstrate empathy and sensitivity toward the victims, but also involvement, respect, and warmth in the relationships with the pupils; the parents must be models of interaction in the school. Teachers must display a proactive attitude in preventing bullying by creating a safe environment for their pupils regardless of their psychosocial characteristics, needs, and cognitive and socio-emotional abilities. Teachers' attitudes toward bullying have been associated with a specific category of competencies within the socio-moral domain (Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2024).

Behaviorally, teachers must cooperate with administrators, school counsellors, school administration, and relevant NGOs, and they must integrate ways of working based on cooperation and contents aimed at tolerance, acceptance, and respect for values. Also, they must participate in various training programs and transfer the practices learned there to real-life situations in the school. The literature indicates that the perceptions of teachers on the solution to bullying are connected to the effective practices of prevention and intervention (Baraldsnes, 2022). In a systematic review that assessed the knowledge, the sense of responsibility, the attitudes and the self-confidence of pre-service teachers regarding the approach to bullying, it was noticed that a small number of pre-service teachers know the particularities of bullying. Regarding their attitude toward bullying, most of them reported being concerned about this behavior, while some considered it normal behavior that is part of raising children. It was also noticed that pre-service teachers tend to perceive physical bullying as the worst form compared to the other forms of manifestation. Pre-service teachers state that they feel responsible for addressing bullying, but they lack confidence in their ability to deal with this phenomenon (Dawes et al., 2023). Teachers who are confident in their bullying-related skills are more likely to intervene in incidents among pupils, whereas many teachers have difficulty identifying and managing it (Taneri et al., 2021).

To examine the similarities and differences in the preventive practices used by in-service teachers, Baraldsnes (2022) conducted a study involving 1576 teachers from 99 schools in Lithuania and 82 teachers from 13 schools in Norway, all of which had implemented the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP). The results showed that Norwegian teachers were slightly more active than Lithuanian teachers at both the school and individual levels, as well as in the program in general. The study also found that female teachers were more active than male teachers at the classroom and individual levels, as well as in the whole programme. In addition, primary school teachers were more active than lower secondary school teachers at the classroom level of the program (Baraldsnes, 2022).

All these theoretical and empirical aspects suggest that being competent in prevention and intervention in various situations of school bullying requires a broad range of related skills, which are acquired as a result of formative, informative, and collaborative work. The continuous professional training of teachers should involve clusters of competencies so that teachers become more effective in preventing and responding to bullying.

This study aims to highlight the role and competencies profile of teachers that can be the premises for achieving efficiency in prevention and intervention efforts in schools. It starts with the descriptive and explanatory analysis of two bullying prevention programs considered to be the

most popular and highly effective: The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) and the KiVa Anti-Bullying Program.

The objectives of the study are following:

O1 – to present and comparatively analyze the two bullying prevention programs based on several comparison criteria;

O2 – to analyse the competency profile of teaching staff in bullying situations, based on a comparison of the two programs and insights from previous studies.

We started with the following research question: What competencies do teachers need for effective intervention in bullying situations, as identified through an analysis of well-established anti-bullying programs?

4. Methodology

4.1. Materials and methods

In the current study, a qualitative comparative analysis was conducted on the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) and the KiVa Anti-Bullying Program, focusing on professional roles and competencies in the management of bullying. The aim was to identify the key competencies that could be developed through the performance of the professional roles assigned to teaching staff by each anti-bullying program. In the first stage, Google Scholar was consulted to identify scientific articles concerning bullying prevention programs, using keywords such as "bullying prevention programs," "Olweus Bullying Prevention Program," "KiVa Anti-Bullying Program," and "teachers' skills/competencies in bullying prevention." The OBPP and KiVa programs were selected due to their international recognition and the existence of studies demonstrating their effectiveness in reducing the incidence of bullying. Furthermore, articles detailing the characteristics and components of both programs were selected, with a specific emphasis on the competencies required of teaching staff. Following the analysis of these two programs, the gathered information was organized according to nine comparative criteria developed in alignment with the research objectives and the core features of the programs, namely: the year of development, the author and the context of the program's development, the target educational levels, key constituencies at a school, basic principles, the main goals of the program, parts of the program, teachers' duties/roles, and teachers' potential competencies to develop. The same analysis criteria were applied to both programs to capture their similarities and differences; the results are presented in Table 1. The analysis of the two programs aimed to examine both the aspects relevant to developing teachers' competencies in managing bullying and the potential implications for educational practice in Romania.

4.2. Data analysis

For the analysis and comparison of the two prevention programs, criteria were established and selected starting from the purpose and objectives of the descriptive and explanatory approach, i.e., to find out what the indicators of success were, and whether and how the teachers had a major impact in this respect. See Table 1 for more details.

Table 1. Comparing OPBB and the KiVa programs

Peculiarities	**OBPP**	**KiVa**
Program development year	1983	2006
The author and the context of the	Dan Olweus developed the OBPP following the initiation of an anti-	The University of Turku in Finland, with funding from the Finnish

program's development	bullying campaign by the Norwegian Ministry of Education (Borualogo et al., 2022).	Ministry of Education and Culture (Borualogo et al., 2022).
The target educational levels	Elementary, middle, and high school grades (children aged 7 to 18)	Children aged 7 to 15
Key constituencies at a school	*Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee (BPCC)* • 8–15 members representing key positions within the school, including administrators, teachers, non-teaching staff, counselors and mental health professionals, parents, and other personnel with relevant expertise (e.g., school nurse and school safety officer) (Olweus et al., 2007; Olweus & Limber, 2010b; Limber, 2011).	• principals, teachers, pupils, parents, counselors, psychologists, and administrative staff at the level of each school; • a group of three people ensures monitoring and rapid intervention in cases of bullying.
Basic principles	• Restructuring the school environment and building a sense of community are based on four key principles: (a) show warmth and interest in their students; (b) set limits to unacceptable behavior; (c) use consistent, nonphysical, nonhostile negative consequences for violation of rules; and (d) act as authorities and positive role models (Olweus et al., 2007; Limber, 2011).	• The approach is based on the role of the participant directed at all pupils (universal actions) but also perpetrators and victim pupils (focused actions); • The program is structured around three core elements: prevention, intervention, and monitoring (Borualogo et al., 2022).
The main goals of the program	• to lower the frequency of bullying incidents among students; • to reduce the likelihood of new bullying incidents; • to promote more positive peer relationships within the school environment (Olweus, 1993; Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999; Olweus et al., 2007).	• to prevent bullying situations; • to intervene quickly and effectively in serious cases of bullying; • to minimize the negative effects of bullying behaviors (Borualogo et al., 2022).
Parts of the program	• The program is organized into four levels of intervention: individual, classroom, school, and community level (Limber, 2011, pp. 73–74; Olweus & Limber, 2010a).	• The program is organized into three units that include lessons on diversity, inclusion, emotions, group dynamics, empathy, respect, conflict resolution, and social responsibility. • The three major components are: prevention, intervention, and monitoring: - school-level components; - pupils involved in bullying situations (Sainio et al., 2019);

Teachers' duties/roles	• participating in a two-day training program led by a certified OBPP trainer; • developing a school-specific plan for implementing the OBPP • informing school staff, students, and parents about the implementation plan; • ensuring that the OBPP program is aligned with other relevant prevention and intervention activities within the school; • seeking opinions from all stakeholders regarding the program's implementation; • presenting the program to the larger community (Olweus et al., 2007; Olweus & Limber, 2010b).	• collaborating with the implementation team to support the delivery of program lessons; • creating a learning environment that encourages pupils' conscious and active participation; • recognizing signs of bullying and intervening promptly when such incidents occur; • providing emotional support to victims; • promoting positive classroom norms and values, including inclusion and respect; • planning and implementing interventions; • communicating with parents, the school community, and specialists; • participation in program-related information sessions and training
Competencies developed by teachers during the program	• communication competencies (e.g., informing students and parents) • managerial competencies (e.g., developing a plan for implementation) • socio-emotional competencies (e.g., showing warmth and interest in children)	• pedagogical competencies (e.g. planning lessons and activities) • relational competencies (e.g. counseling) • organizational competencies (e.g. promoting norms and rules)

5. Results

OBPP and KiVa represent the most well-known and widely analyzed anti-bullying intervention programs worldwide. They are considered benchmarks for the effectiveness of school-based interventions addressing these behavioral issues (Gaffney et al., 2021a).

The comparative analysis leads us to notice that the OBPP and KiVa programs were developed in different years and with an interval of 23 years between them; both are intended for pupils from the primary, secondary, and high school cycles (7-15 years old), which gives us a picture of how the method of designing these programs has evolved. Even though they were carried out two decades apart, both have solid theoretical foundations (Olweus & Limber, 2010b; Sainio et al., 2019), except for KiVa, which was developed based on research on the role of peers as witnesses, conducted over a few years (Salmivalli et al., 2013).

Both programs had as their main objectives: reducing the existing bullying rate, preventing other incidents, creating a positive school environment, and involving and targeting all structures and resources in the school: pupils, school staff, teachers, and parents (Olweus & Limber, 2010b; Smith, 2016). A meta-analytic study (Zych et al., 2015) demonstrated the high effectiveness of the involvement of teachers and parents, and the inclusion of an anti-bullying policy in the school ensured the success of the program (Lee et al., 2015), as both were part of the school curriculum (Olweus & Limber, 2010b; Smith, 2016). The implementation of anti-bullying programs at the school level has included all preventive components and addressed all pupils, thus reducing victimization (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

There are also aspects that differentiate the two programs, but that do not negatively impact their effectiveness. In the case of the OBPP, a *Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee*

(BPCC) is formed, consisting of 8-15 members from key positions in the schooling environment who coordinate prevention activities in the school from an eco-systemic perspective, while in the case of the KiVa, a *KiVa Team* is formed, which consists of three or often more teachers who intervene when a case of bullying draws the attention of the school staff (Johander et al., 2021) and who coordinate the prevention of bullying also from an eco-systemic perspective (principals, teachers, pupils, parents, counselors, psychologists, and administrative staff). Within the OBPP, the responsibility of the teachers involves a two-day professional training of teachers by a certified trainer in the implementation of this program, the development of an implementation procedure at the school level and informing the school, pupils, and parents about these procedures (regulation/plan), along the way evaluation and the expansion of the program at the community level. Within the KiVa, the teachers are informed about the general and specific implementation aspects of the program and participate in the meetings on the discussion forum without the need for special training periods.

Our analysis of the two programs suggests that teachers play a central role in fostering a safe school environment, working in collaboration with other key stakeholders in the educational context: students, colleagues, families, and the community, as effective prevention requires the engagement of all these levels. Both programs necessitate the development of specific clusters of competencies. Within the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP), as shown in Table 1, teachers have been assigned roles that entail managerial skills. Thus, we consider that certain competencies have been exercised, such as analyzing the school environment, planning, coordinating, and organizing, to implement a program tailored to the specific needs of the school and its students, addressing the different types of bullying, and the active intervention strategies required in such situations. Informing staff, students, and parents demands a broad range of communication skills. Consulting with all involved parties requires competencies in collaboration and active listening, as well as the ability to evaluate feedback to refine the intervention. Finally, presenting the program to the wider community calls skills for building partnerships between the school and the community.

Our examination of the KiVa program reveals that the responsibilities of the participating teachers require pedagogical, relational, and organizational competencies. From a pedagogical perspective, teachers need skills in instructional design and the facilitation of learning through interactive, collaborative methods, such as role-playing, which allow students not only to understand but also to practice behaviors that support victims. Promoting positive rules and values within the classroom, teachers must exercise effective group management skills. In terms of interpersonal relations, the teacher must first be able to identify and recognize the specific signs of bullying and develop the skills to intervene in crisis situations, tasks that require empathy, active listening, and counseling abilities. Regarding the organizational dimension, the planning and implementation of interventions, as well as collaboration with all members of the KiVa team, call for skills in teamwork and coordination, alongside competencies in communication, training, and the fostering of strong, functional partnerships.

The role of the educators involved in the two programs is distinguished by its complexity and centrality throughout the implementation process, requiring and fostering a diverse range of competencies and skills. These programs help participants particularly teachers recognize the importance of an attitude of active engagement, while providing an appropriate organizational framework and a set of procedures suited to such situations. The array of specific competencies developed is extensive, encompassing socio-emotional and relational skills, communication abilities, institutional and inter-institutional management capabilities, as well as methodological expertise.

The two programs offer a solid starting point for developing the competencies teachers need to handle situations involving aggression; however, they certainly do not cover the full range of competencies required for the 21st-century school climate. Statistical data indicate that, in Romania, traditional bullying has remained stable since 2022, while cyberbullying has

intensified. Consequently, a teacher's skill set must be expanded to include the digital environment, the ability to recognize risk factors that can lead to aggression and victimization, the capacity to work with individuals with special educational needs, who are frequently targeted by bullies, as well as intercultural and inclusion-related competencies. Bullying is not an isolated social phenomenon; it must be addressed at the level of the entire community, into which every child needs to be integrated.

6. Conclusions

This study aimed to outline the competency profile required for a teacher to prevent and intervene in situations of school bullying. The comparative analysis of the two programs shows us that the role of the teachers in the anti-bullying programs was important, but it was not special, which entitles us to appreciate that the teachers did what they usually do; their interpersonal, psycho-pedagogical, scientific, and managerial skills, their cooperation with various partners (colleagues, parents, administration), and their intrapersonal skills, self-control, self-reflection, and self-analysis are thoroughly practiced. In addition, research has shown that these programs have had positive effects on teachers even though this effect was not monitored. Thus, through a deductive analysis process, we can state that the prevention of bullying involves the skills of communication, collaboration, development and implementation of educational projects of educational partnership, decision-making, and the implementation of regulations/procedures. Competence in the socio-emotional domain (e.g., empathy, conflict resolution, and social responsibility) is also needed, along with skills in classroom management, restorative justice, and communication across cultural backgrounds.

The two analyzed programs, even if they were not completely identical, showed that the teachers' efforts are trained according to the goals of the programs, the way they are implemented, monitored, and evaluated. The effectiveness of teaching staff depends, among other factors, on the involvement of the pupils' parents, on their level of psycho-pedagogical and socio-emotional training, but also on their perception and self-perception in such situations. This raises the following question: What can be done, where appropriate, to optimize the involvement of teaching staff in such programs? Recent studies highlight the importance of addressing teachers' professional training needs in terms of anti-bullying attitudes, knowledge, and intervention effectiveness (Li et al., 2021). Is it beneficial in this context to work in a team, to collaborate, to interact with teaching staff, and to exchange experiences? For these reasons, and also because of the complex nature of the bullying phenomenon, we believe that the continuous training of the teaching staff should be reconsidered from the perspective of the formation of clusters of competences. By bringing together the range of skills teachers need to effectively address bullying, initial and continuing professional development programs can be designed.

A comparative analysis of the two programs, the Olweus Bullying Program (OBPP) and the KiVa Anti-Bullying Program, highlights that teacher training should combine theoretical preparation with practical, applied activities. This ensures the transition from knowing bullying prevention and intervention procedures to effectively applying them within the school environment. A common feature of both programs is their emphasis on systematic professional training for educators, the importance of partnerships with families and the community, and the monitoring of bullying cases.

Consequently, we propose that teacher training programs in Romania incorporate components such as recognizing and identifying bullying situations, implementing prevention strategies, executing appropriate interventions, fostering educational partnerships, and monitoring cases. Furthermore, drawing on the OBPP model, we recommend that professional training programs also focus on developing skills for immediate intervention and case monitoring. In line with the KiVa program, we also argue for developing the ability to understand the dynamics of student groups, as well as the role that bystanders play in the emergence and persistence of

bullying. Based on these findings, teacher training programs in Romania could include strategies for identifying the roles students play in bullying and for engaging the wider student community in bullying prevention efforts. At the same time, we propose adapting these recommendations to the specific characteristics of the Romanian education system, in accordance with professional standards and existing regulations on the prevention of and response to school violence. However, the effectiveness of these proposals for teacher training and skills development should be evaluated through empirical studies conducted in Romanian schools.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our study presents several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the research aimed to examine the role and competency profile of teachers in managing bullying, based on a comparative analysis of only two internationally recognized anti-bullying programs: OBPP and KiVa. Consequently, the study sought to identify similarities or differences between the two programs, without attempting to develop an exhaustive theoretical model of teachers' competencies regarding the management of bullying. Another limitation is methodological in nature, stemming from the specific characteristics of qualitative research design. Moreover, the study did not assess the effectiveness of OBPP or KiVa; references to their effectiveness are based on previous evaluations. The literature search was limited to Google Scholar, and the analysis relied on published descriptions of the programs rather than on observation of their implementation in schools. Because the analysis is based on only two intervention programs, the conclusions drawn from the comparison cannot be generalized; rather, they may serve as a starting point for future studies that could capture various nuances in the methodology for organizing effective anti-bullying prevention programs. A further limitation concerns the integration of these findings into professional training programs for teachers in Romania. Future research could examine the extent to which the teacher roles emphasized by OBPP and KiVa, along with the targeted competencies, can be integrated into educational practice within our country.

Building on the limitations of our study, we aim to extend our comparative analysis to other bullying prevention and intervention programs, with the goal of developing a theoretical model for training educators in this field in Romania, thereby strengthening educational policies in this area.

Author contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization, methodology, writing, review, and editing of the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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