

BULLYING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM: PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

¹MOYINOLUWA GRACE OWOJORI & ²RAMONI LUKUMAN ADEKUNLE

^{1&2}Department of Arts and Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, Lead City University, Ibadan

Abstract

Bullying is a common penetrating issue that affects children all over the world, without early childhood classrooms being exempted. This paper explores the phenomenon of bullying in early childhood classrooms, highlighting its consequences on young children's social, emotional, and academic development. A review of existing literature reveals that bullying can take many styles in early childhood settings, including physical, verbal, and relational aggression. This paper also discusses evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies that early childhood educators can use to create a safe and supportive learning environment. These strategies include promoting social-emotional learning and kindness and implementing positive behavioral supports. The paper also emphasizes the importance of teacher training, parent-teacher cooperation, and community involvement in preventing and addressing bullying in early childhood classrooms. By providing educators and caregivers with the knowledge and tools to prevent and intervene in bullying, we can help create a norm of kindness, respect, and support the wellbeing and success of all young children.

Keywords: Bullying, Early Childhood Education, Prevention, intervention

Introduction

Bullying is a corrupt and demoralizing issue that is affecting millions of people worldwide especially the younger ones. Children begin to display social unacceptable acts of aggressively dominating others as they develop, physical, hurtful teasing, comments, threats, abuse, intimidation and indirect other bullying behaviors are relatively common at this tender age (Ada, 2016). Threats and intimidations are commonly occurrences in childhood settings; yet many adults see it as bad habit that children should be able to cope with even when it comes from someone who is taken privilege advantage of them. Children setting is now becoming an ideal environment for bullying due to indirect endorsement of the behaviour by adults around them which is a violation to child's rights.

Isabella (2023) observed that the rates of prevalence of bullying are relatively constantly becoming a masking polite conformity. It is highly difficult to give adequate report of bullying prevalence due to poor available reporting system. Many cases of bullying were not reported in the schools to teachers and caregivers as many teachers and caregivers of them show indifferent to pupils' complaints. The use of English Language as a formal means of communication in most of the preschools is fueling prevalence of bullying due to miscommunication and misunderstanding amongst English-speaking pupils and those pupils who speak their native language. The prevalence of social bullying occurrence is high in bilingual schools, with a diverse population in terms of culture (Remy, 2020). Frequency can be measured using standardized bullying surveys, incident reports, or observational data. However, the use of statutory records like bullying survey, incident record, and monitoring incidents of bullying records are yet consistent across schools. Most teachers and caregivers do not consider bullying record as an effective tool to support them to monitor incidents, scope and scale of bullying issues in their schools precisely in Nigeria (Childcare Education Institute 2024).

There are different forms of bullying, including verbal which is not unusual for people to experience as a grown child (name-calling, hurtful teasing, abuse or insult). Innocent child might be intimidated and feel under pressure to retaliate in the same manner or develop depression if the incident persists and regular. Suzanne (2023) established the fact that physical bullying, or aggressive physical intimidation (hitting, pushing, kicking, tripping, blocking, pushing, punching, and touching in inappropriate and harmful ways) are not usually reported by many children to their parents or teacher when bullying happens. It is important

to be watchful of signs like unexplained cuts, scratches, or bruises, missing or damaged clothes or frequent complaints of headaches and stomachaches. Some children are not violence naturally or morally, going through such an old condition may down their spirit for schooling and affecting their social interaction.

McMillen (2023) asserted that the form of imitation is one of the ways children learn bullying. This is done by trying out similar tactics targeting the weak one to start with. Relational or social bullying involve ridiculing someone relationship or reputation like social exclusion, rumors, shunning, embarrassment, labeling, and gaslighting. Be aware that children often pretend and soft pedal the report of social bullying because of the embarrassment and shame they feel. It is done when someone tries to downplay relationship or reputation of other(s) which may affect the person's mental health and sense of belonging. Indirect social bullying could be difficult to know nor report because they are only intimidation in nature such as ignoring someone, walking away when someone is speaking, separating someone from a group or activity (McMillen, 2023). Cyber bullying also occurred to children of 5-6 years who imitate their elders in using internet facilities, older siblings pass their phones to younger ones who may not have access to phone whereas some parents allow their children access to unlimited aged social media like facebook, Instagram and tiktoks (Claire, 2016). Understanding the various types of bullying helps teachers and caregivers tailor interventions to address specific behaviors considering student emotional and social well-being.

Emotional and social well-being change occurred as transition from home to preschool center or class as a milestone moment during early childhood years. At this time pupils encounter multiple biological, psychological and social changes mostly at the same time. Children contact with other groups of peers has effect on pupils' emotional and psychological balance or imbalance. A common feature of children peer group is bullying behaviours among the pupils which have impact on the emotional and social well-being of pupils (Leanne, 2015). Bullying in childhood centers or classes can have lasting adverse effect, when children are bullied, they may feel scared leading to negative impacts on their emotional development and affect their self-esteem, making them feel worthless or unloved (McMillen, 2023). Childhood centers and classes should provide a safe and nurturing environment where children feel supported and encouraged to express their emotions. Bullying in childhood centers or classes can also affect a child's social well-being. When children are bullied, they may struggle to form healthy relationships with their peers, leading to social isolation and exclusion. Bullying can also create a sense of fear or intimidation, making children hesitant to participate in social activities or interact with others (Caroline, 2023). Childhood centers and classes should promote social skills, and kindness to help children develop positive relationships and a sense of belonging.

Bullying in early childhood classrooms or centers can have impact on a child's academic performance and engagement (Remy, 2020). When children are bullied, they may experience increased stress and fear leading to decreased motivation and poor interest in learning. As a result, their academic performance may suffer, and they may come behind their peers. Bullying can lead to decreased attendance and reduced participation in class activities. Children who are bullied may feel afraid to come to school, leading to increased absenteeism. They may be reluctant to participate in class activities increasing their social and emotional difficulties. To minimize the effects of bullying on academic performance and engagement, it is essential to create a safe and inclusive learning environment (This Day Newspaper, 2024). By addressing bullying and promoting a positive learning environment, early childhood children can feel safe, supported, and engaged in learning, improved academic performance and their love of learning.

At this stage, children may not fully understand the consequences of bullying, yet aggressive behaviors can still emerge. Young children who bully mostly imitate behaviors observed at home or in the media, while others may lack self-confidence, using aggression to assert dominance (This Day Newspaper, 2024). Victims of bullying in early childhood are often those who appear innocent from their peers, whether due to nature, physical characteristics or social skills. They may exhibit signs like withdrawal and reluctance to participate in group activities. Some may stay silent out of fear, while others may intervene if encouraged by a supportive environment (Isabella, 2023). The impact of bullying at this stage extends beyond the classroom. Victims may develop anxiety, low self-esteem, and difficulty forming friendships, while children who bully may struggle with social rejection and emotional regulation. Without intervention, these patterns can persist,

affecting academic performance and future relationships. Addressing bullying in early childhood requires a comprehensive approach, teaching conflict resolution, and creating a supportive learning environment based on legal and ethical consideration.

Literature Review

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a foundational education stage for a child. The early childhood stage is referred to as the period from birth to about age of five or six before the official primary school age in Nigeria which does not beyond the pre-school year (Akinbote, 2014). There are various developments at this stage including cognitive abilities, values, social, emotional, physical and arts. One of the such is the development of children's social interaction. In developing social interaction, children are invited to play and interact with friends and the environment. Sometimes in the process of the social development, there are social problems faced by children which may be bullying in nature when playing. This may include pinching, kicking, pulling hair, biting, hurtful teasing, comments, threats, abuse, intimidation etc. Basically, children have the right to feel security, peace and happiness. Violence that occurs with these children is called bullying.

There is yet generally acceptable definition for bullying, but there is an agreement on its criteria, which include intentional and repeated physical and psychological effect through aggression and power imbalance in physical, psychological or social ways in which the victim is unable to protect him or herself. However, the presence of all the criteria is not compulsory in the occurrence of bullying in as much it is done intentionally and repeatedly. Bullying is a deliberate act where a person commits negative actions physically, verbally or and psychologically repeatedly to other(s). Olweus (1993) revealed that bullying is a negative action that is carried out repeatedly from time to time on the part of one or more other students. Many regard bullying as a continuous social problem in child development.

Meanwhile, bullying perpetrators do experience social rejection later on and the victims may experience feelings of inferiority complex, anxiety, and intimidation (Saracho, 2017). The victims of bullying have a great chance of becoming perpetrators of bullying over the years on the weaker ones to establish and protect him or herself (Elmahera, 2018). More so, Kochenderfer and Ladd (2017) revealed that many young victims were only a short time and not a long-time victim. Arseneault (2016), Kirves and Sajaniemi (2012) revealed that children aged 2 - 5years who are victims of bullying will find it difficult to adjust in the early years of school.

Baumeister (2021) has established three criteria for labeling bullying behaviour, including: (1) intentional aggressive behaviour (2) behaviour that is carried out repeatedly or over time (3) imbalance of power in interpersonal relationships.

Although a longstanding characterization of children who bully points to their low self-esteem, there is little empirical evidence to support this view. In fact, more research (Baumeister, 2021; Bushman & Baumeister, 2018) suggests that an inflated self-esteem increases the odds of aggressive behaviour. When a bully's self-regard is seriously threatened by insults or criticisms, for example, his or her response will be more aggressive than normal. Bullies often report that they feel powerful and superior, and justified in their actions. Research on family dynamics suggests that many children already have learned to bully others by preschool age. Many young children who bully lack problem-solving skills, and learn through imitation to hit back in response to problems (Loeber & Dishion, 2024; Vladimir & Brubach, 2020). Children who are bullied, on the other hand, are often younger, weaker, and more passive than the bully. They appear anxious, insecure, cautious, sensitive and quiet, and often react by crying and withdrawing. They are often lonely and lack close friendships at school. Without adult intervention, these children are likely to be bullied repeatedly, putting them at-risk for continued social rejection, depression, and impaired self-esteem (Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 2024). A smaller subset of these children, known as "provocative victims," have learned to respond aggressively to perceived threats by retaliating not only against the aggressor, but also against others (Olweus, 1993).

Early childhood bullying behaviour: a controversial issue

The use of the term bullying among young children has been a controversial issue. Specifically, whether the use of traditional definitions of bullying over children's aggressive behaviors, should be included in the context of early childhood has raised controversy among researchers, regarding the use of the three criteria to define bullying intentional harm-doing, repetition, and imbalance of power. Several researchers are so careful in discussing about bullying in early childhood arguing that the above-mentioned criteria are not yet sufficiently developed (Loeber & Dishion, 2024). However, other researchers mention the ability of young children to acknowledge others' motives and identify diverse intentions (Baird and Moses 2021). Vlachou, Botsoglou, and Andreou (2016) note that from the age of three the main components of moral awareness and compliance to rules start developing.

Research data support the notion that peer aggression in early childhood differs from aggressive behaviors encountered in middle childhood and the term 'unjustified aggression' is quite often used as the most proper term (Psalti 2017). The lack of repetition of the victimization over a long period could explain this observed difference (Monks, Smith, and Swettenham 2023). Research data support the idea that aggressive behaviors fitting the bullying definition could be observed among very young children (Kirves and Sajaniemi 2012; Humphrey 2013). However, researchers seem to acknowledge that very young children tend to have an over-inclusive definition of bullying that does not include repetition for example or intention (Vlachou et al. 2011). This is also confirmed by Monks and Smith (2006) who noted that usually young children ignore the elements of imbalance of power and repetitiveness and include aggressive behaviors in general in their definitions of bullying. Despite the controversy regarding the definition of bullying in early childhood, studies have identified aggressive behaviors in early childhood that can be categorized as bullying (Kirves and Sajaniemi 2012; Camodeca, Caravita, and Coppola 2015).

Research data from quantitative, qualitative and observational studies indicate three main categories of early childhood bullying: physical, verbal and relational. Physical bullying is characterized by behaviors such as hitting, biting, kicking, spitting, pushing, pinching, slapping, punching, hair pulling and throwing an object. Verbal bullying involves behaviors such as name calling, laughing at someone, teasing, threatening, using bad language, humiliating, disclosing secrets and gossiping (Rose et al. 2014; Repo and Sajaniemi 2015; Tanrikulu 2018). Relational bullying is based on turning away from a friend, telling peers not to play with someone, rejecting another child to join a game, spoiling the game, destroying friendships, preventing some children to play or communicate with others, ignoring some children, excluding some peers from collective classroom (Rose et al. 2014; Repo and Sajaniemi 2015; Tanrikulu 2018). Overall, research data show that physical and verbal bullying are more often observed among young children than indirect bullying such as rumor spreading. Slee and Rigby (1994) argued that especially for young children the focus should be on how often and how long the aggressive behavior continues rather than on evaluating the purpose behind the action. They claim that if the action is repeated over a long period of time, it is not a case of aggression but of bullying (Slee and Rigby 1994). Although children and early childhood educators have reported bullying or victimization among young children, studies on the subject are still very limited (Psalti 2017). Tanrikulu (2018) notes that the inconsistency in the prevalence of early childhood bullying is probably caused by the variations in research methods, the different age ranges or measurement strategies used by various researchers. This inconsistency is also stated by Nordhagen et al. (2005) who mentioned that the prevalence of bullying varies depending on the definition used and the method of data collection, which can be by self-nomination, peer nomination, teacher ratings, parent ratings or observation.

Classifying children as bullies or victims may lead to stigmatization. Labeling children at this early age can turn the child into a target of a taxonomic system. The stigma can produce the behaviour that is expected from bullies and/or victims and thus act as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Indeed, it is important to consider whether it is meaningful to use terms such as 'bully' and 'victim' with regard to young children. This is also based on the view that bullying behaviour cannot be reduced to the level of individual characteristics, but should be understood as group behaviour. Hence, when the goal is to prevent bullying categorizing very young children as bullies or victims it does not seem beneficial as it could lead to stigmatization of these

children and/or their classification into a taxonomic system (Repo and Repo 2016). It is more useful to focus on preventing the progression of these behaviors rather than emphasizing in definitions. Therefore, it is critical that educators use research and anti-bullying education to understand and acknowledge early bullying behaviors along with adequate strategies to address such phenomena in early childhood settings.

Early childhood educators' perceptions of bullying

Research findings, regarding educators' perceptions of bullying, show that they consider social bullying less serious than the other forms of bullying that children are less likely to actively engage in social bullying incidents unlike physical bullying (Bauman and Del Rio 2016; Psalti 2017). In antithesis teachers usually feel obligated to intervene in instances of physical bullying as it can result in injuries for which they will be accountable to parents among other stakeholders (Small, NeilsenHewett, and Sweller 2013; Psalti 2017). These results resemble findings from similar studies at all levels of education (Craig, Henderson, and Murphy 2020). Mesman et al. (2018) note that most teachers expect young children's physical aggression having in mind that younger children usually use their body to solve their differences and/or claim things due to their underdeveloped language and social skills. Research data show that in many cases bullying is underestimated in classrooms by teachers (Bradshaw, Sawyer, and O'Brennan 2017), and that teachers falsely believe that their direct intervention is rarely needed (Rose et al. 2014). Since early intervention in early childhood aggression and bullying is emerging as an important issue, early childhood educators' role and competency in recognizing, treating, and designing environments that could prevent future incidents of aggressive behaviors is becoming a crucial issue.

One important component of understanding how to prevent and decrease aggression and bullying is based on educators' interpretations and definitions of such behaviors. Educators' role is critical as they can, for example, distinguish rough and tumble play (behaviors similar to aggressiveness such as pulling, knocking down) from truly aggressive behaviors directed from one child to the other or toward objects that are followed by reactions of discomfort (DiCarlo et al. 2015). According to Tanrikulu (2018), research on early childhood bullying is still limited, and little is known about the nature of early childhood bullying. In addition, despite preschool educators' fundamental roles in bullying prevention and intervention, their opinions about early childhood bullying have not attracted enough attention (Alsaker and Valkanover 2022).

Regardless of the high publicity of bullying in our society, studies addressing bullying among young children are limited (Vlachou, Botsoglou, and Andreou 2016) and almost none exploring early childhood educators' views of the phenomenon (Psalti 2017). Therefore, since early childhood educators are in critical positions to assess the type of young children's interactions and identify any problematic behaviors in their classrooms this study explored their experiences and understanding of behaviors and incidents that constitute bullying. As Pochtar and Del Vecchio (2024) stated, it is crucial to explore early childhood educators' experiences and responses since more children attend early childhood education programs at a younger age and consequently are at risk of being bullied very early in their lives.

Incident of Bullying among Children

Evidence suggests that, the incidence of bullying among children is increasing and becoming a nationwide problem. One out of five children admit to being a bully (Noll & Carter, 2017). In general, boys engage in more physical, direct means of bullying, whereas girls engage in the more psychological and indirect bullying, such as exclusion. Roland (2019) reported that girls may be involved in bullying as much as boys, but are less willing to acknowledge their involvement. In addition, because indirect bullying is often less apparent, girls' bullying may be underestimated. Girls tend to bully less as they get older. The percentage of boys who bully, however, is similar at different age levels (Smith & Sharp, 2024). Twenty-five to 50 percent of children report being bullied. The great majority of boys are bullied by other boys, while 60 percent of girls' report being bullied by boys. Eight percent of children report staying away from school one day per month because they fear being bullied. Forty-three percent of children have a fear of being harassed in the school bathroom (Noll & Carter, 2017). Children report that many incidents of bullying occur in situations that are difficult for the teacher to monitor, such as during playground activity.

The Effects of Bullying on Children

To succeed in school, children must perceive their environment as being safe, secure, and comfortable. Yet, for many children, bullying and teasing begins as soon as children first form peer groups. For some children, this is a time when patterns of victimizing and victimization become established. Consequently, the victims perceive school as a threatening place and experience adjustment difficulties, feelings of loneliness, and a desire to avoid school. These feelings may linger even when bullying ceases (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 2016). Children desire and need interaction with peers, physical activity, and time outdoors. Consequently, they often consider outside recess to be their favorite part of the school day. Sadly, however, many children who are bullied report that problems occur on the playground and view the playground as a lonely, unhappy, and unsafe environment. If children are fearful or feel intimidated, they cannot learn effectively. They may react by skipping school, avoiding certain areas of the school (the bathroom or the playground), or, in extreme, yet increasingly common, cases, they may bring weapons to school (Noll & Carter, 2017). Olweus (1991) reminds us that "every individual should have the right to be spared oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation in school, as in society at large". As early exposure to bullying can produce both immediate and delayed effects in children's ability to adjust to school, school staff need to intervene as soon as problems are detected.

Prevention and Intervention of Bullying

A comprehensive plan to address the problems of bullying and teasing must involve school personnel, teachers, children, and families. Intervention must occur on three levels: school-wide, in specific classrooms, and with individuals.

School-wide Intervention: School personnel must recognize the pervasiveness of bullying and teasing and its detrimental effects on children's development. In-service training can be developed that outlines a clear policy statement against bullying and intervention strategies for addressing it. The school also can develop a comprehensive plan geared to teach children pro-social behaviors and skills. The children may be involved in the development of such policies and strategies, providing their input on what behavior is appropriate and identifying sanctions against bullies (Lickona, 2000; Olweus, 1997)

School personnel could enlist families' support and involvement by sharing details of the policy through parent-teacher conferences and newsletters. Families need to be aware of the specific sanctions that will be imposed on children who bully, and they need opportunities to offer feedback and suggestions. It is important to encourage parents to talk with their children about bullying. Children who are bullied often believe that their parents are unaware of the situation, and that their concerns are not being addressed or discussed. Children do want adults to intervene, however (Gropper & Froschl, 2019). If families are kept informed, they can work as a "team member" with school counselors and teachers to change the school environment.

Additional sources of school-wide support for children who are bullied and teased may be developed, including mentoring programmes. Teachers can identify children who need support, and find them a mentor. Children may feel more at ease and less anxious when they have a "buddy," such as an older student, who can help intervene (Noll & Carter, 2017). Counselors at one elementary school selected, trained, and supervised high school students to teach the younger children how to deal with bullying and harassment. After implementation of this program, the teachers observed a decline in reports of harassment (Frieman & Frieman, 2020). Bullying frequently occurs on the playground (Whitney, Rivers, Smith, & Sharp, 2014), yet many children believe that teachers do little to stop it. Consequently, "play-time is more of a prison sentence than an opportunity to play and socialize" (Slee, 2015). Therefore, school personnel may need to review playground design and space, children's access to these spaces, teacher supervision, and the role of the school in early intervention on the playground (Lambert, 2019). Yard monitors and lunch time supervisors can be trained to watch for signs of bullying. In addition, children can be asked to identify those places where bullying most frequently occurs.

Intervention in Specific Classrooms

Clearly, bullying and hurtful teasing affects children's ability to learn and enjoy play, as well as the teacher's ability to teach. Within the classroom, teachers can begin addressing the problem by creating times for children to talk about their concerns. Interestingly, a study showed that when children ages 3 to 5 years of age were asked about assisting someone who was being bullied, 37 percent replied that it was none of their business to help (Slee & Rigby, 2014). Teachers can ask children to talk about what makes them feel unsafe or unwelcome in school. The teacher then can make a list of the children's responses, discuss them (e.g., "I don't like it when someone hits me or calls me a name"), and create corresponding rules (e.g., "Hitting and name calling are not allowed in the classroom"). When necessary, the discussions can be continued during class meetings so that the rules can be reviewed, revised, and updated. The teacher can also show children what to do to help themselves or other children, and remind them of the consequences of breaking the rules. Teachers can reduce children's anxiety by setting firm limits on unacceptable behavior (Froschl & Sprung, 2019).

If the bullying continues, teachers may need to make referrals to school counselors who will work with children, either individually or in groups, to talk about concerns, discuss solutions and options, and give suggestions on how to form friendships. Children without close friends are more likely to be victimized and may benefit from specific suggestions for building friendships (e.g., invite a friend to your house, work together on a school project, share a common interest, play a favorite game together).

Certain types of curricula, especially those that provide opportunities for cooperative learning experiences, may make bullying less likely to flourish. Children need to be engaged in worthwhile, authentic learning activities that encourage their interests and abilities (Katz, 2013). When they are intellectually motivated, they are less likely to bully. For example, project work (Katz & Chard, 2020) involves children's in-depth investigations into topics of their own choosing. As they explore events and objects around them in the classroom, in the school yard, in the neighborhood, and in the community, they learn to cooperate, collaborate, and share responsibilities. Project work can be complemented by noncompetitive games, role playing, and dramatization to raise awareness of bullying and increase empathy for those who experience it. Some teachers use children's literature to help create caring and peaceful classrooms (Morns, Taylor, & Wilson, 2020).

Intervention with Individuals

Developing both immediate and long-term strategies for identifying and working with bullies may be necessary. When teachers observe an incident of bullying, they can intervene by asking the bully to consider the consequences of his or her actions and think about how others feel. By talking calmly, yet firmly, to the bully, the teacher can make it clear that such behavior is unacceptable. Teachers can show the bully alternate ways to talk, interact, and negotiate; at the same time, they can encourage victims to assert themselves. By doing so, the teacher is showing the bully and the victim that action is being taken to stop the bullying. Acting promptly can prevent the bullying from escalating. When interacting with children on a one-on-one basis, teachers should provide encouragement that acknowledges specific attributes, rather than dispensing general praise, approval, or admiration ("I am so glad that you have done a great job; it is wonderful; yours is one of the best projects") that may appear to be contrived. Expressions of specific encouragement ("You seem to be pleased and very interested in your project, and it appears you have worked on it for many days and used many resources to find answers to your questions"), as opposed to general praise, are descriptive, sincere, take place in private, focus on the process, and help children to develop an appreciation for their efforts and work. While developing children's self-esteem is a worthwhile goal, false praise may instead promote narcissism and unrealistic self-regard.

Teachers should avoid encouraging children to think highly of themselves when they have not earned it (Baumeister, 2021; Hitz & Driscoll, 2018). Additional long-term strategies may include encouraging children to resolve their own problems and using peers to mediate between bullies and their targets. Furthermore, teachers can spend time helping children to form ties with peers who can offer protection, support, security, and safety, thus helping to reduce children's exposure to bullying (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 2017; Ladd,

Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 2016). In response to the increase in cases of bullying, the implementation of programmes for interventions to prevent/eradicate the problem in the educational environment has increased (Jiménez et al., 2016). The prevention programs are often targeted at higher stage learners. Studies such as Ilola et al. (2016) highlight the importance of focusing programmes on children who are in the earlier stage, given that the results of their research confirmed that bullying behaviors were a common phenomenon among children in that stage.

Therefore, it is essential to implement activities or intervention programmes in the ECE stage based on empathy, assertiveness, emotional intelligence (EI), social skills, values, etc., with the aim of preventing/eradicating situations of violence in educational environments and outside of them, thus promoting a good school environment and creating resolute adults in conflict situations (Viguer & Solé, 2022). Among the different bullying prevention programmes based on training on values and social skills to ensure a peaceful coexistence, we can find the peer tutoring program. As indicated by Ferrer et al. (2019), this programme was developed in 2002 and implemented in different schools in Spain in 2003. It is a coexistence programme to prevent violence and bullying, and involves the entire educational community. The programme is implemented in the educational stages of Primary, Secondary and Special Education. It is implemented in the ECE and vocational training stages in an experimental phase.

Conclusion

Bullying in early childhood classrooms is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive approach. By implementing prevention and intervention strategies, we can create a safe and supportive learning environment for all children. It is our responsibility as educators, policymakers, and caregivers to take a proactive and collaborative approach to addressing bullying. Together, we can create a bully-free early childhood classroom.

Recommendations

- i. Develop and implement evidence-based bullying prevention programs in early childhood classrooms.
- ii. Provide teachers with training and resources to recognize and address bullying behaviors.
- iii. Encourage parental involvement in bullying prevention efforts.
- iv. Implement restorative justice practices in early childhood classrooms.
- v. Develop policies and procedures for addressing bullying incidents in early childhood classrooms.
- vi. By working together, we can create a safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environment for all children.

In this case parents have a very critical responsibility to strengthen the mentality of children and also build positive relationships with children so that children openly tell their parents about the problems they face while at school. The role of teachers is needed as they are child's guide when at school, most teachers more professional compared to parents at home. It is expected that teachers should identify and handle bullying in children when at school and provide children with information about bullying itself with stories and short film screenings, as well making policy regarding bullying and enforcing it firmly.

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