
**BULLYING AS A BARRIER TO EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE DEVELOPMENT
IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN**

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Annotation

This scientific article analyzes the relationship between bullying and the development of emotional intelligence in primary school children. While emotional intelligence (EI) is considered a critical factor in fostering empathy, self-awareness, and prosocial behavior, bullying interrupts and often reverses this process. The article defines the key components of emotional intelligence in young learners and discusses how persistent exposure to bullying—either as a victim or perpetrator—affects children's emotional regulation, interpersonal trust, and mental well-being. Drawing on empirical research and real-life case studies, the article explores how bullying negatively impacts neural and psychological pathways associated with emotional maturity. Furthermore, it provides a comprehensive set of strategic interventions, including curriculum integration, parental training, emotional coaching, and school-wide reform programs designed to enhance both anti-bullying efforts and emotional intelligence education. The study concludes that addressing emotional intelligence and bullying simultaneously is essential for ensuring a healthy, inclusive, and developmentally supportive school environment.

Keywords: bullying, emotional intelligence, primary school children, empathy, emotional development, psychological resilience, school environment.

Introduction

The school environment is a foundational space where children not only acquire academic knowledge but also learn essential emotional and social skills. Emotional intelligence (EI) is crucial for a child's interpersonal success and well-being, influencing their capacity to understand their own emotions and navigate social dynamics. However, bullying presents a serious obstacle to this development. When children are subjected to bullying, their emotional responses become distorted, leading to fear, aggression, and emotional withdrawal. This article

examines how bullying impairs the development of emotional intelligence in primary school children and discusses how educational systems can address this dual challenge.

The Nature of Emotional Intelligence in Children Emotional intelligence is generally defined as the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and influence one's own emotions and those of others. In children, EI includes self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. These components are not innate but developed through social interaction, guidance, and emotional experiences. Schools play a pivotal role in nurturing emotional intelligence through both formal curricula and informal social contexts.

Children with high EI tend to perform better academically, show greater resilience to stress, and demonstrate more positive peer relationships. On the contrary, children with underdeveloped EI are more prone to anxiety, behavioral problems, and social isolation. Thus, fostering emotional intelligence is not only beneficial for individual children but also for creating a compassionate and respectful classroom climate.

Bullying and its Disruption to Emotional Growth Bullying significantly disrupts the emotional development of children by introducing chronic stress, fear, and insecurity into their daily lives. Victims of bullying often lose trust in peers, become emotionally guarded, and struggle with feelings of shame and inadequacy. These emotional states inhibit their ability to engage empathetically and confidently with others.

From a psychological perspective, consistent exposure to bullying affects the brain's stress response system, impairing areas responsible for emotional regulation and impulse control. Bullied children may become hypervigilant or emotionally numb, both of which hinder their capacity to learn and apply emotional intelligence skills in real-life scenarios.

Moreover, children who engage in bullying behavior also show signs of emotional misdevelopment. Their aggression may stem from poor emotional regulation, lack of empathy, or modeled behavior from adults. These children also need targeted interventions to build healthier emotional processing skills.

Case Examples and Empirical Findings Several studies indicate a strong correlation between bullying experiences and emotional development deficits. Research conducted in elementary schools across Europe and Asia revealed that children who were either victims or perpetrators of bullying scored significantly lower on empathy and emotional regulation assessments compared to their peers.

Case examples from school counseling programs in the United Kingdom demonstrate that early interventions focusing on emotional literacy significantly reduce bullying incidents and improve peer relationships. Programs like PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) and RULER (Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, Regulating) have

shown success in improving emotional intelligence while simultaneously lowering aggressive behaviors.

Strategic Interventions for Dual Development To address both bullying and emotional underdevelopment, schools must implement a dual-focused strategy. The following approaches have proven effective:

- Integrating emotional intelligence training into the core curriculum.
- Providing regular workshops for teachers and parents on emotional development and bullying prevention.
- Creating safe spaces for students to express emotions and resolve conflicts peacefully.
- Encouraging student-led empathy projects that build social cohesion.
- Training school counselors to identify emotional distress early and intervene constructively.

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence and bullying prevention are inextricably linked. Without addressing bullying, efforts to cultivate emotional intelligence are undermined; similarly, without developing EI, children are more susceptible to both engaging in and suffering from bullying. Schools must therefore treat these issues not as isolated challenges but as interconnected elements of a child's holistic development.

Furthermore, the long-term well-being of students is shaped by their ability to process emotions, manage relationships, and feel safe within their social environment. When bullying is present, it compromises not only a child's self-image and trust in others but also their neurological and emotional development. An emotionally intelligent child is better equipped to navigate social challenges, seek help when needed, and build compassionate peer connections.

Incorporating emotional intelligence development into bullying prevention efforts is not merely an educational innovation — it is a necessity. It empowers children to break the cycle of aggression and builds a foundation for inclusive, resilient school communities. Therefore, policies and practices that support this dual development must be prioritized by all educational stakeholders committed to nurturing a generation of emotionally capable and socially responsible individuals.

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