



Research Article

A comparative analysis of Norwegian and Finnish regulations on the concept of safe school within the axis of child's social development

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Abstract

This study provides a comparative analysis of the Norwegian-origin Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme (OBPP) and the Finnish-origin KiVa models—both globally recognised as benchmarks for establishing safe learning environments in educational institutions—in the light of current strategies for 2026. Conducted using the multiple-case study design within qualitative research methods, the study examines Norway's climate-focused approach, which is based on 'relational leadership' and a disciplinary framework characterised by supportive rather than punitive attitudes and clear boundaries. In contrast, Finland's KiVa model defines bullying as a "group process" fuelled by social rewards and extends the intervention to the entire group by transforming peer roles (assistant, reinforcer, defender). The research discusses the limits of technology in the 2026 educational ecosystem through the findings of the "Digital Paradox", highlighting the inadequacy of the traditional "repetition" criterion in defining cyberbullying. The findings indicate that bullying must be redefined not so much by the frequency of incidents but through the student's "subjective sense of security" and "legal rights". Consequently, the study proposes a hybrid model synthesising Norway's legal framework and disciplinary resolve with Finland's empathetic peer management and digital integration. For Turkey's educational vision, the integration of AI-supported early warning systems into platforms and the adoption of the "Relational Leadership" model in teacher training are presented as strategic solutions.

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Introduction

Violence and peer bullying in the school environment are not merely temporary behavioural disorders; they constitute a systematic form of aggression based on power imbalances that directly threaten an individual's academic development and mental health (Olweus, 1993). In the literature, the key criteria for an act to be defined as bullying are that the perpetrator intends to harm the victim, the act is persistent, and there is an asymmetrical power relationship between the parties. Today, bullying extends beyond physical and verbal attacks to include relational manipulation such as social exclusion and spreading rumours, as well as cyberbullying, which occurs via technology due to the impact of digitalisation (Limber & Olweus, 2010; Limber et al., 2018).

The Relationship Between Child's Social Development, School Safety, and Peer Bullying

A child's social development is a dynamic process that encompasses the skills to establish healthy relationships with peers, develop empathy, resolve conflicts constructively, and feel a sense of belonging to a community. The school is the

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primary social domain where this development occurs most intensely. However, violence and peer bullying encountered in the school environment are among the greatest risk factors that directly hinder this developmental process and threaten the individual's mental health (Olweus, 1993). The concepts of peer bullying and school safety intersect with the child's social development along the following core dimensions:

Learning Social Roles: As emphasised in Finland's KiVa model, bullying is not merely an isolated conflict between two individuals, but rather a negative "group process" and a form of socialisation that involves the entire class through roles such as assistants, reinforcers, outsiders, and defenders (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Within these peer group dynamics, children either adopt a negative social role fuelled by social rewards like peer pressure and popularity, or they develop prosocial (positive) behaviours by learning to become a "defender" who supports the victim within a safe school environment (Salmivalli et al., 2011).

Sense of Belonging and Security: The "warmth, care, and clear boundaries" specified in Norway's Olweus model serve as a climate-focused protective shield that allows the child to feel safe at school (Limber, 2011). Empirical studies demonstrate that transforming the school climate at a macro level and increasing teachers' capacity to intervene directly enhance students' subjective perceptions of safety (Limber et al., 2018). Without a safe school climate, it is impossible for a child to fill social voids with trust and mutual respect, and consequently, to develop a healthy sense of belonging and community spirit.

Social Justice and Equity: The values of "equity" and "social justice," which form the foundation of Finnish education policy, aim to prevent exclusion brought about by socio-economic disadvantages and cultural privileges (Jantunen et al., 2026). Merely ensuring physical safety at school is insufficient; for the healthy social development of children, the equitable establishment of school management and institutional culture is essential to fundamentally prevent violence and discrimination (Jantunen et al., 2026). Recent research argues that bullying measurements should focus not merely on the frequency of incidents, but on the psychological harm suffered by the student and the compromised sense of trust within this framework of equity (Brisson, 2026).

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme (OBPP) and the Climate-Focused Approach

The Olweus model, one of the study's primary foundations, is based on four core philosophical pillars that are 'climate-focused' rather than 'punitive' (Limber, 2011):

Warmth and Care: Demonstrating a supportive attitude towards students.

Clear Boundaries: Setting firm limits against unacceptable behaviour.

Non-Hostile Consequences: Applying responsibility-focused negative consequences rather than punishment.

Role Modelling: Adults representing authority through positive behaviour.

In terms of implementation, the model is summarised under adult principles and school-wide measures from a holistic perspective. It is essential that teachers and school leaders approach students with compassion, and apply corrective measures rather than punishment when rules are broken. Within the scope of school-wide measures, it is recommended to establish a "Coordination Committee" to oversee the school's anti-bullying plan, bring "unsupervised" blind spots such as playgrounds and corridors under supervision to reduce opportunities for bullying, and display standard school rules throughout the premises.

Rather than focusing solely on student behaviour, these strategies offer a holistic approach aimed at fundamentally transforming the school climate to prevent violence. In this model, the key lies in bringing "unattended" areas where bullying might occur under control to reduce opportunities, and in structuring a social environment where bullying is not rewarded as a display of power. In this process, teachers and school leaders position themselves as consistent figures of authority and positive role models who approach students with compassion, set clear boundaries, and apply corrective rather than punitive measures. Ultimately, all these steps aim to fill the social gaps where violence might arise with trust and mutual respect, thereby building a strong sense of community and belonging where students feel valued.

A large-scale empirical study conducted by Limber and Olweus (2018) on the implementation of the OBPP in the US revealed that bullying necessitates a change in the school climate at the macro level rather than relying on individual disciplinary practices. The findings demonstrate the inadequacy of individual disciplinary processes in preventing acts

of violence and the strategic importance of transforming institutional culture. It has been observed that as teachers' willingness and ability to intervene in bullying increase, so too does the proportion of students who feel safe. This research has demonstrated that the success of the Norwegian-originated OBPP model is based on 'sustainability'. According to the research, bullying incidents decrease over time in schools where the programme is implemented and, most importantly, students feel safer at school thanks to teachers' proactive intervention. In short, the research has demonstrated that bullying can be prevented not only on an individual basis but through interventions that encompass the entire school climate, such as coordination committees, the revision of monitoring systems, and standard school rules.

Finland's KiVa Model and the Social Equity Approach

In Finland, it is noted that the pursuit of 'equity' and 'social justice' takes precedence over equality in education policy, and that strategies for preventing violence are built upon these values. In the Finnish model, bullying is defined not merely as a conflict between two individuals, but as a group process fuelled by social rewards (popularity, power) (Salmivalli et al., 1996). KiVa is an abbreviation of the Finnish term "Kiusaamista Vastaan" (against bullying). It was developed in 2006 at the University of Turku in Finland for pupils aged 7 to 15 (Salmivalli et al., 2011). Within this framework, the KiVa programme spreads the intervention across the entire group by assigning roles within the peer group: assistants, reinforcers, outsiders, and defenders. The programme's operational strength stems from the balance between Universal Actions, which encompass all students, and Focused Actions, which involve case-based intervention (Salmivalli et al., 2014).

The primary aim of KiVa is to eliminate the social rewards that perpetuate bullying (such as popularity and displays of power). Within the programme, the bullying process is defined by the following roles:

Bullies and Assistants: Those who directly perform the bullying actions and those who join in or act together with the bully.

Reinforcers: Those who encourage bullying by laughing or cheering.

Outsiders (Bystanders): Those who distance themselves from the situation or turn a blind eye.

Defenders: Those who support the victim and offer them comfort.

Key Components of the KiVa Programme: The programme is structured around three main pillars:

Universal Actions (Prevention): Aimed at all pupils. These consist of lessons, role-play exercises, and video games covering topics such as empathy, communication skills, and coping with peer pressure.

Targeted Actions (Intervention): These come into play when a suspicion of bullying arises. The school's KiVa team facilitates behavioural change by conducting individual meetings with the victim and the bully.

Monitoring: The school's overall situation and the programme's effectiveness are monitored via annual online surveys (Mäkelä & Catalán, 2018).

In the Finnish education system, the prevention of violence and discrimination is not merely a matter of ensuring physical safety; it is possible only through the establishment of equity and social justice as an institutional culture. For merely offering equal opportunities is insufficient to eliminate the disadvantages created by social privileges and differences in socio-economic status (Jantunen et al., 2026). Although diversity is ideologically accepted in the Finnish model, it is observed that there are still some shortcomings in its full implementation (Jantunen et al., 2026).

Aim of Study

The primary aim of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the fundamental philosophies, implementation strategies and effectiveness of the Norwegian-origin Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme (OBPP) and the Finnish-origin KiVa programme. The research aims to demonstrate how the 'school climate-focused' and 'equity-based' approaches offered by these two models can provide solutions to current challenges in the digitalising world of education (cyber and hybrid bullying).

In line with this primary objective, the following questions will be addressed:

- How do the strategies forming the basis of the Norwegian model – "warmth/care, clear boundaries, non-hostile sanctions and serving as a positive role model" – function in preventing violence across the school?

- In the Finnish model, what are the "Universal" and "Targeted" actions aimed at defining bullying as a "group process" and eliminating social rewards (such as assistant or reinforcing roles) within peer groups?
- What is the role of the concepts of "equity" and "social justice" in the Finnish education system, particularly in terms of their establishment as an institutional culture that goes beyond mere physical safety, in preventing bullying?
- With the increasing digitalisation in the second half of the 2020s, what is the capacity of traditional prevention models to adapt to the areas of cyberbullying and hybrid education?
- How are the shortcomings and challenges encountered in the implementation of both models (for example, difficulties in putting diversity into practice) assessed in the light of the literature?

In light of data derived from Scandinavian strategies, how can a sustainable and holistic prevention model be structured for Turkey's educational vision and school safety policies?

The key features distinguishing this study from other research in the literature are: it offers a holistic perspective by synthesising Olweus's 'climate and control' focused approach with Finland's 'equity' based philosophy. It discusses the inadequacy of the traditional 'recurrence' criterion in the context of cyberbullying and redefines bullying not in terms of the number of incidents but through the student's 'right to feel safe'. Furthermore, the study opens up a discussion on the limits of technology by analysing the "Digital Paradox" findings (Valenzuela et al., 2022), which question the impact of the KiVa programme's online game component in the Chilean context. Prepared with a vision for 2026, this study presents a unique model synthesis for Turkey's educational vision. The significance of this research stems from the reality that, particularly in the second half of the 2020s, the full integration of digitalisation into education has led to forms of bullying shifting into cyber and hybrid domains. This transformation necessitates the revision of traditional prevention models and the examination of sustainable, evidence-based models for Turkey's educational vision and school safety policies.

Method

This research is designed using a qualitative research methodology to examine complex educational policies and implementation models in depth.

Research Design

In this study, the multiple case study approach, one of the qualitative research methodologies, has been adopted. The school safety models of Finland and Norway, which form the focus of the research, have been analysed as two separate 'cases' that are independent of one another but comparable.

Documents

The research dataset has been constructed from a longitudinal perspective to track the transformation of education policies in both countries. In this context: Historical Foundations: Core implementation guidelines and theoretical framework documents from before and after 2024, covering the development processes of the KiVa and OBPP models, were examined. Data were systematically collected using document analysis, a technique that enhances reliability in qualitative research.

Data Analysis

A descriptive analysis method was used to analyse the data obtained. During this process, the raw data was summarised and interpreted in line with the research objectives. The findings were structured under the following three main themes to facilitate comparative analysis. Theoretical Framework: The philosophical foundations underpinning the models, and the theoretical framework of 'equity' and 'climate'-focused approaches. Intervention Tools: Measures taken across the school, individual intervention techniques, and the management of social roles. Technology Integration: Strategies for combating cyberbullying in digitalised educational environments and implementation methods in hybrid settings. Cultural and Social Adaptation: Inclusive social networks, socio-economic barriers, and harm-focused measurement

Findings

The findings regarding the Norwegian (Olweus/Relational Leadership) and Finnish (KiVa) models examined within the scope of the research are presented in a comparative manner in the thematic table below, based on theoretical foundations and implementation outcomes.

Table 1. Thematic comparative analysis of violence prevention strategies

Themes	Norway (Lund, 2024; Olweus) Findings	Finland (KiVa/Chile/New Zealand) Findings	Discussion and Critical Perspective (Brisson, 2026)
Theoretical Framework and Leadership	Relational and Democratic Leadership: Trust and dialogue are fundamental, rather than punishment. Based on the principle of 'likhet' (equality), the leader stands on an equal footing with the student.	Fairness and Social Justice: Social justice is emphasised as an institutional culture. Bullying is addressed as a group process.	Legal Rights and Safety: In 2024, Norway defined school safety as a "legal right"; it has combined physical and digital safety.
Intervention and Implementation Outcomes	Restorative Processes: These aim to repair social bonds and ensure the perpetrator takes pedagogical responsibility. Partnerships established with refugee families prevent social exclusion.	Statistical Success (New Zealand): The sense of safety at school has risen from 82.4% to 84.2%. Victimization among girls and younger boys has decreased significantly.	Invisible Victims: The traditional criterion of 'occurring 2–3 times a month' results in the group experiencing bullying 'once or twice' being excluded from the analysis and thus remaining invisible.
Technology and Digitalisation	Digital Security Protocols: In line with the 2026 vision, physical surveillance has been integrated with digital measures.	Digital Paradox (Chile): It has been found that the "Full KiVa" group, which includes online games, is less effective than the group without games. Digital rewards can weaken human motivation.	Cyberbullying Paradox: Whilst a single cyber act can reach thousands of people, the 'repetition' criterion is insufficient to explain this form of violence.
Cultural and Social Adaptation	Inclusive Social Network: The aim is to build social well-being through school-family collaboration.	Socio-economic Barriers: In Chile, success has lagged behind that of Finland; adapting the model to the deep-seated social problems in Latin America is difficult.	Harm-Focused Measurement: Rather than the frequency of bullying, it should be measured using more sensitive methods based on the harm and loss of trust experienced by the student.

It can be seen at Table 1, violence prevention strategies in the Norwegian education system are built upon 'relational leadership' and democratic values, as defined by Lund (2024). In this system, leadership adopts a management approach based on mutual trust and dialogue rather than traditional punishment-focused approaches; in resolving conflicts, responsibility is shared rather than relying on the use of hierarchical power. In accordance with the principle of "equality" (likhet), a fundamental aspect of Scandinavian culture, the leader positions themselves on an equal footing with students and staff; this naturally leads to restorative processes that aim to repair social bonds rather than impose punishment in response to misconduct. This approach institutionalises the process of the perpetrator taking responsibility for their actions—the fundamental aim of restorative justice—as a pedagogical practice. In the Norwegian education system, the fight against violence is internalised not only through external rules but also through the concepts of 'horizontal hierarchy' and 'democratic leadership' within school management. As noted by Lund (2024a), Norwegian educational leaders use authority not as a tool of coercion but to build a school climate based on trust and equality. This 'relational leadership' model lays the groundwork for resolving conflicts through pedagogical dialogue before they escalate into violence. In the Norwegian education system, the fight against violence is based on the creation of an inclusive social network from the early childhood period onwards. Research by Lund (2024b) demonstrates that the partnership established between refugee families and education professionals, focused on 'providing a good life', eradicates the root

causes of violence by preventing social exclusion. In this model, violence prevention strategies are not limited to school rules alone but evolve into the construction of social well-being and trust through school-family collaboration.

Norway has defined school safety as a "legal right" in its legislation updated in 2024. The Olweus model's 2026 vision combines physical supervision with digital safety protocols. A study was conducted involving 1,175 pupils aged 6–10 (Years 2 and 6) across seven schools in New Zealand to evaluate the KiVa anti-bullying programme (Green et al., 2020). According to the results of the KiVa programme, by the end of the one-year implementation period, significant decreases were recorded in the rates of self-reported bullying, traditional victimisation and exposure to cyberbullying. Meanwhile, the proportion of children who felt safe at school rose from 82.4% to 84.2%, and teachers' involvement in the process was perceived as more visible by the pupils. The programme's impact varied according to demographic variables; more pronounced success was achieved in reducing victimisation among girls and younger boys. When analysed by year group, victimisation decreased significantly among girls in Years 2, 3, 5 and 6, and among boys in Year 2, whilst it was found that the rates of bullying among boys in Years 2 and 3—who had shown a higher tendency towards bullying prior to the intervention—and among girls in all year groups except Year 4 had decreased significantly.

The KiVa study conducted in Chile (Valenzuela, 2022) presents important findings regarding 'cultural adaptation' and 'the effectiveness of digital tools' in the anti-bullying literature. The results of the Chilean study highlight a "digital paradox" that challenges the limits of technology and cultural adaptation in anti-bullying efforts; the most surprising finding was that the "Full KiVa" group, which included an online game, was less effective than the "Partial KiVa" group, which did not use the game. This situation is interpreted as suggesting that artificial rewards in the virtual environment may have weakened students' natural and human motivations to stand up against bullying, and that digital tools, by failing to replace face-to-face education and classroom interaction, have taken time away from these processes. The fact that the 40% success rate observed in Finland is not replicated at the same level in Chile's socio-economically disadvantaged schools calls into question the universality of the models; highlights the difficulty of adapting a model developed in a high-welfare country like Finland to the social fabric of Latin America, which harbours deeper social issues such as inequality, domestic violence and drug trafficking. Furthermore, whilst the fact that school management and teachers in the non-programme group took greater ownership of the programme and demonstrated higher engagement in education demonstrates the importance of the 'school commitment' factor, it is assessed that having lessons delivered by external experts rather than the school's own teachers may have weakened the trust-based bonds that could have been established with the pupils (Valenzuela et al., 2022).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the study indicate that the Norwegian and Finnish models differ in the depth of their implementation regarding violence prevention. Whilst the Norwegian model focuses more on strengthening adult authority and the legal framework, the Finnish model aims to transform the social dynamics of peer groups. This strategic divergence is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Strategic implementation differences between the Norwegian and Finnish models

Feature	Norway (Olweus/OBPP)	Finland (KiVa+)
Main Focus	Adult authority and relational leadership.	Peer group dynamics and social roles.
Method	Clear boundaries and restorative sanctions.	Removal of social rewards and empathy training.
Definition of Safety	A legal right and physical/digital monitoring.	A corporate culture and social justice.
Target Audience	School climate and authority figures.	The whole class (particularly spectators).

As shown in Table 2, the Norwegian model's emphasis on 'adult authority' is directly linked to current legislation that defines school safety as a legal right. In contrast, KiVa+ offers a more dynamic framework based on breaking the 'bystander' effect in situations such as cyberbullying and peer pressure. The methods used by both countries to prevent violence are criticised from the following perspectives. In traditional methods (the Olweus criterion), an incident is only

classified as bullying if it is repeated "at least 2–3 times a month". However, Brisson (2026) notes that this rule fails to fully account for forms of violence, such as cyberbullying, which can reach thousands of people in a single instance. Research indicates that students who state in surveys that they have "been bullied once or twice" are generally excluded from the analysis. According to the research, this situation results in a large group of students who actually need help remaining 'invisible' (Brisson, 2026). Brisson (2026) argues that rather than measuring bullying solely by how many times it occurs, the focus should be on how much harm the student has suffered as a result of the incident and how safe they feel. If a student experiences violence even once, this deprives them of their right to feel safe at school. For this reason, it is recommended that countries combating bullying (such as Finland and Norway) refine their measurement methods to make them more sensitive

The multi-case analysis conducted within the scope of this research has highlighted the complementary strengths of two major Scandinavian-origin models. The Norwegian model's success in establishing a disciplinary and legal framework, combined with the Finnish model's superiority in peer dynamics and technological integration, offers a hybrid set of solutions for modern education systems.

The research findings indicate that two fundamental pillars must be established simultaneously in the fight against bullying:

Relational Leadership (Norway/OBPP): Adults must adopt a supportive attitude centred on 'warmth and care', whilst setting 'clear boundaries' against unacceptable behaviour; this forms the foundation of disciplinary processes.

Social Responsibility and Peer Management (Finland/KiVa+): Eliminating the social rewards that fuel bullying and transforming "bystander" roles from passive witnessing to proactive advocacy ensures the collective rejection of violence.

Data presented by Limber et al. (2018) regarding the prevalence of bullying demonstrates that interventions at primary and lower secondary school levels should focus on frequency, whilst at upper secondary school level, the strategic depth of interventions is paramount.

Within the framework of the 2026 education vision, a fundamental paradigm shift is required in our methods of measuring violence. As emphasised by Brisson (2026), interpreting bullying solely through statistical recurrence (frequency) is insufficient to account for types such as cyberbullying, which can cause significant harm even in a single instance. In accordance with the principle of 'equity'. The student's subjective sense of safety and the psychological impact of a single incident of violence on the individual must be made the primary criteria in disciplinary processes. Measurements of bullying must shift from the question "how many times did it happen?" to "to what extent were the individual's right to education and safety compromised?"

Conclusions on the Axis of Child's Social Development

Redefining Socialization via Peer Dynamics: The study concludes that school safety policies must shift from individualistic disciplinary actions to systemic interventions; by transforming peer roles from passive bystanders into active defenders, models like KiVa fundamentally restructure the classroom environment into a prosocial space that fosters the child's healthy social development, empathy, and collective responsibility.

The Interdependence of Climate, Equity, and Belonging: The research demonstrates that a child's social development cannot be isolated from the macro-level institutional culture; synthesizing Norway's relational leadership and clear boundaries with Finland's commitment to social equity creates a secure school climate where social voids are filled with mutual trust, thereby guaranteeing the child's subjective sense of safety and right to education.

Policy Recommendations for Turkey

In light of the research findings, the following recommendations are put forward for Turkey's educational safety policies:

- The technological success of the Finnish model must be adapted to local educational platforms through a Learning Management System (LMS), and AI-supported early warning systems must be integrated into the school environment.

- As in the Norwegian example, the right to school safety and protection from violence should be defined in legislation as more explicit and protective ‘legal rights’.
- “Relational Leadership” training, which equips school leaders to use their authority not as a tool of coercion but to foster a dialogue-based environment, should be incorporated into teacher and management development programmes.

Ultimately, the social voids where violence thrives can only be filled by synthesising Norway’s firm disciplinary boundaries with Finland’s empathetic peer culture, based on trust and mutual respect.

Updating the Measurement Paradigm

It has been observed that the criterion traditionally used in bullying research—‘occurring at least 2–3 times a month’ (the Olweus criterion)—excludes cases of cyberbullying, particularly those where a single post can reach thousands of people. Researchers should design measurement methods not so much around the frequency of incidents, but rather around the psychological harm suffered by the student, their subjective perception of safety, and the extent to which their right to education has been compromised.

Examining the "Digital Paradox" and the Limits of Technology

The "Digital Paradox" finding—observed in the Chilean implementation of the Finland-based KiVa model, where groups incorporating online games proved less effective than those without—should be investigated in depth. Researchers should examine how digital rewards and virtual tools affect students’ human motivation to stand up against bullying and how they transform the pedagogical value of face-to-face interaction.

Focusing on the "Invisible Victims" Group

The group of students who responded in surveys that they had "been bullied once or twice" – and who are generally excluded from statistical analyses – must be examined as "invisible victims". As excluding this group from analysis effectively deprives a large population in need of intervention from support systems, it is recommended that researchers develop new data analysis techniques targeting these "grey-area" forms of violence.

Analysing Cultural Adaptation and Socio-Economic Variables

The adaptation of models successful in regions with high levels of welfare and equality, such as the Nordic countries, to contexts with deep-seated social issues (drug abuse, domestic violence, economic inequality), such as those in Latin America, is a critical area of study. Researchers should question the universality of these models and investigate the correlation between violence prevention strategies and the established level of a societal culture of ‘fairness’ and ‘social justice’, rather than relying solely on school rules.

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