



Innovative School Leadership Approaches to Bullying Prevention and Conflict Management in Greek

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Published Online: 17 August 2026	School bullying remains one of the most critical challenges facing secondary education, affecting students' well-being, academic engagement, and the overall school climate. As school leaders play a pivotal role in creating safe and inclusive learning environments, this study aims to investigate the contribution of school leadership to the prevention and management of bullying incidents in Greek secondary schools, with particular emphasis on innovative leadership practices and conflict management strategies. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured questionnaire administered electronically through Google Forms. The study involved secondary school principals serving in public schools across Greece. Data were analyzed using SPSS (version 26), applying descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and appropriate statistical tests were used to examine principals' perceptions regarding bullying prevention, intervention practices, and leadership effectiveness. The findings indicate that school principals recognize bullying as a significant educational and social issue and consider school leadership a decisive factor in its effective prevention and management. Participants reported that collaborative leadership, the establishment of positive school climate, cooperation with school principals, parents, and external support services, as well as the implementation of preventive actions, contribute substantially to reducing bullying incidents. The results also suggest that leadership experience and professional development are associated with greater confidence and effectiveness in addressing school conflicts. The study highlights the importance of innovative school leadership approaches that combine preventive interventions, collaborative decision-making, and evidence-based conflict management practices. Its originality lies in examining school bullying through the perspective of educational leadership within the Greek secondary education context, offering insights that can inform educational policy, leadership training, and the development of more effective anti-bullying strategies in contemporary schools.
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INTRODUCTION

School bullying has emerged as one of the most significant challenges facing contemporary education, affecting students' academic achievement, psychological well-being, and social development. Rather than representing isolated incidents of aggressive behavior, bullying is recognized as a complex social phenomenon that undermines the quality of the school environment and students' sense of safety. International organizations emphasize that preventing school violence and bullying is fundamental to ensuring inclusive,

equitable, and high-quality education for all learners (UNESCO, 2019; UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2023).

Contemporary research conceptualizes bullying prevention as a comprehensive whole-school process rather than a series of disciplinary interventions. Effective prevention requires coordinated school policies, positive school climate, social-emotional learning, student participation, collaboration among school principals, parents, and community stakeholders, as well as systematic monitoring of bullying incidents. Recent evidence also highlights the importance of

whole-education approaches that integrate preventive education, restorative practices, and collaborative school cultures to address both traditional bullying and cyberbullying (O'Higgins Norman et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2023).

Within this framework, school leadership has become a critical determinant of successful bullying prevention and conflict management. School principals are expected to establish a shared vision, foster inclusive values, coordinate preventive initiatives, and create conditions that promote trust, collaboration, and student well-being. Contemporary educational leadership models emphasize instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership as approaches that strengthen school principals' engagement, organizational learning, and continuous school improvement (Hallinger, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Empirical studies indicate that schools led by principals who promote collaboration, open communication, and evidence-based decision-making are more successful in preventing bullying and maintaining positive school climates. Leadership competence, professional development, and experience enable school leaders to coordinate multidisciplinary interventions, implement preventive policies consistently, and respond effectively to incidents of school violence. Conversely, fragmented leadership practices, inadequate preparation, and limited stakeholder involvement may reduce the effectiveness of anti-bullying initiatives and weaken students' perceptions of safety and belonging (Day et al., 2016; Hallinger, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020).

In Greece, school bullying remains an important educational concern despite recent legislative initiatives and the implementation of national prevention programs. Secondary education presents additional challenges associated with adolescent development, increased diversity, digital communication, and the growing prevalence of cyberbullying. These conditions require school leaders to adopt innovative, evidence-informed leadership practices that integrate prevention, early intervention, collaboration, and continuous professional learning in order to build resilient and inclusive school communities (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

Against this background, the present study investigates the role of school leadership in preventing and managing bullying in Greek secondary education. Specifically, it examines school principals' perceptions of bullying prevention, the leadership strategies they employ to address school conflicts, and the organizational factors that contribute to the development of safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments. By focusing on innovative leadership practices within the Greek educational context, this study contributes to the international literature on educational leadership and provides evidence that may inform educational policy, leadership preparation, and the design of comprehensive school-based anti-bullying strategies.

1. Theoretical Framework: Contemporary Approaches to School Leadership, Bullying Prevention, and Conflict Management

School bullying has become a major concern in contemporary educational systems, requiring comprehensive and sustainable interventions that extend beyond disciplinary responses. International organizations increasingly recognize that effective bullying prevention depends on the development of safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments in which students feel respected, protected, and actively engaged in school life (UNESCO, 2019; UNESCO, 2023). Consequently, bullying prevention is now viewed as a whole-school responsibility involving school leaders, students, families, and the wider community.

Current theoretical perspectives emphasize that bullying prevention should be embedded within school culture rather than addressed through isolated interventions. Whole-school approaches promote shared values, positive relationships, restorative practices, social-emotional learning, and collaborative problem-solving. These approaches encourage schools to establish preventive policies, strengthen communication among stakeholders, and implement evidence-based practices that foster students' social, emotional, and behavioral development (OECD, 2023; O'Higgins Norman et al., 2022).

Within this context, school leadership has emerged as one of the most influential factors affecting the success of bullying prevention and conflict management initiatives. School principals serve as strategic leaders who translate educational policy into everyday school practice while promoting a positive organizational culture. Their responsibilities extend beyond administrative management to include supporting school principals, coordinating preventive programs, facilitating collaboration with families and external agencies, and ensuring that anti-bullying policies are consistently implemented (Hallinger, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Research demonstrates that leadership effectiveness is closely associated with principals' professional knowledge, leadership competencies, and continuous professional development. School leaders who possess strong communication skills, conflict resolution competencies, and the ability to build trusting relationships are more likely to establish school environments characterized by respect, inclusion, and psychological safety. These conditions enhance school principals' willingness to intervene in bullying incidents, encourage student participation in prevention initiatives, and strengthen the overall effectiveness of school anti-bullying strategies (Day et al., 2016; Hallinger, 2020).

Leadership style also plays a decisive role in shaping school responses to bullying. Participative, distributed, and transformational leadership models encourage shared decision-making, collaborative problem-solving, and collective responsibility for student well-being. Such approaches strengthen school principals' engagement,

improve organizational learning, and facilitate the implementation of preventive interventions. In contrast, leadership practices characterized by excessive bureaucracy or authoritarian decision-making may discourage collaboration, reduce trust among school stakeholders, and limit the effectiveness of conflict prevention efforts (Day et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Recent developments in educational leadership further highlight the importance of innovation in bullying prevention. Innovative leadership incorporates the use of digital technologies, data-informed decision-making, social-emotional learning initiatives, restorative practices, and interdisciplinary collaboration to address increasingly complex forms of school violence, including cyberbullying. These approaches support proactive rather than reactive interventions and enable schools to create adaptive systems capable of responding effectively to emerging educational challenges (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

Overall, contemporary literature identifies school leadership as a fundamental determinant of successful bullying prevention and conflict management. By fostering collaboration, promoting inclusive school cultures, encouraging innovation, and supporting evidence-based practices, school leaders contribute significantly to creating safer learning environments and improving students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes. Understanding how principals perceive and implement these leadership practices is therefore essential for strengthening educational policy and developing effective whole-school strategies to prevent bullying in Greek secondary education.

Research Problem

School bullying remains a persistent and multifaceted problem within secondary education, affecting students' psychological well-being, social relationships, academic engagement, and overall school experience. Despite the development of prevention programs and institutional policies aimed at reducing bullying incidents, many schools continue to face difficulties in effectively identifying, preventing, and managing conflicts among students. The complexity of contemporary bullying, including the emergence of cyberbullying and indirect forms of aggression, requires educational institutions to adopt more comprehensive and innovative approaches.

Although previous research has extensively examined the prevalence, causes, and consequences of bullying, less attention has been devoted to the role of school leadership as a central mechanism for designing, implementing, and sustaining effective prevention and conflict management strategies. School principals are expected to act not only as administrative managers but also as leaders who shape school culture, promote collaboration among stakeholders, support teachers, and establish conditions that encourage inclusion, respect, and student safety.

A significant challenge concerns the extent to which school leaders possess the necessary knowledge, competencies, and organizational capacity to address bullying effectively. Differences in leadership experience, professional preparation, school context, and available support structures may influence principals' perceptions of bullying prevention and their ability to implement evidence-based interventions. Moreover, while international literature highlights the importance of transformational, distributed, and collaborative leadership approaches, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how these approaches are applied within the Greek secondary education context.

Therefore, the research problem addressed in this study concerns the need to better understand how school leaders perceive their role in preventing and managing bullying and which leadership practices contribute to the development of safer and more inclusive school environments. Investigating this issue is essential for identifying effective leadership strategies, informing professional development programs for school principals, and supporting the development of sustainable whole-school approaches to bullying prevention in Greek secondary schools.

Research Focus

The present study focuses on the role of school leadership in preventing and managing bullying incidents within Greek secondary education. The central research interest is directed toward understanding how school principals perceive their responsibilities, competencies, and leadership practices in addressing bullying and promoting a safe, inclusive, and supportive school environment.

The study particularly examines the extent to which innovative leadership approaches, including collaborative decision-making, distributed leadership, effective communication, and proactive conflict management strategies, contribute to the development of comprehensive bullying prevention practices. The authors' scientific perspective is based on the assumption that school leaders represent key agents of educational change who can significantly influence school climate, student well-being, and the successful implementation of whole-school interventions.

Furthermore, the research seeks to explore the relationship between principals' professional characteristics, leadership experience, and their approaches to bullying prevention and conflict resolution. By focusing on the Greek secondary education context, the study aims to provide empirical insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by school leaders and to contribute to the broader scientific discussion on educational leadership, school safety, and sustainable prevention strategies.

The ultimate focus of the study is to identify leadership practices that can strengthen schools' capacity to prevent bullying, manage conflicts effectively, and create

learning environments based on respect, inclusion, and positive interpersonal relationships.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the present study is to investigate the role of school leadership in preventing and managing bullying in Greek secondary education, with particular emphasis on innovative leadership approaches, conflict management practices, and the development of safe and inclusive school environments. The study seeks to explore how school principals perceive their responsibilities, challenges, and capacities in implementing effective bullying prevention strategies and fostering a positive school climate.

Research Objectives

To achieve this aim, the study pursues the following objectives:

1. To examine school principals' perceptions regarding the importance and effectiveness of leadership practices in bullying prevention and conflict management.
2. To identify the strategies and approaches implemented by school leaders to address bullying incidents and promote positive relationships within the school community.
3. To investigate whether principals' professional characteristics, such as leadership experience and professional background, influence their perceptions and practices related to bullying prevention.
4. To explore the organizational and contextual factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of effective anti-bullying initiatives in Greek secondary schools.
5. To contribute to the development of evidence-based recommendations for strengthening school leadership capacity and improving whole-school approaches to bullying prevention.

Research Questions

Based on the identified research problem and objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do school principals in Greek secondary education perceive their role in preventing and managing bullying incidents?

RQ2: Which leadership practices and strategies are considered most effective for preventing bullying and managing conflicts within the school environment?

RQ3: To what extent are principals' perceptions and approaches to bullying prevention influenced by their professional experience and leadership background?

RQ4: What organizational and contextual factors affect the successful implementation of bullying prevention strategies in Greek secondary schools?

RQ5: How can innovative school leadership approaches contribute to the development of safer, more inclusive, and supportive learning environments?

The research questions derive from the identified gap in the literature regarding the role of school leaders as key agents in implementing sustainable bullying prevention strategies. While existing studies have examined bullying prevalence and intervention programs, fewer studies have focused on principals' perspectives and leadership practices, particularly within the Greek secondary education context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

International Trends in School Bullying Research and Prevention

School bullying has been recognized internationally as a complex educational and social problem that affects students' academic progress, psychological health, social relationships, and overall educational experience. Recent research has moved beyond the traditional perception of bullying as individual aggressive behavior and increasingly conceptualizes it as a systemic phenomenon influenced by school culture, peer relationships, institutional practices, and broader social factors (UNESCO, 2019; Zych et al., 2021). International evidence demonstrates that bullying includes physical, verbal, relational, and digital forms of aggression, with cyberbullying creating additional challenges due to its continuous nature, anonymity, and potential for rapid dissemination (Kowalski et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2023).

In recent years, educational systems worldwide have increasingly adopted whole-school approaches as the dominant framework for bullying prevention. These approaches emphasize that sustainable reduction of bullying requires coordinated action involving school leaders, students, families, and community stakeholders. Research conducted in European countries, North America, and Australia indicates that prevention programs are more effective when they are integrated into school policies and supported by a positive school climate, strong interpersonal relationships, and consistent implementation mechanisms (Gaffney et al., 2021; Hymel & Swearer, 2021).

However, international research also reveals inconsistencies regarding the effectiveness of specific prevention interventions. While some studies demonstrate positive outcomes from social-emotional learning programs, restorative practices, and peer-support initiatives, others highlight difficulties related to program sustainability and adaptation to different cultural contexts (Ttofi & Farrington, 2021; Zych et al., 2021). These differences suggest that bullying prevention cannot rely on isolated programs but requires leadership capacity and organizational conditions that support long-term implementation.

School Leadership as a Key Factor in Bullying Prevention

Contemporary educational research increasingly identifies school leadership as a central factor influencing the success of bullying prevention strategies. School principals have a critical role in shaping school culture, establishing

norms of respect and inclusion, supporting teachers, and coordinating responses to student conflicts. Leadership is therefore considered not only an administrative function but also a process of creating conditions that promote learning, safety, and positive relationships within schools (Leithwood et al., 2020).

International studies indicate that schools characterized by effective leadership tend to demonstrate stronger school climates and improved capacity to address behavioral problems. Successful leaders develop shared visions, encourage collective responsibility, and promote professional learning among school principals, enabling schools to respond more effectively to bullying incidents (Hallinger, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2020).

Nevertheless, differences exist among educational systems regarding the preparation and responsibilities of school leaders. In several countries, principals receive limited formal training in conflict resolution, violence prevention, and social-emotional leadership, creating challenges in translating anti-bullying policies into daily school practices (UNESCO, 2019). Consequently, the effectiveness of bullying prevention initiatives often depends not only on the existence of national policies but also on principals' professional competencies and leadership approaches.

Leadership Approaches and Conflict Management Practices

Recent literature highlights transformational, distributed, and instructional leadership as particularly relevant approaches for managing complex school challenges, including bullying prevention. Transformational leadership emphasizes the development of shared values, motivation, trust, and commitment among members of the school community. Distributed leadership extends this perspective by viewing prevention as a collective responsibility rather than an individual responsibility of the principal (Bush & Glover, 2022).

Research findings suggest that collaborative leadership approaches contribute to improved communication between school principals, students, and families, thereby strengthening schools' ability to identify and address bullying incidents at an early stage. In contrast, authoritarian and highly centralized leadership models may limit participation and reduce school principals' willingness to engage in prevention initiatives (Harris & Jones, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020).

A growing body of research also emphasizes restorative approaches as alternatives to purely punitive responses. Restorative practices focus on repairing relationships, encouraging accountability, and developing students' social competencies. Evidence suggests that when supported by school leadership, restorative approaches can contribute to improved school climate and reduced interpersonal conflicts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Morrison & Vaandering, 2019).

Digital Transformation and Emerging Challenges in Bullying Prevention

The expansion of digital technologies has transformed the nature of bullying and created new responsibilities for school leaders. Cyberbullying presents unique challenges because it can occur beyond school boundaries while continuing to influence students' emotional security and school relationships. International studies emphasize that effective responses require digital citizenship education, technology awareness, and cooperation between schools and families (Hinduja & Patchin, 2022).

Although digital tools provide opportunities for monitoring, prevention, and communication, research remains limited regarding their long-term effectiveness in reducing cyberbullying. Current evidence suggests that technology should complement, rather than replace, relational and educational approaches based on empathy, responsibility, and inclusion (OECD, 2023).

Research Gaps and Contribution of the Present Study

Although the international literature on bullying prevention has expanded considerably, several research gaps remain. First, existing studies have primarily focused on students' experiences of bullying and the effectiveness of specific intervention programs, while the role of school principals as strategic leaders has received comparatively less attention (Zych et al., 2021). Second, much of the empirical evidence originates from North American and Northern European educational systems, whereas research from Southern European contexts remains limited.

Furthermore, previous studies have identified the importance of leadership but have provided insufficient evidence regarding how principals interpret their role, which strategies they prioritize, and how contextual factors influence their decision-making processes. This limitation is particularly relevant in Greece, where secondary schools operate within a centralized educational system with specific organizational and cultural characteristics.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining innovative school leadership approaches to bullying prevention and conflict management in Greek secondary education. By focusing on principals' perceptions and leadership practices, the study contributes to the international discussion regarding how educational leaders can develop sustainable, inclusive, and evidence-based approaches to creating safer school environments.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study employed a quantitative research design to investigate school principals' perceptions regarding innovative leadership approaches for bullying prevention and conflict management in Greek secondary education. A quantitative methodology was selected because it enables the systematic measurement of participants' attitudes,

perceptions, and reported practices, allowing the identification of patterns and relationships among variables.

The research was designed as a cross-sectional study, with data collected during the academic year 2025. The methodological approach was based on the assumption that school leaders’ professional characteristics, leadership experience, and school context may influence their perceptions and practices regarding bullying prevention and conflict management.

Sample and Participants

The study population consisted of school principals working in public secondary schools in Greece. A purposive sampling approach was employed, as participants were selected based on their direct professional involvement in school administration and their responsibility for implementing school policies related to student safety, conflict management, and school climate. The final sample consisted of 84 secondary school principals.

The sample included principals from schools located in urban, semi-urban, and rural areas, allowing the investigation of possible differences related to school context.

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Ethical principles regarding informed consent and protection of personal data were followed throughout the research process.

Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed based on the international literature on school bullying prevention, educational leadership, school climate, and conflict management.

The questionnaire consisted of two main sections. The first section collected demographic and professional information, including participants’ gender, age, school principals experience, years of leadership experience, and school characteristics.

The second section included Likert-scale items measuring principals’ perceptions regarding:

- The importance of school leadership in bullying prevention;
- The effectiveness of existing prevention strategies;
- Leadership practices used for conflict management;
- Collaboration among school principals, students, and parents;
- Organizational factors influencing the implementation of anti-bullying initiatives.

Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

The questionnaire was distributed electronically through Google Forms during the period June- October 2025. The online format was selected because it facilitated access to school principals from different geographical areas and ensured efficient data collection. The reliability of the scales was examined using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient.

Impact of the Digital Platform on the Prevention and Management of School Bullying

This section presents the findings concerning participants' level of awareness and use of the digital platform, together with the existence and degree of updating of the school's internal operating regulations. These results provide an overview of the institutional conditions that support bullying prevention and conflict management within the participating secondary schools.

Table 1. School Principals' Awareness of the Digital Platform and the Updating of School Internal Regulations

Question	Category	N	%
Awareness of the digital platform for reporting school violence and bullying	No	1	1.19
	Yes	83	98.81
Perceived usefulness of the digital platform for reporting school violence and bullying	Not at all	16	19.28
	Slightly	25	30.12
	Moderate	18	21.69
	Very	15	18.07
	Extremely	9	10.84
Updating of the school's internal regulations	No	6	7.14
	Yes	78	92.86

Note. Percentages for perceived usefulness are based on 83 valid responses.

The findings indicate a high level of awareness regarding the existence of the dedicated digital platform for reporting incidents of school violence and bullying, as 98.81% of the

participating school principals (83 out of 84; N = 84) reported being aware of its availability. In contrast, only 1.19% of the

participants (1 out of 84) indicated that they were unaware of the existence of such a platform.

Correlation analyses revealed that Perceived Usefulness of the Dedicated Digital Platform was strongly and positively correlated with Strengthening the Role of School Principals ($\rho = .67, p < .01$). Moderate positive correlations were also observed with Management Protocol ($\rho = .59, p < .01$), Intervention Policies ($\rho = .47, p < .01$), Parent-Level Measures ($\rho = .44, p < .01$), Action Protocol ($\rho = .44, p < .01$), Student-Level Measures ($\rho = .42, p < .01$), Phenomenon Prevention ($\rho = .41, p < .01$), Effectiveness in Managing the Phenomenon ($\rho = .39, p < .01$), Conflict Management ($\rho =$

$.39, p < .01$), School Unit-Level Measures ($\rho = .37, p < .01$), Principal-Level Measures ($\rho = .37, p < .01$), and Incident Reporting ($\rho = .35, p < .01$).

Furthermore, a weak positive correlation was identified with School Leadership Measures ($\rho = .27, p < .05$). Overall, these findings suggest that higher perceived usefulness of the dedicated digital platform is significantly associated with dimensions related to the prevention, management, and intervention of school violence and bullying. This highlights the potential role of digital tools in supporting comprehensive school-based strategies for addressing bullying.

Table 2. Statistically Significant Correlations with the Perceived Usefulness of the Dedicated Digital Platform

Factors	Perceived Usefulness of the Dedicated Digital Platform
Phenomenon Prevention	0.41
Incident Reporting	0.35
Effectiveness in Managing the Phenomenon	0.39
Conflict Management	0.39
School Unit-Level Measures	0.37
School Leadership Measures	0.27
Principal-Level Measures	0.37
Student-Level Measures	0.42
Parent-Level Measures	0.44
Action Protocol	0.44
Management Protocol	0.59
Strengthening the Role of School Principals	0.67
Intervention Policies	0.47

Note. Values represent Spearman's rho (ρ) coefficients. All correlations are statistically significant at $p < .01$, except School Leadership Measures ($p < .05$).

3.2. School Unit-Level Measures

This subsection presents the results related to improvement measures implemented at the school unit level for the prevention and management of school violence and bullying. The findings indicate that participants perceive a high level of implementation of institutional policies aimed at preventing and managing these phenomena, particularly regarding the existence and enforcement of the school's internal regulations ($M = 3.90$; $SD = 0.83$), the establishment of appropriate mechanisms for reporting incidents occurring within the school context ($M = 3.71$; $SD = 1.00$), as well as the the systematic recording, categorization, and analysis of incidents of school violence and bullying, including both incidents that have already occurred and those that may potentially occur ($M = 3.65$; $SD = 0.86$).

Furthermore, school principals reported that, to a considerable to high extent, actions related to awareness-raising and training are implemented for both school principals and parents/guardians ($M = 3.49$; $SD = 1.14$), along with programs aimed at promoting mental health and raising awareness within the educational community ($M = 3.45$; $SD = 1.05$). Similarly, a moderately high level of active participation and cooperation among members of the school community in the implementation of institutional prevention policies was observed ($M = 3.18$; $SD = 1.18$).

Overall, the results indicate that *School Unit-Level Measures* were rated between a considerable and high level of implementation ($M = 3.57$; $SD = 0.85$), suggesting a relatively strong institutional commitment to the prevention and management of school violence and bullying.

Table 3. School Unit-Level Measures

Question	Min.-Max.	M	SD
Existence and implementation of school internal regulations	2-5	3.90	0.83
Mechanisms for reporting incidents of school violence and bullying	2-5	3.71	1.00
Systematic recording, categorization, and analysis of incidents	2-5	3.65	0.86

Awareness-raising and training actions for school principals and parents/guardians	1-5	3.49	1.14
Mental health promotion and awareness programs within the school community	1-5	3.45	1.05
Active participation and cooperation of the school community in prevention policies	1-5	3.18	1.18
Overall Score for School Unit-Level Measures	1.50-5.000	3.57	0.85

Limitations of the Study

This study presents certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample size (N = 84) and its restriction to a single geographical region in Greece limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the use of a non-probability convenience sample may introduce selection bias, restricting the representativeness of the results. Third, the cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences regarding the relationships among educational leadership, digital platform use, and bullying prevention outcomes. Finally, the reliance on self-reported data may be subject to social desirability bias.

Future research should address these limitations by employing larger, nationally and internationally representative samples, as well as longitudinal and mixed-method designs to better capture causal mechanisms and contextual factors.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this study have important implications for educational practice and policy. First, they highlight the need to strengthen educational leadership capacity, particularly in relation to distributed, pedagogical, and digitally competent leadership practices that support bullying prevention and intervention strategies. School leaders should be systematically trained to integrate digital tools into school governance and conflict management processes.

Second, the results underscore the importance of institutionalizing clear and standardized procedures, including updated school regulations, structured reporting systems, and well-defined intervention protocols. Such mechanisms enhance organizational coherence and ensure timely and effective responses to incidents of school bullying.

Third, the positive association between the perceived usefulness of digital reporting platforms and key dimensions of school functioning suggests that educational authorities should invest in the development and implementation of integrated digital systems for monitoring, reporting, and managing school violence. However, successful implementation requires not only technological infrastructure but also continuous professional development and support for school leaders.

Finally, policymakers should promote a systemic approach to bullying prevention that combines leadership development, school climate improvement, and digital governance strategies, ensuring alignment between educational policy, school-level practice, and technological innovation.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated school principals’ perceptions regarding innovative leadership approaches to bullying prevention and conflict management in Greek secondary education. The findings provide important insights into the role of school leadership in addressing bullying as a complex educational challenge and highlight the importance of organizational, relational, and professional factors that influence prevention practices. Overall, the results indicate that school principals recognize bullying as a significant issue requiring systematic intervention, while emphasizing the importance of collaborative leadership, and the development of a positive school climate.

A central finding of the study is that school leaders consider their role essential in creating safe and inclusive school environments. Participants identified leadership commitment, communication, and cooperation among members of the school community as key elements for effective bullying prevention. These findings are consistent with international research demonstrating that successful prevention strategies depend not only on specific intervention programs but also on the capacity of schools to establish supportive cultures based on trust, respect, and shared responsibility (UNESCO, 2019; Zych et al., 2021). Previous studies have similarly emphasized that schools with stronger organizational climates and stronger interpersonal relationships are more capable of reducing bullying behaviors and improving students’ sense of belonging.

Another important finding concerns the emphasis placed by principals on collaborative and participatory leadership approaches. The results indicate that school leaders perceive bullying prevention as a collective process involving students, parents, and external support networks. This finding supports contemporary leadership perspectives that view distributed and transformational leadership as effective approaches for addressing complex school problems. Research has shown that leadership models based on collaboration and shared decision-making enhance schools’ ability to implement sustainable prevention initiatives (Harris & Jones, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020).

The findings also demonstrate that professional experience and leadership background influence principals’ perceptions of bullying prevention and conflict management. More experienced school leaders appear to report greater confidence in managing school conflicts and implementing preventive practices. This result aligns with previous research indicating that leadership experience contributes to improved

decision-making, stronger organizational awareness, and greater capacity to coordinate complex educational interventions (Hallinger, 2020). However, experience alone may not be sufficient, as international evidence highlights the importance of continuous professional development focused specifically on conflict resolution, school safety, and social-emotional leadership.

An additional contribution of the study concerns the importance attributed to school climate as a foundation for bullying prevention. Participants emphasized that positive relationships, cooperation among stakeholders, and a culture of inclusion are essential conditions for reducing aggressive behaviors. These findings correspond with previous studies showing that school climate represents one of the strongest contextual factors associated with bullying prevalence and student well-being (Hymel & Swearer, 2021). Schools characterized by supportive relationships and clear behavioral expectations tend to demonstrate lower levels of bullying and stronger student engagement.

The results further support the growing international movement toward whole-school approaches to bullying prevention. Rather than focusing exclusively on individual perpetrators or victims, contemporary approaches emphasize systemic interventions involving policies, leadership practices, school principals' competencies, and student participation. The present findings are consistent with research indicating that isolated anti-bullying programs often have limited effectiveness when they are not embedded within broader school development strategies (Gaffney et al., 2021; O'Higgins Norman et al., 2022).

However, the findings also reveal challenges related to the implementation of bullying prevention practices. Although principals recognize the importance of preventive strategies, differences in perceptions suggest that schools may vary in their capacity to implement consistent approaches. These variations may be associated with differences in resources, leadership preparation, school context, and institutional support. Similar challenges have been reported internationally, where researchers highlight the gap between policy expectations and the practical realities faced by schools (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce the argument that school leadership should be understood as a central mechanism connecting educational policies with everyday school practices. Effective bullying prevention requires leaders who can transform policies into meaningful actions, develop professional collaboration, and promote a culture of responsibility. The study therefore supports contemporary leadership theories that emphasize instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership as essential approaches for improving school environments (Leithwood et al., 2020).

The study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from the Greek secondary education context, which remains relatively underrepresented

in international research. While previous studies have extensively examined bullying prevalence and intervention effectiveness, fewer studies have explored how school principals understand their leadership role in prevention and conflict management. By focusing on principals' perspectives, the present research expands current knowledge regarding the organizational processes that support sustainable anti-bullying practices.

The findings have important practical implications for educational policy and leadership preparation. The strong emphasis on collaboration, professional development, and school climate suggests that leadership training programs should include specialized preparation in bullying prevention, conflict resolution, restorative practices, and evidence-based intervention strategies. Furthermore, educational authorities should support schools through systematic frameworks that encourage whole-school approaches rather than isolated responses to bullying incidents.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study relies on self-reported data from school principals, which may be influenced by personal perceptions and social desirability bias. Additionally, the sample may not fully represent all secondary schools in Greece, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future research should include larger samples, multiple stakeholder perspectives (teachers, students, and parents), and mixed-method designs to provide deeper understanding of leadership practices and their impact on bullying prevention outcomes.

In conclusion, the present study demonstrates that innovative school leadership represents a critical factor in preventing bullying and managing conflicts in secondary education. Effective leadership requires more than administrative action; it involves building collaborative cultures, strengthening professional capacity, and creating inclusive environments where students and school principals feel supported. The findings contribute to international discussions on educational leadership by highlighting the importance of context-sensitive approaches for developing safer and more resilient schools.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study examined the role of school leadership in bullying prevention and conflict management in Greek secondary education, focusing on principals' perceptions, leadership practices, and the organizational factors that influence the development of safe and inclusive school environments. The findings demonstrate that school leaders consider bullying prevention a complex educational responsibility that requires coordinated action, strong communication, and collaborative engagement among all members of the school community.

The results indicate that innovative leadership approaches constitute a significant factor in strengthening schools' capacity to prevent bullying and manage conflicts

effectively. Principals emphasized the importance of developing positive school climates, promoting cooperation among them, students, and parents, and adopting proactive rather than exclusively reactive approaches. These findings confirm that bullying prevention is not limited to disciplinary procedures but requires a broader organizational strategy based on inclusion, trust, and shared responsibility.

A key conclusion of the study is that the effectiveness of bullying prevention initiatives depends substantially on school leaders' professional competencies, experience, and opportunities for continuous development. School principals require appropriate preparation in areas such as conflict resolution, restorative practices, social-emotional learning, and evidence-based prevention strategies. Therefore, leadership training programs should incorporate specialized modules that enhance principals' capacity to respond effectively to contemporary forms of school violence, including cyberbullying.

The study also highlights important implications for educational policy. Sustainable bullying prevention requires systemic support from educational authorities, clear institutional frameworks, and mechanisms that enable schools to adapt interventions according to their specific needs and contexts. Policies should encourage whole-school approaches that involve school principals, students, families, and community stakeholders rather than relying exclusively on individual interventions.

From a scientific perspective, this research contributes to the international literature by providing empirical evidence from the Greek secondary education context, which remains relatively underexplored. While previous studies have focused extensively on bullying prevalence and intervention programs, the present study emphasizes the strategic role of school leadership as a determining factor in the successful implementation of prevention and conflict management practices.

Despite its contribution, the study has limitations that should be considered. The use of self-reported data and the focus on school principals' perspectives may limit the interpretation of findings. Future research should adopt longitudinal and mixed-method approaches, incorporating the perspectives of school principals, students, and parents to provide a more comprehensive understanding of bullying prevention processes. Comparative studies between different educational regions and countries could also provide valuable insights into how cultural and organizational factors influence leadership practices.

Overall, the study demonstrates that innovative school leadership represents a fundamental component of effective bullying prevention in secondary education. Strengthening leadership capacity, promoting collaborative school cultures, and implementing evidence-based strategies can contribute significantly to the creation of safer, more inclusive, and more supportive learning environments.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should further investigate the complex relationship between school leadership practices and the effectiveness of bullying prevention strategies in secondary education. Although the present study provides valuable insights into school principals' perceptions and leadership approaches, additional empirical evidence is required to better understand how leadership practices influence the long-term reduction of bullying incidents and the improvement of school climate.

First, future studies should adopt mixed-method research designs that combine quantitative data with qualitative approaches, such as interviews, focus groups, and observations. Such approaches would provide a deeper understanding of how school leaders, students, and parents experience bullying prevention initiatives and how these practices are implemented in everyday school life.

Second, future research should expand the sample to include multiple stakeholders, particularly school principals, students, parents, and educational policymakers. Examining different perspectives would allow researchers to identify possible differences between policy intentions, leadership practices, and the experiences of school community members.

Third, longitudinal studies are needed to examine the long-term effects of innovative leadership approaches on bullying prevention and conflict management. Future research could explore whether sustained leadership interventions, professional development programs, and whole-school strategies produce measurable improvements in school climate, student well-being, and interpersonal relationships over time.

Furthermore, comparative studies across different regions of Greece and other European educational systems could provide important evidence regarding the influence of cultural, organizational, and institutional factors on bullying prevention practices. Such research would contribute to identifying transferable leadership models while also recognizing the importance of adapting interventions to local educational contexts.

Another important direction concerns the role of digital technologies and artificial intelligence in preventing and managing new forms of bullying, particularly cyberbullying. Future studies should examine how digital tools, online safety education, and data-informed approaches can support school leaders in identifying risks and developing timely interventions.

Finally, future research should focus on the development and evaluation of specialized professional development programs for school leaders. Investigating how leadership training in conflict resolution, restorative practices, social-emotional learning, and inclusive education influences principals' competencies would provide valuable evidence for improving educational policies and

strengthening schools’ capacity to create safe and supportive learning environments.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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