

Teacher coping competence: a systemic resource for preventing victimization of students with SEN in inclusive settings

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine teacher coping competence as a systemic professional resource for ensuring the psychological safety of students with special educational needs (SEN) and preventing their victimization in inclusive educational environments. The study addresses the relationship between teachers' coping strategies, methodological competence, and readiness to respond to bullying and other forms of violence. The empirical study involved 145 teachers working in special and inclusive educational organizations. A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was applied. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire assessing coping strategies, perceived forms of violence, methodological competence, and professional confidence. Statistical analysis included Pearson's chi-square test and Pearson's correlation coefficient. The results showed that bullying, mockery, and ridicule were the most frequently perceived forms of violence toward students with SEN (47.4%), followed by social isolation and physical violence (31.6%). No statistically significant relationship was found between professional experience and sensitivity to violence ($\chi^2 = 4.06$; $p = 0.131$). At the same time, methodological competence was positively associated with teachers' confidence in responding to victimization situations ($r = 0.41$; $p < 0.01$). Constructive coping strategies, including seeking support from colleagues (89.4%) and emotional self-regulation (84.3%), were predominant among respondents. The study proposes a four-level model of teacher potential (physiological, social, personal, and spiritual-moral), in which coping competence is conceptualized as an integrative professional resource. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening teacher education through the development of self-regulation, reflective skills, ethical responsibility, and preventive readiness.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Special educational needs (SEN), Coping competence, Teacher resilience, Bullying prevention, Psychological safety

Introduction

The expansion of the regulatory and organizational foundations of inclusive education does not guarantee the psychological safety

of students with special educational needs (SEN). Effective prevention of bullying, social exclusion, and other forms of victimization depends on teachers' ability to identify risks, maintain emotional stability, and move from passive observation to timely preventive action [1, 2]. Thus, a research gap concerns teacher coping competence as a systemic resource integrating internal resilience, methodological preparedness, and the ability to ensure psychological safety for students with SEN in inclusive settings.

The development of inclusive education in the Republic of Kazakhstan has been gradual. Initial inclusive practices emerged during the 1980s and 1990s, while the State Program for Education Development (2005–2010) provided institutional

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support. The current stage is associated with the 2025 approval of the Inclusive Education Model of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “Inclusion without Borders,” aimed at ensuring equal access to quality education. This development has strengthened teachers’ role as key agents in implementing an inclusive educational environment [3].

Despite the legal priority given to children’s rights, inclusive environments remain associated with increased victimization risk. Students with SEN are particularly vulnerable: according to the World Health Organization, children with disabilities are four times more likely than their peers to experience violence and neglect [4]. Teachers therefore require an active preventive stance to identify bullying, social exclusion, and other risks to psychological well-being [1].

Teachers are no longer merely transmitters of knowledge but agents responsible for psychological safety [1]. However, expanded responsibilities can increase psychological strain and burnout risk. Depersonalization is concerning because diminished empathy and formalized attitudes toward students with SEN may undermine humanistic pedagogical practice [5, 6]. In this context, coping is understood as a dynamic process of mobilizing and regulating internal resources in response to environmental demands [2]. Within the transactional model of stress proposed by Lazarus and Folkman, effective adaptation depends on cognitive appraisal and available resources [7]. Teacher coping competence may therefore facilitate the transition from passive observation to preventive involvement while supporting emotional self-regulation.

Empirical evidence indicates that professional experience is not an unequivocal predictor of coping effectiveness [8]. Teachers with up to five years of experience tend to demonstrate fewer constructive strategies, those with 6–15 years greater resilience and flexibility, while those with more than 16 years may experience a return to emotion-focused and destructive coping because of accumulated exhaustion. These patterns indicate the nonlinear nature of professional development and the need for support across career stages.

The present study conceptualizes teacher coping competence through a four-level model encompassing physiological, social, personal, and spiritual and moral resources. Constructive coping represents an external manifestation of professional maturity and the integration of these resources. The study aims to identify relationships among methodological competence, teachers’ coping strategies, and readiness to respond to victimization of students with SEN and to provide empirical support for this model as a systemic resource for prevention.

Literature review

The contemporary educational paradigm is oriented toward the “Inclusion without Borders” model, which seeks equal access to education while recognizing diverse educational needs [3]. However, inclusive environments may involve conflict, emotional strain, and insufficient teacher preparedness [1]. Bullying is increasingly conceptualized as a systemic phenomenon

shaped by individual, social, and institutional factors, including school climate and pedagogical practices [9, 10].

Students with SEN face higher risks of victimization than peers without disabilities, particularly psychological bullying, verbal aggression, and social exclusion, with potential consequences for emotional well-being and educational participation [4, 11]. Covert forms, including ignoring, exclusion from group interaction, and psychological distancing, are especially difficult to detect and require teachers’ sensitivity to social and psychological processes within the group [1, 10].

Inclusive teaching also involves substantial emotional demands. Insufficient internal resources may contribute to professional burnout, particularly depersonalization, characterized by reduced empathy and formalized attitudes toward students [5]. Such processes can weaken teacher–student interaction and undermine humanistic educational principles [6].

Within the transactional framework of Lazarus and Folkman, coping involves managing environmental demands through cognitive appraisal and mobilization of internal resources [7]. Contemporary research views coping as an integrative resource for professional adaptation and a professional meta-competence involving self-regulation, reflection, and constructive interaction [2]. Its development may be nonlinear: early-career teachers tend to demonstrate fewer constructive strategies, mid-career teachers greater resilience, and highly experienced teachers a potential return to destructive coping associated with professional exhaustion [8].

The present study conceptualizes coping competence as a multilayered system of internal resources. The physiological level concerns self-regulation and psychological resilience; the social level involves collaboration with psychologists, parents, and colleagues; the personal level includes responsibility, reflection, and emotional intelligence; and the spiritual and moral level reflects commitment to children’s dignity and humanistic educational interaction. From a human-potential perspective, coping is a developable professional resource complementing methodological competence with social and emotional maturity, reflexivity, and self-regulation [2, 8].

Recent research has also considered artificial intelligence as a supplementary tool for identifying professional burnout and developing early-warning systems in educational environments [12]. Such technologies should complement rather than replace professional reflection, interpersonal interaction, and pedagogical responsibility. Overall, the literature indicates the need for an integrated framework linking external educational conditions, teachers’ internal resources, and coping mechanisms. Accordingly, the present study proposes an integrative model of coping competence, presented in **Figure 1**.

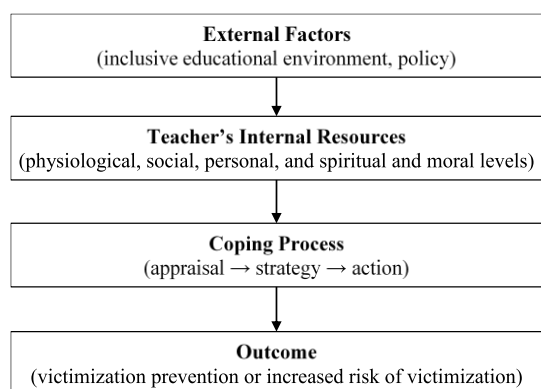


Figure 1. Integrative Model of Teacher Coping Competence

Materials and Methods

Research design and setting

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative correlational design to examine the relationships among teachers' coping strategies, methodological competence, professional confidence, and readiness to prevent and respond to bullying and other forms of victimization involving students with special educational needs (SEN). The empirical phase of the study was conducted at higher education institutions in Astana, Kazakhstan.

The correlational design was selected to identify the presence, strength, and direction of statistical relationships among the variables under investigation. Because the data were collected at a single point in time, the study was not intended to establish direct causal relationships.

Participants and sampling

The study involved 145 practicing teachers working in special and inclusive educational organizations. Participants were selected using a random sampling procedure from among teachers who met the established eligibility criteria.

The inclusion criteria were current professional involvement in teaching, at least two years of teaching experience, and direct experience in teaching or supporting students with SEN. Participation was voluntary, and only respondents who provided informed consent were included in the study.

Research instrument and operationalization of variables

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to assess the following domains:

- dominant coping strategies, including problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance;
- teachers' perceptions of different forms of violence and victimization in inclusive educational environments;
- readiness to prevent bullying and respond to conflict situations;
- perceived methodological competence and professional confidence.

The questionnaire included scale-based, frequency-based, and categorical items. The operationalization of coping strategies was based on the theoretical framework developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) [7].

Problem-focused coping was assessed through items reflecting readiness to intervene actively, discuss a problem openly, seek practical solutions, and involve other professionals when necessary. Emotion-focused coping referred primarily to the regulation of emotional responses under stressful professional conditions. Avoidance coping was operationalized through behaviors such as ignoring a situation, withdrawing from it, or distancing oneself from responsibility for intervention.

Methodological competence referred to teachers' perceived knowledge of appropriate procedures, intervention algorithms, and methods for responding to bullying and other forms of victimization. Professional confidence reflected the extent to which teachers considered themselves capable of implementing preventive and responsive actions in difficult situations. Sensitivity to violence referred to teachers' perceived ability to recognize both overt and latent manifestations of aggression, social exclusion, and psychological pressure.

All these indicators were based on participants' self-reports. Therefore, they reflect teachers' subjective perceptions of their competence, coping behavior, and readiness for preventive intervention rather than independently observed professional behavior.

Instrument quality assurance

Before the main data collection, the questionnaire underwent expert review and pilot testing. Specialists in inclusive education, educational psychology, and research methodology evaluated the relevance, clarity, and comprehensibility of the items, as well as their correspondence to the constructs examined in the study.

The pilot testing was used to identify ambiguous wording, assess the appropriateness of the response formats, and evaluate the logical sequence of the questionnaire items. Based on the feedback obtained during this stage, several formulations and the order of individual items were refined. These procedures supported the face and content validity of the final version of the questionnaire.

Data collection procedure

Before completing the questionnaire, participants received information about the purpose and content of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without adverse consequences. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before data collection began.

Participants then completed the structured questionnaire concerning their professional experience, coping strategies, perceptions of violence and victimization in inclusive settings, methodological competence, and readiness to respond to bullying and conflict situations.

The collected responses were coded and processed in aggregated form. No identifying information that could be used to

determine the identity of individual respondents or their educational organizations was included in the analytical dataset.

Data analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 32.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize participants' responses and describe the distribution of perceived forms of violence, coping strategies, and indicators of preventive readiness.

Pearson's chi-square test was used to examine the association between categorical variables. In particular, it was applied to determine whether teachers' professional experience was significantly associated with their sensitivity to incidents of violence and victimization.

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to assess the direction and strength of the linear relationship between teachers' methodological competence and their confidence in implementing measures to respond to violence and victimization.

The threshold for statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. The results are reported using the relevant test statistic, correlation coefficient, and achieved significance level.

Results and Discussion

Perceived forms of violence in inclusive educational environments

The participants were asked to assess the prevalence of different forms of aggression within inclusive educational environments. Since the data were obtained through self-reports, the presented indicators reflect teachers' perceptions of relevant forms of violence rather than the objectively measured prevalence of victimization among students with SEN.

The analysis showed that the most frequently reported form of violence toward students with SEN was bullying, mockery, and ridicule, identified by 47.4% of respondents. Social isolation and physical violence were each reported by 31.6% of participants, while psychological pressure was indicated by 21.1%.

The distribution of responses demonstrates that teachers perceive not only overt manifestations of aggression but also less visible forms of victimization, including social exclusion and psychological pressure. These indicators should be interpreted as the proportion of respondents who identified each form of violence rather than as mutually exclusive categories of victimization. The results are presented in **Figure 2**.

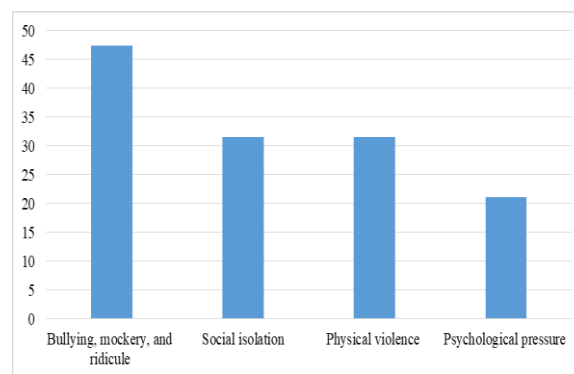


Figure 2. Perceived Forms of Violence in Inclusive Educational Environments

Difficulties in Identifying Hidden Forms of Bullying

A particular challenge for teachers was the identification of latent forms of victimization. Difficulty in detecting hidden bullying and concealment of violence-related incidents was reported by 73.7% of respondents as a major obstacle in preventive work.

Thus, teachers' responses indicate that preventive activities are challenged not only by the need to respond to identified cases of violence but also by difficulties in recognizing social exclusion, psychological pressure, and other forms of aggression that may not involve direct physical manifestations.

This result characterizes teachers' perceived professional difficulties and does not by itself demonstrate their actual ability to identify hidden bullying in real educational situations.

Distribution of coping strategies

To identify the coping strategies used by teachers, participants were asked to indicate their preferred approaches to overcoming professional difficulties. The analysis revealed a predominance of constructive coping strategies among respondents.

The most frequently reported strategy was seeking support from colleagues, indicated by 89.4% of participants. This result highlights the importance of social resources within the structure of teachers' professional coping behavior and suggests that respondents perceive collegial support as an important resource in dealing with professional challenges.

Open discussion of problems was reported by 84.2% of respondents, while emotional self-regulation was indicated by 84.3%. These findings demonstrate the frequent use of strategies related to communication, problem discussion, and regulation of emotional responses under stressful professional conditions.

Avoidance or ignoring of problematic situations was reported by 36.8% of participants, whereas 63.2% selected the response option "never." Thus, although avoidance was not the dominant strategy, it was present in the responses of a substantial proportion of participants and should therefore be considered when developing teacher support and professional development programs.

The distribution of coping strategies is presented in **Figure 3**.

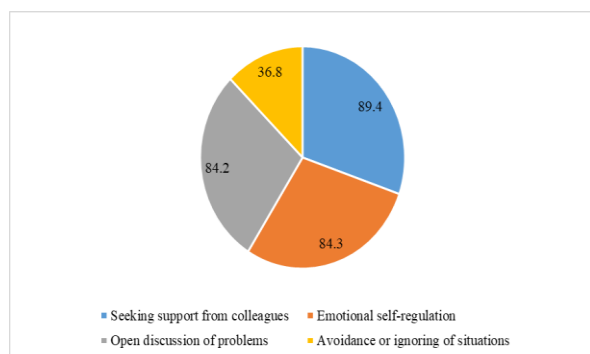


Figure 3. Distribution of Coping Strategies among Teachers (%)

Relationship between professional experience and sensitivity to violence

To identify factors associated with teachers' readiness for preventive activity, statistical analyses were conducted examining relationships among professional experience, methodological competence, and confidence in responding to violence-related situations.

Pearson's chi-square test was used to examine the relationship between professional experience and teachers' perceived sensitivity to violence and victimization. No statistically significant association was identified between these variables ($\chi^2 = 4.06$; $p = 0.131$).

This finding indicates that the length of professional experience alone was not statistically associated with higher or lower sensitivity to violence within the studied sample. It does not imply that professional experience is irrelevant for teacher development; rather, it indicates the absence of a statistically confirmed relationship between the specific variables measured in this study [13-18].

Relationship between methodological competence and confidence in responding

Correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between teachers' perceived methodological competence and their confidence in implementing response measures ($r = 0.41$; $p < 0.01$).

This result indicates that higher levels of perceived methodological competence were associated with greater confidence in responding to violence and victimization situations. However, due to the correlational design, this association should not be interpreted as evidence that methodological competence directly causes increased confidence.

The results of the statistical analysis are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Statistical Relationships Between Key Variables

Variables	Statistical Test	Value	Significance Level
Professional experience × sensitivity to violence	Pearson's χ^2 test	4,06	$p = 0,131$ (not significant)

Methodological competence × confidence in responding	Pearson's correlation coefficient	0,41	$p < 0,01$
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Note. No statistically significant relationship was identified between professional experience and sensitivity to violence. A moderate positive correlation was found between methodological competence and teachers' confidence in responding to violence-related situations.

The graphical representation of the correlation between methodological competence and confidence is presented in **Figure 4**.

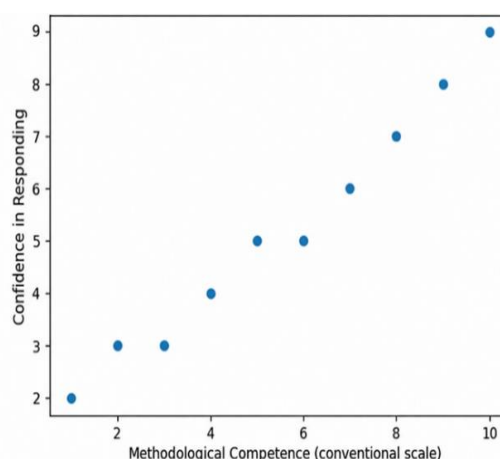


Figure 4. Relationship Between Methodological Competence and Teachers' Confidence in Responding ($r = 0.41$)

The findings demonstrate that bullying, mockery, and ridicule were the most frequently perceived forms of victimization affecting students with SEN, while social isolation and psychological pressure were also identified as significant concerns. At the same time, teachers reported considerable difficulties in detecting hidden forms of bullying.

The structure of self-reported coping strategies was characterized by a predominance of social support seeking, emotional self-regulation, and open discussion of problems. However, avoidance strategies were also present among a proportion of participants.

Statistical analysis showed no significant association between professional experience and sensitivity to violence but revealed a moderate positive relationship between methodological competence and confidence in responding. These findings provide empirical support for further discussion of teacher coping competence as a professional resource, although they do not independently verify causal mechanisms or the complete theoretical model.

The findings suggest that teacher coping competence is not merely an individual psychological characteristic but a systemic component of professional maturity that may influence teachers' functioning in inclusive environments and their readiness to prevent bullying. The study therefore views coping competence as an integrative construct involving cognitive, emotional, and value-based resources [19-23].

A substantial proportion of teachers reported constructive coping strategies, including seeking support, openly discussing

problems, and emotional self-regulation. This finding is consistent with research emphasizing socially oriented and problem-focused coping as resources for professional adaptation and psychological resilience [2]. The high proportion reporting collegial support (89.4%) highlights the importance of social resources in teacher adaptation [24-33]. Nevertheless, 73.7% reported difficulties detecting hidden bullying, indicating that emotional stability alone is insufficient and must be accompanied by professional knowledge and interpretive skills, particularly because social exclusion, ignoring, and psychological pressure can be difficult to recognize [9, 10].

Professional experience was not significantly associated with sensitivity to violence ($\chi^2 = 4.06$; $p = 0.131$). Thus, years of teaching experience alone do not necessarily ensure greater readiness to identify or prevent bullying. Professional development may depend on reflection, methodological preparation, and psychological resources in addition to length of service. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that prolonged professional activity may be accompanied by emotional exhaustion and changes in coping patterns when adequate support is unavailable [8].

Methodological competence was positively associated with confidence in responding to violence ($r = 0.41$; $p < 0.01$). This finding indicates that methodological preparedness and response confidence are related dimensions of teacher readiness. However, because the relationship is correlational, it does not establish that methodological competence directly causes greater confidence.

The findings support the proposed four-level model of teacher potential. The physiological level concerns psychological endurance and self-regulation; the social level involves cooperation with colleagues, psychologists, and parents; the personal level includes responsibility, reflection, and emotional intelligence; and the spiritual and moral level reflects recognition of every learner's dignity and commitment to humanistic education. Together, these dimensions suggest that bullying prevention requires more than methodological training and should incorporate emotional regulation, reflection, collaboration, and ethical responsibility.

Professional burnout is an important contextual factor. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization may reduce teachers' involvement, increase psychological distancing, and contribute to formal rather than supportive interactions with students with SEN [5, 6]. Strengthening coping competence may therefore support resilience and help preserve empathy in inclusive educational settings [34-36].

Within the proposed framework, coping competence may connect the demands of inclusive education with teachers'

internal resources and professional responses. **Figure 5** illustrates the proposed relationships among external conditions, internal resources, coping competence, coping strategies, and preventive behavioral responses [37-44].

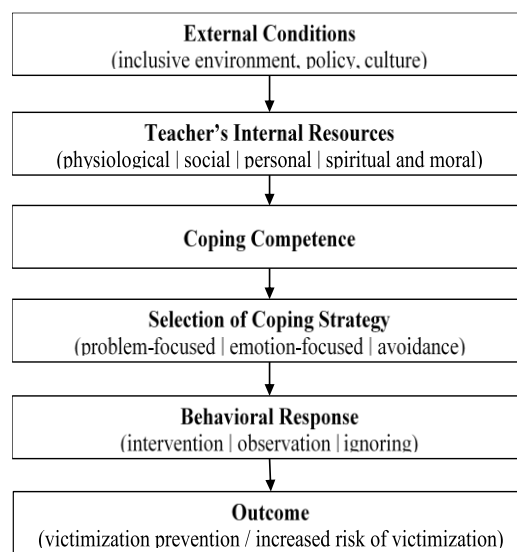


Figure 5. Conceptual Mechanism of the Influence of Coping Competence on Victimization Prevention

Note. The model represents a theoretical interpretation of coping competence as a systemic mechanism linking teachers' professional resources with preventive practices. It should not be interpreted as a statistically tested mediation model because mediation analysis was not conducted in the present study.

Within the "Inclusion without Borders" model, teachers should therefore be viewed not only as knowledge transmitters but also as key actors in promoting psychological safety and preventing victimization among students with SEN. Consistent with the transactional model of stress [7], coping responses depend on situational appraisal and available resources. In demanding inclusive environments, coping competence may support teachers' readiness to respond to bullying and other forms of victimization.

Different coping strategies may have different implications for preventive activity (Table 2). Problem-focused coping, reflected in active discussion, solution seeking, and collaboration, may support preventive action; 84.2% of respondents reported openly discussing problems. Emotion-focused coping, particularly emotional self-regulation, may support psychological stability, with 84.3% reporting emotional control. However, emotional regulation alone may not ensure effective intervention when methodological knowledge and appropriate response strategies are insufficient. Avoidance coping, including ignoring problems or distancing from students' difficulties, may represent a potential risk for insufficient intervention, although it was not dominant in the sample.

Table 2. Interpretation of Coping Strategies in the Context of Teachers' Readiness for Bullying Prevention.

Coping strategy	Behavioral manifestations	Potential implications for bullying prevention
Problem-focused coping	Active intervention, problem discussion, seeking solutions	Higher readiness for preventive action
Emotion-focused coping	Self-regulation, emotional control	Supports psychological stability
Avoidance coping	Ignoring, distancing, withdrawal	Potential risk of insufficient response

Note. Constructive coping strategies, particularly problem-focused coping and adaptive emotional regulation, may support teachers' readiness for preventive action, whereas avoidance strategies may be associated with reduced responsiveness to situations of victimization.

The four-level model further suggests that professional maturity depends not only on formal experience but also on integrated psychological and professional resources. Collegial support (89.4%) illustrates the importance of the social dimension, while responsibility and reflection may help teachers move beyond passive observation. Recognition of every child's dignity provides the value basis for rejecting violence and supporting inclusive practices.

Accordingly, the model provides a conceptual framework for understanding how teachers' internal resources may contribute to preventive practices and psychological safety. However, it requires further validation through longitudinal and experimental research. Overall, bullying prevention is a multidimensional process requiring the integration of professional knowledge, coping resources, social support, and value-based orientations. Coping competence may therefore serve as a connecting element between teachers' internal resources and the practical implementation of inclusive education principles.

These findings have implications for teacher education. Preparation should extend beyond methodological training to include self-regulation, reflection, communication competence, coping skills, and ethical responsibility. Such an approach may help teachers create safe, supportive, and human-centered learning environments.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that teacher coping competence is an important professional resource for supporting psychological safety and preventing victimization among students with SEN. Within the "Inclusion without Borders" model, teachers' roles extend beyond knowledge transmission to include risk recognition, preventive support, and constructive interaction with vulnerable learners.

Teachers identified bullying, mockery, and ridicule as the most common forms of violence affecting students with SEN (47.4%), while social isolation and psychological pressure were also significant concerns. Difficulties in detecting hidden bullying indicate that effective prevention requires both emotional stability and professional sensitivity. Constructive coping strategies were predominant, particularly collegial support (89.4%), emotional self-regulation (84.3%), and open discussion of problems (84.2%).

Professional experience was not significantly associated with sensitivity to violence ($\chi^2 = 4.06$; $p = 0.131$), whereas methodological competence was positively associated with confidence in responding to victimization ($r = 0.41$; $p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that preventive readiness is related not simply to accumulated experience but also to specific methodological and psychological resources.

The study contributes a four-level model of coping competence integrating physiological, social, personal, and spiritual

and moral resources. This model conceptualizes coping competence as an integrative professional characteristic connecting teachers' internal resources with preventive practices. Teacher education should therefore incorporate self-regulation, reflection, emotional competence, ethical responsibility, and practical strategies for responding to bullying.

The findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The sample comprised 145 teachers from a specific educational context in Kazakhstan, limiting generalizability. Self-reported data reflect perceived rather than objectively observed competence and behavior, while the cross-sectional design does not permit causal conclusions. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples, mixed methods, and longitudinal or intervention-based designs.

Overall, coping competence represents a promising conceptual and practical resource for strengthening inclusive educational environments. Its development may support teachers in promoting psychological safety, protecting students' dignity, and adopting more proactive approaches to victimization prevention.

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Conflict of interest: None

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Ethics statement: The study was conducted in accordance with generally accepted ethical principles for educational and psychological research involving human participants. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before the questionnaire was administered. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were protected throughout all stages of data collection, analysis, and reporting.

The study did not employ procedures that could reasonably be expected to cause psychological harm. The questionnaire focused on participants' professional experience and their perceptions of coping strategies, inclusive educational environments, and responses to bullying and victimization. The collected data were used exclusively for research purposes and were presented only in aggregated form.

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