

PREVENTING AND OVERCOMING BULLYING IN THE DIGITAL EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH



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To cite this article:

Shakhrai, V., & Honchar, L. (2025). Preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment: findings of the research. *Education: Modern Discourses*, 8, 16–26. <https://doi.org/10.37472/2617-3107-2025-8-02>

Abstract. *The purpose of the paper is to characterize the main stages of scientific research on the pedagogical principles of preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment and to generalize its findings. The research methods are: analysis of scientific and methodological literature on the research problem; questionnaires, observations, comparisons, ranking, modeling, analysis and generalization of the obtained data. At the theoretical and constitutive stage of the research, the relevance of the problem in the context of the demands of the Ukrainian society and pedagogical science was revealed; the state of research on the problem in pedagogical theory and practice was analyzed; the essence of the main concepts of the study was clarified; the state of preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment was characterized. At the experimental and practical stage of the scientific research, the pedagogical conditions for preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment were substantiated; methods for preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment were developed; methods were tested on the basis of experimental educational institutions. The main tasks solved at the generalization and implementation stage of the research were: generalization of the results of the formative stage of the pedagogical experiment to identify the influence of pedagogical conditions and the proposed methodological tools on preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment. It is concluded that pedagogical actions to prevent and overcome bullying in the digital educational environment should be based on pedagogical approaches to preventing and overcoming bullying in the educational environment, taking into ac-*



count the specifics of bullying manifestations in the digital space and using digital tools in educational work with students.

Keywords: *bullying, bullying in the digital educational environment, parents, results, scientific research, stages, students, teachers.*

INTRODUCTION

Today the problem of bullying is becoming increasingly acute in the educational environment as a dangerous socio-psychological phenomenon that causes significant harm to the physical and mental health of schoolchildren and reduces the possibilities for proper personal development. Schools are meant to be safe and supportive environments for students and teachers. At the same time, research shows that for many students, schools can unfortunately be places where violence, bullying, and intimidation occur.

The problem of bullying is global. The document adopted at the 40th session of UNESCO noted that there is a long-overdue need to effectively address the root causes of violence and promote a culture of respect for students' rights and zero tolerance for violence (UNESCO, 2019).

Particular attention is currently being paid to developing mechanisms to combat bullying among children and young people, which is carried out using electronic means of communication. According to researchers, while the number of manifestations of traditional bullying is slowly decreasing, cyberbullying is rapidly increasing worldwide (Zhang et al., 2022). The adverse effects of cyberbullying on children, including reduced safety and educational attainment, poor mental health, etc., have prompted UNICEF to state that no child is completely safe in the digital world (UNICEF, 2017).

Therefore, one of the primary tasks of pedagogical science is the theoretical substantiation of ways to solve the problem of preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment, the search for effective mechanisms of pedagogical activity to prevent bullying and reduce its impact on the lives of participants in the educational process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of bullying on a systematic basis started in Western Europe relatively recently, i.e. in the 1980s. Olweus, one of the most authoritative scientists dealing with the problem of bullying and its prevention, published the book "Battle Boys and School Bullies" in 1973 and the program to prevent bullying in the school environment in the 1990s (Olweus, & Limber, 2010).

The essence of bullying and cyberbullying, the scale of involvement of children and students in it are studied by modern researchers Brochado, Hinduja, Langos, Patchin, Smith and others (Brochado et al., 2021; Langos, 2012; Patchin, & Hinduja, 2022; Smith et al., 2008). The impact of bullying and cyberbullying on the behavior and health of students, the causes of bullying and cyberbullying are highlighted by Zhang, Zhu, Huang and others (Zhang et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2021). The need for targeted actions to prevent and combat bullying, to identify ways, means of their implementation, methods and techniques of working with children and youth to prevent and combat bullying and cyberbullying is reflected in documents of international organizations, the works of Hinduja, Patchin, Olweus, Menesini, Salmivalli (UNESCO, 2020; Hinduja, & Patchin, 2021; Menesini, & Salmivalli, 2017; Olweus, & Limber, 2010). Scientific publications, primarily foreign ones, emphasize the special role of the teacher in preventing and combating bullying, its capabilities (Hornby, 2016; Marshall, 2012; UNESCO, 2022). The need to develop students' social competence and interpersonal interaction skills as ways to combat bullying is revealed in their research by Doğan, Gradinger, Yanagida, Strohmeier (Doğan et al., 2017). Ways to prevent cyberbullying, one of which is the proper use of the Internet and social networks by students and adults, are reflected in the studies of Ortega-Ruiz, Del Rey, JCasas (Ortega-Ruiz et al., 2012).

The Ukrainian researchers reveal certain aspects of preventing and overcoming bullying among children and young people in their works (Fedorchenko, 2023; Honchar, 2024; Mozghova, & Pomytkina, 2021; Naidonova, 2018; Shakhrai, 2025; Shakhrai et al., 2025b). Important are works that highlight the risks of the digital educational environment (Aliexsieienko, 2024; Sysoieva, 2021).

The need for targeted actions to prevent and combat bullying, to determine ways and means of their implementation is reflected in the Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Combating Bullying (Harassment)”, the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine “Some Issues of Responding to Cases of Bullying (Harassment) and the Application of Educational Influence Measures in Educational Institutions” (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy, 2019a; 2019b).

The scientific research of the Department of Institutional Education of the Institute of Educational Problems of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine “Pedagogical Principles of Preventing and Overcoming Bullying in the Digital Educational Environment” (2023–2025) is dedicated to the search for effective mechanisms for combating bullying in the digital educational environment in the modern socio-cultural conditions of Ukraine.

In this paper, we focus on the main stages of the research and its findings. The aim of the paper is to characterize the main stages of scientific research on the pedagogical conditions for preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment and to summarize its results. The tasks are to reveal the content of the stages of scientific research on the pedagogical principles of preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment; to analyze the conducted scientific research and formulate conclusions.

METHODOLOGY

The research of the problem of preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment was guided primarily by the following scientific approaches:

- *axiological*, which reflects the need to form the worldview of the younger generation based on the values of world and national culture, in particular the values of freedom, responsibility, respect for the opinions and actions of others, safety (one’s own and other people’s), in the process of interaction in the digital environment;
- *personality-oriented*, which involves such an organization of subject-subject interaction (teacher-students-parents), in which the student realizes himself as a person, reveals and reveals his capabilities, creative abilities, acts as an active participant in various types of activities, and is a subject of ideological and behavioral choice;
- *competency-based*, which involves focusing the educational process on mastering life competencies necessary for successful independent solution of life tasks, prevention of various threats to one’s life and development of one’s own personality, in particular while in a digital educational environment;
- *socio-environmental*, which necessitates the use of the educational potential of various socio-educational institutions (school, family, community) in the process of personality formation. etc.) and taking into account the specifics of the environment;
- *activity-based*, it is based on the premise that effective prevention and overcoming of bullying among students in the digital educational environment is carried out in the process of direct activities in which models of safe behavior are tested and verified;
- *specific-historical*, that involves determining the current tasks of preventing and overcoming bullying at a certain stage of the functioning of society, in particular in modern conditions that have arisen under the influence of Russian military aggression.

The research methods have included analysis of scientific and methodological literature on the research problem; questionnaires, observations, comparisons, ranking, modeling, analysis and generalization of the obtained data.

MAIN RESULTS

The research was implemented in three stages: theoretical and ascertaining, experimental and practical, and generalizing and implementing. At ***the theoretical and constitutive stage***, the relevance of the problem in the context of the demands of Ukrainian society and pedagogical science was revealed; the state of research on the problem in pedagogical theory and practice was analyzed; the essence of the main concepts of the study was clarified; the state of the process of preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment was characterized.

During the theoretical stage it was revealed that today the problem of bullying is becoming more acute in educational institutions as a socio-psychological phenomenon that causes significant harm to the physical and mental health of schoolchildren, leads to injuries of various kinds, reduces the possibilities of self-realization and personal development, sometimes causing tragic consequences.

The authors have substantiated the essence of the key concepts of the research as following:

- *digital educational environment* as the creation of conditions for productive interaction between participants in the educational process, based on the use of digital means and tools, with the aim of acquiring knowledge, comprehensive development and self-realization of students;

- *prevention of bullying in the digital educational environment* is a system of pedagogical actions aimed at preventing (preventing) manifestations of bullying and cyberbullying among students in the process of obtaining education and in extracurricular time, and which are based on involving students in spiritual and moral values, developing their social and emotional skills, ability for empathy, assertive behavior, fostering a culture of behavior in the digital space and active use of digital resources and technologies for this purpose;

- *overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment* as a system of pedagogical actions aimed at eliminating the manifestations and consequences of bullying and cyberbullying among students in the process of obtaining education and in extracurricular time, and which are based on the development of social and emotional skills in students, in particular, a sense of responsibility for their own actions (in offenders), resilience traits (in victims), education of a culture of behavior among students in the digital space and active use of digital resources and technologies for this purpose.

Another theoretical result of the study is the substantiation of the principles of preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment, which in the author's interpretation are defined as: principle of humanism; a person-oriented principle; affirmation of the value of life and personal security; ensuring proper teacher-parent interaction; systematicity and continuity in the education of students.

Based on the research of the scholars and practices in educational institutions the areas of activity on preventing and combating bullying and cyberbullying have been formulated:

- involving various stakeholders in the process of preventing and overcoming bullying and cyberbullying;

- paying special attention to the safety of the educational environment; forming a positive school climate (class climate);

- increasing the responsibility of teachers for creating a psychologically and physically safe environment at school and in the classroom;

- developing the digital competence of teachers;

- involving students in preventive measures to prevent bullying, developing their social activity;
- teaching constructive social communication and fostering resilience, positive self-esteem;
- establishing proper interaction between the educational institution and the family, increasing the level of parental responsibility and pedagogical culture.

It was found that bullying and cyberbullying are closely related and quite often the same individuals are victims of bullying and cyberbullying. It is concluded that pedagogical actions to prevent and overcome bullying in the digital educational environment should be based on pedagogical approaches, taking into account the specifics of bullying manifestations in the digital space and using digital tools in educational work with students.

The main actors in the process of preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment are identified as teachers, parents, and students, which is reflected in: the ability of teachers to prevent and overcome manifestations of bullying and cyberbullying among students; the development of students' social and emotional skills and the ability to counteract bullying; the pedagogical culture of parents and their ability to detect manifestations of bullying and cyberbullying among their own children and counteract such manifestations.

An important task of the theoretical and factual stage of the research was to develop criteria, indicators, and levels for preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment. The following criteria have been defined:

- *cognitive*: knowledge about the problem of bullying and cyberbullying, their manifestations, causes, consequences, ways to counteract bullying and cyberbullying, knowledge about legislation on the problem of bullying;
- *emotional-values*: development of spiritual and moral value orientations, in particular the values of freedom, responsibility, respect for the opinions and actions of others, safety (one's own and other people's), development of a sense of empathy, positive self-esteem, resilience traits;
- *activity*: the ability to constructively interact with others, to self-protect and support others in a situation that threatens the safety of individuals, the formation of a culture of behavior in the digital space.

Taking into account the criteria, the levels of bullying prevention in the digital educational environment were formulated: high (socially harmonious); medium (socially acceptable); low (socially inhibiting) and the levels of bullying overcoming in the digital educational environment: high (socially capable); medium (socially regulatory); low (socially dysfunctional).

Based on the obtained empirical data, the current state of bullying prevention in the digital educational environment was clarified (based on the implementation of the ascertaining stage of the pedagogical experiment). It was determined that:

- 25.9 % of surveyed teachers, 21.7 % of surveyed students, and 18.3 % of surveyed parents have a *high (socially harmonious)* level, when there are no manifestations of bullying and cyberbullying in the educational environment.
- *Medium (socially acceptable)*: manifestations of bullying and cyberbullying are extremely minor (insults, intimidation are not systemic) – 48.2 % of teachers, 49.4 % of students, 48.4 % of parents experience it.
- *Low (socially inhibited)* is characterized by periodic manifestations of bullying and cyberbullying in the educational environment. This level is reached by 25.9 % of teachers, 28.9 % of students, and 33.3 % of parents.

The levels of overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment have been identified:

• *High (socially competent)*: manifestations of bullying completely disappear due to the influence of targeted pedagogical actions. This level is reached by 25.0 % of surveyed teachers, 20.2 % of surveyed students, and 19.2 % of surveyed parents.

Medium (social-regulatory): the number of bullying manifestations is significantly reduced due to the influence of pedagogical actions – 52.1 % of teachers, 53.0 % of students, 48.1 % of parents have it.

Low (socially dysfunctional): the number of manifestations of bullying in the digital educational environment is not decreasing. This level is reached by 22.9 % of teachers, 26.8 % of students, and 32.7 % of parents.

Analysis of the findings showed that the state of prevention and overcoming of bullying in the digital educational environment is generally unsatisfactory and requires proper pedagogical attention, implementation of educational work based on spiritual and moral values, in particular the value of personal safety and respect for it. It was also found that the family is not sufficiently competent in preventing and overcoming bullying among their own children in the digital educational environment, in particular, they do not have proper knowledge of the legal principles of preventing and overcoming bullying, and a developed digital culture.

The identified problems require theoretical substantiation of pedagogical conditions and development of methods for preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment.

At *the experimental and practical stage* of the research, pedagogical conditions for preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment were substantiated; methods for preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment were developed; methods were tested on the basis of experimental educational institutions. The main pedagogical conditions substantiated by the authors are:

• Increasing the capacity of the educational institution regarding the safety and comprehensive development of students in the digital educational environment, which primarily involves increasing the professional and digital competence of teachers and their ability to prevent and overcome bullying among participants in the educational process.

• Development of personal qualities in students that contribute to combating bullying (both to protect against it and to deter its commission), which leads to the expansion of knowledge and skills of children and students regarding the safe use of digital space, the formation of their assertive behavior, resilience, and the organization of life activities on the basis of spiritual and moral values.

• Ensuring partnership between school and family to prevent bullying among school-age children in the digital educational environment, increasing the pedagogical culture of the family, improving the digital competence of parents and their ability to prevent and overcome bullying among participants in the educational process.

• Using the capabilities of the digital educational environment to prevent and overcome bullying among students, primarily the development of educational technologies to prevent and overcome bullying, based on the capabilities of the digital educational space.

The authors have developed methodology for preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment, in particular:

a) a methodology for increasing the professional competence of pedagogical workers in preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment, which is reflected in the curriculum “Prevention and Overcoming Bullying Among Schoolchildren in the Digital Educational Environment” (30 hours), which is aimed at preparing teachers to work on preventing and overcoming bullying and cyberbullying among school-age children. It consists of the following topics:

- “Preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment: basic concepts and measurement criteria”;
- “Readiness of teachers to prevent and overcome bullying in the digital educational environment”;
- “The importance of creating a favorable moral and psychological climate in the student community in order to prevent bullying”;
- “Improving pedagogical culture and digital literacy of the family as a factor in preventing and overcoming bullying”.

b) a methodology for improving the educational activities of class teachers to prevent and overcome bullying among adolescents in the digital educational environment, which includes developing the content of a seminar for class teachers “Forms and methods of preventing bullying among adolescents in the digital educational environment”. The approximate topics of the seminar include:

1. Introductory lesson. What is “bullying”, its causes and consequences (lecture with elements of conversation).
2. Adolescent aggression, its impact on the interaction of a teenager with others (lecture with elements of conversation).
3. Possible ways to overcome teenage aggression (round table with elements of a workshop).
4. How to establish emotional contact with a teenage child (lecture with elements of a practical session).
5. Techniques for overcoming problematic behavior in adolescents (mini-workshop).
6. Introduction to the methodology “Studying the Tendency to Manipulate” (practical lesson), etc.

The methodology also includes the development of a set of forms and methods of working with adolescents to prevent and overcome bullying in the digital educational environment: discussions between students to formulate rules of behavior with each other, discussions of books, films, and programs to develop empathy (compassion) in relationships between students, children’s creation of thematic media products (stories, photos, films, etc.), psychocorrectional training to develop conflict prevention skills, role-playing games, etc.

c) organization methodology interaction between the educational institution and the family regarding the involvement of parents in the process of preventing bullying among children in the digital educational environment, which is aimed at ensuring partnership cooperation between the school and the family regarding the prevention of bullying among school-age children in the digital educational environment, improving the pedagogical culture of the family, and improving the ability of parents to prevent bullying among their own children. The methodology provides for: meetings with parents (including in a remote format) on the topics: “Bullying and cyberbullying – a modern threat”, “Increasing our own digital literacy”; conversations with parents: “Different faces of bullying and cyberbullying”, “Legal responsibility of parents for committing bullying and cyberbullying”; organization of joint events for children, parents, teachers, etc.

d) a methodology for preventing and overcoming bullying among high school students in a digital educational environment, based on taking into account the tendency for cyberbullying to prevail (over traditional) among students, the need to develop knowledge and skills of online etiquette in high school students, the use of the possibilities of the digital environment in educational work to develop the socio-emotional skills of students, the broad involvement of students in public activities, student self-government, etc. It includes: individual and group conversations with students; classes on expanding digital literacy and online etiquette; discussions; the “case-study” method (using information about bullying cases pos-

ted on the Internet); meetings with law enforcement officials; poster, video, and presentation competitions on the problem of combating bullying and other types of violence, etc.

The experimental and practical stage of the research included testing the proposed mechanisms of pedagogical activity aimed at preventing and overcoming bullying among schoolchildren in the digital educational environment (the formative stage of the pedagogical experiment). Analysis of its results indicates an increase in students' ability to counteract bullying in the digital educational environment. The percentage of students with high (socially harmonious) and medium (socially acceptable) levels of preventing bullying in the digital educational environment and high (socially capable) and medium (socially regulatory) levels of overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment has significantly increased.

The main tasks solved at *the generalization and implementation stage* of the research were: generalization of the results of the formative stage of the pedagogical experiment to identify the influence of pedagogical conditions and the proposed methodological tools on preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment; preparation of manuscripts of the monograph and methodological manual; implementation of the results of the scientific research.

Comparing the findings the formative stage of the pedagogical experiment, we can state the effectiveness of the proposed pedagogical conditions and their methodological support. It is worth emphasizing that preventing bullying and bullying in the digital educational environment requires systematic work and the use, first of all, not of disciplinary means, but of educational, restorative approaches, which are based on maintaining trust between participants in the educational process, between parents and children, as well as on discussing certain conflict situations and making joint decisions, active involvement of children and students in spiritual and moral values, pro-social activities, and the formation of a culture of behavior of children and students in the digital space.

To improve teachers' understanding of the system of actions aimed at preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment, a structural and functional model of preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment has been developed (Fig. 1).

CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that pedagogical actions to prevent and overcome bullying in the digital educational environment should be based on pedagogical approaches, taking into account the specifics of bullying manifestations in the digital space and using digital tools in educational work with students.

The main pedagogical conditions that will contribute to the success of the process of preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment are:

- increasing the capacity of the educational institution regarding the safety and comprehensive development of students in the digital educational environment.
- developing students' personal qualities that contribute combating bullying.
- ensuring partnership between school and family to prevent bullying among school-age children in the digital educational environment.
- using the capabilities of the digital educational environment to prevent and overcome bullying among students.

To implement the specified pedagogical conditions, methods have been developed to prevent and overcome bullying in the digital educational environment. Experimental verification of substantiated pedagogical conditions and developed methods indicates their effectiveness and feasibility of implementation into the educational practice of educational institutions.

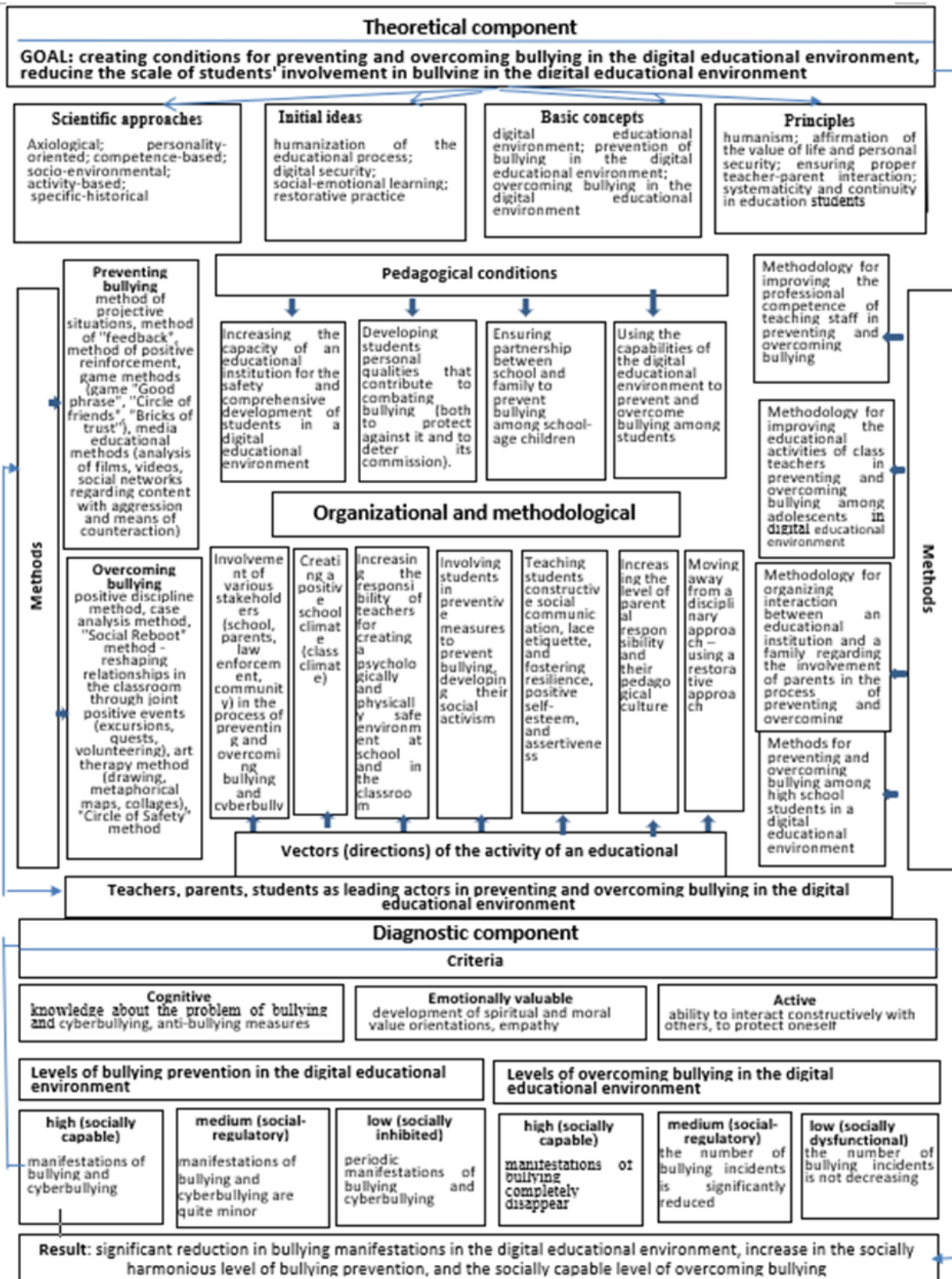


Figure 1. Structural and functional model of preventing and overcoming bullying in the digital educational environment

Source: Created by the authors based on: Shakhrai et al, 2025a.

It should be noted that the conducted scientific research represents only some aspects of a complex scientific and pedagogical problem. The impact of restorative practices, developed

social-emotional skills, online etiquette on students' involvement in bullying in the digital educational environment, etc., requires further development.

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Received: 19 Sept 2025; Accepted: 06 Nov 2025; Published online: 29 Dec 2025