

**Secondary School Teachers' Perception of "Safe School" in Selected Schools in
Astana**

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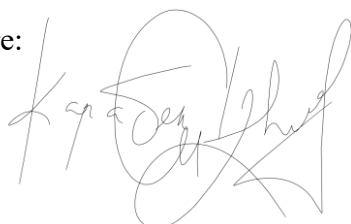
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Ethical Approval



53 Kabanbay Batyr Ave.
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Date: 29 of October, 2024

Dear: Gulzhan Karabek

This letter now confirms that your research project titled **Secondary School Teachers' Perception of "Safe School" in Selected Schools in Astana** has been approved by the Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee of Nazarbayev University.

You may proceed with contacting your preferred research site and commencing your participant recruitment strategy.

Yours sincerely,

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Abstract

Secondary School Teachers' Perception of "Safe School" in Selected Schools in Astana

Feeling safe in school is an important and fundamental right of students. When students feel safe in the classroom, they are more likely to talk openly about what they do not know and be willing to share their thoughts, which can contribute to a supportive and collaborative learning environment. However, frequent bullying and emotional distress raise questions about how this sense of safety can be ensured. Teachers play a key role in fostering a school climate in which students feel physically, emotionally and socially safe. Therefore, this study explores secondary school teachers' perceptions of safe learning environments in selected public and private schools in Astana, Kazakhstan. Based on UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools (CFS) concept, the study explores how teachers understand "safe school", implement safety practices, and what challenges hinder them to nurture safe learning environments. This qualitative phenomenological study used semi-structured interviews from 8 secondary school teachers from a private and a public school in Astana. Thematic analysis was used as a data analysis framework. Findings of the study revealed that while teachers in all schools recognized the importance of safety to student well-being and achievement, their approaches and challenges varied according to available resources, school policies, and individual experiences. It should be noted that emotional and psychological safety has become a growing concern, especially in schools facing disciplinary problems. Moreover, private school teachers often reported greater autonomy and support in implementing safety measures compared to their public-school colleagues. The findings highlight the need for systemic support of stakeholders, professional development on emotional intelligence and inclusive safety policies for new coming students to ensure child-friendly and equitable learning environments in all schools.

Keywords: school safety, safe learning environment, UNICEF Child-Friendly Schools framework, secondary education, Kazakhstan

Аңдатпа

Мектепте қауіпсіз әрі жайлы сезіну – әрбір оқушының маңызды және іргелі құқығы. Оқушылар сыныпта өздерін қауіпсіз сезінген жағдайда білмегенін ашық айтып, ойларымен еркін бөлісуге бейім болады, әрі бұндай қолдаушы және бірлескен оқу ортасын қалыптастыруға ықпал етеді. Алайда буллинг жағдайлары мен эмоционалдық күйзелістер оқушылардың қауіпсіздік сезімін қалай қамтамасыз етуге болатыны туралы сұрақтар туындатады. Мұғалімдер оқушылар өздерін физикалық, эмоционалдық және әлеуметтік тұрғыдан қауіпсіз сезінетін мектеп ортасын қалыптастыруда шешуші рөл атқарады. Осыған байланысты, бұл зерттеу Астана қаласындағы мемлекеттік және жеке меншік мектептердегі мұғалімдердің қауіпсіз оқу ортасы туралы көзқарастарын зерттеуге бағытталған. ЮНИСЕФ-тің “Балаға мейірімді мектеп” (Child Friendly Schools) тұжырымдамасына сүйене отырып, зерттеуде мұғалімдердің “қауіпсіз мектеп” ұғымын қалай түсінетіні, қауіпсіздік шараларын қалай іске асыратыны және қауіпсіз оқу ортасын қалыптастыруда қандай кедергілерге тап болатыны қарастырылады. Бұл феноменологиялық бағыттағы сапалық зерттеу Астанадағы бір мемлекеттік және бір жеке меншік мектептен 8 мұғаліммен жүргізілген жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбаттарға негізделген. Тақырыптық талдау нәтижесінде барлық мұғалімдер оқушылардың амандығы мен үлгерімі үшін қауіпсіздіктің маңыздылығын мойындағанымен, олардың тәсілдері мен кездесетін қиындықтары қолжетімді ресурстарға, мектеп саясатына және жеке тәжірибелеріне байланысты өзгеріп отыратыны анықталды. Әсіресе тәртіптік қиындықтары бар мектептерде эмоционалдық және психологиялық қауіпсіздік мәселелері өзекті болып отырғаны байқалды. Сонымен қатар, жеке меншік мектеп мұғалімдері қауіпсіздік шараларын жүзеге асыруда мемлекеттік мектептегі әріптестеріне қарағанда көбірек автономия мен қолдауға ие екендерін атап өтті. Бұл зерттеу нәтижелері барлық мектептерде балаға

мейірімді және тең мүмкіндікті оқу ортасын қамтамасыз ету үшін мүдделі тұлғалардың жүйелі қолдау, мұғалімдердің эмоционалдық зерделік бойынша кәсіби дамуы мен мектепке жаңадан келген оқушылар үшін инклюзивті орта жағдайын қалыптастыру қажеттілігін көрсетеді.

Кілт сөздер: мектеп қауіпсіздігі, қауіпсіз оқу ортасы, ЮНИСЕФ-тің “Балаға мейірімді мектептер” тұжырымдамасы, орта білім, Қазақстан

Аннотация

Чувство безопасности в школе является важным и фундаментальным правом каждого ученика. Когда ученики чувствуют себя в безопасности в классе, они с большей готовностью открыто говорят о том, чего не знают, и делятся своими мыслями, что способствует формированию поддерживающей и совместной учебной среды. Однако случаи буллинга и эмоционального стресса вызывают вопросы о том, как можно обеспечить это чувство безопасности. Учителя играют ключевую роль в формировании школьного климата, в котором учащиеся чувствуют себя физически, эмоционально и социально защищёнными. В связи с этим данное исследование направлено на изучение восприятия безопасной образовательной среды учителями средних школ в выбранных государственных и частных школах города Астаны, Казахстан. Основываясь на концепции “Школы, доброжелательные к детям” (Child Friendly Schools) ЮНИСЕФ, в исследовании рассматривается, как учителя понимают понятие “безопасная школа”, какие меры они предпринимают для обеспечения безопасности, а также с какими трудностями сталкиваются при создании безопасной образовательной среды. Это качественное феноменологическое исследование основано на полуструктурированных интервью с восьмью учителями из одной частной и одной государственной школы в Астане. Тематический анализ показал, что хотя все учителя признают важность безопасности для благополучия и успеваемости учащихся, их подходы и трудности различаются в зависимости от доступных ресурсов, школьной политики и личного опыта. Следует отметить, что вопросы эмоциональной и психологической безопасности становятся всё более актуальными, особенно в школах, где имеются дисциплинарные проблемы. Кроме того, учителя частных школ чаще сообщали о наличии большей автономии и поддержки в реализации мер безопасности по сравнению с коллегами из государственных школ. Полученные результаты

подчёркивают необходимость системной поддержки со стороны заинтересованных сторон в образовательном процессе, повышения квалификации в области эмоционального интеллекта и разработки инклюзивной политики в сфере безопасности для учеников, пришедших в новую школу, с целью создания ориентированной поддержки на ребёнка и справедливой образовательной среды во всех школах.

Ключевые слова: безопасность в школе, безопасная образовательная среда, концепция Школы, доброжелательные к детям ЮНИСЕФ, среднее образование, Казахстан

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Feeling safe at school is an important and fundamental right of students and ensuring a safe and sound environment for learning is the responsibility of schools. When students feel safe in the classroom, they are more likely to talk openly about what they do not know and are willing to share their thoughts, which can foster a supportive and collaborative learning environment. However, when students face physical danger in the form of assault, bullying, or learn in an environment with a high prevalence of suicide and pressure, they can feel unsafe, which could affect their ability to learn and feel confident in school (Cohen & Espelage, 2020). Besides, the prevalence of bullying in schools further undermines students' sense of security, which could result in high levels of anxiety, low self-esteem, and decreased ability to concentrate on the learning process (Ayoub et al., 2021; Cohen & Espelage, 2020; Boulton et al., 2012; Siegel et al., 2009; Wichstrøm et al., 2013). Consequently, the continuous experience of feeling concerned limits children's capacity to learn and can negatively impact their physical and mental health, further development, and efficient socialization (Martínez-Carrera et al., 2024; Yu & Zhao, 2021).

Considering the consequences of unsafe school environments, it is important to understand how safety is perceived and enforced in schools, especially by teachers, since students spend most of their time with teachers and teachers are the adults who can influence or prevent possible negative effects. Therefore, this study investigates secondary school teachers' perceptions of a safe learning environment, to find out how they define safety, what methods they use to enforce it, and what challenges they face in doing so.

This chapter focuses on the topic of student safety in school and its impact, describing the background of the study and its practical and policy context. Next, the problem statement, the research questions, and the purpose of the study are presented. The

significance of the study and key concepts are then outlined. Finally, the chapter ends with an outline of the subsequent chapters.

Background Information

Certain societal norms and methods of upbringing during the Soviet Union may contribute to behaviors associated with aggression and bullying in Kazakhstan. For example, in many Kazakh families, a strict and authoritarian approach to parenting is common, where children are often expected to obey authority figures without question (Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2023). Moreover, in cases of disobedience, parents would often resort to physical punishment to correct the child's behavior. This can lead to an environment in which aggressive behavior and use of physical force are modeled and accepted as a normal way of controlling or resolving conflicts (Alla, 2021; Glicksman, 2019).

In traditional male-centric families, boys are raised to be brave and discouraged from expressing emotions such as fear and sadness. Suppressing these feelings can lead to aggressive or bullying behavior as an outcome (Purwadi et al., 2020). For instance, when a child raised with narratives such as "boys never cry" meets a "weak" boy who can express his emotions, their different perceptions of "crying" can lead to exclusion or bullying.

In recent years, the safety of the school environment has become an emerging issue in many countries, including Kazakhstan. A number of studies and reports indicate widespread violence and aggression in schools (CABAR, 2022; Haar, 2013; Hillis et al., 2016; UNICEF, 2022). A 2011 study by the UN International Children's Emergency Fund found extensive violence in Kazakhstan's schools, affecting more than two-thirds of students. More than 66% of students encountered violence, with nearly half being victims themselves (Haar, 2013). This situation has not improved since then. The UNICEF (2022) conducted study about violence in Kazakhstan, findings of that study revealed that three-

fourths of adults express approval of corporal punishment to control their children's behavior, and half of children aged 2-14 years face abusive parenting at home. In addition, approximately 67% of school-aged children have been exposed to, either directly or indirectly, violence or discrimination perpetrated by peers or teachers, with highest incidences observed in boarding schools and settings for children with behavioral problems. Moreover, in 2021, a total of 140,000 cases of cyberbullying were officially reported across the country (CABAR, 2022). School violence is not just an issue in Kazakhstan; it is a global challenge that affects communities worldwide. According to a systematic review by Hillis et al. (2016), over 50% of the world's children, including more than half of children from North America, Africa, and Asia, have experienced violence. The consequences of bullying extend far beyond physical harm. Adolescents who experience bullying are more likely to demonstrate limited academic involvement and lower performance, low self-regard, and less motivation (Ayoub et al., 2021; Samara et al., 2021). The 2019 UNESCO report also highlights that bullied schoolchildren are twice as likely to suffer from insomnia, feelings of isolation and suicidal thoughts. The number of reported acts of bullying and its possible impacts highlight the urgent need for intervention.

The incidents of violence and bullying episodes within educational environments have raised public concern about the safety of students. For example, Kazakhstan's education policy aims to provide a safe and inclusive environment for all learners. However, there is a significant discrepancy between policy and practice, as evidenced by the numerous cases of violence and bullying reported in the media. For example, in Petropavlovsk, there was a shocking case of a 9th grade student injuring three peers with an axe, indicating serious omissions in school safety measures (Lykova, 2023). In another case, a student at a sports boarding school was beaten to death under mysterious

circumstances, raising further concerns about the effectiveness of existing school safety protocols (Tengrinews, 2024).

Education Policy and Practice in Kazakhstan

The education system in Kazakhstan is prioritizing the creation of a safe and healthy environment for students, which is in line with the legal and regulatory framework of the country. The latest revision of key articles of the National Education Policy highlights a safe environment in schools by prohibiting violence, designating responsibilities for safety measures and ensuring accountability for the well-being and safety of students. Looking at these provisions in more detail, Article 28 clearly prohibits the use of any form of physical, moral and mental aggression against students. This requirement corresponds with International Human Rights Standards and shows Kazakhstan's intention to protect students from ill-treatment and to maintain a positive and supportive learning environment. On the other hand, the state obligates educational organizations to create a safe environment. Articles 43 and 48 of the Republic of Kazakhstan's law on education point out the essential role of educational organizations in providing a safe and healthy environment for children. Article 43, paragraph 11-2 requires educational organizations to protect and develop the health of their learners, including health promotion concerns in their daily affairs. In addition, Article 48 places the responsibility for creating a healthy and safe environment for learning, education, work and recreation directly on the heads of educational organizations. This dual focus not only ensures a comprehensive approach to student well-being but also holds school leaders responsible for implementing effective safety protocols and health promotion initiatives. Consequently, school administrators are responsible for implementing safety measures, emergency preparedness plans and health promotion initiatives. Thus, the legislative framework sets a clear expectation that educational institutions prioritize the physical and

mental health of their students, providing a supportive environment for their holistic development. In case of violation of any legislations related to law on education will result in consequences under Chapter 11 (Article 67) of the Responsibility for Violation of the Legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Field of Education. Although these regulations on national educational law state that a safe and supportive environment in academic settings is essential by prioritizing physical safety, it does not declare the importance of the mental and emotional health of learners and fails to state the measures that should be taken to promote the intrapersonal wellness of learners.

Discussing the implementation of practices aimed at preventing and intervening in cases of bullying in Kazakhstan, besides the superficial regulation on Education Law (2022), there are very few programs or training for school staff. For example, since October 16, 2023, a 111 helpline has been activated to provide emergency assistance to children and adults who are victims of domestic violence or bullying. According to the official information source of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2023), a program is currently being developed to assist victims of violence and bullying, and the Finnish anti-bullying program, KiVa (Finnish phrase “kiusaamista vastaan” which translates to “against bullying”), will be introduced in NIS schools. Although the support program will help address the consequences of bullying incidents, preventative measures are still not on the agenda in the local context. Starting in March of 2024, a pilot anti-bullying program “Dos Bol Like” has been launched to protect children from the violence of school bullying. The program is aimed at developing students’ skills of constructive response to conflicts, developing children’s social-emotional skills, optimizing interpersonal and community relations, and increasing the level of children’s subjective well-being. By the end of 2022-2023 academic year, only 70,000 students (out of almost 4 million) and 5300 teachers (out of 340,000) from nine regions participated in this pilot

program (Ministry of Enlightenment of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024). This practice demonstrates the inconsistent use of anti-bullying measures. Although the policy about students' safety exists and intervention and preventive measures are starting to be implemented, there is a gap between policy and practice.

Problem Statement

The instances of crime within schools generated considerable concern among parents about the safety of their children and triggered school administrators and policy makers to review security measures in educational settings. In response to incidents such as in Petropavlovsk, Kazakhstan's Prime Minister Alikhan Smailov urged a comprehensive review and improvement of school safety standards, with a focus on increased video surveillance, tighter controls at entrances and regular security checks (Smailov, 2023). Assylbekova et al. (2023) found that nearly a quarter of students had experienced bullying, and more than 20% had considered dropping out of school or harming themselves. These alarming statistics underscore the urgent need to address safety issues in schools. Bullying not only affects students' emotional and psychological well-being but also creates an unsafe learning environment that hinders academic achievement and social development by creating unsafe conditions that can lead to school dropout, mental health problems, and long-term educational inequality (Hysing et al., 2021; Nikolaou, 2022; Singham et al., 2017). To address these problems, Kazakhstan introduced a new standard for the security of educational settings, which came into force on July 1, 2024. According to this standard, all educational institutions must be provided with private security guards, and the guards must have appropriate training and qualifications. Regular security monitoring will be conducted to assess and improve the security infrastructure, including doors, windows, fencing, surveillance systems, alarms and checkpoints. These measures aim to create a safer environment for pupils and staff and to ensure that schools

are better prepared to deal with potential threats. However, these technical and organizational measures are limited to the physical security of students and staff, whereas students' feeling of being safe includes social, emotional, intellectual, and civic security as well. Consequently, students' emotional, mental, and social safety are not given sufficient attention, while these aspects are important factors in the children's healthy development.

As stated earlier, the statistics on bullying and violence emphasize the importance of urgent intervention in the situation. On the other hand, while bullying receives extensive research attention globally (Francis et al., 2022; Kartal & Bilgin, 2009), it remains understudied within the Kazakhstani school context. There is lack of research focusing on the broader aspects of a safe learning environment in Kazakhstan, with existing studies predominantly centered around the effects of bullying on the physical and mental health of students and assessment of the anti-bullying program effectiveness in Kazakhstani schools. Since teachers play an important role in eliminating school bullying, both teacher-centered and student-centered discipline techniques can contribute to positive changes in school discipline systems (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Hui et al., 2011). Therefore, there needs to be more research done and proper intervention should be proceeded toward bullying to create a safer learning environment, along with a shortage of relevant and current statistics in this area.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of novice and experienced secondary school teachers regarding a safe school environment in selected schools in Astana using the following research questions:

1. What are the teachers' perceptions of a safe learning environment in various types (public and private) of schools in Astana?

2. How do teachers' gender, background, and experience influence their perceptions of and responses to unsafe conditions in school?
3. What are the challenges experienced by teachers in implementing strategies for safe schools?

This research aims to identify how school teachers' experiences influence their understanding and responses to school safety issues. By analyzing their responses, the specific challenges teachers face in implementing safety strategies could be identified along with how these challenges vary between different types of schools, such as mainstream and private schools.

Significance of Study

High school teachers, school administrators and research participants working in Astana can benefit from this study, as its findings can help them reflect on existing problems in their educational institutions, give them ideas on how to foster and strengthen a safe and healthy climate in educational organizations, in addition to supporting secondary school teachers in creating a positive learning environment in their classrooms. The outcomes can help school administration identify early patterns of unsafe climate and develop effective prevention and intervention strategies by creating a more supportive and safer environment for all students. Enabling teachers to recognize and respond promptly to cases of insecurity (i.e. violent behaviors, bullying, sexual harassment, and discrimination) and helping them address bullying behavior will promote a healthier learning environment where students' mental and physical health are prioritized and protected (Ojukwu, 2017; Ojukwu & Chigozirim, 2015). Teachers will be able to create a more conducive learning environment when they can understand their students' safety concerns. This leads to better classroom management and more effective teaching practices. Parents also may benefit from more open and informed communication with teachers, facilitating a collaborative

approach to bullying prevention and intervention. Students are the primary beneficiaries of this study, as it aims to create a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment for learning. Moreover, the findings may provide evidence-based recommendations for school administrators and policymakers to design and implement effective safety policies, interventions, targeted support, and professional development. By fostering a safe and supportive school environment, the research indirectly contributes to improving student well-being and academic performance.

Definitions of Terms

A Safe Learning Environment

In this study, a safe learning environment is operationalized as a multidimensional learning setting that prioritizes the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of both teachers and students, including aspects such as physical safety, emotional support, respect for diversity, and opportunities for active participation in the learning process in which threats and disruptions are minimized (Haidari & Karakus, 2019; Mubita et al., 2023; Young et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2009).

Bullying

This study defines bullying in accordance with description on Education Law of Kazakhstan (Adilet LIS, 2024). Bullying is defined as repeated (two or more times) humiliating actions, harassment or intimidation directed at a child. It includes any attempts to coerce a child to do or refrain from doing certain acts. Bullying can occur in public or implicitly. Bullying also can take place through social media, telecommunication networks or online platforms (cyberbullying).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines the literature related to teachers' perceptions and experiences of a safe learning environment. It begins with a description of the theoretical framework that guides the research study. Then, studies related to the following themes are explored: importance of a safe learning environment, unsafe schools, impact of safety on students' performance, overview of international standards, importance of teachers' perceptions, and challenges and strategies to improve safety measures within educational settings. These themes were chosen based on their direct relevance to both the research questions and the theoretical framework on which this study is based. Additionally, they address key aspects of my research questions, specifically how teachers perceive and respond to unsafe conditions, what factors influence their perceptions, and what challenges they face in implementing safety strategies. By structuring the review around these themes, I aim to provide a comprehensive analysis that not only contextualizes existing research but also situates my study within the broader discourse of safe school environments. The chapter ends with a summary.

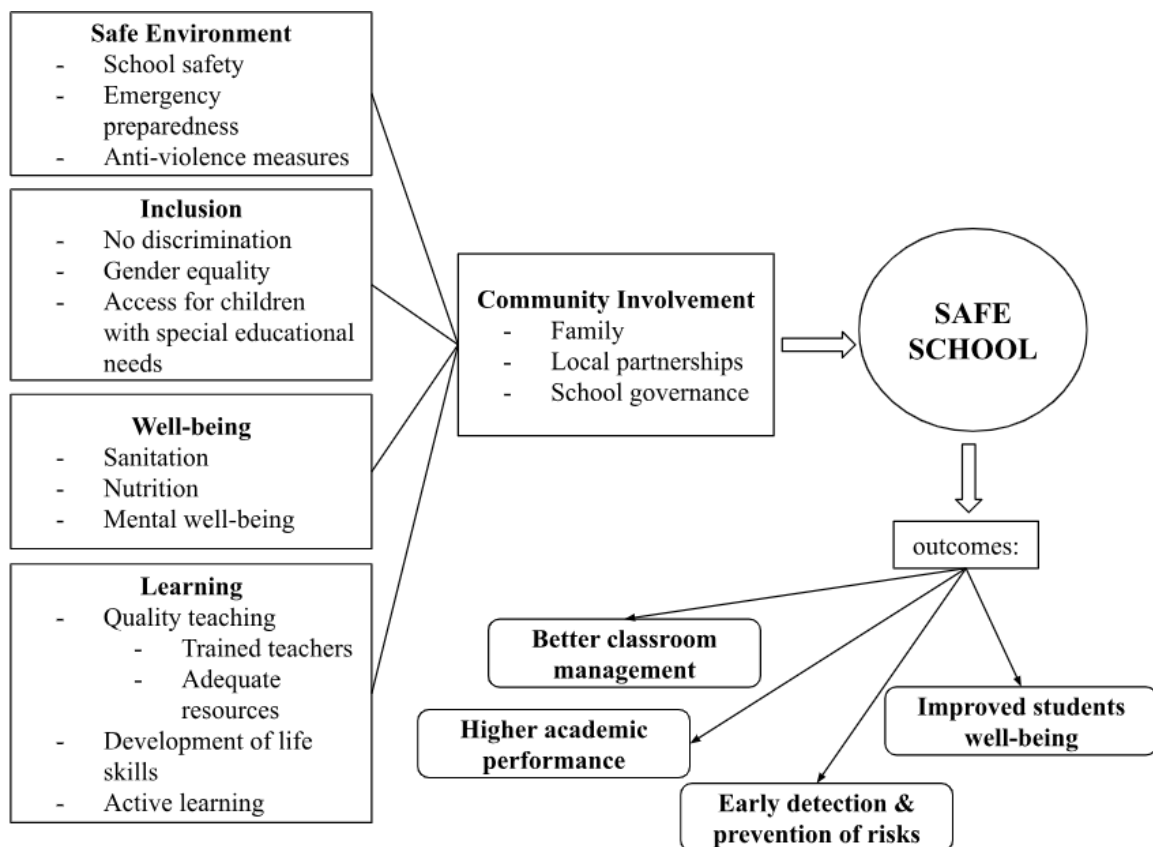
Theoretical Framework

To define features of safe learning schools, I will adopt the United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) framework. The reason for using the CFS framework is that it is a comprehensive approach that promotes a safe, healthy, and supportive educational environment that prioritizes the well-being and holistic development of children in school settings. It recognizes the fundamental rights of children to quality education in a secure and inclusive setting, free from violence, discrimination, and exploitation (Chabbott, 2004). On the other hand, Fitriani et al. (2021) provide a case study of how the CFS model can be interpreted and applied at the school level. Their study shows how the components of the CFS model were localized and implemented in an

Indonesian school setting. This extends my theoretical approach by illustrating the usefulness and flexibility of CFS in the real world when addressing school safety issues. CFS includes five core dimensions that together contribute to a safe, inclusive and effective school environment: Safe Environment, Learning, Inclusion, Well-being and Community Engagement (UNICEF, 2009). Figure 1 provides a schematic explanation of relationship among dimensions.

Figure 1

CFS Framework



Note. Adopted from UNICEF’s Child Friendly Schools Manual.

These pillars comprehensively reflect the multi-dimensional nature of school safety, which goes beyond physical protection to include emotional, social and academic support for all students. The “Safe Environment” pillar includes school safety, emergency preparedness, and anti-violence measures which directly aligns with how teachers define

and address school safety in my study. The Learning and Inclusion components emphasize the importance of quality teaching, trained staff, and equal access to education, which is critical to understanding the challenges teachers face in implementing safety strategies. In addition, the “Well-Being” and “Community Involvement” components emphasize factors such as mental health, sanitation, and the role of family and partnerships in creating a safe learning space (see Figure 1).

I chose this framework because it holistically reflects the structural, pedagogical, and psychosocial aspects of safe schools to analyze teachers’ views in the Kazakhstani context. Drawing on this framework, safety can be seen not only as the absence of harm, but also as the presence of a supportive environment for learning and well-being.

The Importance of a Safe Learning Environment

A school is a place which almost every child in the world attends to learn, develop, and improve their lives. For a child to perform well, a school needs to be an environment where learners and teachers will be able to realize their shared goals. However, going to school does not always bring children positive emotions. It may be the forced stay in unequipped classrooms, hunger, thirst or feeling unwell; it may also be the fear of punishment, humiliation, bullying or even violence from teachers and classmates. Unfortunately, when conditions are deplorable at school and home, academic achievement is no longer realistic.

Creating a safe and supportive school climate for learning and personal growth of all students is an indicator of quality education and top priority for school leaders and society at large (Geller et al., 2007; Nickerson et al., 2021). School safety is influenced by various factors which can be grouped under two categories: factors related to physical and emotional safety. According to the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE), physical safety involves safeguarding of all involved

individuals in schooling from acts of aggression, violence, harassment, usage of weapons or toxic substances during school hours and school-related events. Besides protecting stakeholders from different types of threats, UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools Manual includes factors such as comfortable buildings that are resistant to regional ecological climate, access to clean water and hygiene facilities, safety and health provisions, and ergonomic classrooms as physical school protection (Wright et al., 2009).

Whereas physical safety involves protection from environmental hazards and potential threats that cause physical harm or injury, emotional safety involves prevention from socio-emotional abuse, psychological trauma, and discrimination. Emotional safety in schools is a learner's experience characterized by emotional safety, a sense of security and confidence to take risks, to openly express their emotions, and a feeling of being challenged and excited to explore new opportunities (NCSSLE, n.d.). It is important for students to experience a sense of safety and self-assurance when expressing their emotions and accepting difficulties that promote curiosity and discovery (Gonzalez et al., 2020). Although physical and emotional safety are two different aspects of school safety, some threats such as bullying may have an effect on both protection measures. Fredrick et al. (2021) claim that students felt less emotionally and physically safe in schools where bullying occurred frequently. Therefore, adopting a holistic strategy to school safety, covering both physical security measures and emotional well-being were suggested in a few studies (Nickerson et al., 2021; Vicario & Sallán, 2017).

The Impact of School Climate on Students Performance and Well-being

The issue of school safety has gained significant importance due to its impact on the learning environment and academic achievements of learners. There are several studies that emphasize the important impact of the learning environment on students' well-being and performance (Amali et al., 2023; Booren et al., 2011; Cardenas & Cerado, 2016; Kiuru

et al., 2019). Amali et al. (2023) state that core components of the learning environment, such as strategies for classroom management, interactions between teachers and students, and school climate, can significantly shape students' academic and social outcomes. This quantitative study based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory determined that on mesosystem level Malaysian students prefer a supportive environment where making mistakes without receiving punishment from the teacher or ridicule from their peers. Similarly, another quantitative research conducted by Booren et al. (2011) in the USA highlights that feeling safe in the classroom has an impact on engagement and academic achievement, and claims that adolescents' perceptions of school safety and school climate are essential aspects of students' academic culture.

Sharma (2015) conducted a qualitative study on secondary school students in New Zealand. The findings indicated that teachers play a significant role in fostering a supportive environment where students feel free to ask questions, engage in challenging tasks, and make mistakes. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of classroom culture, teacher-student relationships, and group activities that involve collaborative dialogue, which the study shows enhances students' willingness to take risks in mathematics for instance. However, the study used a small non-random sample and acknowledges the need for research with more extensive, diverse samples to generalize the findings.

In another longitudinal study of Finnish students for 3 years in the transitional period from primary to secondary school by Kiuru et al. (2019), models were constructed to measure feelings of satisfaction and stress during schooling and conflicts in relationships with parents, teachers, and friends. This study findings suggest that positive and supportive relationships with teachers, parents, and peers are essential for adolescents'

well-being at school and academic achievement during educational transitions in Finnish schools.

While the positive effects of a safe learning environment are well-documented, it is equally crucial to understand that when schools are unsafe, it can affect how well students perform and feel in their classes (Hebib & Žunić-Pavlović, 2018; Lah, 2020; Young et al., 2016). According to an analysis by the United States Agency for International Development (n.d.), factors contributing to an unsafe learning environment include internal risks (bullying and emotional abuse, gender-based school violence), external risks (attacks during travel to and from school and ideological assaults targeting the learning environment), and environmental risks (earthquake, flooding, infectious diseases, etc.). These threats not only jeopardize students' physical safety but also harm their academic performance.

In Tanzania, Kibriya and Jones's (2021) study on the importance of a safe learning environment strongly indicate the adverse effects of an insecure educational setting on students' academic performance of second graders in standardized tests in math and English. The study reveals that the gender of students, home and school facilities, location of school in urban or rural areas, and teachers' and parents' attributes have a significant effect on school climate. Interestingly, their study demonstrated that the assigning security guards to schools deemed unsafe improves student success compared to schools without security services in Tanzania. This highlights a significant link between school safety and learning outcomes.

Another study found that children who experience physical and emotional fear in New York schools are more likely to report more instances of victimization, as well as low levels of involvement and a sense of belonging (Lacoe, 2016). This implies the impact of feeling safe in school on students' socialization opportunities and social-emotional well-

being. Consequently, this feeling can hinder students' capacity to focus and participate in academic, social, and emotional activities, ultimately resulting in mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and low concentration (Bernal-Morales et al., 2015; Nickerson et al., 2021). Students who feel unsafe are vulnerable to low attendance, academic failure, and ultimately dropping out of school. A substantial number of studies indicate that low student engagement and school insecurity are negatively correlated with academic achievement and increased likelihood of school dropout (Fall & Roberts, 2011; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Lee, 2013; McMillan & Reed, 1994). In addition, students who feel unsafe or separated from the school community are more likely to struggle academically and ultimately leave school before graduation (Fall & Roberts, 2011; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Lee (2013) also suggests that increasing student engagement and providing a safe and supportive school environment are essential in preventing negative consequences, underscoring the importance of addressing safety issues and fostering a favorable climate, which are critical to student welfare and academic achievement. All these findings highlight the significance of school safety and climate in shaping adolescents' learning performance and indicate a need for furthermore contextualized research.

Overview of International School Safety Standards

In response to various security concerns within school walls, various international organizations and governments have developed guidelines and policies to ensure safe schools. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has developed a "Safe Schools Declaration" that outlines a set of principles and commitments to protect students and educational institutions during armed conflict (Nickerson et al., 2021). Similarly, the European Union has taken a proactive approach to addressing school safety by establishing the "European Safe Schools Network," a

collaborative initiative that brings together member states to share best practices and coordinate efforts to improve overall school safety (Nickerson et al., 2021).

Even though UNICEF set certain standards on Child Friendly Schools, the CFS models of schools vary from country to country and from region to region. Not surprisingly, Cohen and Espelage (2020) also mentioned in their book titled “Feeling Safe in School” their decision of not including “developing,” or low-income countries regarding the needs that differ from countries in which social and emotional safety matters just as much as physical safety and have been the agenda for decades.

Importance of Teacher Perceptions in Shaping School Safety

Education practitioners have an important role in preventing and overcoming bullying. It is imperative to provide training for teachers and school staff to enable them to identify the signs of bullying and respond with appropriate actions (Chowdhury, 2020; Rose et al., 2018; Yerger & Gehret, 2011).

A mixed study involving 225 teachers with an average of 19.2 years from preschools, primary and secondary schools in Spain revealed mixed perceptions among teachers regarding school climate (Martínez-Carrera et al., 2024). More than half of participants of the study believed that the use of ICT has exacerbated coexistence problems. In addition, 54.67% of the teachers equated bullying with academic performance problems among students. However, one third downplayed the significance of these problems indicating lack of recognition of these problems among teachers. On the other hand, teachers expressed interest in receiving specialized training in bullying prevention. Nevertheless, they maintained confidence in their ability to manage their classrooms and address bullying-related problems independently, perceiving such acts as integral to their educational responsibilities (Martínez-Carrera et al., 2024; Mobarki et al., 2020). Even though teachers showed interest in anti-bullying prevention programs, they

mentioned their teaching workload as a hindrance in their ability to focus on bullying prevention (Martínez-Carrera et al., 2024). Teachers were not confident in the effectiveness of prevention measures and were not aware of successful bullying prevention programs (Kartal & Bilgin, 2009; Martínez-Carrera et al., 2024). They strongly believed in the importance of family involvement and student learning as the main prevention strategies. In addition, they advocated integrating values and moral education into the curriculum, organizing talks, cultural activities and assemblies, training teachers, and collaborating with public safety agencies (Eisenberg et al., 2021; Martínez-Carrera et al., 2024).

A study conducted by Kartal and Bilgin (2009) in elementary school in Turkey reveals the discrepancy between teachers' and students' perception of types of bullying. While teacher reports emphasized physical bullying over verbal bullying, student reports indicated that verbal bullying is the most common form of bullying. This could be due to the challenge that teachers face in identifying verbal bullying, as they may not recognize it as such when they hear it. Consequently, it indicates that teachers should have an increased awareness of bullying and provide support to students in acquiring effective conflict resolution techniques.

A quantitative study by Mobarki et al. (2020) in Jizan, Saudi Arabia assessed teachers' perceptions of bullying in elementary schools focusing on gender, age, experience, and other factors influencing their views. The findings indicated that concern about bullying among female teachers were statistically significant compared to their male counterparts, which is likely due to their empathy and attention to children's behavior. This is consistent with previous research emphasizing strong perceptions of bullying among female teachers (Abbas et al., 2020; Grigoropoulos, 2022).

Grigoropoulos's (2022) study on early childhood educators in Greece found that working experience and impact of education level did not significantly affect teachers' knowledge of bullying in the classroom. However, Mobarki et al. (2020) states that younger teachers with 1 to 5 years of experience perceived bullying more acutely. On the other hand, Grigoropoulos (2022) points out the subjectivity of bullying, as perceptions can vary among staff members working with the same group of children.

According to Altinsoy and Okan (2017), contextual factors such as classroom size and conditions, policy regulations, administrative support, and student-related challenges greatly impact on how teachers perceive the safe learning environment. Some research in Portugal and New York show that public school teachers often perceive school safety as a structural and behavioral problem influenced by inadequate security measures, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of administrative support (Boyd et al., 2011; Flores & Day, 2006). On the other hand, Flores and Day (2006) reported that Portuguese teachers' positive and negative interactions with their former teachers as students strongly influenced their approaches to teaching. Some teachers sought to imitate their role models, while others consciously avoided the ineffective or discouraging practices they observed in their schools. Although most teachers rely on their prior experiences, their perceptions are also influenced by initial teacher training during their pre-service studies and the school context. Many teachers mention that these training courses are overly theoretical and do not adequately prepare them for the complexities of real classroom and school practices (Flores & Day, 2006). The study also found that teachers working in collaborative and supportive schools are more likely to remain enthusiastic and use innovative teaching methods.

Summary

The review of existing research has shown the importance of school climate in educational settings, impact of school safety on students' well-being and academic performance and the roles of teachers' perspectives in enhancing a safe learning environment. However, not much is known about the perceptions of Kazakhstani teachers regarding the supportive school climate. Specifically, there has been no comprehensive analysis of how the CFS framework is reflected in school environments in Kazakhstan. This gap may be due to limited prioritization of teacher voice in educational research or a lack of systematic focus on school climate in national education policies. Furthermore, review of the studies tends to suggest that the learning outcomes are influenced by early identification of unsafe climate and developing effective prevention and intervention strategies by creating a more supportive, safe, and sound environment for all students. The studies have also shown that teachers can create a more conducive learning environment when they understand their students' safety concerns and experiences. This leads to better classroom management and more effective teaching practices. In this study, I aim to explore how teachers' current perceptions and lived experiences of school safety align with the principles of CFS in Astana's educational institutions. With a clear understanding of the research gap and the benefits of exploring safe learning environments, the following methodology chapter will outline the approach used to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences of creating and maintaining a safe environment in secondary schools in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The previous chapter reviewed the relevant literature on the theoretical framework, importance of school safety for learners, impact of school climate on students' performance and well-being, the role of teachers' perception in ensuring safety measures at school, and the challenges they face in improving school safety. This chapter describes the main components of the methodological section of the study, particularly the research design, research site, participant selection, data collection tools and data analysis procedures. In addition, the chapter discusses the ethical aspects of the study and possible risk factors.

Research Design

Since this study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of a safe learning environment in different school types regarding their teaching experience, a qualitative phenomenological approach was chosen. Creswell (2012) states that one of the characteristics of qualitative research is a deep "detailed understanding of the central phenomenon" (p. 16). As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) affirm, the purpose of phenomenological inquiry is to discover the essence or fundamental structure of concrete human experience. Consequently, this method allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences of the teachers and understand the phenomenon of a safe learning environment from their perspectives in a particular school context (Qutoshi, 2018; Ramsook, 2018). Therefore, I conducted a phenomenological study to understand the lived experiences of educators on the phenomenon of 'a safe learning environment'. In this research, I focused on how teachers in two schools perceive a safe school environment and the factors they believe contribute to a safe learning classroom. The study explored how teachers' experience and background influence their perceptions. The challenges teachers face in

nurturing a safe environment and the strategies they use to promote a safe environment for learners were also explored.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in two different types of secondary schools in Astana city: public and private schools. The rationale for choosing these two school types is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, as existing literature suggests that school contexts may influence teachers' perceptions and experiences (Keiler, 2018). First, a public mainstream school follows the national curriculum and were included to understand the challenges teachers face in a typical school setting. Second, a private school operates on its own curriculum integrated with the national standard curriculum and their inclusion in the study can show how the resources and school policies in a private setting shape teachers' experience. To align with the focus on secondary education, schools were required to offer educational programs from grades 5 through 11. Preference was given to schools with a diverse teaching staff in terms of professional experience, background, and gender, as this diversity allows for a deeper and more representative understanding of teachers' perceptions of school safety. Additionally, selected schools were required to have been in operation for at least three years to ensure a stable educational environment and the presence of established safety practices. Schools were excluded if they offered only primary education, had been in operation for less than two years, or served specialized populations (e.g., students with special needs or vocational training), as such institutions were not considered representative of mainstream secondary education settings in Astana.

Sampling Procedure

In this study, a purposeful sampling technique was used to select participants. Purposeful sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which participants are deliberately selected based on certain characteristics or criteria to ensure that they possess

features relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). This sampling approach is well suited for qualitative studies such as phenomenological research because it allows the researcher to identify and select individuals who know about or have experienced the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). By utilizing purposive sampling, I can ensure that the selected teachers have the necessary experiences and perspectives to provide rich and detailed information about their perceptions of safe learning environments in a variety of school contexts.

For this study, participants from two different schools were selected based on the following criteria: a) novice teachers (0-3 years of working experience at this school) and b) experienced teachers (more than 3 years of experience in teaching at this school) were recruited regardless of their gender, age, marital status, linguistic background, and subject areas they teach. Eight secondary school teachers (from one public and one private school in Astana) participated in semi-structured interviews. There were no restrictions on gender, age or subject area, allowing for a diverse pool of participants. This purposeful, criterion-based sampling ensured that participants were particularly knowledgeable or experienced with the phenomenon of school safety (Palinkas et al., 2015).

After receiving approval from the GSE Ethical Review Committee, I contacted the principals of the selected schools through professional networks. I sent official letters outlining the purpose of the study, minimal risks, potential benefits, and procedures for conducting the interviews. Upon obtaining consent from the principals, I provided each school with informed consent forms in both Kazakh and Russian languages. The school directors assisted in distributing these documents to the teaching staff and in identifying teachers who met the sampling criteria. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary – interested teachers responded on their own, and the school directors shared only the names of those who expressed a willingness to take part. All potential participants were given the

opportunity to review the study information and ask questions before deciding whether to participate.

Instrument for Data Collection

To collect qualitative data for my phenomenological study, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary data collection method. According to Silverman (2017), semi-structured interviews give participants the flexibility to express their points of view and allow researchers to obtain detailed information on specific topics. Semi-structured interview guide was specifically designed for this study based on extensive review of literature related to CFS. This guide was aligned with research questions of the study. The interview questions were designed to explore teachers' perceptions of safe learning environments, their experiences in creating such environments, and the factors influencing their views. The interview questions were open-ended and designed to encourage participants to share their life experiences, concerns and strategies related to creating safe learning environments. The demographic information of participants was collected on eight personal and professional variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, level of education, type of school, language of instruction, teaching experience, and length of teaching experience, at the same school (see Table 1). The semi-structured interview guide, presented in Appendix D1, consisted of four sections and included fifteen items aimed at exploring teachers' perception, experiences, and challenges related to a safe learning environment. To ensure the validity of the tool, a pilot interview was conducted in which the open-ended questions were asked by five teachers. Based on their feedback, the questions were revised for clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness, and minor changes were made to the wording and sequence of items to improve their effectiveness in obtaining detailed responses.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews were conducted either in person at the school or online via Zoom, depending on the availability and level of convenience of the participant. Approximately half of the teachers (n=4) opted for online interviews due to scheduling constraints and personal preference, while the rest met with the researcher face-to-face. Regardless of the mode, each interview was conducted in a private setting to ensure confidentiality and comfort. A quiet, designated room in the school was used for face-to-face meetings.

The interviews were conducted in participants' native languages Kazakh and Russian to ensure comfort and clarity of communication. All interview questions followed the protocol approved by the Ethics Committee. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, ranging from 20 to 40 minutes depending on the participant's responses. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription. Once the interviews were transcribed, they were translated word-by-word using Google Translate before analysis. All audio recordings were permanently deleted to maintain confidentiality and adhere to ethical research standards.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed thematically using Clarke and Braun's (2013) six step data analysis framework. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), thematic analysis can uncover nuanced insights and understandings that contribute to a rich and comprehensive understanding of the topic. Following the instructions from Merriam and Tisdell (2016), responses from in-depth semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data were uploaded to Google Sheets and manually transcribed with thematic labels. Initial codes were then generated by systematically highlighting significant features of participants' responses through coloring the codes (see Appendix E). Then, I organized codes to develop overarching themes that capture the main ideas or patterns in the data.

The emerging themes were reviewed and refined. Consequently, I interpreted main ideas in relation to the research questions and objectives, considering the context and participants' perspectives on a safe learning environment in their educational settings. Finally, I compared and contrasted the patterns of teachers' perceptions and experiences of ensuring a safe school climate in accordance with their teaching experiences and school facilities depending on the school type.

Ethical Considerations

During the research process, I was mindful of potential risks that may arise, such as emotional distress or discomfort experienced by participants during the interview. To mitigate these risks, I have:

- Clearly explained the purpose of the research and the interview process to set appropriate expectations.
- Offered participants the opportunity to take a break or stop the interview if they feel uncomfortable.
- Ensured that all data collected was securely stored and that only the researcher had access to it.

In addition, the research may be limited by participants' willingness to openly share their personal experiences and views during the interview. To address this, I established a positive relationship with participants, ensured confidentiality and created a safe and comfortable interview environment to encourage their honest responses.

Regarding ethical considerations, I obtained informed consent from all participants and ensured their voluntary participation. The privacy and confidentiality of participants were protected through the use of nominal identities and secure data storage.

Summary

Overall, this chapter outlined the key elements of the research methodology. It detailed the research design, the location of the study, the recruitment of participants, and the data collection instruments and procedures. At the end, the chapter presented the ethical considerations of the study. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore teachers' perceptions of safe learning environments in different school contexts in Astana, Kazakhstan. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing literature on school safety and provide valuable insights for policy makers, school administrators and teacher educators to promote safe learning environments.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of eight secondary school teachers regarding a safe learning environment in one public and one private school in Astana. Guided by UNICEF's Children Friendly Schools framework data was collected through semi-structured interviews from the eight teachers. After presenting the demographic characteristics of the schools and participants, the chapter is organized around five main themes and fourteen sub-themes (see Table 2) that emerged from the coding of interview data through inductive thematic analysis which aims to address the study's main research questions. Direct quotes from interviews are included to provide a deeper understanding of the teacher's views on safety in their schools. The chapter ends with a summary.

Descriptions of Research Site and Participants

School Characteristics

Two schools in Astana city were selected for the study: a public school and a private school. The names of schools are coded due to ethical reasons.

School 1 is a public school in Astana which follows a standard national curriculum. It accommodates more than 2300 students from the 0 to 11 grades. The school has been functioning for four years.

School 2 is a private school in Astana which has a Cambridge curriculum adapted to national standards. There are more than 1000 students studying from the 0 to 11 grades. The school has been operating for four years.

Participant Characteristics

Eight teachers were selected from two schools, four teachers from each school. Table 1 provides demographic information for participants. The participants' ages varied

between 20 and 59 years. The study includes both novice and experienced educators teaching different subjects to gain a broader understanding of safety across various subject contexts. Teachers from each school were chosen to ensure maximum diversity in terms of age, gender, teaching subject, teaching experience, educational level and background. All interviews were conducted in their native languages, Kazakh or Russian, then transcribed and translated into English. To maintain confidentiality, each respondent was given an alphanumeric code, and their identities remain anonymous.

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Participants

Participant Code	Age	Gender	Type of School	Teaching Experience	Teaching Subject	Educational Background	Education Level
T1	21	Female	Public	5 months	English	In education	Bachelors
T2	20	Female	Public	5 months	Math	In education	Bachelors
T3	44	Female	Public	11 years	Physics	In education	Bachelors
T4	59	Male	Public	30 years	Physics	Non-education	Bachelors
T5	24	Female	Private	5 months	Chemistry	In education	Masters
T6	26	Male	Private	4 years	Physics	Non-education	Bachelors
T7	40	Male	Private	8 years	Physics	In education	PhD
T8	34	Male	Private	8 years	Biology	In education	Masters

Note. T = Teacher.

Themes and Sub-themes

During the interviews, participants were asked to describe their understanding of the term “safe learning environment,” reflecting on how their background and experience shaped their perspectives and discuss the challenges they face in implementing school

safety strategies. The interviews followed a semi-structured format that allows for in-depth exploration of participants' views.

Thematic inductive analysis of data emerged four overarching themes and twelve subthemes (see Table 2), capturing the diverse perceptions and lived experiences of secondary school teachers in fostering a safe learning environment. The main themes include: 1) Understanding of a safe school; 2) Impact of a safe school environment; 3) Impact of teachers' background on their perceptions; 4) Challenges; 5) Other factors. These themes provide a comprehensive insight into the complexities of school safety from the perspective and experience of educators working in two different school contexts.

Table 2 displays the research questions, corresponding themes and sub-themes in. Notably, the sequence in which themes appeared varied among participants, reflecting the individual nature of their experiences and perceptions.

Table 2

The Study Research Questions, Themes, and Sub-themes

Research Questions	Themes	Subthemes
1. What are the teachers' perceptions of a safe learning environment in various types (public and private) of schools in Astana?	Understanding of a safe school	Physical safety Emotional and psychological safety Social safety
	Impact of a safe school environment	
2. How do teachers' gender, background, and experience influence their perceptions of and	Impact of teachers' background on their perceptions	School type Teaching experience and gender Professional development

responses to unsafe conditions in school?

3. What are the challenges experienced by teachers in implementing strategies for safe schools?

Challenges

Other factors

Values and beliefs

Lack of adjustment for new students

Overcrowded classrooms

Lack of preventive measures

Limited training and support on emotional intelligence

Inadequate communication and coordination

Families' role in a safe learning environment

Technology's role in safety

Understanding of a Safe School Environment

Based on the interviews, teachers have a variety of perspectives on defining a safe and comfortable learning environment. Their responses reflect a combination of physical, emotional, psychological and social elements, emphasizing the importance of each in creating an environment promoting both academic success and personal well-being.

Physical Safety. A fundamental theme that emerged from the interviews is the emphasis on physical safety as the top priority. The majority of participants (6 out of 8) mentioned physical safety as the first thought that came to their minds. They realize that it goes beyond just classroom management to include a variety of safety measures and preparedness strategies. Many teachers expressed the importance of maintaining safe and functional physical spaces such as classrooms, corridors and laboratories. Proper maintenance of desks, chairs, and equipment (e.g., fire safety measures, safe electrical outlets) was considered vital to physical safety. Important safety features such as fire-resistant materials, emergency signs and regular evacuation drills were also mentioned.

One of the participants (T6) emphasized the priority of maintaining a hazard-free environment for the physical health of learners: “The most important aspect is, of course, physical safety – ensuring there are no threats to a child’s health.” This broad view of safety includes attention to even the smallest details, such as ensuring “even simple things like chairs and desks should be in good condition so that when a student sits down, they don’t fall,” which underscores the importance of a well-maintained physical environment. Teachers also recognize that safety measures should be comprehensive, covering both the classroom and the broader school grounds. For instance, T3 and T8 pointed out that “In terms of physical safety, we introduced certain measures this year. For example, we have a Face ID system – an outsider simply cannot pass through the checkpoint,” emphasizing the role of modern technology in maintaining secure school premises. Many teachers, such as T1 and T8, highlighted the importance of ensuring that the classroom and school premises are free from physical hazards. For example, an experienced teacher T8 stated, “In terms of physical safety, we introduced certain measures this year... the entire school is fenced, and the territory is completely closed,” which reflects the school’s commitment to preventing any potential threats to students’ physical safety. The following quotes from participants describe their perception of physical security and how they see teachers’ role in ensuring security: “Physical safety includes basic things. If it’s a laboratory class, then everything should be as safe as possible. The teacher is one of the key figures in the classroom responsible for ensuring this safety” (T7); “... it’s essential to regularly inspect and maintain the school’s safety systems” (T8); “Schools should have lounge areas with poufs and special seating areas where students can sit, work on additional assignments, and prepare for their lessons in a relaxed environment” (T3); “...such as fire safety. In our school, we have fire-resistant curtains to prevent flames from spreading in case of a fire. This is for emergency situations. Proper signage should be placed everywhere. For

example, if the cleaning staff mops the floor, they must put up a warning sign to inform students that the floor is wet. Small details like this matter” (T7).

Emotional and Psychological Safety. Beyond physical safety, while teachers also recognize the importance of emotional and psychological safety, which allows students to feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgment, there are clear differences in how they perceive its role in creating a supportive learning environment. One common perspective among participants is the belief that the teacher-student relationship plays a central role in emotional safety. Several teachers emphasize the need for trust and openness in this relationship, believing that when students feel understood and supported by teachers, they are more likely to feel emotionally secure. Female teacher T5 underscores the importance of trust when she states, “If a student is afraid to express their thoughts, the teacher will not be able to accurately assess their level of knowledge.” This comment implies that emotional safety is not only about creating a safe space for academic enhancement but also about fostering an environment in which students feel they can express themselves and share their thoughts without judgment. By contrast, female novice teacher T1 adds another dimension, emphasizing that teachers should refrain from reprimanding students in front of the class, as “such actions may lead the child to withdraw, become reserved, and lose motivation for learning.” Here, the emphasis is on avoiding actions that could harm a student’s emotional state and create barriers to effective learning. Both teachers agree on the importance of positive teacher-student relationships but highlight different aspects: one focusing on open communication and the other on protecting students from humiliation.

Teachers believe that when students feel emotionally secure, they are better able to focus on learning because their emotional well-being directly affects their academic performance. Consequently, participants emphasize how a student’s mental state directly

influences their ability to learn, suggesting that a lack of emotional safety can severely hinder academic engagement. They work to create an environment where students feel respected, supported, and protected from bullying, and often collaborate with psychologists (T1, T6, and T8) and classroom teachers to ensure the overall well-being of their students. A safe learning environment is also characterized by a positive classroom atmosphere where students can trust their teachers and peers and conflicts are resolved in a constructive way. For instance, T8 shared: “A student’s psychological and emotional state significantly affects their academic performance. If a student experiences instability, anxiety, or emotional distress, it can lead to a loss of concentration.” Moreover, T1 pointed out, that “[emotional safety] enables students to express their thoughts freely without hesitation.”

Social Safety. Based on the interviews, teachers identify many aspects of social safety in the learning environment, which are categorized into macro- and meso-levels. These aspects vary in scale from broad structural factors (macro-level) to more immediate, classroom-specific factors (meso-level), and teacher-student interactions (micro level). At the micro level, the focus shifts to the direct and personal interactions that teachers have with their students on a day-to-day basis within the classroom context. These aspects are analyzed in detail below.

In the macro context, novice teacher T5 links social safety to the peace and stability of the country by noting “the absence of war in the country is the most fundamental factor for a safe learning environment.” This statement reflects her perception that a stable national environment free from war and external threats is crucial for creating a socially safe space for children to learn. If students are living in a country that is experiencing conflict or instability, consequently, their ability to feel secure in school is compromised. Based on T5, national peace and security provide the foundation upon which schools can

operate effectively and ensure the safety of students. This perspective highlights the interdependence of national stability and the safety of students in schools.

At the meso-level, teachers focus on specific aspects of the school environment that facilitate or inhibit students' social safety. These factors include school policies, physical security measures, school support systems and the overall culture of the school. Public school teacher T1, T3, and T4 emphasized the importance of school emergency security systems, surveillance cameras, and access control mechanisms to ensure security in interaction within the school. These measures help prevent incidents involving outsiders and certain groups of people, protect students from possible harm such as "... terrorism," "... bullying in the classroom," and provide peace of mind for both students and teachers. These physical security measures help provide a framework of security where students can focus on learning and socializing without fear of external threats through providing social security.

Another aspect of social safety at the meso-level is school climate, which includes student-teacher interactions, policies governing behavior, and the general atmosphere of the school. Experienced male teacher T7 argue that fair treatment is important to maintain social safety in school. He emphasizes that "a teacher should treat all students as equally and fairly as possible." This fairness goes beyond classroom socializing, affecting how students perceive the school environment as a whole. If students feel that they are being treated unfairly or excluded, this can cause insecurity and undermine their social security.

One of the most important aspects at the micro level is the relationship between teachers and students in the classroom. T8 teacher from private school highlights the importance of creating a supportive environment where students can express themselves freely without fear of being judged. He explains that students should be encouraged to ask questions and make mistakes without fear of being ridiculed. This sense of emotional

security allows students to engage in the learning process with confidence and reduces the fear that often prevents them from participating.

Teachers also state the importance of peer relationships and the need for effective conflict resolution to ensure social safety. T5 draws attention to the consequences of bullying, noting that "... students who excel academically are bullied by their peers, who call them names like "nerd" or "botan [nerd]" (a slang term in Russian for an overachiever)," leading to exclusion from school. This reflects the detrimental impact of negative peer interactions on students' learning experiences such as intentionally avoiding active participation in the learning process as T5 stated: "As a result, some students intentionally start performing poorly in school to avoid being targeted." T3 shares similar concerns, describing how bullying in the classroom can damage students' mental health and hinder their ability to integrate into the school community. Both teachers point to the importance of preventing and addressing bullying through open communication, peer education and teacher intervention.

Impact of a Safe School Environment

Teachers have different views on how a safe learning environment affects student success, but all agree that it is essential for students' growth. T5 articulates that when students feel emotionally safe and not intimidated, they are more likely to engage in learning and achieve good academic results:

I believe a safe learning environment is a space where a student can feel free and is not hindered in their work or thoughts. By free, I mean that students should be able to express their opinions without fear. Teachers should not pressure students but instead allow them to speak freely.

T8 agrees, noting that emotional safety helps students focus and reduces anxiety levels, which ultimately contributes to their academic success. On the other hand, T7 adds

that fairness in the classroom, where all students are treated equally, creates a positive atmosphere where students feel important, which promotes their participation and increases their confidence in learning. T4 continues this idea by emphasizing the importance of safety measures and facilities for students with special needs, noting that these provisions enable them to better focus on academic tasks. Finally, T1 mentions the role of positive peer interactions and bullying prevention, believing that when students feel accepted and respected by their peers, they are more likely to succeed both socially and academically.

Impact of Teachers' Background on Their Perceptions

To examine the impact of teachers' gender, background, and experience on their perceptions and responses to unsafe conditions, the participants were asked to reflect on how their gender, background, school type and professional experience have influenced their perceptions and responses to unsafe conditions in schools. The following sub-themes emerged in the interview data.

School Type. The type of school plays a significant role in shaping teachers' perceptions of safety regarding resources and infrastructure. Teachers from private school T5 and T8, who both work in private schools, highlight the importance of smaller class sizes in creating a safe environment. T5 notes that private schools tend to have fewer students per class, which allows for more individual attention and a more intimate and controlled environment. Likewise, T8 also agrees with T5 saying that "if we talk about the ideal learning environment, for example, having 20 students per class is a great setup." This is contrasted with the public school system, where overcrowded classrooms can make it difficult for teachers to address students' individual needs effectively, as observed by T4. He argues that large class sizes in public schools create challenges in providing a

supportive environment for all students, especially when dealing with emotional and social safety.

Regarding resource allocation, interview responses indicate that all teachers believe private schools have better conditions and more resources compared to public schools. For example, T8 from a private school believes that “physical safety is definitely better in private schools – there is security, a closed campus, and safety systems.” Interestingly, T4 from a public school holds a similar opinion that private schools offer better physical safety due to the fees charged. However, the participants’ perceptions of public schools may be biased. Contrary to these perceptions, considering the fact that both types of schools were opened at the same time, public schools are equipped with surveillance cameras in nearly every classroom and in the main hallways, while private schools only have cameras in the main halls and not in the classrooms. Moreover, both schools are fenced, have security guards, and strictly control student and visitor entrance and exit through designated school personnel which implies that the schools are not vastly different in terms of provisions for physical safety.

Teaching Experience and Gender. Teachers’ age and gender do not directly influence their understanding of social safety, although older teachers such as T4, a male with approximately 30 years of experience, tend to have a wider range of strategies and confidence in managing safety due to their vast experience. T4 mentions that over time he has become more adept at resolving student conflicts, noting that his initial difficulties were gradually overcome with experience: “When I was younger, I didn’t always know what to say or how to act when children argued. But over time, I’ve learned how to handle such situations and effectively resolve conflicts. Now, I feel confident in managing them.” Nevertheless, young teachers such as T2, a 20-year-old female with only five months of teaching experience at the time of the interview, are in the process of refining their

strategies and rely more on external support such as mentoring and formal training to address safety issues: “I wasn’t sure how to communicate or deliver information to parents effectively. Workshops or seminars on this topic would be very helpful.”

Professional Development. Teachers’ access to support networks and professional development opportunities plays a critical role in shaping their approach to creating safe learning environments. T2, a beginning teacher, relies heavily on mentoring programs and emotional intelligence training to effectively manage her classroom and address safety concerns. This highlights that teachers who have access to professional development programs or mentoring are likely better prepared to recognize and address safety issues, both physical and emotional, in the classroom.

Values and Beliefs. Finally, teachers’ personal values and beliefs significantly influence their perceptions of what constitutes a safe learning environment. For example, a teacher from private school (T5), who focuses on emotional well-being, may prioritize emotional safety over other aspects of safety. Similarly, other teachers who prioritize physical safety, such as T4 from public school, may place more emphasis on control systems and infrastructure of the environment. Personal experiences and individual beliefs about what helps students feel safe likely influence how teachers approach safety in their classrooms.

Challenges

Lack of Adjustment for New Students. In reflecting on the challenges teachers face in providing safe learning environments, there were several repeating issues that emerged during the interviews. One of the most common challenges was the lack of adequate support when integrating students, especially new or special needs students in both schools. T6 and T1 emphasized that inadequate support for new students can create difficulties in providing a safe and welcoming environment. T6 from private school noted:

“I encountered these in my first years as a classroom teacher. One of the main challenges I found was the lack of support from the school to help new students integrate and adapt in the classroom” emphasizing the significant emotional and social difficulties these students face without the necessary support systems. T1 from public school also spoke about the challenges of working with new students, especially when there is a lack of emotional acceptance from peers, leading to disruptions in class: “We recently had a new student join our class, but the other students in the class do not accept him. As a result, lessons are sometimes disrupted because there are disagreements and fights over lack of acceptance.”

Overcrowded Classrooms. Another common problem was overcrowded classrooms, especially in public schools, which significantly limits teachers’ ability to meet the individual needs of students. T6 emphasized that “in public schools there are at least 30 students per class.... This leads to overcrowded classrooms, making it difficult for teachers to give individualized attention to each student.” This concern was supported by several other teachers who indicated that large class sizes make it difficult to ensure emotional and physical safety for all students. In contrast, teachers at private schools such as T7 reported fewer problems with overcrowding, pointing to smaller student-teacher ratios, which allow for more effective monitoring of student well-being.

Lack of Preventive Measures. The issue of emotional and psychological safety also appeared to be a major concern. Several teachers, including T7 and T5 from private school, observed that despite having a 3-person counselling team and one student welfare coordinator in schools, emotional safety remains difficult to manage. T7 admitted, “You can’t monitor everyone all the time, and you can’t monitor every conversation that happens behind closed doors.” T8 commented on the potential of psychologists saying that

... we have a team of psychologists. We also have class advisors who coordinate work with students. If requested by parents or teachers, the psychologists and class

advisors address these concerns. However, it is important to understand that school psychologists do not provide full professional psychological assistance. Their role is more preventive – they focus on diagnosing and preventing potential issues.

The teacher proceeded to emphasize that the psychologists cannot provide in-depth therapeutic or clinical psychological care, which requires more specialized training and qualifications. Instead, psychologists work with classroom teachers and teachers to coordinate support for students, especially those who may need emotional or behavioral intervention. This highlights the limitations of formal psychological support as it is often reactive rather than proactive. T5 also noted that “the lack of cameras in classrooms does not ensure complete safety ... if [emotional] bullying happens in the classroom, it can go unnoticed,” suggesting that physical monitoring alone through cameras is not enough to ensure the emotional safety of students. Verbal and psychological bullying often goes undetected without appropriate tracking and intervention systems.

Limited Training and Support on Emotional Intelligence. Teachers often lack training in emotional intelligence and conflict resolution, making it difficult to effectively recognize and address students’ emotional needs. Some teachers also feel emotionally exhausted due to the workload and cannot adequately support students. As a result, teachers may unintentionally overlook the emotional needs of their students, which can have a negative impact on their well-being and academic performance. Some teachers believe that specific training in emotional intelligence will help them better deal with emotional problems, particularly students’ emotional distress, conflict, or behavioral problems. In fact, many educators believe that such training will not only enhance their ability to provide emotional support to students, but also improve their own professional development by allowing them to create a more empathetic and responsive classroom environment. Without sufficient training and support in this area, it is difficult for teachers

to provide the emotional and psychological safety needed for a positive and productive learning environment. Here are the verbatim responses from the teachers I interviewed: “Our school has many students. Teachers work from morning to evening, and they need emotional support. Additionally, there is a need for specialized training on developing emotional intelligence” (T1); “Some teachers lack knowledge about emotional intelligence, making it difficult for them to recognize students’ emotions, which can inadvertently affect the students’ mood and motivation” (T2); “... emotional intelligence training would be beneficial for my colleagues” (T5); “... we should have more training sessions, especially from psychologists, on how to react in emergencies and what to do in critical situations” (T7).

Inadequate Communication and Coordination. Some teachers drew attention to the need for better communication and coordination between administrators, teachers, and students on safety issues. The lack of a coordinated approach sometimes leads to difficulties in effectively managing student safety. T6 pointed out that “I think we need stronger communication between the administration and teachers, as well as between the administration and students,” implying the need for collaboration which should extend beyond individual classrooms so that problems are addressed systematically rather than in isolation.

The need for clearer communication of safety procedures was also stated. Three teachers from public and private schools (T2, T4, and T6) noted that despite the availability of various safety protocols and information sessions on physical safety measures, evacuation during fire and terrorist attacks, how to administer first aid, how to maintain emotional and psychological health still requires more coordinated efforts with practical demonstrations rather than theoretical information.

On the other hand, it appears that some subject teachers, rather than classroom teachers, do not attend safety workshops or other similar training courses. One teacher said that since he is not a classroom teacher, he does not attend safety workshops or participate in such discussions. Several participants indicated that safety-related workshops and training sessions are typically attended by teachers who are responsible for a class. For example, T4 stated, “Since I’m not a homeroom teacher, I don’t participate in such activities. However, I know seminars and training sessions are held because I hear about them from my colleagues.” This suggests that such opportunities are more frequently offered to, or expected of, homeroom teachers, who are directly responsible for students’ daily well-being and safety. Similarly, T2 noted that “... in particular, homeroom teachers attend trainings on character education,” highlighting the targeted nature of professional development sessions based on teaching roles within schools. This suggests that safety training is more oriented towards classroom teachers, while subject teachers may not be obligated to participate in such events. This division in participation may limit subject teachers’ understanding and preparedness when it comes to addressing safety issues or managing emotional and psychological well-being in their own classrooms. It also points to a potential gap in coordination between teaching staff where all educators, regardless of their specific role, could benefit from more inclusive safety education.

Other factors

Families’ Role in a Safe Learning Environment. Two teachers (T1 and T2) raised the issue of emotional pressure on students from both parents and peers. T2 pointed out that “some students tend to wait for the ‘smart kids’ to answer questions ...when I give a high-performing student a grade of ‘4,’ they sometimes cry...they often say, “My parents will scold me; I must get a 5.” This reflects how external pressures, especially parental expectations, can undermine students’ emotional safety and overall well-being. Similarly,

T1 discussed how students sometimes face emotional and psychological challenges due to pressure from parents, stating, “Parents demanding perfect scores make students anxious.” This external pressure often adds to the emotional burden on students, making it difficult for them to feel safe in expressing themselves or engaging with the curriculum.

The other two teachers mentioned that students from families with limited emotional support or strict parental expectations often have difficulties with emotional well-being, which directly affects their behavior and academic performance. For example, T5 described a student who was particularly afraid of making mistakes due to parental pressure, which led to him being overly cautious in class and often experiencing emotional distress, commenting on the student’s behavior:

One of my students is particularly afraid of making mistakes. Whenever he speaks, he hesitates, fearing they might say something incorrect. If he makes an error, he says things like, “Oh, I’m so stupid,” while physically pinching himself. After noticing this behavior, I spoke to other teachers to understand why the student behaves this way. I learned that the students’ parents are very strict and monitor their grades closely, rarely allowing them to go outside.

Such parental pressure for perfect grades can create an unsafe environment for a child, affecting their self-esteem and mental health. T8 commented that some students, especially those from wealthy families, suffer from a lack of parental attention: “Parents work in other countries,” and some are “often on business trips,” which can lead to them seeking attention in destructive ways or withdrawing emotionally. This withdrawal or mal-adaptive behavior can create problems in the classroom because these emotional needs are not being met at home.

Role of Technology in Safety. Interview responses suggest positive and negative impacts of technology on the creation of safe learning environments. On the positive side,

technology is used to enhance physical safety in schools. For instance, one teacher mentioned that cameras are installed in hallways and classrooms to help resolve conflicts and ensure accountability:

We cannot always oversee what happens in the cafeteria, outside the classroom, or in the schoolyard during 5-15-minute breaks... camera footage serves as evidence ... The presence of cameras in schools helps prevent bullying and discrimination among students because they are aware of being monitored, which can serve as evidence if needed.

Additionally, technology aids in making lessons more engaging and accessible. T2 explained how interactive tools like whiteboards enhance student involvement: "I use interactive tools to present material in dynamic and engaging ways." However, technology also poses challenges to students' emotional safety. One concern was the role of social media in the development of cyberbullying. T4 noted that while technology can facilitate learning, it also contributes to negative experiences: "Nowadays, with the internet being so accessible, incidents like cyberbullying and bullying do occur." Moreover, excessive involvement with digital tools, according to T5, can negatively affect the social safety of the learning environment by reducing face-to-face interaction. The lack of face-to-face interaction can hinder the development of trust and positive relationships between students and teachers, which is crucial for creating a favorable classroom environment. This disconnect can lead to students feeling isolated, undermining social safety that is vital to a healthy learning environment.

Summary

This chapter presents the findings from qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with secondary school teachers in one public and one private school in Astana. It begins by describing the characteristics of the schools and providing

demographic information about the participants. The chapter then outlines the relationship between research questions and emerging themes.

The first set of findings explores how teachers in different school contexts perceive a safe school environment. The data reveal that when teachers talk about safety, their immediate association is with physical safety. This includes emergency preparedness, restricted access to school grounds by outsiders, adequate lighting, appropriate furniture, and overall physical comfort within the learning environment. Emotional and psychological safety emerged as the second key concern. Teachers emphasized the importance of a positive classroom atmosphere, opportunities for students to express themselves without fear of judgment, feeling supported by adults, and being protected from bullying.

Subsequently, the chapter compares teachers' perceptions across variables such as school type, teaching experience, and background. For instance, both public and private school teachers acknowledged that private schools are often better equipped in terms of physical safety provisions. While age and teaching experience did not directly shape how teachers defined a safe learning environment, these factors appeared to influence teachers' confidence and preparedness in maintaining safety. Notably, novice teachers expressed a strong desire to receive more training, especially in emotional intelligence, to better support students' emotional well-being. The chapter also outlines several challenges teachers face in fostering safe learning environments. These include large class sizes, a lack of practical safety training, the need for emotional intelligence development, excessive workloads, and unequal access to safety training opportunities between subject teachers and homeroom teachers.

Finally, additional findings that were not directly aligned with the initial research questions are presented. These include the role of technology in school safety and the

influence of families on students' overall well-being. These insights offer important contributions to the broader understanding of school safety and will be discussed in relation to existing literature in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussions

The previous chapter reported the findings in relation to the perceptions and experience of a safe school environment of secondary school teachers in two schools in Astana. This chapter builds on these findings by interpreting them through existing literature and UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools (CFS) framework to address the three research questions regarding 1) teachers' perceptions of different types of schools; 2) the influence of their education and experience; and 3) the challenges they face in implementing safety strategies. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Teachers' Understanding of Safety

The objective of this thesis was to explore teachers' understanding of a safe learning environment. Based on the interpretation of the findings, four key sub-themes emerged: 1) physical safety, 2) emotional and psychological safety, 3) social safety, and 4) the impact of a safe school environment on student well-being.

Physical Safety

The findings reveal that teachers attach great value to physical safety as the basis of a safe learning environment. Majority of participants, when asked about school safety, predominantly highlighted well-equipped classrooms, emergency preparedness, safe entrance and laboratory conditions as the main elements of physical safety at a school. For instance, T6 emphasized the absence of threats to students, while others noted systems such as Face ID entry, fireproof curtains, and clear signage to reduce hazards. These responses indicate that teachers consider physical safety as a basic requirement for teaching and learning and their understanding is limited to controlled environments focused on preventing bodily harm. The literature also supports this emphasis on physical protection. For example, the National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments defines physical safety as protecting students from threats such as violence and

environmental hazards, which is consistent with what teachers emphasized. Geller et al. (2007) state that a physically safe school is key to students' academic and social success. Similarly, Kibriya and Jones (2021) found that having security systems at schools directly improves student achievement, especially in resource-limited settings. Likewise, teachers' perceptions of this study about safety aligns with UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools concept where physical protection is considered as a core element of a safe school. According to the CFS manual, a physically safe school includes buildings that are resilient to climate risks, access to clean water, safe classroom infrastructure and adequate sanitation (UNICEF, 2009). Teachers' attention in this study to the quality of classroom furniture, evacuation drills and restricted access reflects partial compliance with these standards. However, interviews did not reveal a clear understanding of all the physical safety indicators described in the CFS model, such as hygiene amenities, access to clean water, deworming, accessibility for students with disabilities, or essential nutrient intake. Although teachers recognize the importance of physical safety, the findings reveal that their understanding is still limited to visible and surface-level measures such as safe technology and furniture conditions, rather than the broader, systemic infrastructure described in the CFS. This suggests that school administration should take actions to broaden teachers' understanding of physical safety beyond emergency signs and security cameras.

In terms of differences between the public and private settings in this study, teachers from both schools tend to describe private schools as safer and more controlled. However, based on findings both private and public schools in this study had similar infrastructure such as surveillance, fencing, security guards; interestingly, while the School 1 had surveillance cameras in each classroom the School 2 did not. This shows that perceptions are biased by school reputation rather than actual safety measures.

Emotional and Psychological Safety

The second sub-theme indicates that teachers recognize the importance of emotional and psychological safety, but their understandings and approaches vary. Several teachers emphasized the value of trust, open communication, and supportive teacher-student relationships. On the one hand, the responses of teachers suggest that emotional safety is related to student engagement and achievement and public reprimand can lead to pupils feeling humiliated. However, although teachers recognized the emotional needs of pupils, many described emotional safety in terms of preventing perceived emotional harm or providing basic respect rather than promoting deeper well-being or emotional growth.

This finding shows some consistency with UNICEF's CFS framework, which emphasizes that emotional well-being is central to the development of a child-friendly school. According to CFS, a safe learning environment should not only be free from physical threats, but also actively support children's self-esteem, emotional expression and mental health (UNICEF, 2009). Other studies also support the importance of emotional safety in enhancing academic and social development at school (Gonzalez et al., 2020; Martínez-Carrera et al., 2024; Nickerson et al., 2021; Sharma, 2015). Some participants agree with Gonzalez et al. (2020) and Sharma (2015) that students are more engaged when they feel emotionally secure and are not afraid to make mistakes or ask questions. Furthermore, teachers' intention to build a better atmosphere in the classroom at the beginning of the lesson was approved by Nickerson et al. (2021) highlighting that emotional safety should be part of a holistic approach to school safety, and not treated separately from physical protection. Although the teachers in this study relate emotional safety to learning, their practice appears to be reactive rather than proactive. This reflects the findings of a study by Martínez-Carrera et al. (2024), which noted that while teachers

valued emotional well-being, they often lacked adequate tools or training to foster it intentionally.

Social Safety

The interview results show that teachers perceive social security as a multi-level concept that covers everything from peace in the country to classroom dynamics and peer relationships. However, few teachers demonstrated a comprehensive, integrated understanding of how social security can be purposefully promoted at all levels.

According to UNICEF's CFS concept, a socially safe school is a school that not only protects students from harm, but also actively promotes inclusion, equity, participation and positive relationships among all stakeholders (UNICEF, 2009). The CFS model emphasizes equal treatment, non-discrimination, and a culture of respect as essential features of a socially safe learning environment. The fact that some teachers emphasize equal treatment reflects partial compliance with this principle. For example, T7 believes that a teacher should treat all students as equally and impartially as possible. However, the findings also suggest that many teachers place less emphasis on actively creating inclusive and participatory communities, as advocated by the CFS approach. The teacher's perception of connection between success and favorable school climate aligns with Amali et al. (2023) and Sharma (2015), who emphasize that school climate and respectful classroom cultures significantly impact students' engagement and academic outcomes. Similarly, Kibriya and Jones (2021) support this finding that improved social safety, especially when combined with supportive relationships, can lead to better academic performance. However, teachers in this study sometimes treated social safety as an issue to be managed or prevented rather than a positive climate to be cultivated. For instance, bullying was typically discussed reactively – as a problem to stop – rather than as an opportunity to teach empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution.

Another interesting finding is about the impact of peer relationships on the social safety of students. Some teachers shared their concerns about bullying and peer exclusion, particularly targeting high-performing students and students with “extraordinary” ways of speaking (those who speak in a very formal or unusually expressive manner). These observations suggest that even high-achieving students can experience social insecurity and emotional damage due to peer relationship dynamics. Correspondingly, Lacoé (2016) and Nickerson et al. (2021) support this view, showing that bullying significantly affects students’ sense of belonging, motivation, and emotional well-being.

Impact of a Safe School Environment on Student Learning and Well-being

Another finding reveals that teachers believe that a safe school environment has a direct impact on students’ academic engagement, emotional well-being and participation in lessons. Several teachers emphasized that when students feel safe – physically, emotionally and socially – they are more confident, focused, and ready to express themselves. This suggests that safety is seen not only as a protective measure, but also as a condition for cognitive and emotional growth. The reviewed literature also supports this relationship between safety and learning outcomes. For example, Gonzalez et al. (2020) and Nickerson et al. (2021) argue that emotional and psychological safety helps students take academic risks, stay motivated, and build strong relationships with teachers. Fredrick et al. (2021) also explain that school environments where bullying and exclusion are prevalent lead to lower achievement and alienation. Teachers in this study observed similar patterns, noting that anxious or emotionally distressed students were often less able to focus or participate in lessons.

Another significant finding was the impact of peer relationships on learning outcomes. Teachers noticed that students who experience bullying or peer rejection may become distracted from lessons, avoid participation, or even deliberately lower their

performance to avoid being targeted. This suggests that social and emotional insecurity can indirectly but strongly affect learning. While teachers recognize this dynamic, few mentioned proactive interventions such as classroom discussions after the incidents.

Differences between School Types

Based on the findings, the type of school – public or private – plays an important role in shaping teachers' perceptions of safety, particularly in relation to resources, classroom conditions, and individualized attention to students. Teachers working in private schools, such as T5 and T8, associated their school environment with smaller class sizes, better infrastructure, and higher levels of physical safety. These perceptions contribute to the belief that private schools are inherently safer and more supportive. In contrast, teachers from public schools, such as T4, cited overcrowded classrooms as a major obstacle to providing individualized support and emotional or social safety. This belief was particularly evident when discussing management of large groups and responding to students' emotional needs. While these perceptions reflect real differences in school management and day-to-day experiences, the actual infrastructure of the different types of schools in the study appeared similar rather than different. For example, both public and private schools were fenced, had security staff and entrance control systems. Interestingly, public schools even had more CCTV cameras in classrooms, while private schools only had cameras in the hallways. This contrast between perception and reality highlights how a school's reputation and working conditions can influence teachers' opinions, even if material differences are small.

As Altinsoy and Okan (2017) noted, aspects such as class size, school regulations, and administrative support directly influence teachers' perceptions of safety. Similarly, Flores and Day (2006) found that public school teachers often perceive school safety as a structural problem related to overcrowding and limited resources. The results of the study

support this: public school teachers are more likely to express concern about the lack of space and time to regulate students' emotional and behavioral needs. On the other hand, private school teachers appeared to feel more competent to manage their students' well-being due to smaller student populations and more manageable workloads. However, under the CFS concept, safety and inclusion are not dependent on the type of school or the availability of funding. Rather, CFS principles promote equity and access to a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment for all children, regardless of their background or the socio-economic status of the school (UNICEF, 2009). The difference between perceived and actual safety conditions in public and private schools suggests that perceptions of school type may influence how strongly teachers will follow CFS principles, particularly in relation to inclusion and equal participation.

Challenges

The findings on challenges state that teachers face numerous challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of training, emotional exhaustion and poor coordination among school staff in implementing strategies to provide a safe learning environment. Some public-school teachers expressed concerns about class sizes of 30 or more students, which made it difficult to respond to students' emotional needs. In contrast, private school teachers commented that they were more flexible about pupils' wellbeing. This suggests that the constraints of the institution, especially in public schools, may reduce teachers' ability to take a holistic approach to safety. Flores and Day (2006) argued that public school teachers often feel unprepared to deal with safety issues due to limited administrative support and lack of training. This was confirmed in our study by teachers such as T2 and T7 who stated that although safety protocols exist, training is often theoretical rather than practical. Subject teachers in particular reported that they were not allowed to attend safety workshops. Such practice can lead to missed opportunities to

create a holistic whole-school approach to student safety. According to the CFS framework, creating a safe learning environment requires school-wide participation, shared leadership and professional development for all staff, not just those directly responsible for classroom management (UNICEF, 2009). The lack of communication and coordination in these schools contrasts with these expectations. Teachers noted that certain groups are often excluded when discussing safety issues, and there is little collaboration between teachers and administrators. This isolated approach undermines the CFS principle that safe school environments should be inclusive, holistic, and participatory.

Another issue was the lack of preventive emotional support, despite the availability of school psychologists and social welfare coordinators. Some teachers recognized that although psychologists are present in schools, their role is often limited to basic prevention and coordination rather than deep emotional or therapeutic support.

Teachers also identified emotional exhaustion and burnout as a barrier. T1 noted that “teachers work from morning to night, and they need emotional support,” implying that overloaded schedules reduce teachers’ energy to provide emotional support to students. In addition, several teachers favored additional training in emotional intelligence and crisis response, skills necessary not only for student support but also for teacher well-being. These findings are supported by Martínez-Carrera et al. (2024), who found that teachers often want specialized training in bullying prevention and social-emotional support but are limited by time and institutional priorities.

Another factor affecting emotional safety was external pressure from parents, especially regarding academic expectations. Teachers described students sometimes experiencing stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem due to fear of punishment for poor grades. One participant described a student who physically hurt himself for fear of disappointing his parents. These examples emphasize that emotional security is not only

shaped in school but also in the family, further underscoring the CFS recommendation of a strong school-family partnership (UNICEF, 2009).

Family's Role

The major findings of this study were parental expectations and emotional support at home, which have a direct influence on students' emotional safety and classroom behavior. Teachers noted that pressure from parents to achieve high academic results often leads to stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem in students. Participant's response showed how external pressure from families can create a psychologically unsafe space for students, undermining their ability to participate confidently in class. This finding is in alignment with the concept of CFS, which emphasizes the role of family and community in children's well-being. According to CFS guidelines, a truly child-friendly school should maintain strong partnerships with families to ensure that the values, expectations, and emotional climate that children experience at home and at school are aligned (UNICEF, 2009). Although teachers in the study clearly recognize the emotional impact of family behavior, their comments suggest that schools are not always prepared to build constructive relationships with parents. Studies such as Martínez-Carrera et al. (2024) and Yerger and Gehret (2011) emphasize the importance of involving families in school safety planning and emotional support initiatives. However, the lack of school systems to actively engage parents can lead to teachers feeling powerless to deal with the psychological damage caused by external expectations. Moreover, a lack of coordination between family and school may contribute to feelings of isolation or helplessness for students who find themselves caught between the high demands of their parents during adolescence.

Another aspect noted in the findings was the lack of emotional support in some families, especially when parents are physically distant or emotionally unavailable. One participant noted that students from affluent families whose parents work abroad or are

frequently away may experience neglect, leading them to either withdraw emotionally or seek attention through disruptive behavior. This issue is subtle but important because it touches on invisible forms of emotional insecurity that affect children's behavior and learning – even in the absence of overt violence or pressure.

Despite these complex dynamics, there was little evidence of schools offering formal strategies to address such emotional gaps. Teachers responded individually, sometimes talking with other staff members or attempting to forge closer bonds with affected students. While these efforts are valuable, the CFS model recommends system-wide interventions that include structured support for students experiencing emotional distress, as well as building the capacity of teachers to address such issues more professionally and consistently (UNICEF, 2009).

Technology's Role

Teachers recognized the value of technology in increasing physical safety through the use of security cameras and access control systems. Several participants reported that cameras in hallways, classrooms, and cafeterias help prevent bullying and provide evidence in case of disputes and support accountability among students, especially during unstructured recess. Thus, teachers view technology as a useful tool for controlling behavior and preventing physical harm. However, while these features contribute to safety, they are largely reactive and focus on identifying incidents after they occur, rather than fostering a positive school culture that prevents harm.

On the other hand, teachers also expressed concern about the negative emotional and social impact of technology, especially in relation to cyberbullying and reduced personal interaction. T4 explained that “cyberbullying and bullying are happening” because of the widespread access to the Internet, and T5 warned that overuse of digital tools can lead to a reduction in personal interaction, damaging relationships in the

classroom. These concerns suggest that while technology can improve surveillance, it also poses new safety risks – particularly in terms of emotional and social wellbeing. Martínez-Carrera et al. (2024) reported that more than half of the teachers in their study believed that the use of ICTs had exacerbated coexistence problems in schools. While technology can improve learning and access to information, it must be balanced with precautions and strategies to protect students' emotional and social safety. In the study, teachers such as T2 mentioned using interactive whiteboards to make learning more engaging, suggesting that technology can be a powerful tool to increase motivation and participation. However, these benefits can be negated if schools do not actively address the risks that technology can bring, especially if it is unsupervised or used irresponsibly.

Summary

This chapter explored the perceptions of secondary school teachers regarding a safe school environment in one public and one private school in Astana. The analysis found that while teachers recognize the importance of physical, emotional and social safety, their understanding and implementation often remain superficial and reactive rather than proactive and learner-centered. Physical safety is prioritized, but broader elements such as inclusive design and sustainability are rarely addressed. Emotional safety is recognized but is usually approached through harm prevention rather than holistic support and social-emotional development. Social safety is often equated with discipline and fairness, overlooking the importance of developing an inclusive and participatory school culture. While teachers recognize that safety has a positive impact on student learning and wellbeing, their efforts tend to be individualized and fragmented, determined by school type, class size, and school-wide norms. Systemic barriers, including uneven preparation, lack of coordination, emotional overload, and limited family involvement, prevent the full realization of a safe school environment. Teachers also face challenges in adapting to

digital threats while trying to use technology constructively. To better align with UNICEF's vision of Child-Friendly Schools, schools must adopt a coordinated, inclusive approach that involves all stakeholders – teachers, families, administrators and students – to ensure safety in all aspects of school life.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study has explored the perceptions and experiences of eight secondary school teachers in Astana, Kazakhstan, regarding safe learning environments, with particular attention to the physical, emotional-psychological, and social aspects of safety in public and private schools. The conclusion chapter summarizes the key findings of study that were guided by the research questions. Additionally, the chapter discusses the implications of this study for policy and practice for local educational settings. Finally, the strengths and limitations of study are presented along with recommendations and final reflections.

Summary of Key Findings

The current phenomenological qualitative study explored the perceptions and lived experiences of secondary school teachers of one public and one private school in Astana. The study investigated the teachers' understanding and experiences and how they differ between the two types of schools. While many international studies highlight the importance of school safety by emphasizing how it affects students' well-being, academic achievement and social development, local research remains scarce or almost non-existent. Therefore, this study fills this gap by providing qualitative information that is aligned with UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools framework, which offers a structured and internationally recognized approach for understanding and assessing school safety (Chabbott, 2004; Fitriani et al., 2021).

Teachers' Perceptions of School Safety

Teachers commonly associate 'safe school' with protection from physical harm, emotional support for students and the development of respectful relationships (Geller et al., 2007; Kibriya & Jones, 2021; Lah, 2020). However, their understanding tends to be disproportionately focused on physical safety, especially aspects such as safe infrastructure, surveillance and emergency preparedness. While most teachers recognize

the importance of emotional well-being and positive peer interactions, these aspects are often less clearly articulated and appear to be secondary in their conceptualizations of safety (Kiuru et al., 2019; Sharma, 2015). Notably, other important aspects of school safety such as reproductive health, sanitation and nutrition security were not mentioned by participants at all (Walker et al., 2020; Wilkins et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2009).

This suggests only a partial alignment with the comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach to school safety promoted by UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools (CFS) concept. It also reflects a narrow and limited perception of safety – mainly focused on the physical body and immediate external threats – instead of an inclusive view that includes psychosocial, health-related and contextual factors (Geller et al., 2007). Moreover, concepts such as inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds or proactive support for marginalized groups were largely absent from teachers' accounts (GEM Report, 2020).

Influence of Teacher Background on Safety Perceptions

Teachers' perceptions of school safety significantly influence their professional behavior and interactions with students. Those who prioritize emotional and social safety tend to use more student-centered approaches, promote open communication, and work to create a caring classroom environment. However, some teachers-especially in more rigid or resource-constrained schools-reported that systemic constraints (e.g., overcrowded classrooms or administrative burdens) prevented them from fully meeting students' emotional needs.

The study also revealed differences in teachers' perceptions of school safety depending on the type of school. Teachers in private schools tended to report that they had greater autonomy and access to resources, allowing them to implement certain safety practices more effectively. However, they also reported experiencing more pressure, often

related to parental expectations and school requirements. Public school teachers, in contrast, worked with more limited resources but described their schools as more structured and consistent, which they felt contributed to a sense of stability and predictability.

Interestingly, some teachers expressed a bias, believing that private schools were inherently safer because of better funding and facilities. However, the data suggests that these assumptions do not always reflect reality.

Challenges in Implementing School Safety Strategies

Participants identified several challenges, including limited institutional support, insufficient training, lack of a clear safety policy, and minimal teacher involvement in school-level decision-making. Moreover, teachers noted that while they are expected to promote safety, they do not always have the tools, authority and support to do so effectively.

Another key finding is the gap between policy and practice. While national policies emphasize the need for safe and inclusive school environments, implementation is often inconsistent, and teachers are rarely consulted in the process. Furthermore, the study suggests that parental expectations and the increasing role of digital technology also affect teachers' perceptions of emotional safety.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to improve the safety of the learning environment. First, it is recommended to organize professional development programs on strengthening teachers' emotional intelligence. Second, schools should develop a structured support system specifically designed for new students' adjustment into the school community. Third, it is advisable to prioritize more practical and hands-on training on safety responses for both teachers and students, rather

than overly theoretical approaches. Overall, these suggestions can lead to fostering supportive and inclusive safe environments for teaching and learning processes.

Contribution

The findings of this study have important implications for school leaders and teachers, policy makers, and researchers in education. The study contributes to schools in creating systemic support for students by emphasizing professional development in emotional intelligence, proactive classroom management, and safe school climate. Moreover, it provides evidence-based recommendations for policymakers to develop school safety policies tailored to the realities of different school types in Astana. By prioritizing the early identification of unsafe climate patterns, policymakers can foster more supportive and inclusive learning settings that promote students' well-being. Finally, the findings of this study contribute to theory by qualitative research that applies CFS framework of UNICEF and suggests insights on teachers' perceptions and experience on school safety in Astana.

Limitations

This study, while offering valuable information on teachers' perceptions of safe school environments, has several limitations that should be noted. First, the study was conducted on a relatively small sample of teachers from selected public and private educational institutions in Astana. As a result, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions of Kazakhstan, particularly rural areas where school structures, resources and cultural contexts may differ significantly. This urban focus may also reflect a certain urban bias, overlooking the particular challenges faced by rural schools, such as limited infrastructure, low diversity of students, access to health care, and emergency preparedness.

In addition, the study was largely based on UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools framework, which provided a useful structure for analyzing safety. However, this approach may have limited the study by emphasizing specific aspects of safety while excluding other theoretical models or local understandings. As a result, alternative conceptualizations of school safety that might more accurately fit the Kazakhstani educational context may have been overlooked.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is a need for further research to find out how culturally specific values, national policies and school structures influence the implementation and adaptation of UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools (CFS) system in the local educational context of Kazakhstan. As this study focused on teachers' perceptions in Astana schools, comparative studies of rural and urban contexts or different regions of Kazakhstan could help identify systemic differences and inform the development of more equitable and inclusive safety practices.

While this study examined teachers' views, future research should consider mixed-methods approaches that combine teachers' views with indicators of student well-being to provide a more comprehensive view of school safety. Moreover, the role of school leadership has been shown to be an important factor in shaping school climate and the successful implementation of safety strategies. Thus, examining the views of school leaders and administrators is necessary to understand the existing institutional support mechanisms and barriers to creating safe learning environments.

Another important gap is the lack of case-appropriate assessment tools that can determine whether a learning environment is truly safe, inclusive, and nurturing. In addition, future research needs to incorporate the perspectives of students, parents and school administrators. Taking a multi-dimensional approach will provide a more holistic

view of school safety and help identify blind spots that may be overlooked by teachers alone. Such inclusive research can improve the coherence and effectiveness of safety strategies in Kazakhstani schools.

Final Reflections

The reason why I have decided to research this topic is because I am deeply committed to creating educational spaces where students feel supported, respected and protected. As a full-time teacher and mentor to future teachers, I know firsthand how the presence or absence of safety in schools directly affects students' ability to learn and students' development as individuals.

Although the interview protocol did not include direct questions about bullying, the fact that all participants mentioned bullying a total of 26 times emphasizes its importance in teachers' perceptions of school safety. This emerging theme suggests that bullying is implicit in their understanding of social and emotional safety, reflecting a systemic problem that needs more attention in both research and policy.

In addition, I have noticed that despite the growing global awareness of student well-being, there is a lack of local research, especially in Kazakhstan on how school safety is perceived and implemented by teachers who are directly involved in this issue.

At the very beginning of this study, I thought about a broader and deeper personal issue: could the roots of domestic violence in some cases go back to experiences of bullying or emotional harm during the school years? Although this study did not explicitly explore this connection, this thought was one of reasons why I decided on this topic. It was very interesting to investigate how safe or unsafe the school environment is for learners, as well as how different stakeholders perceive safety and whether existing school procedures are effective in providing the necessary protection and well-being for students. I believe that schools are not isolated institutions; they are foundational spaces where children begin

to form their identities, relationships, and coping mechanisms. If this early environment is characterized by fear, alienation, or unresolved conflict, the consequences can extend far beyond the classroom. This thought prompted me to listen carefully to the experiences and perspectives of teachers, knowing that how we provide safety today can have a profound impact on the emotional state of individuals and communities in the future.

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Appendix A: AI Declaration Form



Thesis Title: Secondary School Teachers' Perception of "Safe School" in Selected Schools
in Astana

Declaration of the Use of Generative AI

I hereby declare that I have read and understood NUGSE's policy concerning appropriate use of AI and composed this work independently (please check one):

- with the use of artificial intelligence tools, or
 without the use of artificial intelligence tools.

(If you have used AI tools as defined in the GSE policy document, please complete the rest of this form.)

During the preparation of this thesis, I used ChatGPT, Scribbr, SciSpace, Grammarly to structure and organize the written text, edit the text for clarity and grammar, find or select sources on a topic, generate APA citation of sources.

I also declare that I

- am aware of the capabilities and limitations of AI tool(s),
 have verified that the content generated by AI systems and adopted by me is factually correct,
 am aware that as the author of this thesis I bear full responsibility for the statements and assertions made in it,
 have submitted complete and accurate information about my use of AI tools in this work, and
 acknowledge that there may be disciplinary consequences if I have not followed NUGSE's guidelines regarding appropriate AI use.

Name: Gulzhan Karabek

Date: 27.04.2025

Signature:

Appendix B1: Consent Letters

Informed Consent Form for Teachers

Title of Study:

Secondary School Teachers' Perception of "Safe School" in Selected Schools in Astana

Description of the Study:

You are invited to participate in a research study aimed at exploring the perceptions and experiences of secondary school teachers regarding safe schools in Astana. The study focuses on identifying the challenges teachers face in implementing safety strategies and understanding how these challenges differ across various types of schools.

Your participation will involve an interview at your preferred time, place, and mode (in person or online), during which you will be asked to share your insights and experiences related to school safety practices, the challenges in maintaining a safe learning environment, and the strategies used to address unsafe conditions in different school contexts.

The interview will be conducted in your preferred language, so please feel free to express yourself openly. Your honest responses are highly valued and will make a meaningful contribution to this research.

Your anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly protected by assigning coded names, and any identifying information will be removed from the data before analysis and presentation in the master's thesis.

With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded solely for transcription purposes. The recorded material will be securely stored on the researcher's password-protected computer and will be accessible only to the researcher. All data will be retained for one year after the thesis submission, after which it will be permanently deleted.

Time Involvement:

Your participation is estimated to require approximately 30-40 minutes.

Risks and Benefits:

Participating in this study entails minimal risks. Should any of the topics discussed during the interview cause discomfort, you have the option to refrain from answering specific questions or to withdraw from the study entirely at any point without penalty.

Throughout the interview process, the researcher will ensure your well-being and address any concerns you may have. In the event that you choose to withdraw from the study post-interview, all data pertaining to you will be promptly deleted. You can skip any questions you find uncomfortable to answer, and no explanations will be required.

While there are no direct benefits to you for participating, your contribution to this study holds significant potential for societal impact. By sharing your experiences, you can facilitate a better understanding of the challenges and strengths inherent in nurturing a safe learning environment in schools which is free from bullying and violence, thus improving overall student well-being and academic performance. Additionally, your participation can help raise awareness about student well-being, ultimately aiding educators, policymakers, and society as a whole in fostering healthy educational and developmental practices for children in schools.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the freedom to withdraw from study or decline to answer specific questions without facing any repercussions.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints regarding this research study, its

procedures, risks, or benefits, please feel free to contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor, Sourav Mukhopadhyay, at sourav.mukhopadhyay@nu.edu.kz.

For independent inquiries or concerns about the research process or your rights as a participant, you may contact the NUGSE Research Committee at gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz.

Statement of Consent:

I have carefully reviewed and understood the information provided above. I willingly consent to participate in this study and permit the use of my data for research purposes.

Participant's Name:

[Participant's Name]

Participant's Signature:

[Participant's Signature]

Date:

Appendix B2: Consent Letters in Kazakh

Зерттеу Жұмысы Келісімінің Ақпараттық Формасы

Зерттеу тақырыбы:

Астана қаласындағы таңдаулы орта мектеп мұғалімдерінің “қауіпсіз мектеп” туралы түсінігі

Сипаттама:

Сізді Астана қаласындағы орта мектеп мұғалімдерінің қауіпсіз мектептер туралы түсініктері мен тәжірибесін зерттеуге арналған ғылыми зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға шақырамыз. Бұл зерттеу мұғалімдердің мектепте қауіпсіздік стратегияларын жүзеге асыру барысында кездесетін қиындықтарды анықтауға және бұл қиындықтардың әртүрлі мектеп типтерінде қалай көрініс табатынын зерттеуге бағытталған.

Сіздің зерттеуге қатысуыңыз өзіңіз қалаған тілде, өзіңіз таңдаған уақытта, жерде және форматта (жүздесу немесе онлайн) сұхбат жүргізуді қамтиды. Сұхбат барысында сіз мектептегі қауіпсіздік тәжірибесіне, қауіпсіз оқу ортасын қамтамасыз етудегі қиындықтарға және әртүрлі мектеп жағдайларында қолданылатын стратегияларға қатысты ой-пікіріңізбен және тәжірибеңізбен бөлісе аласыз. Өз көзқарасыңызды ашық білдіруден тартынбаңыз – сіздің шынайы жауаптарыңыз бұл зерттеуге маңызды үлес қосады және құнды дерек көзі болып табылады.

Сіздің анонимділігіңіз бен құпиялылығыңыз толығымен қамтамасыз етіледі: әрбір қатысушыға кодтық атау беріледі, ал жеке басты анықтауға болатын кез келген ақпарат талдау мен магистрлік диссертацияда ұсынылмас бұрын жойылады. Сіздің келісіміңізбен сұхбат тек транскрипция жасау мақсатында аудиожазба құрылғысына жазылады. Жазба материалдары зерттеушінің құпия сөзбен қорғалған компьютерінде қауіпсіз түрде сақталады және тек зерттеушінің өзіне ғана

қолжетімді болады. Барлық деректер магистрлік жұмыс тапсырылғаннан кейін бір жыл бойы сақталып, кейін біржолата жойылады.

Сұхбат уақыты:

шамамен 30-40 минут

Зерттеу жұмысына қатысудың қатерлері мен артықшылықтары:

Бұл зерттеуге қатысу ең аз тәуекелге ие. Сұхбат барысында талқыланған тақырыптардың кез келгені сізге ыңғайсыздық тудырса, сұрақтарға жауап беруден бас тарта аласыз немесе ешбір салдарсыз кез келген уақытта зерттеуден толығымен бас тарта аласыз. Сұхбат бойы зерттеуші сіздің әл-ауқатыңызды қадағалап, кез келген сұрақтарыңызға жауап береді. Сұхбаттан кейін зерттеуден бас тартуды шешсеңіз, сізге қатысты барлық деректер дереу жойылады. Жауап беру сізге ыңғайсыздық тудырған кез келген сұраққа жауап бермеуге құқылысыз және ешқандай түсініктеме талап етілмейді.

Зерттеуге қатысудың сізге тікелей пайдасы болмаса да, сіздің үлесіңіз қоғамға әсер ету үшін айтарлықтай әлеуетке ие. Тәжірибеңізбен бөлісу арқылы сіз мектептерде буллинг пен зорлық-зомбылыққа қарсы қауіпсіз оқу ортасын құруға тән қиындықтар мен мүмкіншіліктерін жақсырақ түсіне аласыз, бұл оқушылардың жалпы әл-ауқаты мен оқу үлгерімін жақсартады. Сонымен қатар, сіздің қатысуыңыз оқушылардың әл-ауқаты туралы хабардарлықты арттыруға көмектесуі мүмкін, бұл мұғалімдерге, саясаткерлерге және жалпы қоғамға мектептерде салауатты оқу және балаларды дамыту тәжірибесін енгізуге көмектеседі.

Зерттеуге қатысудың еріктілігі:

Сіздің осы зерттеуге қатысуыңыз толығымен ерікті. Кез келген уақытта ешқандай салдарсыз зерттеуге қатысудан бас тартуға немесе белгілі бір сұрақтарға жауап бермеуге құқығыңыз бар.

Сұрақтар мен байланыс үшін:

Осы зерттеуге қатысты сұрақтарыңыз, пікірлеріңіз немесе шағымдарыңыз болса, магистрлік диссертация кеңесшісі Соурав Мукхопадхьяй sourav.mukhopadhyay@nu.edu.kz бойынша хабарласыңыз.

Зерттеу процесі немесе қатысушы ретіндегі құқықтарыңыз туралы сұрақтар немесе түсініктемелер үшін gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz бойынша NUGSE зерттеу комитетіне хабарласуға болады.

Келісім туралы мәлімдеме:

Мен жоғарыда келтірілген ақпаратты мұқият оқып шықтым және түсіндім. Мен осы зерттеуге қатысуға өз еркіммен келісемін және деректерімді зерттеу мақсатында пайдалануға рұқсат беремін.

Зерттеуге қатысушының аты-жөні:

Күні:

Қолы:

Appendix B3: Consent Letters in Russian

Форма Информационного Согласия для Учителей

Название Исследования:

Представление учителей средних школ о “безопасной школе” в определенных школах Астаны

Описание Исследования:

Приглашаем вас принять участие в исследовании, направленном на изучение представлений и опыта учителей средних школ о безопасных школах в Астане. Исследование сосредоточено на выявлении проблем, с которыми сталкиваются учителя при реализации стратегий обеспечения безопасности, а также на изучении того, как эти проблемы различаются в зависимости от типа школы.

Ваше участие будет включать интервью, которое состоится в удобное для вас время, в предпочтительном формате (при личной встрече или онлайн) и на комфортном для вас языке. В ходе интервью вы сможете поделиться своими взглядами и опытом, связанными с практиками обеспечения безопасности, трудностями в создании безопасной учебной среды и стратегиями, используемыми для устранения небезопасных условий в различных школьных контекстах.

Пожалуйста, не стесняйтесь делиться своими мыслями – ваши искренние ответы имеют большое значение и внесут важный вклад в это исследование.

Анонимность и конфиденциальность будут строго соблюдены: каждому участнику будет присвоено кодовое имя, а любая информация, позволяющая установить личность, будет удалена перед анализом и представлением результатов в магистерской диссертации.

С вашего согласия интервью будет записано исключительно в целях последующей расшифровки. Аудиозаписи будут надёжно храниться на защищённом

паролем компьютере исследователя и будут доступны только исследователю. Все данные будут храниться в течение одного года после сдачи диссертации, после чего будут окончательно удалены.

Время участия:

Ваше участие потребует около 30-40 минут.

Риски и Выгоды:

Участие в этом исследовании несет в себе минимальный риск. Если какая-либо из тем, обсуждаемых в ходе интервью, вызовет у вас дискомфорт, вы можете не отвечать на конкретные вопросы или полностью отказаться от участия в исследовании в любой момент без каких-либо последствий. На протяжении всего интервью исследователь будет следить за вашим самочувствием и отвечать на любые возникающие у вас вопросы. Если вы решите отказаться от участия в исследовании после интервью, все относящиеся к вам данные будут немедленно удалены. Вы можете пропустить любые вопросы, на которые вам неудобно отвечать, и никаких объяснений не потребуется.

Несмотря на отсутствие прямых выгод для вас от участия в исследовании, ваш вклад в него имеет значительный потенциал влияния на общество.

Поделившись своим опытом, вы сможете лучше понять проблемы и сильные стороны, присущие созданию безопасной учебной среды в школах, свободной от буллинга и насилия, что улучшит общее самочувствие и успеваемость учащихся. Кроме того, ваше участие может способствовать повышению осведомленности о благополучии учащихся, что в конечном итоге поможет педагогам, политикам и обществу в целом внедрять здоровые методы обучения и развития детей в школах.

Добровольность Участия в Исследовании:

Ваше участие в данном исследовании является абсолютно добровольным. Вы вправе в любой момент отказаться от участия в исследовании или не отвечать на определенные вопросы без каких-либо последствий.

Контакты и Вопросы:

Если у вас возникнут вопросы, замечания или жалобы относительно данного исследования, его процедур, рисков или выгод, не стесняйтесь обращаться к руководителю магистерской диссертации, Соурав Мукхопадхьяй, по адресу sourav.mukhopadhyay@nu.edu.kz.

По независимым вопросам или замечаниям о процессе исследования или ваших правах в качестве участника, вы можете связаться с Комитетом по исследованиям NUGSE по адресу gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz.

Заявление о Согласии:

Я внимательно ознакомился(-ась) и понял(-а) предоставленную информацию выше. Я добровольно соглашаюсь участвовать в этом исследовании и разрешаю использование моих данных в исследовательских целях.

Имя Участника:

Подпись Участника:

Дата:

Appendix C1: Recruitment Emails

Dear Participant,

I hope this message finds you well. I am Gulzhan Karabek, and I am currently pursuing a master's degree at Nazarbayev University. As part of my academic requirements, I am conducting a research project titled "Secondary School Teachers' Perception of "Safe School" in Selected Schools in Astana".

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of novice and experienced in selected secondary school teachers regarding a safe school environment. This research aims to identify how schoolteachers' experiences influence their understanding and responses to school safety issues. By analyzing their responses, the specific challenges that teachers face in implementing safety strategies could be identified. In addition, how these challenges vary between different types of schools, such as mainstream and private schools, will also be explored.

Your participation would involve a one-on-one interview, which is expected to last approximately 30-40 minutes. You will be interviewed in your preferred locations. Interviews will be conducted in your preferred language (Kazakh/ Russian/ English). Your identity and any personal information shared during the interview will be kept strictly confidential, and all data will be anonymized to ensure your privacy.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without any consequences. If you would be willing to participate or have any further questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at gulzhan.karabek@nu.edu.kz. I would be happy to provide more information and discuss any concerns you may have.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to important research on the secondary school teachers' perception of a safe learning environment. Your insights and experiences are invaluable, and I greatly appreciate your time and support.

Warm regards,

Gulzhan Karabek

Nazarbayev University

Leadership in School Education

email: gulzhan.karabek@nu.edu.kz

Appendix C2: Recruitment Emails in Kazakh

Құрметті қатысушы,

Менің атым Гүлжан Қарабек, мен қазір Назарбаев университетінде магистратура бөлімінде оқып жатырмын. Өзімнің академиялық талаптарымның аясында мен “Астана қаласындағы таңдаулы мектептердегі “қауіпсіз мектеп” туралы орта мектеп мұғалімдерінің түсінігі” атты ғылыми жобаны жүргізіп жатырмын.

Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – жаңадан келген және тәжірибелі орта мектеп мұғалімдерінің қауіпсіз мектеп ортасы туралы түсініктері мен тәжірибесін зерттеу. Олардың жауаптарын талдау арқылы мұғалімдер қауіпсіздік стратегияларын жүзеге асыру кезінде кездесетін нақты қиындықтарды анықтауға болады. Сондай-ақ ол негізгі және жекеменшік мектептер сияқты әртүрлі мектептерде бұл мәселелердің қалай өзгеретінін зерттейді.

Сіздің қатысуыңыз шамамен 30-40 минутқа созылатын сұхбатты қамтиды. Сіз өзіңіздің ұсынған ортаңызда сұхбат беретін боласыз. Әңгімелесу өзіңіз қалаған тілде (қазақ/орыс/ағылшын) жүргізіледі. Сіздің жеке басыңыз және сұхбат кезінде берілген кез келген жеке ақпарат құпия болып табылады және сіздің жеке құпиялығыңызды қамтамасыз ету үшін барлық деректер анонимді болады.

Бұл зерттеуге қатысу толығымен ерікті және сіз кез келген уақытта ешбір салдарсыз қатысудан бас тарта аласыз. Зерттеуге қатысқыңыз келсе немесе оған қатысты қосымша сұрақтарыңыз болса, менімен gulzhan.karabek@nu.edu.kz хабарласыңыз. Мен қосымша ақпарат беруге және сізде зерттеруге қатысты туындауы мүмкін кез келген сұрақтарды талқылауға қуаныштымын.

Орта мектеп мұғалімдерінің қауіпсіз оқу ортасы туралы түсініктерін зерттейтін маңызды зерттеулерге қосқан үлесіңіз үшін рахмет. Сіздің идеяларыңыз

бен тәжірибеңіз баға жетпес ақпарат болып табылады. Сіздің уақытыңыз бен қолдауыңызды бағалаймын.

Ізгі ниетпен,

Гүлжан Қарабек

Nazarbayev University

Leadership in School Education

email: gulzhan.karabek@nu.edu.kz

Appendix C3: Recruitment Emails in Russian

Уважаемый участник,

Надеюсь, это сообщение застанет вас в добром здравии. Меня зовут Гульжан Карабек, и в настоящее время я получаю степень магистра в Назарбаев Университете. В рамках своих академических требований я провожу исследовательский проект под названием “Восприятие учителями средних школ “безопасной школы” в определенных школах Астаны”.

Цель данного исследования – изучить представления и опыт начинающих и опытных учителей средней школы о безопасной школьной среде. Анализируя их ответы, можно выявить конкретные проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются учителя при реализации стратегий безопасности. Кроме того, будет изучено, как эти проблемы различаются в разных типах школ, таких как общеобразовательные и частные школы.

Ваше участие будет включать в себя интервью, которое, как ожидается, продлится около 30-40 минут. Вы будете проходить собеседование в предпочтительных для вас местах. Интервью будет проводиться на предпочтительном для вас языке (казахском/русском/английском). Ваша личность и любая личная информация, сообщенная в ходе интервью, будут строго конфиденциальны, а все данные будут обезличены для обеспечения вашей конфиденциальности.

Участие в данном исследовании является полностью добровольным, и вы можете отказаться от участия в нем в любое время без каких-либо последствий. Если вы хотите принять участие в исследовании или у вас есть дополнительные вопросы о нем, пожалуйста, свяжитесь со мной по адресу

gulzhan.karabek@nu.edu.kz. Я буду рада предоставить дополнительную информацию и обсудить любые вопросы, которые могут у вас возникнуть.

Спасибо за возможность внести свой вклад в важное исследование, посвященное изучению восприятия учителями средних школ условий безопасного обучения. Ваши идеи и опыт бесценны, и я очень ценю ваше время и поддержку.

С наилучшими пожеланиями,

Гульжан Карабек

Nazarbayev University

Leadership in School Education

email: gulzhan.karabek@nu.edu.kz

Appendix D1: Data Collection Instruments

Information on demographic variables (personal and professional characteristics) of the participants was collected, including:

- Gender
- Age
- Ethnic background
- Education level
- School type
- Language of instruction
- Years of experience
- Years of experience at the same school

The semi-structured interview consists of four sections. Each section includes questions designed to explore participants' understanding, experiences, and challenges related to safe learning environments. The open-ended questions are intended to encourage detailed responses and are presented below. As this is a semi-structured interview, follow-up questions were asked as necessary based on participants' answers to obtain deeper information and clarify or expand upon their responses.

Section 1: General Understanding of Safe Learning Environment

1. What is your understanding about the “safe learning environment”?
2. Could you elaborate on the key elements you associate with a safe learning environment?
3. How do you define a safe teaching environment, and why is it essential for student outcomes?

Section 2: Current School Safety Conditions

1. How do you perceive the safety conditions in your school? Could you provide examples?
2. Are there specific areas (e.g., physical, emotional, or social safety) where you feel the school excels or struggles?
3. Do you believe this type of school influences the safety of the learning and teaching environment? If yes, how are they different?
4. Could you compare your current school to any previous schools you've worked in?

Section 3: Personal Experiences and Perspectives

1. Can you share specific examples of how your perspective on school safety has evolved over time?
2. What strategies have you developed or changed over time to address these conditions?
3. Can you share a situation in which you felt unsafe and how effectively you dealt with such a situation?
4. Looking back, would you handle this situation differently now? Why or why not?

Section 4: Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement

1. What are the main challenges you face in ensuring a safe learning environment in your school?
2. Are these challenges related to school policies, resources, or community factors?
3. Could you describe a specific situation where you found it difficult to implement a safety strategy? What were the obstacles, and how did you address them?
4. Are there specific safety issues that are harder to address in your school?

Appendix D2: Data Collection Instruments in Kazakh

Қатысушылардың демографиялық айнымалылары (жеке және кәсіби сипаттамалары) туралы ақпарат жиналды, оның ішінде:

- Жынысы
- Жасы
- Этникалық шығу тегі
- Білім деңгейі
- Мектеп түрі
- Оқыту тілі
- Жалпы еңбек өтілі
- Бір мектептегі еңбек өтілі

Сұхбат сұрақтары:

1-бөлім: Қауіпсіз оқу ортасын жалпы түсіну

1. “Қауіпсіз оқу ортасы” ұғымын сіз қалай түсінесіз?
2. Қауіпсіз оқу ортасымен қандай негізгі элементтерді байланыстырасыз?
Толығырақ айтып бере аласыз ба?
3. Қауіпсіз оқыту ортасын қалай анықтайсыз және ол неге оқушылардың оқу нәтижелері үшін маңызды?

2-бөлім: Мектептегі қазіргі қауіпсіздік жағдайы

1. Мектебіңіздегі қауіпсіздік жағдайын қалай бағалайсыз? Мысал келтіре аласыз ба?
2. Қай салаларда (мысалы, физикалық, эмоционалдық немесе әлеуметтік қауіпсіздік) мектеп жақсы нәтиже көрсетеді немесе қиындықтарға тап болады деп ойлайсыз?

3. Сіз мектептің типі оқу және оқыту ортасының қауіпсіздігіне әсер етеді деп санайсыз ба? Егер иә болса, олар қалай ерекшеленеді?
4. Қазіргі мектебіңізді бұған дейін жұмыс істеген мектептермен салыстырып бере аласыз ба?

3-бөлім: Жеке тәжірибе және көзқарастар

1. Мектеп қауіпсіздігіне деген көзқарасыңыз уақыт өте келе қалай өзгергенін нақты мысалдармен бөлісе аласыз ба?
2. Қауіпсіздік жағдайларын шешу үшін қандай стратегияларды дамыттыңыз немесе өзгерттіңіз?
3. Өзіңізді қауіпсіз сезінбеген жағдайды сипаттай аласыз ба және ол жағдаймен қалай тиімді күрестіңіз?
4. Сол жағдайға қазір қайта тап болсаңыз, басқаша әрекет етер ме едіңіз? Неліктен?

4-бөлім: Қиындықтар мен жақсарту мүмкіндіктері

1. Мектебіңізде қауіпсіз оқу ортасын қамтамасыз ету кезінде қандай негізгі қиындықтарға тап боласыз?
2. Бұл қиындықтар мектеп саясатына, ресурстардың жеткіліктілігіне немесе қоғам факторларына байланысты ма?
3. Қауіпсіздік стратегиясын іске асыру қиын болған нақты жағдайды сипаттай аласыз ба? Қандай кедергілер кездесті және оларды қалай жеңдіңіз?
4. Мектебіңізде шешілуі қиын арнайы қауіпсіздік мәселелері бар ма?

Appendix D3: Data Collection Instruments in Russian

Была собрана информация о демографических переменных (личных и профессиональных характеристиках) участников, включая:

- Пол
- Возраст
- Этническое происхождение
- Уровень образования
- Тип школы
- Язык преподавания
- Годы опыта работы
- Годы опыта работы в одной и той же школе

Вопросы интервью:

Раздел 1: Общее понимание безопасной образовательной среды

1. Как вы понимаете термин “безопасная образовательная среда”?
2. Могли бы вы подробнее рассказать о ключевых элементах, которые вы связываете с безопасной образовательной средой?
3. Как вы определяете безопасную среду для преподавания и почему она важна для успеваемости учеников?

Раздел 2: Текущее состояние безопасности в школе

1. Как вы оцениваете условия безопасности в вашей школе? Могли бы вы привести примеры?
2. Есть ли конкретные области (например, физическая, эмоциональная или социальная безопасность), в которых школа преуспевает или испытывает трудности?

3. Считаете ли вы, что тип школы влияет на безопасность учебной и преподавательской среды? Если да, то чем они различаются?
4. Могли бы вы сравнить вашу нынешнюю школу с предыдущими школами, в которых вы работали?

Раздел 3: Личный опыт и взгляды

1. Можете ли вы привести конкретные примеры того, как с течением времени изменилось ваше восприятие безопасности в школе?
2. Какие стратегии вы разработали или изменили со временем для решения проблем безопасности?
3. Можете ли вы рассказать о ситуации, когда вы чувствовали себя небезопасно, и как вы справились с этой ситуацией?
4. Оглядываясь назад, поступили бы вы в этой ситуации иначе? Почему да или почему нет?

Раздел 4: Проблемы и возможности для улучшения

1. С какими основными трудностями вы сталкиваетесь при обеспечении безопасной образовательной среды в вашей школе?
2. Связаны ли эти трудности с политикой школы, ресурсами или факторами сообщества?
3. Могли бы вы описать конкретную ситуацию, когда вам было трудно реализовать стратегию обеспечения безопасности? С какими препятствиями вы столкнулись и как вы их преодолели?
4. Есть ли конкретные вопросы безопасности, которые труднее решить в вашей школе?

Appendix E: Data Analysis – Transcript and Coding Samples

Interview	Initial Codes	Themes
“First and foremost, the most important aspect is physical safety – the safety of their bodies and health. Secondly, psychological and emotional safety are just as important.”	Importance of physical safety; Importance of emotional and psychological safety	Understanding of safe learning environment
“If a student experiences instability, anxiety, or emotional distress , it can lead to a loss of concentration .”	Emotional distress affects concentration and learning	Impact of safety on academic performance
“ Physical infrastructure of school buildings (like broken stairs or old electrical systems) also poses risks.”	School facilities	Physical safety measures
“We have a team of psychologists ... they focus on diagnosing and preventing potential issues.”	Role of school psychologists	Psychological safety measures
“Private schools have closed campuses and better security systems compared to public schools.”	Better physical security measures in private schools	Different perceptions based on school type
“Conflicts usually arise when the teacher loses control of the class or the students are left with nothing to do.”	Importance of teacher control to prevent conflicts	Conflict prevention measures
“ Regular drills (fire, terrorist threat, earthquake) help students react appropriately in emergencies.”	Importance of regular safety in emergency situations	Emergency preparedness (physical safety)
“ All members of the school community, including students themselves, are responsible for maintaining a positive environment.”	Shared responsibility for safe environment	Safety perceptions
“We have a Face ID system, security checkpoints, and a closed campus .”	Restriction to school campus for strangers	Physical safety measures
“ Psychological bullying may still happen even if physical violence does not.”	Forms of bullying	Emotional safety threats
“ Parents’ involvement and socio-economic status can influence how safe students feel in school.”	Impact of parent’s role on learners’ safety	Another perception