

Article

Reclaiming Authority: A Mixed-Methods Investigation of Student-Initiated Bullying Against Teachers in Lebanese Schools

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Abstract

Student-initiated bullying against teachers has become an increasingly visible yet under-studied issue in educational research, particularly in regions like Lebanon, where such dynamics remain largely unspoken. This mixed-methods pilot study explored the experiences of 53 educators working in Lebanese private schools, combining survey responses with in-depth interviews from a purposive subsample of 11 teachers across elementary, middle, and high school levels. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and the Power Relations in Education framework, the study examined how intersecting layers of influence, from classroom interactions to institutional cultures and broader societal norms, and patterns of student-to-teacher aggression. The findings revealed frequent occurrences of verbal defiance, emotional manipulation, and cyberbullying. Many teachers reported feeling unsupported by school administrations and constrained by cultural attitudes that silenced discussions about teacher vulnerability. Educators described emotional exhaustion, professional frustration, and a growing sense of disempowerment in the face of persistent aggression. Their voices underscored the pressing need for structural reforms, including clear policies, sustained training, and a cultural shift that reinforces respect for educators. This research contributes to a broader understanding of the emotional and professional impact of student bullying on teachers and highlights the need for inclusive, context-sensitive strategies that prioritize educator well-being and authority in the school environment.

Keywords: classroom power dynamics; ecological theory; Lebanese education; school climate; student-to-teacher bullying; teacher victimization



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1. Introduction

Although schools are often viewed as safe and nurturing environments, they can also serve as spaces where subtle and overt forms of aggression occur. The concept of “schooling as violence,” introduced by [1] pointing out that educational settings may perpetuate harm through systemic patterns of disrespect and hostile classroom dynamics. Building on this idea, more recent scholarships have drawn attention to a largely overlooked phenomenon: the aggression that students direct toward their teachers. Over the past few decades, educational research has intensely scrutinized bullying within schools, largely portraying students as victims and peers as perpetrators [2]. However, a growing body of literature reveals a parallel concern: teachers are increasingly becoming targets of bullying, particularly by their students [3]. Despite the rising prevalence of this phenomenon globally,

the Middle East, particularly Lebanon, remains underrepresented in the literature. The existing silence reflects not a lack of incidents, but a cultural and institutional reluctance to confront them.

Recent research has brought growing attention to the harmful effects of student aggression on teachers' professional and emotional well-being. For instance, ref. [4] explored the relationship between student-directed hostility and school climate, revealing that when teachers experience higher levels of aggression from students, they tend to perceive their school environment more negatively and report lower levels of personal well-being. Similarly, ref. [5] uncovered troubling rates of both verbal and physical violence against teachers, emphasizing the profound psychological and professional toll such victimization can take. Adding to this body of evidence [6], in their study of secondary teachers in South Korea, found that student-perpetrated victimization was closely linked to feelings of neglect and reduced pride in one's work, even though many teachers remained committed to their roles. Collectively, these studies underscore the complex and damaging impact of student aggression on educators, highlighting a pressing need for institutional strategies that support teacher resilience and promote safer school climates. Student-to-teacher bullying challenges foundational assumptions about classroom authority and teacher autonomy. Grounded in the Ecological Systems Theory of [7], this study conceptualizes student bullying behavior as influenced by multilayered environmental factors, ranging from immediate classroom interactions to broader sociocultural norms and administrative policies. Simultaneously, the theory of power relations of [8] provides a critical lens to examine how authority is contested, re-negotiated, and, at times, subverted within educational institutions.

Teachers who experience bullying often suffer in silence. The stigma attached to victimhood in professional settings, especially in cultures where teachers are expected to maintain authority, prevents them from reporting incidents [9]. Many Lebanese teachers report feeling isolated, unsupported by school administrators, and fearful of repercussions on their careers. This erosion of psychological safety can significantly impact teacher retention, job satisfaction, and overall school climate [10]. This study was inspired by firsthand experiences of observing colleagues grapple with persistent student misconduct without institutional recourse. As Lebanese educators, we contend that these narratives deserve visibility and scholarly attention. By amplifying teachers' voices, this research seeks to initiate a culturally relevant dialog and recommend sustainable, context-sensitive interventions.

1.1. Problem Statement

In Lebanon, the phenomenon of student-to-teacher bullying remains under-researched and socially silenced. Teachers who endure harassment or disrespect by students often find themselves trapped in a cycle of underreporting and institutional apathy. This dynamic not only weakens teacher morale and efficacy but also normalizes student misconduct as a tolerated part of school life.

Existing literature reveals that in contexts where teacher authority is undermined and administrative support is lacking, bullying behavior can escalate, leading to long-term professional burnout [3]. Student-to-teacher bullying has been documented across a range of international contexts, including Europe, North America, Asia, and Australia, suggesting that while its expression may differ across settings, the issue itself is a broader educational concern. For example, ref. [3] documented similar patterns of teacher-targeted bullying in Finland. Lebanese schools often lack the frameworks or disciplinary protocols to address student aggression towards teachers, allowing such incidents to go unaddressed. Moreover, cultural perceptions discourage teachers from voicing their grievances for fear of being labeled incompetent.

This study seeks to disrupt that silence and critically investigate how Lebanese teachers experience and interpret student-initiated bullying, emphasizing the need for institutional accountability and cultural change.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

This pilot study aims to explore the phenomenon of student-to-teacher bullying in Lebanese schools from the perspectives of educators. By employing mixed-methods design, the study seeks to:

- Identify the types and manifestations of student bullying directed at teachers.
- Analyze how such behaviors impact teachers' professional identity, emotional well-being, and classroom management.
- Examine the role of administrative responses and institutional climate in addressing or exacerbating the problem.
- Propose culturally sensitive and evidence-based interventions that can mitigate such incidents and support teacher resilience.

The study is theoretically grounded in **the Ecological Systems Theory**, ref. [7] explains the interplay between individual behaviors and systemic influences, and **power theory of [8]**, interrogates the fluid and contested nature of authority within hierarchical structures.

1.3. Research Questions

To guide the inquiry, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What forms of bullying do Lebanese teachers report experiencing from their students?
2. How do these teachers interpret and emotionally respond to such incidents?
3. What roles do school leadership and institutional structures play in enabling or curbing student-to-teacher bullying?
4. What strategies do teachers recommend for managing or preventing student-initiated bullying?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study makes a novel contribution to both regional and global discussions on school-based bullying by centering a marginalized and often silenced group: teachers who are bullied by students. While research in Western contexts has begun to address this issue, Lebanon and the broader Arab region remain largely absent from the scholarly discourse.

By applying ecological and power-theoretical frameworks, the study goes beyond merely describing incidents to analyzing how systemic and cultural forces interact to perpetuate or mitigate bullying. Unlike traditional peer-to-peer bullying, upward bullying involves a reversal of expected authority relationships, where students collectively or individually challenge formal teacher authority. In many cases, this behavior may reflect resistance to discipline, attempts to avoid accountability, peer-performance motives, or efforts to test institutional boundaries. These perceived motivations are interpreted here through teachers' lived experiences rather than as directly measured student intentions. For this study, bullying is understood as repeated intentional behavior involving a perceived power imbalance. The findings are crucial for Lebanese school leaders, policymakers, and teacher preparation programs, highlighting the urgent need to develop context-sensitive anti-bullying policies that protect educators as well as students. Furthermore, this research invites a reimagining of classroom power structures and advocates for equity-driven educational reforms that respect the dignity and safety of all stakeholders within the learning environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Defining Bullying in Educational Contexts

Bullying in educational settings is a complex phenomenon that reflects broader social hierarchies and institutional dynamics. While traditionally viewed through the lens of student victimization, recent scholarship highlights the victimization of teachers, emphasizing the need to expand the conceptualization of school bullying [3]. Educator-directed bullying, particularly by students, can be understood through Ecological Systems Theory of [7], which posits that behavior is influenced by interactions within layered environmental systems, microsystems like classrooms, mesosystems such as school culture, and macrosystems including societal norms.

Globally, bullying is often categorized into reactive aggression, driven by emotional responses such as anger or frustration, and proactive aggression, which is deliberate, goal-oriented, and intended to dominate or manipulate others [11]. Most student-initiated bullying toward teachers functions as a chronic job demand that erodes well-being, particularly in settings where traditional authority hierarchies are shifting [12,13]. Workplace bullying is defined as repeated, health-harming mistreatment by one or more employees, characterized by verbal abuse, offensive conduct, and deliberate humiliation [14]. In school settings, student-to-teacher bullying represents a unique and increasingly common variant of workplace bullying, wherein the perpetrator occupies a subordinate position but exercises power through disruptive behavior, disrespect, or digital harassment [15]. Essential features of bullying include power imbalance, intentionality, repetition, and psychosocial harm [2].

2.2. Bullying of Teachers by Colleagues and Parents

Workplace bullying in schools is not limited to students. Teachers may also experience hostile behavior from their peers due to professional jealousy, departmental politics, or social marginalization [16]. In highly competitive or poorly managed institutions, colleagues may exploit power differentials to intimidate or isolate one another, particularly targeting novice educators or those with perceived vulnerabilities [9]. Parent-induced bullying is another overlooked facet. Teachers often report verbal threats, public humiliation, and even online harassment from parents who seek to challenge or override classroom authority. This behavior is particularly prevalent in private school settings where parental involvement intersects with consumerist expectations [17]. Studies suggest that inexperienced teachers are more likely to be the target of such behaviors, especially when parents perceive them as lacking authority [10].

2.3. Student-to-Teacher Bullying

Student-to-teacher bullying, also referred to as contrapower harassment or cross-peer aggression, is marked by verbal, physical, or cyber conduct directed from a subordinate (student) to a superior (teacher) in a manner that defies traditional hierarchies [18]. This form of harassment is widespread, with evidence of teachers being shouted at, sworn at, intimidated, or mocked by their students [3]. Cyberbullying has emerged as a growing concern, as students anonymously target teachers on social media, damaging reputations and mental health [19]. A multi-country comparative study by [20] revealed that teacher-directed bullying tends to occur more frequently in schools lacking clear behavioral policies and where school leadership fails to support teacher authority. Such environments reinforce student impunity and marginalize teacher voices.

2.4. Teachers' Perceptions of Student Bullies

Teachers' interpretations of student bullying significantly shape their coping strategies. Some educators regard such behavior as a rite of passage or a reflection of adolescent

rebellion, while others associate it with home violence, media exposure, or individual pathology [21]. Cultural narratives that frame teachers as authority figures often discourage them from admitting victimization, leading to internalized shame and emotional suppression [9]. In some contexts, teachers view bullying as an outcome of inadequate parental involvement or inconsistent discipline at home [10].

2.5. Forms of Bullying Directed at Teachers

2.5.1. Overt Bullying

Verbal Aggression: Teachers frequently report being subjected to yelling, insults, name-calling, and threats. Such hostility often aims to undermine their authority in front of peers or the class [3].

Physical Aggression: Though less common, some teachers experience acts such as pushing, property damage, or physical intimidation [3].

2.5.2. Covert Bullying

Relational or Social Bullying: This includes spreading false rumors, inciting peer groups against a teacher, mocking teachers on social media, and sabotage through deceitful behavior [22]. These acts often cause long-term psychological harm, particularly when administrators fail to intervene.

2.6. Profile of a Student Bully

Contrary to stereotypes, student bullies are not a homogeneous group. While some exhibit low self-esteem and emotional instability, others are socially skilled and manipulate power to achieve dominance [11]. Gender-based patterns are inconsistent—some studies report higher rates of aggression among males, while others find little to no gender specificity in teacher-targeted bullying [22].

2.7. Profile of Bullied Teachers

Key predictors of victimization include novice status, poor classroom management skills, and lack of administrative support [9]. The power asymmetry is especially visible when teachers feel unsupported by colleagues or leadership, increasing their vulnerability [16]. Furthermore, effective classroom management has been shown to reduce disruptive behaviors, while chaotic classroom environments invite more aggression [3]. Teacher personality traits, such as agreeableness, emotional sensitivity, or conflict avoidance, may also play a role in their susceptibility to bullying [23]. Teachers perceived as passive or insecure may be more likely to be targeted by assertive or defiant students.

2.8. Consequences of Workplace Bullying on Teachers

2.8.1. Psychological and Emotional Effects

Workplace bullying profoundly impacts teachers' mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, burnout, and even symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [22]. Teachers often report diminished confidence, emotional exhaustion, and difficulty managing classrooms after repeated exposure to student aggression.

2.8.2. Physiological and Behavioral Consequences

Prolonged bullying may manifest in physical symptoms such as sleep disturbances, headaches, elevated blood pressure, and digestive issues [16]. Teachers may become socially withdrawn, exhibit reduced patience, or disengage from collaborative teaching practices.

2.8.3. Impact on Teaching Practices and School Culture

Victimized teachers often experience declining job satisfaction and professional efficacy. They may resort to overly rigid or authoritarian teaching styles to compensate for lost control [9]. Long-term effects include increased absenteeism, reluctance to innovate pedagogically, and premature departure from the profession [10].

2.9. Theoretical Frameworks

Understanding the complex phenomenon of student-to-teacher bullying requires a multi-dimensional theoretical lens. Unlike traditional workplace bullying, this form of aggression, often labeled upward bullying or contrapower harassment, involves power inversions where individuals in lower hierarchical positions (students) inflict psychological or emotional harm on higher-status individuals (teachers) [15,18]. The following frameworks provide a layered understanding of both the perceived motivations behind such behaviors and their emotional and institutional consequences.

2.9.1. Attribution Theory: Understanding Perceived Causes of Bullying

Attribution Theory, originally developed by [24] and later expanded by [25] explores how individuals interpret and assign causality to events. The theory distinguishes between internal attributions (causes within the individual) and external attributions (causes outside the individual), with added dimensions such as stability, controllability, and intentionality [25].

In the context of student-to-teacher bullying, this framework helps examine how teachers perceive the reasons behind student aggression. For instance, a teacher may attribute a student's defiance to internal traits (e.g., disrespect, lack of empathy) or to external pressures (e.g., dysfunctional family life or peer influence). These attributions influence not only how teachers respond to bullying but also their emotional reactions and coping strategies [10].

Recent research confirms that educators who perceive bullying as externally caused (e.g., social context or upbringing) are more likely to respond with empathy and seek institutional solutions, while those who attribute it to stable, internal factors may feel powerless and disillusioned [17].

2.9.2. Humiliation Theory: Emotional Trauma and Power Dynamics

Humiliation Theory, developed by [25] posits that humiliation occurs when individuals are publicly degraded by others perceived to hold more power, causing deep psychological wounds such as shame, rage, and social withdrawal. While traditionally applied to political or intergroup conflict, the theory has been increasingly used to explain interpersonal aggression, particularly in hierarchical settings such as schools [26].

In the case of student-to-teacher bullying, humiliation often occurs publicly in the classroom or online, where teachers are mocked, defied, or disrespected in front of peers or students. This social exposure amplifies emotional harm, making the teacher feel powerless and devalued. Teachers subjected to such acts may internalize feelings of inadequacy or respond with defensive teaching practices, thereby compromising pedagogical quality [3].

Humiliation is typically categorized into four processes: conquest, relegation, reinforcement, and exclusion, each serving to reestablish dominance and strip the target of dignity [25]. These patterns are clearly evident in persistent bullying behaviors where students challenge classroom authority or ridicule a teacher's credibility.

2.9.3. Organizational Culture Theory: Institutional Enablers of Bullying

Bullying does not occur in a vacuum; it is often shaped and reinforced by the organizational culture of the institution [27]. Ref. [27] offers a useful framework for analyzing how shared values, norms, leadership styles, and institutional structures influence workplace behavior.

According to [27] culture operates at three levels:

Artifacts: Visible structures and processes (e.g., disciplinary policies, classroom layouts).

Espoused values: Stated beliefs and goals (e.g., mission statements, school ethics).

Underlying assumptions: Deeply embedded beliefs about power, discipline, and hierarchy.

When schools maintain ambiguous or unenforced behavior policies, tolerate aggressive student behavior, or lack consistent administrative support, they foster environments where bullying becomes normalized. Studies indicate that hierarchical power gaps, competitive school environments, and authoritarian leadership styles can further exacerbate the prevalence of bullying against teachers [16].

In academic institutions where educators are evaluated primarily on student satisfaction or performance metrics, teachers may hesitate to report bullying for fear of being viewed as ineffective or unfit, thus perpetuating a cycle of silence and abuse [18]. This dynamic may unintentionally discourage teachers from reporting bullying, particularly in environments where educator effectiveness is closely tied to student evaluations.

2.9.4. Integrated Application of Frameworks

Together, these three theories, Attribution Theory, Humiliation Theory, and Organizational Culture Theory, provide a holistic lens to analyze the individual, relational, and institutional layers of student-to-teacher bullying:

- **Attribution Theory** explains how teachers interpret student behavior, influencing emotional responses and reporting decisions.
- **Humiliation Theory** underscores the psychological impact of public disrespect and the power dynamics that fuel it.
- **Organizational Culture Theory** illuminates how school systems may unknowingly tolerate or enable student aggression.

These frameworks collectively underscore the urgency for systemic reform, not only to empower teachers but also to foster a respectful, supportive educational climate where authority and dignity are preserved.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to explore how teachers perceive and respond to student-initiated bullying in Lebanese schools. The authors brought professional experience in teacher education, educational leadership, and school counseling, while maintaining reflexive awareness throughout data collection and analysis. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the research aimed to capture both the prevalence and lived experiences of this phenomenon. The quantitative component, consisting of an online survey, provided measurable data across grade levels and teaching experiences. Meanwhile, the qualitative component, which involved individual and focus group interviews, allowed for a deeper examination of the emotional and professional impact of student aggression on teachers. This methodological integration aligns with the recommendations of [28], offering both generalizability and contextual richness.

The qualitative strand illuminated the nuanced emotional realities and coping strategies employed by teachers, while the quantitative strand helped identify consistent patterns and institutional trends. To further engage participants and enhance reflection, teachers were encouraged to read a curated selection of academic articles related to classroom

management and contemporary pedagogical practices. This strategy aimed to stimulate critical dialog during interviews. In parallel, students engaged in related class projects were guided to consult academic sources, thereby promoting exposure to a variety of values and viewpoints in education.

3.2. Participants

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, as the study specifically sought educators who could provide meaningful insight into experiences of student-to-teacher bullying within the selected school context. All teaching staff were invited to complete the survey, and participants for the qualitative phase were selected from those who indicated willingness to participate in follow-up interviews. This sequential approach allowed the qualitative findings to build directly on the quantitative results. The focus groups included interview participants as well as additional volunteer teachers.

3.2.1. Sample Description

The participants were recruited from a reputable private school located in central Beirut that offers Lebanese, American, and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. The school is known for its academic rigor and diverse cultural and religious body. Faculty members similarly reflect a range of sectarian backgrounds, contributing to a pluralistic school environment. Teachers from the elementary, middle, and high school divisions were invited to participate in the study. Eligibility criteria included having direct or indirect experiences with student misbehavior or bullying.

3.2.2. Sampling Procedure

To ensure balanced representation across educational levels, a stratified random sampling method was used. Two rounds of online surveys were distributed through the school's IT department. (See Appendix A.1.. Perceptions Questionnaire, Appendix A.2.. Types of Bullying Questionnaire and Appendix A.3.. Teachers' Individual Interview Guide).

Teachers who reported direct incidents of student-initiated bullying were invited to participate in the qualitative phase. Eleven teachers volunteered for this stage, which involved individual interviews and focus groups conducted via Zoom.

3.3. Survey and Interview Protocol Design

To capture the complexity of student-to-teacher bullying, the study employed a mixed-methods data collection design consisting of a structured questionnaire followed by semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was designed to gather both demographic and experiential data and was organized around four domains: (1) frequency and forms of student-to-teacher bullying, (2) teachers' emotional and professional responses, (3) perceived institutional support and administrative response, and (4) coping strategies used by teachers following bullying incidents. Responses included both closed-ended and open-ended items to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences.

To deepen understanding of teachers' lived experiences, follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with volunteer participants who reported direct experiences of student-to-teacher bullying. The interview guide was developed to explore recurring themes identified in the survey and included prompts related to: (a) descriptions of bullying incidents, (b) perceived motivations behind student behavior, (c) emotional and professional consequences, (d) institutional responses, and (e) recommendations for prevention and intervention. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility for participants to expand on issues they considered most significant.

The instruments used in this study were thoughtfully adapted from established tools to ensure contextual relevance and validity. The survey questionnaire drew on validated

instruments originally developed by [29] both of which examined dimensions of student-initiated bullying and staff perceptions of cyberbullying in educational settings. To support the qualitative phase, semi-structured interview protocols were informed by conceptual frameworks provided by [3,9], with the goal of capturing the multifaceted nature of bullying as it unfolds in schools. Within the Lebanese program, students follow the national curriculum, including Arabic language instruction, Lebanese history, civics, and preparation for official state examinations.

The adapted survey included items addressing various forms of student misconduct, verbal, physical, social, and cyber, as well as questions related to possible triggers, coping strategies used by teachers, and perceived levels of institutional support. Prior to full deployment, the instrument was reviewed by a panel of experts in education and psychology, then piloted with a small sample of teachers to refine clarity and content.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and formal authorization from the participating school's administration, the survey was distributed electronically with the help of the school's IT department to ensure participant anonymity. Teaching faculty were invited to complete the questionnaire voluntarily and without time constraints. Upon completion of the quantitative phase, a subset of eleven teachers who had indicated experiences with student aggression agreed to participate in follow-up interviews. These interviews were conducted via Zoom and focused on participants' personal experiences, institutional responses, and recommendations. With participants' consent, the sessions were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to support rigorous thematic analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis Strategy

Labels were added throughout to distinguish quantitative and qualitative subsamples.

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages to identify patterns in reported bullying experiences and institutional responses. Qualitative interview data were analyzed thematically following an iterative coding process. Initial open coding was used to identify recurring ideas, followed by focused coding to refine broader themes related to teacher vulnerability, institutional culture, and perceived power dynamics. To enhance credibility, coding decisions were reviewed collaboratively by the research team until thematic agreement was reached.

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design guided the research process [28]. Quantitative data were first analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27 and Microsoft Excel to examine frequencies, cross-tabulations, and correlations related to bullying incidents and demographic variables. This phase helped to map patterns of student misconduct across school levels and contexts. In the second phase, qualitative data were coded inductively using thematic analysis to deepen the interpretation of quantitative trends. Key themes, such as emotional toll, perceived power imbalances, lack of institutional preparedness, and the need for systemic support, emerged organically from participants' narratives.

3.6. Ensuring Trustworthiness and Credibility

To enhance validity and reliability, all instruments were adapted with appropriate permissions and subjected to expert review and pilot testing. Methodological triangulation, using data from surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups, strengthened the credibility of the findings by allowing for convergence across sources. Reflexivity was incorporated throughout the research process by maintaining analytic memos and field notes, which helped minimize bias and capture nuances in teachers' experiences.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent prior to participation and were assured that their responses would remain confidential. Given the emotional sensitivity of the topic, participants were reminded that they could withdraw at any stage without consequence. The study adhered to strict ethical standards, guided by APA's ethical principles and the IRB's requirements. All participants received comprehensive information about the study's aims and procedures and signed informed consent forms before participation. Confidentiality was rigorously maintained: survey responses were collected anonymously, and all interview data were de-identified during transcription. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely, and no personal identifiers were included in any published material. Participants retained the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

4. Results

This mixed-methods study aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions of student-to-teacher bullying, explore its most prevalent forms, and collect suggestions for proactive intervention. Data were gathered from 51 teachers working in elementary, middle, and high schools through structured surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. The quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS (Version 27), and descriptive statistics were used to present frequencies and percentages. The results are reported across three core areas: (1) survey responses, (2) interview insights, and (3) focus group themes.

4.1. Survey Results

4.1.1. Demographics and General Awareness

Of the 51 respondents, an overwhelming majority were female (96.1%). More than half (56.9%) acknowledged the existence of student-initiated bullying in their schools. However, when asked about personal experience, 66.7% reported not having been directly targeted in the past two academic years. Still, 23.7% stated that they had personally experienced bullying by students during that period (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographics and Experience with Student-to-Teacher Bullying (n = 51).

Category	Percentage (%)
Gender (Female)	96.1
Acknowledged the existence of student-to-teacher bullying	56.9
Did not personally experience bullying (past 2 years)	66.7
Personally experienced bullying (past 2 years)	23.7

4.1.2. Emotional and Cognitive Reactions

Bullying incidents evoked intense emotional reactions. Most notably, 86% of respondents reported feeling anger in response to such events, while 67% indicated that these incidents negatively affected their overall well-being and job satisfaction. Teachers overwhelmingly (90%) advocated for more robust training in classroom management for undergraduate education majors. Meanwhile, 16% of teachers expressed the need for personal or institutional support to address bullying effectively (see Table 2).

Table 2. Emotional and Cognitive Reactions to Student Bullying.

Emotional/Cognitive Reaction	Percentage (%)
Felt anger	86
Reported impact on well-being/job satisfaction	67
Support undergraduate training on classroom management	90
Needed support to address bullying	16

4.1.3. Types of Bullying Experienced

Teachers reported encountering various forms of student aggression. Verbal bullying emerged as the most frequent (81%), followed by social/relational aggression (70%), cyberbullying (68%), and physical bullying (43%). These figures reveal the multifaceted nature of student-perpetrated harm in schools (see Table 3).

Table 3. Types of Student-Initiated Bullying Reported by Teachers.

Type of Bullying	Percentage (%)
Verbal	81
Social/Relational	70
Cyberbullying	68
Physical	43

4.1.4. Incident Reporting and Institutional Response

Although over half of the teachers (56%) stated that they reported incidents to their section heads, only one-third (33%) believed that school management held adequate responsibility for addressing bullying behavior. This distribution reflects the broader gender profile of the Lebanese teaching profession, where women constitute most school-based teachers. On a more positive note, 69% supported the implementation of a comprehensive school-wide anti-bullying policy (see Table 4).

Table 4. Reporting Behavior and Institutional Perceptions.

Category	Percentage (%)
Reported incidents to section head	56
Believed school management response	33
Advocate for whole-school policy	69

4.1.5. Collegial Witnessing and Engagement

Interestingly, 11 respondents reported having witnessed student aggression directed toward their colleagues. Despite this, only five teachers expressed interest in participating in follow-up qualitative interviews, suggesting a potential hesitancy or emotional fatigue around the topic.

4.2. Survey 2: Frequency and Correlational Patterns

The second phase of the survey delved deeper into the frequency and demographic patterns of bullying incidents. Although inferential analyses were limited by the modest sample size, preliminary trends suggested that younger, early-career teachers were more frequently targeted by students, particularly in middle school environments. These trends are discussed further in the qualitative section of the study. Data analysis incorporated both quantitative (SPSS Version 27) and qualitative (NVivo 14, thematic analysis) approaches to ensure depth and rigor. Quantitative results are presented with descriptive statistics,

while qualitative findings are structured around themes supported by interview and focus group data.

4.2.1. Demographic Profile and Teaching Experience

Of the 51 participating teachers, the majority were women aged 35–44, with 11–20 years of teaching experience. Distribution across elementary, middle, and high school levels was roughly equal (approximately 33% per category). This balanced sample supports comprehensive insights across educational settings.

4.2.2. Gender Dynamics in Student Bullying

Participants overwhelmingly agreed (68%) that bullying can be perpetrated by students of any gender. However, gender-specific patterns emerged (see Table 5):

Table 5. Gender-Specific Bullying Behavior (n = 51).

Observed Behavior	Percentage (%)
Male students bullying female teachers	35
Female students bullying female teachers	25
Female students bullying male teachers	17
Male students bullying male teachers	11

Table 5 shows the figures suggesting that female teachers are most frequently targeted, particularly by male students.

4.2.3. Perceived Causes and Behavioral Traits

Table 6 presents the Survey data which revealed that 74% of teachers linked student bullying to poor classroom management, and 43% reported that bullying occurs across all grade levels. In teacher discourse, student bullies were often described as struggling with the regulation of anger, attention-seeking, or having a history of being bullied themselves.

Table 6. Perceived Causes of Bullying (n = 51).

Attributed Cause	Percentage (%)
Bullying across all grade levels	43
Poor classroom management	74
Emotional regulation issues (qualitative)	—
Attention-seeking or prior victim status	—

(The dash indicates themes identified through qualitative analysis, rather than quantitative frequency.).

4.2.4. Forms and Frequency of Bullying

Using SPSS analysis of a Likert-type psychometric scale, the following frequencies were observed as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Frequency and Form of Student-to-Teacher Bullying (n = 51).

Type of Bullying	Percentage (%)
Verbal (e.g., unwarranted criticism)	45
Physical (e.g., disrespectful gestures or actions)	50
Social/relational (e.g., lying, manipulation)	45
Social/relational (e.g., passive resistance, lateness)	39
Cyberbullying (e.g., digital harassment)	10

4.3. Qualitative Insights

4.3.1. Interview Narratives

Eleven teachers participated in semi-structured interviews. NVivo thematic coding highlighted several core areas: Teachers unanimously described student-to-teacher bullying as intentional, harmful behavior directed at undermining authority. Approximately 80% equated these behaviors with workplace bullying, while 20% attributed them to developmental immaturity.

4.3.2. Personal Experiences

Over half of the participants (6 out of 11) shared direct experiences with bullying, ranging from verbal defiance to inappropriate sexual remarks. All were aware of colleagues who had faced similar aggression. This hesitation appears meaningful and may reflect emotional fatigue, fear of professional stigma, or concern that acknowledging victimization may be interpreted as weakness. Teachers often described administrative responses as passive, reflected in delayed intervention, inconsistent disciplinary action, or formal acknowledgment without meaningful follow-up.

4.3.3. Perceived Causes

Table 8 shows that 60% of teachers attributed bullying to a combination of student and teacher factors, 30% pointed to students' emotional challenges, and 10% acknowledged that classroom control might be a contributing factor.

Table 8. Qualitative Breakdown: Perceived Causes from Interviewees (n = 11).

Cause Category	Percentage (%)
Both student and teacher-related	60
Student behavioral/emotional issues	30
Teacher/classroom management	10

4.3.4. Impact on Teachers

Respondents reported profound effects: diminished self-confidence, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, personal stress, and work–life spillover. One respondent added, “The incident was documented, but after that, nothing really changed”.

4.3.5. Recommendations for Action

Table 9 presents the strategies the Teachers suggested to address bullying:

Table 9. Teacher-Endorsed Interventions (n = 11).

Recommended Intervention	Percentage (%)
Teacher training (classroom/conflict management)	40
Character-building campaigns for students	30
Psychological counseling for bullies and victims	50
Root cause investigation	30
Clear anti-bullying policy with consistent enforcement	20
Greater parental involvement and collaboration	30

4.3.6. Focus Group Themes

Three focus group discussions, each with 6–8 participants, expanded on interview findings:

Dominant Bullying Forms: Verbal aggression was identified as most prevalent, often targeting teachers' appearance or tone. Cyberbullying and sexual harassment, though less frequent, were emerging concerns.

Perpetrator Traits: Bullies were often characterized as attention-seeking, trauma-affected, or driven by a desire for control or revenge.

Victim Characteristics: Newer teachers, those perceived as too lenient or too strict, or those differing socio-culturally from colleagues, were more susceptible.

Concrete Examples: Teachers shared vivid examples, such as students mocking attire, sending sexual innuendos online, ignoring instructions during remote lessons, and even mimicking inappropriate gestures.

Using SPSS, descriptive analysis confirms a pervasive, multi-dimensional pattern of student bullying, with verbal and physical forms most common and female teachers most affected. NVivo-supported thematic analysis captures deeper teacher experiences: from self-doubt and burnout to calls for professional training and policy reform. The integration of both methods provides a comprehensive, human-centered portrayal of the issue. The results revealed that student-to-teacher bullying was not only a persistent issue across Lebanese schools but also one that manifests in multiple forms, verbal, social, physical, and digital, each leaving its mark on educators' emotional and professional well-being. This often involves undermining teachers' disciplinary decisions, bypassing teacher authority, or limiting teachers' autonomy in classroom management. Quantitative and qualitative data converged to highlight that many teachers feel unsupported when navigating these challenges. Participants emphasized the psychological toll of repeated aggression, especially when institutional responses are perceived as passive or inconsistent.

5. Discussion

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on student-to-teacher bullying, particularly within the Lebanese educational context, a region where this issue remains underexplored. The findings affirm the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon and align with international research documenting both overt and covert forms of aggression faced by educators [9,17,30].

5.1. Prevalence and Forms of Bullying

Consistent with previous global studies, verbal bullying emerged as the most prevalent form, reported by over 54% of participants. This finding aligns with studies conducted in Estonia [31], Luxembourg [3] and South Africa [9], which all indicate a significant rise in verbal abuse directed at educators.

Physical bullying, while less prevalent, was still reported by one-third of participants. Similar rates were noted by [31], suggesting that although physical aggression may be less visible than verbal abuse, it remains a concern warranting intervention.

Covert forms of bullying, such as social exclusion and cyberbullying, were also notable, accounting for 47.2% of reported incidents. These findings echo research by [3], who found that the digitization of classrooms has amplified student access to teachers, increasing incidents of cyber harassment. Lebanese teachers in this study shared parallel concerns, particularly linked to the online learning environments adopted during and after the COVID-19 pandemic [20]. Participants described cyberbullying as especially insidious, masked behind anonymity and enabled by asynchronous communication. These concerns mirror findings in global studies indicating a spike in teacher-targeted [3]. Likewise, social bullying, such as spreading rumors and excluding teachers from classroom dynamics, was reported frequently, though with slightly different cultural manifestations compared to studies from North America or Europe.

Cultural context shaped several findings: in Lebanon, sectarian affiliations and sociopolitical sensitivities were noted as contributing factors to student aggression. Teachers also expressed concern that female educators may hesitate to report incidents due to soci-

etal norms surrounding gender roles and shame, a finding echoed in studies from other patriarchal contexts [10].

5.2. Teachers' Perceptions and Emotional Impact

Most educators viewed student-to-teacher bullying as a legitimate form of workplace harassment, despite its informal and often hidden nature. This perception aligns with [16]'s definition of workplace bullying as a pattern of behavior that seeks to intimidate, degrade, or harm individuals in a professional setting.

Over 86% of teachers reported feeling anger, stress, and anxiety as a result of bullying, and more than 60% expressed concern over its long-term impact on their professional identity. These emotional responses are consistent with prior literature, which highlights how teacher-directed bullying contributes to emotional exhaustion, diminished job satisfaction, and poor mental health [30].

Teachers described bullying not only as a personal attack but also as a professional threat, undermining their authority, self-efficacy, and classroom relationships. The fear of being perceived as weak often discouraged reporting, a theme supported by [30], who argue that bullied educators may avoid disclosure to protect their reputations.

The application of Attribution Theory [24] in this context sheds light on how teachers interpreted the causes of bullying. Many educators attributed the behavior to external student-related factors, such as dysfunctional homes or psychological distress, rather than internal failings on their part. This tendency to externalize blame serves as a coping mechanism, helping teachers preserve their professional self-image.

5.3. Demographic and Institutional Factors

Bullying was not perceived to be gender-specific; both male and female students were seen as potential perpetrators. This finding contrasts with previous literature suggesting gendered patterns of aggression [20] possibly reflecting a cultural shift in student behavior or a unique feature of the Lebanese school environment.

Teachers identified several risk factors for becoming targets: young age, lack of classroom management experience, and visible differences in appearance or communication style. These factors are consistent with the findings of [9] that inexperienced or vulnerable educators are more frequently targeted, especially when institutional support is weak. Moreover, organizational culture played a significant role. The lack of clear anti-bullying policies, limited administrative support, and competitive work environments were cited as contributing institutional factors, consistent with [27] Organizational Culture Theory, which posits that values, rituals, and unwritten rules shape employee interactions and behaviors.

Addressing Student-to-Teacher Bullying: Toward Sustainable Solutions.

Participants strongly advocated for comprehensive and collaborative interventions involving students, teachers, and administrators. Over 90% of teachers emphasized the importance of supporting victims and equipping all stakeholders with the skills to identify and address bullying early.

Suggestions included:

- **Root-cause analysis of bullying behavior** (30%), echoing [31] call for restorative practices in classrooms.
- **Psychosocial support** for both perpetrators and victims, as proposed by [21].
- **Awareness campaigns**, such as films, interactive Q&A sessions, and role-playing activities to cultivate empathy and shared responsibility [29].
- **Teacher empowerment through training**: Nearly all teachers (90%) called for more robust classroom management and de-escalation workshops. These findings align with Longobardi et al. (2018) [30], who emphasized the need for ongoing professional development.

Teachers agreed that school leadership must take a proactive role by establishing explicit policies, offering emotional support, and creating safe reporting mechanisms. Institutions that fail to intervene risk perpetuating a hostile climate that erodes staff morale and student-teacher relationships [11].

The findings support broader system-level investigations into student-to-teacher bullying. This study reinforces that student-to-teacher bullying is neither rare nor inconsequential. It poses serious risks to teacher well-being, disrupts classroom dynamics, and undermines the overall learning environment. By integrating findings with theoretical insights, particularly Attribution Theory, Humiliation Theory, and Organizational Culture Theory, the research highlights both the psychological and systemic nature of this form of aggression.

Addressing this issue requires institutional accountability, teacher empowerment, and student-centered interventions rooted in empathy, transparency, and restorative discipline. While Lebanon presents a unique sociocultural context, the lessons from this study resonate globally and underscore the urgent need to reframe bullying as a whole-school responsibility, not just an individual burden.

Given the persistent nature of student-initiated bullying toward teachers, ref. [13] found that beginning teachers with stronger classroom management self-efficacy handled frequent disruptions better than those without it, suggesting that mentoring and skill development matter more than simply urging teachers to “toughen up.” Second, ref. [12] found no evidence that manageable levels of adversity build resilience; rather, prior job demands directly predicted subsequent burnout, indicating that bullying accumulates over time and requires sustained institutional responses rather than one-off workshops. Third, ref. [32] demonstrated that social capital, defined as collaboration with colleagues and support from supervisors, was the strongest buffer against declining wellbeing across multiple waves of data. For teachers experiencing student bullying, this finding implies that a supportive school culture reduces harm, whereas administrative indifference amplifies it. These longitudinal studies suggest that efforts to address teacher bullying should shift away from individual resilience training and toward building systemic support, strengthening teacher self-efficacy, and treating emotional exhaustion as a chronic job demand rather than a personal failing.

6. Limitations

While this study offers important insights into the largely unexplored issue of student-to-teacher bullying in Lebanon, several limitations should be acknowledged. The relatively small sample size, particularly the marked gender imbalance skewed heavily toward female participants, may have influenced the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the limited inclusion of student voices in the qualitative interviews may have introduced some bias, as understanding the students’ perspectives is essential for a holistic view of bullying dynamics. The study’s reliance on straightforward quantitative analyses and its focus on a single private school setting further limit the extent to which these findings can be generalized across Lebanon’s diverse educational landscape, including public schools and institutions with differing socio-economic profiles.

7. Conclusions

This study provides an initial, context-specific examination of student-to-teacher bullying in Lebanon, based on the reported experiences of the participating educators. While the findings are not generalizable across all Lebanese schools, they reveal patterns that warrant further investigation, including specific forms of student-initiated mistreatment, perceived institutional silence, and societal attitudes that may enable such behaviors. Within this sample, teachers described feelings of fear, frustration, and diminished pro-

professional authority—conditions that raise legitimate concerns about educator well-being. Rather than suggesting that all schools fail to address this issue, the results indicate that some school environments would benefit from policy clarification, leadership engagement, and cultural shifts regarding the acceptability of student-to-teacher aggression. Addressing this phenomenon is not solely a matter of school discipline but also one of professional justice and the protection of educators' emotional and psychological integrity. Future research should replicate and extend this study across a broader range of private and public schools, varying by geographic region, socioeconomic status, and grade level, before drawing more general conclusions about the prevalence or persistence of student-to-teacher bullying in Lebanon. Incorporating student perspectives through interviews or focus groups will be crucial to deepening understanding of bullying behaviors and their perceived motivations. Moreover, employing a broader range of methodological approaches, such as longitudinal designs or ethnographic observations, could enrich the field's knowledge and inform more effective, context-sensitive interventions. Future studies may also explore whether gender identity and sexual orientation shape vulnerability to student-to-teacher bullying.

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Appendix A

Appendix A.1. Perceptions Questionnaire

Perceptions Questionnaire Link: <https://forms.office.com/r/TS1zBcJpJq> (Accessed on 19 April 2026).

Appendix A.2. Types of Bullying Questionnaire

Types of Bullying Questionnaire Link: <https://forms.office.com/r/eRnrH8sDEB> (Accessed on 19 April 2026).

Appendix A.3. Teachers' Individual Interview Guide

1. What does workplace bullying mean to you?
2. Do you think bullying by students towards teachers should be classified as workplace bullying? Why or why not?
3. Can you share your personal experience with student-to-teacher bullying?
4. Have you ever personally encountered bullying by a student? How did you respond?
5. What do you perceive as the main reasons behind student-to-teacher bullying?
6. How does being bullied by students affect a teacher's professional and personal life?
7. What measures do you believe could prevent student-to-teacher bullying?

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