



Factors related to verbal bullying in elementary school students

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Abstract

Verbal bullying in schools is a significant issue that can cause a crucial impact upon both students' mental health and their learning. However, few studies have evidence on this issue. This research aimed to: (1) survey the ratio of students being verbal bullied in the upper elementary level; and (2) compare the ratio of students being verbal bullied in the upper elementary level according to individual factors such as gender, the time spent studying at the school, the status of the bullying, and from 12 schools which varied from demonstration schools under the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC), schools under the Primary Educational Service Area Office (PESAO), and schools under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. The total number of the target group was 1,053 students. Questionnaires were used to explore and compare the ratio of students being verbal bullied in the upper elementary schools. The factors related to being verbal bullied are the gender of the bullied, the period of time that the bullied study at the school, the status of the bullied, and from 9 schools which varied from the demonstration schools under the OHEC, the schools under the PESAO, and the schools under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. It was found that the schools under the PESAO have a higher rate of the students being verbal bullied in the upper elementary level than the schools under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and demonstration schools under the OHEC respectively.

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Introduction

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) indicates that nearly a third of young people worldwide have experienced being teased, bullied or bullied in school for Thailand. Tapanya (2006) reported approximately 600,000 students are bullied in school each year, the second highest statistical data in the world after Japan.

Trivorawat (2017) reported Thai students are more likely to be bullied in school every year. Bullying can take many forms, such as physical bullying, social bullying online bullying, but the most common bullying in today's society is verbal bullying. Caliskan et al. (2019) studied bullying among peers' pre-adolescent age (Grade 6, Secondary 1 and Secondary 2), and it was found that verbal bullying occurred the most at 52.10 percent, followed by physical bullying (13.40%). A survey of patterns of bullying among 3,240 high school students in Thailand from October to November 2020 found 71.47 percent of the patterns of verbal bullying, 36.36 percent

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of them disseminating false information, bans from participating in groups 22.68 percent, and publishing a secret 17.00 percent (Pavasuttipaisit et al., 2021). The most common cause of verbal bullying is that we all use language in our daily conversations with others. How much does such affect the mental state of the listener? At times, we may accidentally use words that insult or criticize, and at other times mock others on purpose. People in society get used to this, thus causing them to become neglectful, not being careful with one's own words.

Literature Review

Verbal bullying is any type of speech that affects feelings or causes pain, such as taunting, ridiculing, intimidating, and insulting. Satire in a group of friends. It is the bullying that has the most profound effect on the minds of the bullied. It is also a hard-to-detect bullying. This is because bullies often choose to act during times when they are away from their parents. This can include verbal criticism in the form of fanfare, rumors, gossip and lies and misrepresentation with the purpose of causing pain and focus on things beyond the control of the persecuted person, such as appearance, race, family, economic status, etc.

Studies have shown whether children are among those who bully others or are bullied by others. These children have different mental health problems. Children who bully others often have problems with unruly behavior, are aggressive, like to use violence, are anti-social, have anxiety and experience domestic violence. Children who are bullied by others tend to have problems with isolation, showing aggressive, pessimistic behavior, loss of self-worth, anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide (Pavasuttipaisit et al., 2021).

If we continue to leave Thailand as the second most bullying country in the world, we know from research that these children grow up to have behavioral, personality and mental health problems that will affect their work, health and life in society. The researchers are therefore concerned about what will happen to Thailand when these children grow up to become adults in the future, which is the future of the nation. Also, at present, there has been very little research on verbal bullying although this is the most common bullying and includes bullying among upper elementary school students, which is considered a group that may cause further serious bullying problems. Therefore, this research was done to make society aware of the problems that arise in schools. It provides information and guidance to education personnel involved in planning and developing programs to help

reduce and prevent bullying in schools. Finally, the researchers hope that this research will benefit all Thai children and reduce bullying in Thailand's schools.

Factors Affecting Verbal Bullying

Risk Factors Related to Bullying Behavior can be divided into 4 factors (Langan, 2011) which are biological factor, psychological factor, environmental factor, and social factor with details as follows:

1. Biological factor; medical advances have made it possible to discover that the underlying cause of aggression can be biological, e.g., genetic, hormonal, or brain development.

2. Psychological factor; this is a factor that is important in today's bullying, such as personality, emotional expression, low self-esteem, etc. There is also research explaining the psychological factors associated with bullying as a result of the imbalance of power between the bully and victim, for example, the bully has a large body while the person being bullied is small, or how the bully wants to show off to cover up his own inferiority by bullying others to make himself feel superior.

3. Environmental factor; this is a very diverse factor, for example the influence of the media on violence or use of force, being raised by quarrelsome or physically abusive parents or violent video game content without parental guidance, etc.

4. Social factor; this refers to factors of economic and social status. That is to say, social and economic inequality including being in a society with differences in race, religion, culture and values are all factors that can cause bullying.

Research on Verbal Bullying

Chaiwat (2019) studied bullying among secondary and vocational students in Bangkok Metropolitan Region to explore student bullying patterns including patterns of cyberbullying among students to present educational guidelines or actions that are beneficial to society in the future. The study found that as many as 91 percent of students had been bullied in school. Of the students, 88 percent had experienced verbal bullying. The results of the five most common types of bullying were naming of parents (29.3%), use of profanity to ridicule in a way that was hurtful or saddened (23.7%), verbal learning, mimicking the inferiority complex or racial, skin or physical characteristics (18.7%), punching, kicking, pushing, shoving or being locked in a room (6.9%) and stealing or causing damage (5.6%). It can be seen that the top three are all related to verbal bullying. Such indicated

that the most common form of bullying was verbal bullying.

Kurniasih et al. (2020) searched for articles on verbal bullying in schools. A search for keywords in the research, “Verbal bullying” and “School” in the Scopus database on March 12, 2020, found 115 records. Additionally, words found in verbal bullying research were linked to male and female factors and age of students. From the examination of the above research papers, the authors found that there hasn’t been much research exploring verbal bullying. While verbal bullying is the most common of all types of bullying, it is also less common among upper elementary school students. This is despite the fact that lower elementary school students are highly prone to verbal bullying and are likely to have a significant impact on the bullying and verbal bullying in upper elementary school students.

Objectives

1. To explore verbal bullying encountered in upper elementary school
2. To compare verbal bullying experienced in upper elementary school. The characteristics of the person are, namely, the gender of the bullied person, length of time spent by the bullying person in school, the status of the bully, and affiliation with the school.

Preliminary Agreement

The data collection in this research used a self-reported questionnaire (Self-report), so the interpretation is verbal bullying or not. Therefore, it is the interpretation of the sample alone. In fact, the speaker may not have any intention of causing the sample to have negative feelings.

Methodology

Sample Group

The sample group in this research was upper elementary school students (Grade 4–6), academic year 2020, studying in a demonstration school supervised by the Office of the Higher Education Commission, schools under the Primary Education Service Area Office and schools under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration in Bangkok, totaling 12 schools. The researcher used a simple random sampling method for 4 schools in each affiliation. For sample size determination, the researcher used the program G*Power 3 by determining the influence size (Effect size) equal to 0.25, the level of statistical significance equal to 0.05, the power of test (Power of

test) equal to 0.95, thus the yielded sample size was 305 people. A total of 1,053 sample groups were used by the researchers to analyze the data, exceeding the minimum sample number specified by the G*Power program.

Tools Used to Collect Data

A questionnaire, which was an open-ended and closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 2 parts, was used to survey and compare verbal bullying among upper elementary school students. Part 1 was general information about the respondents, and part 2 was information about their experiences of verbal bullying. The researcher examined the quality of the tools by having qualified persons in primary education, linguistics and psychology, a total of 3 persons, examine the structure of the questionnaire and the appropriateness of the words used in the questionnaire by finding the index of item-objective congruence (IOC). From the evaluation, the experts found that all questions had a consistency value of 0.50 or higher.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using statistical methods for frequency and percentage.

Results

The researcher sent 1,200 questionnaires to 9 schools (3 schools per affiliation, 3 affiliations). The researcher received a total of 1,053 questionnaires, representing 87.75 percent.

Basic Information of the Sample

The sample group consisted of 1,053 people, 528 of whom were females, representing 50.14 percent, having an education level of Grade 5, 371 people, representing 35.23 percent, studying in schools under the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, a total of 358 people, representing 34.0 percent. Most of the samples, 939 people, studied in schools from 2 years or more, representing 89.17 percent of all upper primary school students.

Gender and Verbal Bullying

From Table 1 it is shown that of 1,053 students in upper elementary school, 1,024 were subjected to verbal bullying, or 97.25 percent. It was found that the gender with the most verbal bullying was 521 males, or 98.27 percent.

Table 1 Number and percentage of subjects who experienced verbal bullying by gender

Gender	Found bullying		No bullying was found		Total Number (person)
	Number (person)	%	Number (person)	%	
Male	512	98.27	9	1.73	521
Female	509	96.40	19	3.60	528
Not specified	3	75.00	1	25.00	4
Total	1,024	97.25	29	2.75	1,053

(N = 1,053)

The Amount of Time Spent in School Affecting Verbal Bullying

Table 2 shows that from a sample of 1,053 people, 1,024 were verbally bullied, representing 97.25 percent. When classified by length of time spent in school, it was found that verbal bullying was the most common, with 79 students who studied in school for 1–2 years, representing 100 percent. Of the seven unspecified students who were in school, seven were verbally abused, or 100 percent. Of the 939 students who had been in school for 2 years or more, 912 of them were verbal bullied, or 97.10 percent, and of 28 students who had been in school for less than 1 year, 26 were subjected to verbal bullying, which accounted for 92.86 percent.

The Status of the Bully

Table 3 shows a sample of 1,053 people, classified by the status of the bully. It was found from the sample that

was verbally bullied, that from the group of people who were friends, 1,014 people were verbally bullied, representing 98.88 percent, followed by 386 from seniors, representing 36.66 percent, 333 from adults, or 31.62 percent, and 256 from juniors, accounting for 24.31 percent respectively.

School Affiliation with Verbal Bullying

Table 4 shows that from a sample of 1,053 people, 1,024 people, or 97.25 percent, were verbally bullied. When classified by school affiliation, it was found that the schools with the most verbal bullying were those belonging to PESAO, where from 352 people, 350 experienced verbal bullying, representing 99.43 percent, followed by 354 people out of 358 people under the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), or 98.88 percent, and from OHEC, of 343 people, 320 experienced verbal bullying, or 93.29 percent, respectively.

Table 2 Number and percentage of samples Classified by length of time spent in school

Period studying in school	Found bullying		No bullying was found		Total	
	Number (person)	%	Number (person)	%	Number (person)	%
< 1 year	26	92.86	2	7.14	28	100.00
1–2 years	79	100.00	0	0.00	79	100.00
> 2 years	912	97.10	27	2.90	939	100.00
Not specified	7	100.00	0	0.00	7	100.00
Total	1,024	97.25	29	2.75	1,053	100.00

(N = 1,053)

Table 3 Number and percentage of subjects who experienced verbal bullying, classified by the status of the bully

Status of the Bully	Found bullying		No bullying was found		Total	
	%	Number (person)	%		Number (person)	%
Friend	1,014	96.30	39	3.70	1,053	100.00
Senior	386	36.66	667	63.34	1,053	100.00
Adult	333	31.62	720	68.38	1,053	100.00
Junior	256	24.31	797	75.69	1,053	100.00

(N = 1,053)

Table 4 Number and percentage of samples Classified by school affiliation

Affiliation	Found bullying		No bullying was found		Total	
	%	Number (person)	%		Number (person)	%
BMA	354	98.88	4	1.12	358	100.00
PESAO	350	99.43	2	0.57	352	100.00
OHEC	320	93.29	23	6.71	343	100.00
Total	1,024	97.25	29	2.75	1,053	100.00

(N = 1,053)

The variables studied in this research were the gender of the bullied person, length of time spent by the bullying victim in school, status of the bully and affiliation with the school. The results of the research found that males are more prone to verbal bullying than females. Students who attended school for 1–2 years were most bullied. The most common bullying status is friends and belonging to the school with the most verbal bullying is a school under the Office of Elementary Education Service Area.

Discussion

In a survey of verbal bullying seen in lower elementary school students, it was found that the factors related to verbal bullying were found in upper elementary school students, namely, the gender of the bullied person, length of time spent by the bullying victim in school, the status of the bully and affiliation with the school with details as follows:

The Gender of the Bullied

Gender is an important part of the study of verbal bullying. According to the research, males are more prone to verbal bullying than females. This corresponds to the results of Puranachaikere et al. (2015), whose research study on strategies for solving the problem of bullying among upper elementary school students reported that male students were bullied more than female students, and it is also consistent with the research of Karlsson et al. (2014), who that reported more American male adolescent students are bullied than female adolescent students.

According to research, male students are verbally bullied more than female students. This, perhaps, is because of the patriarchal society in which people have different roles and men are perceived as leaders with higher level of abilities. As a result, verbal bullying has been found to be more common among male students than female ones. Boys' levels of intelligence and abilities are made fun of as higher expectations are put on them, rather than girls, to become capable leaders (Aroonjit, 2020). Moreover, there is a constructed discourse, which has become globally recognized, regarding gentlemen, champions and heroes. This shows that men are expected to be decent, capable, and always ready to assist weaker ones like the women (Athiwasanapong, 2004). Teasing about ones' poor qualities has been used in verbal bullying among men, which is evidently different from what women use. Lastly, Chaiwat (2019) states that, according to Thai ways of thinking, it is believed that boys tend to be rowdy. They can speak and act more openly, compared with girls. Therefore, verbal bullying is obviously more common among boys than girls.

Time Spent in School of the Bullied

The subsequent findings from the survey on verbal bullying among upper elementary school students was the length of time the bully was educated in school. According to the research, students who studied in school for 1–2 years were most bullied (100%). This was followed by students who attended school for two years or more (97.10 percent) and students who attended school for less than one year (92.86 percent). According to statistical data, more than 90 percent of students were verbally bullied during all periods of time in school, but students who have been in school for 1–2 years are most likely to find it at 100 percent.

From the results of the analysis of data on the length of time the bully was educated in school, it can be said that such comes from the value factor, being considerate of speaking to people who are not close to you (Jaisue, 2006). In other words, students who have only been in school for a year are less likely to experience verbal bullying. Their peers were considerate of the students who only studied for a year at school, so those students were less likely to experience verbal bullying than other groups of students. For students who have been in school for two years or more, verbal bullying is the second most common. This may be due to their intimacy and familiarity with the school over many years, therefore, they have more shields from verbal bullying. As for students who are in school for 1–2 years, it may be a period that begins with adjusting and then building familiarity with the school. As a result, they were more likely to experience verbal bullying than other groups of students. They developed a sense of intimacy and trust with their peers and teachers and found some words that caused emotional damage, subsequently causing a bad feeling. This corresponds to the personality and social development of students in the upper primary school age, who tend to pay a lot of attention to the words of their close friends and those around them, especially friends and teachers.

The Status of the Bully

From the analysis, it was found that the people who spoke and caused the most verbal bullying among upper elementary school students were friends (98.88%), followed by seniors (36.66%), adults (31.62%), and juniors (24.31%), respectively. It can be said that students in the late primary school are considered to be the age where interpersonal relationships are important, especially close people. Most students in late primary school tend to have a group of friends, and their mood depends on their peers, such as wanting to be accepted by friends or fear of having no friends (Ratanaphan, 2016).

From these developments, it was evident that the most influential person in the upper primary school age was friends. This factor is considered one of the factors that contribute to the importance of the words of friends because it is a quote from an influential person in the life of a high school student.

Based on a child development theory, upper primary students tend to put emphasis on intelligence, abilities, and appearance. Compared with children from different age ranges, they like to talk more about intelligence and appearance. This possibly leads to verbal bullying and making up fake stories. A study, conducted by Niammeesri (2020), finds that malicious gossiping is a popular way of verbal bullying in schools as it seems that excluding someone from a group can easily be done. Therefore, students might make up fake stories about others, resulting in negative experiences that the victims have to go through.

School Affiliation

The results showed that a school with the most verbal bullying is a school under the Office of Elementary Education Service Area, which accounted for 99.43 percent, followed by schools under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, accounting for 98.88 percent, and the organizations and schools that encountered the least bullying were under the Office of the Higher Education Commission, accounting for 93.29 percent. From the results of the data analysis, it was found that verbal bullying was more than 90 percent in upper primary school students in all three affiliations.

From the various verbal bullying issues found above, it can be seen that upper elementary school students in schools affiliated with Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and schools under the Primary Education Service Area Office were more prone to verbal bullying than demonstration schools under the Commission on Higher Education. Additionally, when considering the context of the three schools' affiliations, it was found that the verbal bullying problems found in the above-mentioned primary school students may be caused by four factors: (1) teacher-related factors; (2) internal school counseling and guidance factors; (3) family socioeconomic status factors; and (4) student admissions factors, with details as follows:

The first factor is the teacher. Teachers are an extremely important factor in educating and caring for students and directly affect the quality of education. Successful countries emphasize three key principles of teachers' practice: (1) bring the best as teachers; (2) keep the good teachers and bring the best out of them; and (3) let the teachers step in as soon as you see that students are

having problems or are unable to study with their peers (McKinsey Report, 2007). Such countries consider teachers to be close to their students every day and able to provide students with the knowledge they expect. But in the present situation, Thailand's teacher shortage index is higher than the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average. If considering the Thai school system, it was found that the schools with the highest teacher shortage were schools under the Primary Education Service Area Office. In addition, in schools affiliated with Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, there is a teacher shortage rate as well. Only demonstration schools under the Office of the Higher Education Commission do not have a shortage of teachers. Factors such as the shortage of teachers may result in verbal bullying in demonstration schools directed by the Office of the Higher Education Commission, and in it being less common in Schools under the Primary Education Service Area Office and schools under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. Teachers are the ones who have to take care of students thoroughly and in every aspect of the school both academically and behaviorally. Therefore, if the number of teachers is sufficient, they will be able to take care of their students and not have other student problems, including this problem of bullying.

The second factor is the mentoring and guidance within the school. In general, in schools in Thailand, most people assume that bullying is a normal developmental occurrence, and that the impact of the problem of bullying is not as great as violence in other areas (Sriparyasilp, 2008) such as drug use, fighting, etc. that must have clear prevention measures. Unlike Thailand, schools abroad have direct measures to address student bullying, such as a co-operation program to resolve student conflict and bullying. This is consistent with the research by Voracharoensri (2016), which said that one form of bullying prevention in foreign schools is the cooperation of relevant persons, such as guidance teachers, counselors, psychiatrists, lawyers, parents, and the community to help and resolve the problems of bullying in schools. The research results by Pongglud (2010) found that in most schools in Thailand, the homeroom teacher will often address the problem of bullying that has already occurred rather than bullying prevention.

From the consideration of such issues, it was found that demonstration schools under the Office of the Higher Education Commission at the elementary level have a clear implementation of guidance work with the class teacher (Yanpirat, n.d.) by acting to promote students' education to be effective. It is also an important source of information for teachers in the study of student behavior and helps class teachers and tutors understand students better. It also provides parents with information about

students. Thus, homes and schools have helped to find ways to develop students both academically and behaviorally in the same direction. This factor is therefore considered one of the factors consistent with the research findings that in demonstration schools under the Office of the Higher Education Commission, Verbal bullying was found to be less than schools under the Primary Education Service Area Office and schools under Bangkok's affiliation.

The next factor is the family's socioeconomic status. The income of the parents of the students of the schools under the Primary Education Service Area Office and schools under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration is at 5,001–10,000 baht, different from parents of student in schools under the Office of the Higher Education Commission, whose earnings are above 100,000 baht (Kaewwohan & Kanjanawasee, 2018). Socioeconomic factors of parents may affect their readiness to care for their children. In other words, a family that is well prepared to take good care of their children is the best defense against bullying (Boonsangsom, 2020). This is consistent with Supharan (2020), who points out that the readiness of the economy and society, including the upbringing of the family, is an important part of the child's development. Too neglectful parenting resulting in abandoned children or not being cared for, has behaviors demanding attention from society in various ways, so the influence of the family and the behavior of the parents affect the expression of the child.

The last factor is the student admission factor. The underlying nature of the schools under the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration is a policy to promote and encourage schools to accept students based on fairness and equality with a transparent and verifiable admissions process, encouraging pre-elementary children to receive appropriate education, and ensuring that all children who meet the compulsory education criteria receive compulsory education. Therefore, all children who meet the compulsory education criteria to enter primary grade 1 are selected as appropriate. By accepting children aged 7 or having graduated from pre-primary school in the service area of the school, everyone attends grade 1 without an academic proficiency test. If the school is not full, children can be picked from outside the school's service area. In the event that the number of applicants exceeds the number of permissible applicants, a draw will be used in coordination with nearby schools, whereby they can still accept more students, finding and arranging a place to study for all children.

As for the characteristics of the schools under the Primary Education Service Area Office, the principle is similar. Every child has the opportunity to receive a quality education through a process of accepting students that is fair, equitable, transparent, and can be audited in

accordance with good governance. In admitting students to study in primary school grade 1 in schools under the Office of Primary Education Service Area, all children aged 7 or having graduated from pre-primary school who are in the area attend grade 1 without having to take an academic proficiency test or any other competency. If the admission quota is not full, children can be picked from outside the service area. In the event that the applicants exceed the acceptable amount, the method of drawing lots is used in coordination with nearby schools to provide a place to for all children.

However, the characteristics of demonstration schools under the Office of the Higher Education Commission are similar to those of foreign lab schools or demonstration schools, where an elementary school and a secondary school are under the supervision of various universities as a place for both education and various research studies. In accepting students in the first grade of the Demonstration School under the supervision of the Office of the Higher Education Commission, students are required to pass a readiness assessment before entering elementary school, which is different from schools under the Primary Education Service Area Office and schools under Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, both of which accept all students in the service area.

The admission factor for further studies is another factor that has been linked to bullying, especially verbal bullying. Students in demonstration schools supervised by the Office of the Higher Education Commission must pass a readiness assessment before entering. Thus, such demonstration schools have students who are ready to study at a certain level and who are fully supported by their families because they must be supported in order to pass the assessment of readiness to study in the school. In addition, these students have passed readiness assessments often in many areas, such as environmental factors, influencing the students. This is consistent with what Supharan (2020) reported, that the environment that students are close to influences learning and unconscious behavior imitating because it is a direct experience greatly affecting the development of children, for example, if the surrounding environment has violence in the community, children will have behavior and attitudes towards expressions consistent with the practices seen in the community in which they live. The demonstration school under the Office of the Higher Education Commission has more students who passed the readiness assessment made from different areas than Bangkok schools and schools under the Primary Education Service Area Office. Such may be a factor that results in less verbal bullying than in schools under Bangkok and schools under the Primary Education Service Area Office including that the students at the demonstration school

under the Office of the Higher Education Commission must pass readiness assessment. This is considered as one aspect that corresponds to the intellectual development of students in the upper primary school age. When students in demonstration schools under the Office of the Higher Education Commission are ready for intellectual development, they are well able to manage problems that arise, as well as solve the problem of verbal bullying.

The above factors clearly reflected the difference in verbal bullying among upper elementary school students between the three schools. In addition to the academic aspect, the most important thing that every school affiliation should take into account is the safety of students both physically and mentally because this will enable students to develop to their highest potential.

Recommendations

1. Other forms of bullying among elementary school students should be researched, such as physical bullying and cyber bullying, to prevent bullying in schools

2. There should be a study from a sample of students at other levels or from areas other than Bangkok to benefit the study of verbal bullying in Thailand

3. Research on how to prevent verbal bullying in schools should be researched to maximize the benefits of students

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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