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From Perceived Rise To Increased Visibility: Intercultural Communication And Visibility Regimes of School Bullying In Kazakhstan

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Abstract: Recent public debates in Kazakhstan increasingly frame school bullying as a growing problem. This study examines how this perception of increase is produced and interpreted within a bilingual Kazakh–Russian communicative context. Drawing on a qualitative corpus collected in 2025—comprising 18 focus group discussions, 100 semi-structured expert interviews, and 154 pre-discussion questionnaires—the study traces communicative repertoires and visibility regimes rather than measuring behavioral incidence. The findings indicate that the perceived rise in bullying reflects shifts in visibility (observability), including institutional detection practices, public circulation through digital media, and changing normative thresholds. Three recurring patterns support this interpretation: (1) the routinization of anti-bullying work through values education modules and scheduled prevention activities; (2) intergenerational narratives that lower tolerance for coercive practices; and (3) mediatization that accelerates digital circulation and moral evaluation. The article introduces a visibility framework that analytically separates behavioral incidence from the processes that render episodes detectable, publicly circulating, and institutionally classifiable. This distinction clarifies how administrative counts may increase without a behavioral surge. The study contributes to intercultural communication by demonstrating how the category "bullying" is negotiated across linguistic repertoires and institutional arenas. Policy implications include event-level monitoring that records detection channels and digital traces, coordinated offline and online prevention strategies, and structured engagement with parents as a key detection pathway.

Keywords: Bullying, Cyberbullying, Intercultural Communication, Visibility, Mediatization, Normative Change, Qualitative Research

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1.   Introduction

In recent years, bullying has become firmly entrenched in Kazakhstan's school and public agenda. It no longer functions merely as a narrow pedagogical term; rather, in contemporary debates, it serves as a generalized moral frame for assessing adolescent interactions and maintaining order in schools (Volk et al., 2014; Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Within Kazakhstan's Kazakh–Russian linguistic landscape, this article draws on a bilingual qualitative corpus assembled in 2025. The corpus includes 18 focus group discussions conducted in Kazakh and Russian across urban and rural sites, 100 semi-structured expert interviews with representatives from education, media, and research, and 154 brief pre-discussion questionnaires. The study does not measure behavioral prevalence. Instead, it documents descriptive repertoires, operative thresholds of permissibility, and the institutional and media pathways through which incidents become visible (observable) and subject to public scrutiny.

Positioned within intercultural communication (Hall, 1976; Ting-Toomey, 1999), this study examines how a globally circulating harm category, "bullying", is localized, translated, and negotiated within Kazakhstan's Kazakh/Russian bilingual communicative space. It analyzes how intergenerational moral communication reshapes what counts as "acceptable strictness" versus "bullying" (Wierzbicka, 1997), and how mass media and digital platforms act as intercultural translators that move school conflicts across audiences and institutional arenas, including school documentation, parent chats, mass media, and social media. From this perspective, the perceived rise in bullying reflects not only a putative behavioral trend but also a shift in communicative visibility and moral qualification.

We propose a qualitative observability framework, conceptualized as a visibility regime, that analytically distinguishes behavioral incidence, which this study does not measure, from three visibility processes: detection, public circulation, and normative thresholds. Applying this framework to Kazakhstan's bilingual communicative space, we demonstrate how the widely repeated narrative of an "increase" emerges through the interaction of institutional routines, media circulation, and moral translation across arenas. The corpus reveals a recurring dual pattern. Participants report a perceived rise in bullying as part of everyday school life, while simultaneously describing the recent institutionalization and routinization of anti-bullying practices, the incorporation of related terminology into values education modules, and the relatively recent entry of the term "bullying" into the school lexicon. Intensified public visibility through social media complements this configuration. Everyday practices of moving conflicts online accelerate circulation and amplify moral censure (Kowalski et al., 2014; Modecki et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2008; Tokunaga, 2010).

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Taken together, this evidence challenges a direct interpretation of the perceived rise as a straightforward increase in behavioral incidence and motivates an analytic separation between behavioral dynamics and dynamics of visibility and sensitivity (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). We assume that the narrative of increase emerges largely from the normalization of anti-bullying language within schools and from the accelerated digital circulation of incidents. In this interpretation, "bullying" functions not only as a behavioral category but also as an indicator of shifting boundaries of permissibility within the school community.

While prior research has documented fluctuations in bullying prevalence and cross-national variation in reported trends (UNESCO, 2019; Modecki et al., 2014), as well as the expansion of harm-related categories through processes of semantic broadening and concept creep (Haslam, 2016), it has rarely provided a systematic analytical distinction between behavioral incidence and regimes of visibility that structure detection, circulation, and classification (Becker, 1963; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). This study advances the literature by introducing a decomposed visibility framework (I–D–P–T) that separates incidence from detection, public circulation, and normative thresholds. By grounding this framework in a bilingual intercultural communicative space (Hall, 1976; Ting-Toomey, 1999), the article reframes perceived increases not as self-evident behavioral trends but as outcomes of shifting visibility infrastructures.

Research question. How do institutionalized anti-bullying practices, mediatized circulation, and shifting normative thresholds jointly shape the widely repeated perception of a rise in school bullying in Kazakhstan, and how can these visibility dynamics be analytically distinguished from behavioral incidence (which this qualitative design does not measure)?

To illustrate the interaction between detection and mediatization, consider an incident at a rural school in southern Kazakhstan. During a routine school day, a minor disagreement between two students escalated into a physical altercation. Teachers would typically handle such incidents internally, and they might remain confined to the school setting. In this case, however, a bystander recorded the altercation on a mobile phone and uploaded the video to social media. Within hours, the footage attracted significant attention, generating comments and shares across multiple digital platforms. The rapid dissemination brought the incident into public view and accelerated its transformation into a formal "bullying" case, as school authorities responded to the digital uproar.

This example demonstrates how detection and public circulation mechanisms can transform a localized school conflict into a widely recognized issue that demands administrative action. Using qualitative data, this article specifies the mechanisms through which school conflicts become detectable, publicly circulated, and morally qualified as "bullying," thereby producing an apparent increase in perception without demonstrable evidence of increased incidence. Given the qualitative nature of the corpus, the analysis focuses on languages of description, institutional routines, and channels of visibility rather than on behavioral frequencies. The remainder of the paper reviews relevant scholarship, details the corpus and analytic strategy, presents findings on institutionalization, intergenerational threshold shifts, and mediatization as mechanisms of visibility, and concludes with implications for monitoring and prevention in both offline and online school environments.

2.   Literature Review

2.1. Behavioral Definitions and Measurement

Mainstream research on school bullying anchors its analysis in a behavioral definition characterized by three core criteria: intent, repetition, and power imbalance. This definition continues to structure measurement instruments and inform intervention design (Olweus, 1993). When researchers integrate socioecological perspectives, they situate bullying within the multilevel organization of school environments, where individual characteristics, peer-group roles, and institutional regulations jointly shape risk and intervention trajectories (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Salmivalli, 2010). Accordingly, scholars conceptualize bullying not as an isolated individual act but as an event embedded in social architecture and institutional routines. In this framework, the conditions of recognition and response become constitutive of how schools produce "bullying" as an actionable object of governance.

A key implication of this shift is that bullying events are socially formed before they enter formal registers. The distribution of participant roles among peers, along with shared expectations about what warrants intervention, influences whether observers notice, narrate, and subsequently label an episode (Salmivalli, 1999). In parallel, meta-analytic assessments of prevention programs show that local implementation and recordkeeping practices influence outcomes, not only intervention content (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). These findings foreground an important methodological issue: administrative registers and standardized instruments reflect detection and reporting regimes as much as behavioral dynamics.

From a measurement standpoint, this issue raises the problem of invariance. Temporal increases or decreases in recorded bullying may reflect shifts in vocabulary, procedures, and classification thresholds rather than changes in underlying behavior. Psychometric research has long emphasized this concern in discussions of measurement invariance across time and groups (Meredith, 1993; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Cross-national reviews reinforce this point. Global self-report data show divergent trends and substantial cross-country variation, undermining universal claims of a generalized increase and instead highlighting the role of locally specific detection and visibility regimes (UNESCO, 2019). Taken together, this scholarship suggests that valid interpretations of "trends" require analytic attention not only to behavioral incidence but also to the infrastructures that make incidents countable and comparable.

Methodologically, the invariance problem has a direct sociological analogue. Categories used for counting and comparison do not function as neutral descriptors; rather, they emerge from naming practices, institutional processing, and shifting evaluative standards. When classification practices change, time-series movement may appear even under stable behavioral baselines. This linkage motivates a shift from psychometric equivalence to sociological theories of labeling, moral evaluation, and public attention.

2.2. Visibility, Labeling, and Moral Change

The sociology of deviance and social problems provides the theoretical foundation for separating "behavior" from "visibility." Labeling theory emphasizes that deviance emerges through processes of naming and social control; changes in language and

procedure can expand the category of "deviations" without altering the underlying event structure (Becker, 1963). The moral panic framework shows how institutions and media can recalibrate standards of public evaluation and response (Cohen, 1972), while the public arenas model explains how issues compete for attention and resources, thereby institutionalizing rules of visibility (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). From this perspective, an apparent rise in a social problem may reflect shifts in attention, categorization, and institutional routinization rather than a straightforward behavioral surge.

Research on semantic expansion in harm-related categories complements these approaches. The concept of "concept creep" captures how definitions of harm broaden over time, bringing milder or novel episodes within established categories and producing systematic drift in qualification thresholds (Haslam, 2016). Applied to bullying, this framework suggests that "more bullying" may partly indicate that more behaviors now qualify as bullying due to changing moral vocabularies and shifting boundaries between acceptable strictness and unacceptable coercion.

An intercultural communication perspective makes these labeling dynamics particularly salient in multilingual settings. Meaning-making around harm categories unfolds across contexts, as labels stabilize interpretive frames among audiences that differ by language repertoire, generation, and institutional role. When a globally circulating category such as "bullying" enters a bilingual communicative space, actors negotiate its uptake through translation choices, pragmatic accommodation, genre conventions (for example, administrative documentation versus everyday talk), and the distribution of communicative authority across arenas such as schools, families, and media.

Scholarship in intercultural communication, discourse, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics offers tools for analyzing how actors negotiate, recontextualize, and render such categories socially consequential across languages and institutional contexts (Hall, 1976; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Blommaert, 2010; Kecskes, 2014; Piller, 2017; Scollon et al., 2012). In this light, concept creep and threshold drift reflect not only individual changes in sensitivity but also processes of intercultural meaning-making that reorganize what becomes speakable, reportable, and institutionally actionable.

3.   Methodology

The empirical basis of this study is a qualitative corpus assembled in 2025. The corpus includes transcripts of 18 focus group discussions with parents and other adults connected to schools, 100 semi-structured expert interviews with representatives from education, media, and research, and 154 brief pre-discussion questionnaires completed by focus group participants prior to discussion.

Researchers moderated the focus groups as collective conversations in urban and rural sites in both Russian and Kazakh to reconstruct everyday categories and local norms of school life. They conducted expert interviews using a uniform protocol to document professional repertoires for recognizing and responding to conflictual interactions, including prevention procedures and risk assessment practices. The corpus covers major cities and districts as well as rural localities, with particularly strong representation from the southern and eastern regions.

The transcripts include direct references to bullying (and common Russian near-synonyms), as well as discussions of adjacent themes such as school discipline, upbringing, values education, and communication practices in parent chats and media contexts. The research team used questionnaires to contextualize group composition and baseline attitudes; they did not design them to produce sample-based estimates. The study does not aim to measure behavioral prevalence. Instead, it traces descriptive repertoires, operative thresholds of permissibility, and the channels through which incidents become visible and subject to public scrutiny.

3.1. Recruitment and Sampling

The research team conducted recruitment through purposive sampling via local channels in the regions where fieldwork took place. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent. Inclusion criteria covered adult participants, parents or legal guardians, teachers, and school administrators, who could participate in Russian or Kazakh. To reduce role conflicts and minimize potential risks, the team excluded individuals involved in ongoing personal disciplinary proceedings. They balanced group composition by sex, age, and professional or parental role. The researchers determined thematic saturation when no new codes appeared in consecutive sessions within language strata (Russian or Kazakh) and settlement strata (urban or rural).

3.2. Positionality and Reflexivity

The researchers conducted the study as external academic investigators. They negotiated access to field sites through local contacts and did not participate in school governance or disciplinary decision-making. Given the bilingual context, bilingual team members proficient in both Kazakh and Russian conducted moderation and analysis. The research team recognizes that linguistic background forms a crucial element of the interpretive framework. They therefore maintained reflexive awareness of how language may shape interpretation. To monitor potential bias related to professional familiarity with education and media debates, as well as language-based interpretive choices, the team used reflexive memos and regular consensus discussions.

3.3. Data Handling and Analytic Strategy

Each data component served a distinct analytic purpose. Focus groups provided access to everyday definitions and norms of acceptability and revealed how participants integrated bullying vocabulary into ordinary descriptions. Expert interviews documented institutional and professional frames, ranging from prevention practices to mediatization and digital risk.

The research team analyzed both data types within a single integrated coding framework. First, they mapped themes within each source (everyday versus institutional repertoires). They then triangulated convergences and divergences across data types, languages, and settlement contexts. Moderators conducted each session in the group's native language, thereby reducing translation effects and enabling systematic comparison of Russian- and Kazakh-language discussions and of urban and rural sites. The study does not claim national representativeness.

The analytic strategy aligns with the research question by distinguishing behavioral dynamics from visibility dynamics. The team applied qualitative content analysis to the transcripts, followed by thematic aggregation. The unit of analysis was the

participant's turn, and the unit of context was a thematic fragment within which the topic and evaluative frame remained coherent.

Coding proceeded sequentially. In the first stage, the researchers recorded descriptive markers of bullying and its paraphrases; institutional designations of school practices and norms (such as upbringing, values education, activities, discipline, charters, and rules); channels of visibility and public handling (including social networks, messaging platforms, mass media, and parent chats); and evaluative comparative constructions that indicated shifts in tolerance thresholds (for example, the "earlier versus now" contrast, characterizations such as "too tender" or "too harsh," and statements such as "there is more" or "it happens more often").

In the second stage, the team aggregated fragments along the principal analytic axes of the study: (a) descriptions of behavioral aggression; (b) institutional normalization and embedding of the anti-bullying agenda in school procedures; (c) mediatization and the digital environment as channels for producing public visibility; and (d) intergenerational expectations and tolerance thresholds. This approach enables a principled distinction between statements about behavior and statements about regimes of detection, institutional processing, and public adjudication. The team conducted coding and data management using qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 14). To enhance coding consistency, two researchers independently coded an overlapping subset of transcripts in the original language. They resolved disagreements through documented consensus discussions and iterative refinement of the codebook.

3.4. Negative Case Strategy

To reduce confirmatory bias, the team implemented a negative case strategy. They systematically searched for fragments that could challenge the interpretation of increased visibility. These included accounts of local spikes in severe offline episodes without digital traces, references to top-down campaigns that might plausibly affect behavior rather than recordkeeping, and mentions of singular high-profile events as external shocks. The researchers coded such fragments separately and compared them with the dominant patterns.

3.5. Use of Questionnaire Data and Limitations

The team aggregated questionnaire data descriptively and used them to interpret group dynamics and language choices in discussions. They did not convert quantitative indicators into generalized estimates of frequency or trends. The limitations follow directly from the qualitative design. Focus groups, expert interviews, and brief questionnaires do not permit reliable estimates of bullying prevalence or its temporal dynamics. The conclusions, therefore, pertain to descriptive repertoires, institutional practices, and the channels through which the phenomenon becomes visible.

4. Results

Reporting note. This section reports empirical patterns in participants' accounts and institutional descriptions. Consistent with the qualitative design described in Section 3, the evidence concerns visibility (observability) processes, including detection, public circulation, and normative thresholds, rather than estimates of behavioral incidence.

4.1. The School as a Node of Normalization

The corpus shows that schools function as central institutions where actors articulate and reproduce the boundaries of acceptable behavior on a daily basis and where they form and disseminate the language used to counter bullying. Two recurrent empirical strands support this role: the routinization of preventive practices embedded in the instructional and organizational fabric of schools, and generalized local judgments that "there is more now."

In a southern rural focus group, participants describe preventive activities as a regular component of school life:

"Events are held regularly: for Nauryz, on countering bullying, on preventing drug use, and on patriotic education."

[FGD-South-rural-Kazakh, Participant].

In the same setting, participants note that the school's documentation now includes a separate "values education" section:

"Starting this academic year, a mandatory separate 'values education' section has been introduced."

[FGD-South-rural-Kazakh, Participant].

These descriptions portray bullying-related work not merely as episodic responses but as routinized procedures, lessons, discussions, and scheduled events, through which schools formally frame conflicts as matters requiring institutional handling. Alongside this procedural register, participants articulate generalized evaluative formulations that signal perceived intensification. In a rural group from the eastern region, a participant summarizes perceived change as follows:

"There is more bullying in schools now."

[FGD-East-rural-Kazakh, Participant].

Across the corpus, procedural statements refer to schedules and thematic blocks ("anti-bullying events," "values education"), whereas evaluative statements aggregate everyday observations into generalized claims ("there is more now"). Both registers co-occur within the same local accounts: participants describe bullying simultaneously as an object of regular prevention and as an intensified problem.

The examples in this subsection come primarily from rural groups in the southern and eastern regions. What remains analytically significant is the joint presence of routinized preventive descriptions and generalized evaluations of intensification within the same local narratives.

4.2. Intergenerational Gap

The material reveals a persistent intergenerational divergence in defining the permissible limits of "harshness" in interactions

with students. Participants in a southern rural focus group articulate this divergence through narratives about the "heightened tenderness" and "fragility" of contemporary children. One participant formulates this contrast explicitly:

> *"Today's children are not the same; they have become too tender."*

[FGD-South-rural-Kazakh, Participant].

Such statements do not recount specific incidents. Instead, they establish an evaluative frame that positions coercive or sharply authoritarian practices outside the boundaries of acceptability. The "earlier versus now" contrast shifts the focus from what happened to how actors currently evaluate behavior. These accounts register not a momentary change in adult conduct but a shift in the normative boundary itself, indexed through generational comparison and moral self-description. Practices previously regarded as acceptable within strict limits are now more likely to fall within a zone of moral prohibition.

Notably, narratives about "tenderness" arise in the same local contexts where participants describe routinized preventive activities and the implementation of values education modules. In many accounts, references to generational sensitivity appear alongside discussions of anti-bullying programming, linking intergenerational evaluation to the vocabulary through which actors describe and judge school interactions. Importantly, these evaluations unfold within a bilingual communicative space in which naming practices are not neutral. Participants draw on repertoire-specific expressions and near-synonyms that subtly differentiate between "conflict," "strictness," and "bullying." Such lexical variation affects how episodes are pragmatically framed and which labels become institutionally consequential. The intercultural dimension, therefore, operates not only at the level of audience circulation but also at the micro level of classification.

4.3. Mediatization

Expert interviews consistently identify the digital environment as a growing domain for problematizing school conflicts. In an interview conducted on June 11, 2025, a respondent formulates this perspective in prognostic terms:

> *"Cyber risks appear to be one of the problems that will have to be faced in the future."*

[Expert-researcher].

Experts typically frame such statements as forward-looking and evaluative rather than event-descriptive. Their formulations emphasize anticipated risk and probability ("will have to be faced," "will be one of the problems"), which distinguishes them from procedural descriptions of offline prevention.

Focus group participants, by contrast, highlight immediate disclosure dynamics. They describe how conflicts are rapidly externalized through digital channels:

> *"If something happens, it is immediately in social networks."*

[FGD-city-Russian, Participant].

Across the corpus, participants characterize mediatization primarily in terms of accelerated disclosure and expanded audiences. Once conflicts move online, audiences widen, and evaluative commentary intensifies as episodes circulate across arenas, including school settings, parent communication channels, and broader public online spaces. In these accounts, digital circulation functions as a mechanism that increases visibility and amplifies moral scrutiny.

Table 1: Descriptive summary of themes and corresponding observability parameters

Results theme	Core descriptive pattern in the corpus	Primary parameter(s)	Illustrative evidence
4.1 School as a node of normalization	Routinized prevention and the institutional embedding of bullying vocabulary co-occur with generalized judgments of a perceived rise ("there is more now").	D, T	References to scheduled events and "values education"; generalized tendency formulations.
4.2 Intergenerational gap	"Earlier vs now" narratives reframe harshness as less acceptable and broaden the evaluative vocabulary of the unacceptable.	T	Comparative constructions; "tenderness/fragility" narratives; boundary work between "strictness" and "bullying."
4.3 Mediatization	Digital channels are described as accelerating disclosure and expanding audiences; experts highlight cyber risks, and focus groups report immediate posting.	P (and partly D)	Prognostic expert statements; "immediately in social networks"; references to messengers/platforms.

(Note: The qualitative corpus does not estimate incidence (I); the table summarizes visibility-related parameters.)

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpretive scope

Taken together, the findings support interpreting the widely repeated perception of a rise in school bullying in Kazakhstan primarily as an effect of normative problematization and the associated expansion of the definition of deviance, rather than as direct evidence of rising incidence. By *normative problematization*, we refer to the translation of customary forms of harsh interaction into a category of moral unacceptability that warrants institutional intervention. By *expansion of the definition*, we refer to the enlargement of situations classified as bullying following shifts in the linguistic and procedural frames through which actors recognize and process them (Spector & Kitsuse, 1977). This interpretation aligns with the three recurrent empirical patterns identified in the Results: routinized institutional prevention, intergenerational reappraisals of acceptable "strictness," and intensified mediatization.

Epistemic note. Empirically, the corpus documents:

(i)   routinized school-based prevention and the institutional embedding of anti-bullying vocabulary;
(ii)   intergenerational narratives that reorganize moral evaluations of coercive practices; and
(iii)   (accelerated disclosure and circulation of conflicts through digital channels.

Theoretically, we interpret these patterns as qualitative indications of shifts in visibility (observability) processes that may contribute to the perception of an increase and to rising administrative counts. This inference does not establish causal effects or national incidence trends. To encourage broader application and reflective engagement, educators outside Kazakhstan may consider the following question: How might the observability framework developed here reveal similar shifts in visibility processes in their own educational contexts? Testing these dynamics across varied settings could refine and extend the framework beyond its initial empirical scope.

5.2. Interpretation within the observability framework (without restating the framework)

Institutionalization manifests in regular anti-bullying activities and in the inclusion of relevant terminology within values education modules. By introducing designated procedures and standardized language, schools embed the topic within everyday pedagogical cycles and create stable entry points for detecting and formally handling conflicts as administratively relevant cases (Durlak et al., 2011). From a visibility-centered perspective, such embedding increases the likelihood that actors notice, discuss, and formally process episodes, even when the underlying repertoire of everyday interactions does not demonstrably change.

Intergenerational narratives about the "heightened tenderness" and "fragility" of today's children signal a reevaluation of what counts as permissible harshness. The comparative register of "earlier versus now" shifts attention from events themselves to their moral qualification. From an observability perspective, this shift reflects a reconfiguration of the normative boundary governing when actors label an episode as "bullying" rather than "strictness" or "ordinary conflict." As thresholds move, the distribution of labels applied to comparable episodes may change over time, complicating intuitive interpretations of administrative growth as behavioral growth.

Expert interviews introduce a mediatization dimension. Respondents frame the digital environment as an increasingly salient arena in which conflicts become publicly articulable and institutionally consequential, consistent with broader accounts of transformations in adolescent peer relations within social media contexts (Nesi et al., 2018). Focus-group accounts of immediate disclosure further indicate that digital traces function as a practical infrastructure of visibility: they shorten detection lags, expand audiences, and intensify moral evaluation as episodes circulate across arenas. In networked environments, where diffusion can be rapid and wide (Boyd, 2014), public circulation becomes a structural condition that shapes how schools and families experience conflicts as more urgent, more visible, and more normatively charged (Vosoughi et al., 2018).

The analysis also considered alternative explanations and boundary conditions. We examined fragments suggesting local increases in severe offline episodes independent of digital circulation and procedural embedding, as well as references to top-down campaigns that might plausibly alter everyday behavior rather than recordkeeping practices. These fragments refine the scope of generalization but do not dominate the corpus or reproduce the joint configuration of institutional routinization, threshold reappraisal, and mediatized circulation documented in the main findings.

Interpreted through the I–D–P–T decomposition, the corpus aligns with qualitative shifts in detection (D), public circulation (P), and normative thresholds (T). The study does not estimate incidence (I); accordingly, the discussion centers on the visibility conditions under which episodes become detectable, publicly circulated, and institutionally classified. Table 1 provides a concise mapping of the inferential scope of each parameter within the present design.

Table 2: Empirical grounding and inferential scope of the I–D–P–T decomposition in this study

Parameter	What is documented empirically in the corpus (Section 4)	Interpretive inference used in this article	What requires additional data (beyond this qualitative design)
I (Incidence)	Generalized claims of increase and episodic descriptions; no prevalence sampling and no standardized event-counting frame	No incidence trend is inferred; "increase" is treated as a communicative and classificatory outcome	Repeated standardized measurement (e.g., comparable surveys), event-level administrative data with stable definitions, and/or independent harm indicators
D (Detection)	Accounts of routinized prevention, procedural handling, and recurrent pathways of recognition (who notices, how signals enter school handling)	Increased detectability and routinization may contribute to growth in recorded cases and perceived salience	Time-to-signal and time-to-action measures; distribution of detection sources; ratio of signals to formally handled cases under stable rules
P (Public circulation)	Accounts of rapid disclosure and movement of conflicts across arenas via digital channels; references to digital traces and widened audiences	Expanded circulation may amplify moral evaluation and administrative responsiveness even without behavioral change	Metadata on digital trace presence and reach; measures of diffusion speed/radius; linkage between circulation indicators and subsequent institutional handling
T (Normative threshold)	Comparative "earlier vs now" narratives and boundary work between "strictness," "conflict," and "bullying."	Threshold drift is treated as a mechanism that can change classification rates for content-similar episodes	Repeated vignette modules; tests of invariance in classification over time and across language/settlement strata; documentation of definitional changes in regulations

Note to Table 2. The table clarifies the boundary between empirical documentation and theoretical inference; it is not a quantitative estimate of behavioral frequencies.

5.3. Intercultural Communication Implications

The intercultural communication implications follow directly from the mechanisms identified in the corpus.

First, intergenerational narratives function as forms of moral translation. Participants re-encode experiences previously categorized as legitimate "strictness" into a new evaluative vocabulary (Wierzbicka, 1997), thereby shifting the boundary between what actors consider morally unacceptable and what institutions treat as actionable. Second, mass media and digital platforms operate as intercultural amplifiers and translators. As school conflicts move between parent chats, schools, and broader publics, actors recontextualize them for new audiences. This cross-audience translation intensifies circulation and moral evaluation and may alter incentives for institutional responses (Hjarvard, 2008; Couldry & Hepp, 2017). And Third, Kazakhstan's Kazakh/Russian bilingual discourse directly shapes classification work. Repertoire-specific pragmatics, near-synonyms, and translation choices influence how participants name episodes and which labels ("conflict," "strictness," "bullying," "cyberbullying") become administratively recognized and consequential. In this sense, intercultural meaning-making does not merely accompany institutional classification; it actively structures it.

5.4. Methodological Implications For Research Design

Two methodological implications follow from this analysis.

First, comparative studies of bullying that use temporal or between-school designs must explicitly address the comparability of classification practices over time. When vocabularies, procedures, and normative thresholds shift, administrative counts and survey indicators may lose equivalence, even if the measurement instrument remains formally unchanged. Researchers should therefore pair administrative time series with repeated qualitative calibration modules, such as vignette-based exercises and systematic documentation of regulatory definitions in force. Such pairing enables analysts to distinguish behavioral dynamics from visibility dynamics.

Second, accurate trend interpretation requires separating offline and online contours of school conflict. Digital traces transform circulation into a structural factor that affects detection speed, audience scope, and the moral and administrative salience of episodes. Treating mediatization as a modifier of visibility parameters, primarily detection (D) and public circulation (P), allows researchers to interpret recorded growth without conflating increased publicity with increased behavior (Hjarvard, 2008; Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

5.5. Practical Implications For Monitoring And Prevention

Practical recommendations follow from the same logic. Monitoring in educational organizations should be organized to record the incident, the channel of detection, the setting of occurrence (offline, online, hybrid), the presence and nature of the digital trace, and the locally applicable definition of unacceptable behavior in force at the time of the event. Such event-level documentation supports the correct interpretation of time series by separating managerial effects of procedures and communication from behavioral dynamics.

Prevention is most plausibly structured as a two-track system. In the offline module, priorities include explicitly articulating the boundary between acceptable pedagogical strictness and unacceptable coercion, procedures for early intervention, mediation practices, and educator training to diagnose borderline situations that are likely to be reclassified as bullying as thresholds change. In the online module, priorities include the hygiene of digital communication, ethically safe methods for documenting and transmitting digital traces, and de-escalation techniques that minimize the costs of public exposure (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009; Livingstone et al., 2011). The principle of minimally necessary publicity should be operationalized in school communication protocols, because public circulation itself can transform a single episode into a long-tail disciplinary "case."

Work with parents should be institutionalized as a standing channel for calibrating expectations and reducing norm conflict at the home–school interface. Given that parents often serve as a detection channel, aligning lexicon and response rules between home and school can improve signal quality, reduce escalation through public circulation, and support more consistent qualification practices.

5.6. Limitations and Future Work

The study's limitations follow from the qualitative nature of the corpus and its focus on adult and expert voices. The analysis documents languages of description, institutional routines, and pathways of visibility, but it does not estimate behavioral incidence or national-level trends. Future research should incorporate student perspectives, ethically robust integration of digital traces, and quasi-experimental before-and-after comparisons of regulatory innovations (for example, changes in reporting forms or prevention modules). Such designs would allow researchers to examine whether shifts in detection, circulation, and normative thresholds systematically correspond with administrative growth and to identify conditions under which visibility dynamics diverge from behavioral dynamics.

6. Conclusions

This article examined the widely repeated perception that school bullying in Kazakhstan has increased in recent years. Drawing on a bilingual qualitative corpus collected in 2025, the analysis suggests that this perceived rise is closely linked to increased visibility (observability): the procedural embedding of anti-bullying work and vocabulary within schools, intensified digital circulation of conflicts, and shifting normative thresholds that broaden what actors qualify as "bullying." The proposed visibility framework separates behavioral incidence from the conditions under which episodes are detected, circulated, and institutionally classified. This distinction clarifies why administrative counts and public narratives may rise even when the present design does not permit inferences about incidence.

Theoretically, the findings sharpen the study's intercultural communication contribution. In this context, "bullying" operates not only as a behavioral label but also as a communicative category negotiated across linguistic repertoires and social boundaries. Within Kazakhstan's Kazakh/Russian bilingual setting, moral translation across generations and recontextualization through media and digital platforms shape how actors name, interpret, and render conflicts institutionally

actionable at the school–family–public interface. Two implications for policy and practice follow directly. First, monitoring systems should record the visibility conditions associated with each incident, including the source and channel of detection and the presence of digital traces, so that intensified observability is not conflated with behavioral change. Second, prevention should integrate coordinated offline and online strategies and include structured engagement with parents, who frequently serve as key channels of detection and interpretation. In this study, bullying emerges not only as a social problem but also as a communicative construct shaped by language, media, and moral translation across institutional and generational boundaries. Future research on school bullying should therefore treat administrative growth not as self-evident evidence of behavioral escalation, but as a potential outcome of evolving visibility regimes.

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