

# THE DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF SAFETY: A PHENOMENOGRAPHIC STUDY IN THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

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## Abstract

This article analyses the diversity of students' subjective safety experiences at school, based on a phenomenographic research approach. The aim of the study is to reveal different ways students experience and perceive safety, as well as their interactions, in the social and cultural school context. The study involved 56 students (26 boys and 30 girls) from three urban and three rural schools, purposely selected to reflect regional and social diversity. The data were collected in March and April 2024 through written reflections and focus group discussions. The data analysis was based on phenomenographic principles, identifying categories of description and constructing an outcome space. The study revealed that students' experiences of safety vary according to regional context: urban students associate safety more often with physical measures and technologies, while rural students relate it to community closeness and teacher sensitivity. The findings highlight how social, cultural and regional factors shape the diversity of safety experiences, and offer recommendations for improving the school climate.

KEY WORDS: student safety, subjective safety, phenomenographic study, social and cultural context, regional differences.

## Anotacija

Šiame straipsnyje analizuojama mokinių subjektyvių saugumo patirčių mokykloje įvairovė, taikant fenomenografinį tyrimo metodą. Tyrimo tikslas: atskleisti skirtingus mokinių subjektyvaus saugumo patyrimo ir suvokimo mokykloje būdus bei jų tarpusavio sąveikas. Tyrime dalyvavo 56 mokiniai (26 berniukai ir 30 mergaičių) iš trijų miestų ir trijų kaimo vietovių mokyklų, atrinktų tikslingai, siekiant atskleisti regioninę ir socialinę įvairovę. Duomenys rinkti 2024 m. kovo–balandžio mėn. taikant dvi papildančias metodikas: rašytines refleksijas ir diskusijų grupių diskusijas. Analizės eiga paremta fenomenografijos tyrimuose taikomais principais, kurie akcentuoja patyrimo įvairovės išskyrimą, o ne dažnumo ar kalbinės raiškos analizę. Tyrimas atskleidė, kad mokinių saugumo patirtys skiriasi, atsižvelgiant į regioninį kontekstą: miestų mokiniai saugumą dažniau sieja su fizinėmis priemonėmis ir technologijomis, tuo tarpu kaimo vietovių mokiniai – su bendruomeniškumu ir mokytojų jautrumu. Rezultatai atskleidė, kaip socialiniai, kultūriniai ir regioniniai veiksniai formuoja skirtingas saugumo patirtis.

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## Introduction

In the context of contemporary education, increasing attention is given to the idea that a sense of safety is a prerequisite for successful learning and positive psychosocial development (Osher et al., 2021; Cohen, Espelage, 2020). The topic of students' subjective sense of safety remains particularly relevant in the light of public expectations for a secure learning environment, the growing diversity within schools, and continuously evolving threats (e.g. Schildkraut et al., 2023; Mariani, Schiff, 2025). Contemporary literature stresses that students' safety is not solely the result of infrastructural or technological measures (Schildkraut, Muschert, 2019; Thatcher, Hoyle, 2010), but rather a multifaceted experience in which the school climate, a sense of community, and social relationships play a crucial role (Cohen, Espelage, 2020; Osher et al., 2020).

Although the international literature increasingly addresses school climate and safety policies (Cohen, Espelage, 2020; Osher et al., 2021), there remains a lack of research examining students' subjective experiences of safety, not only in general terms but also in relation to regional and cultural differences. The phenomenographic method, which allows researchers to uncover how different students experience safety and what variations influence the strength of their perceived safety, remains rarely applied. Subjective experiences of safety are closely linked to students' emotional wellbeing, trust in institutions, and sense of social inclusion. Certain groups, such as those from rural areas, minority backgrounds, or with learning difficulties, may feel less safe even when formal safety measures are identical. These disparities highlight the importance of exploring not only the presence of safety measures, but also how they are perceived and experienced by different students. The problem lies in the fact that although school safety measures increasingly rely on technological solutions or prevention programmes (Schildkraut, Hernandez, 2020), there remains a lack of research on how students themselves subjectively perceive safety within different social and cultural contexts (Osher et al., 2021; Li et al., 2025). This is especially important considering research showing varying perceptions of safety between urban and rural schools, where community and human relationships may be more significant than formal structures (Thapa et al., 2013; Bosworth, Judkins, 2014). The guiding research question is: 'How do students in different social and cultural contexts perceive and experience safety in school?'

A phenomenographic approach makes it possible to explore how students experience safety as a phenomenon, and to identify the variation in those experiences, which may be shaped by regional, cultural or school climate factors (Marton, Booth, 1997; Åkerlind, 2005). The phenomenographic approach chosen to address this problem makes it possible to move beyond general patterns and uncover individualised forms of safety experience. Unlike statistical studies, phenomenography does not aim to quantify safety levels but to identify different types of experience, which can inform more context-sensitive safety strategies in schools. The relevance of this study lies in the need to gain a deeper understanding of how safety is constructed in students' consciousness, and what factors they consider essential in creating a safe environment. What makes this study distinct is its reliance on students' voices and their authentic experiences, revealing diverse ways of understanding subjective safety in school, which is an area that has so far been little examined through a phenomenographic lens.

As mental health challenges grow in schools, and student wellbeing becomes an increasingly central focus of education policy (e.g. Lithuania's Ministry of Education, Science and Sport Strategy for 2021–2030), the analysis of students' subjective safety is becoming integral to the quality of education. This study not only contributes to the academic discourse but also provides insights for designing more targeted social-emotional learning and prevention strategies.

Object of the study: students' subjective perception of safety at school.

Aim of the study: to reveal the different ways students experience and perceive subjective safety in school, as well as the interactions among those perceptions.

Research objectives:

- To identify the various ways in which students experience subjective safety at school.
- To construct a model of students' subjective experiences of safety.

Research methods: theoretical methods: analysis and synthesis of academic sources; empirical method: qualitative phenomenographic study (data collection methods: written free reflection and focus group discussions; data analysis method: construction of descriptive categories based on the principles of phenomenographic research). During the analysis process, the artificial intelligence tool OpenAI ChatGPT (April 2025 version) was used to systematise student responses and to construct a model of perception types. The final analysis and interpretations are the responsibility of the author.

## Literature review

In educational research, the concept of safety is typically divided into objective and subjective levels. The distinction between objective and subjective safety was first developed in criminology and public safety studies. In their research on urban space safety, Brown and Altman emphasise that 'objective safety is defined by measurable conditions such as crime rates and security installations, while subjective safety reflects individual perceptions, feelings and interpretations of risk' (2008, 114). This dual concept laid the foundations for broader research in which safety issues began to be examined through the lens of individual experiences and environmental interaction. Objective safety has been associated with visible indicators (such as crime rates and security measures), while subjective safety refers to individual experiences and interpretations of risk. This twofold framework was transferred to educational research (Thatcher, Hoyle, 2010; Osher et al., 2010), where students' experiences of safety are understood as the interaction between infrastructure, preventive measures and subjective perceptions. The criminological research model was adopted and adapted within educational studies, where students' safety is similarly examined as an interplay between physical security conditions, institutional measures and personal experiences.

Scientific literature emphasises that objective safety in schools is associated with infrastructure, control measures, rules and technological solutions (Schildkraut et al., 2015; Thapa et al., 2013). Measures such as surveillance cameras, metal detectors and access control form the material foundation of safety (Schildkraut, 2023). In the literature, objective school safety is defined as a set of complex measures that ensure the physical and psychological wellbeing of students and staff through infrastructure, rules and control systems. According to Schildkraut et al., 'school safety measures are designed to protect students and staff by controlling access to facilities, monitoring behaviors, and preventing harm through physical and technological interventions' (2015, 98). This means that safety involves not only securing buildings but also monitoring behaviour and applying technological solutions. The authors stress that 'physical security measures, including metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and secured entryways, have become common tools in efforts to enhance school safety' (p. 99), reflecting a tendency to rely on material and technological means to create a secure school environment. Adding to this perspective, Thapa et al. state that 'school safety is often ensured through clear rules and consistent enforcement, fostering an orderly environment where students feel protected' (2013, 359). This indicates that clarity of rules and their consistent application are essential to creating an orderly and safe environment. Moreover,

the authors emphasise that ‘a positive school climate, supported by fair rules and adequate physical conditions, is associated with students’ perceptions of safety’ (p. 381), showing that objective factors are closely linked to students’ subjective sense of safety. An analysis of these studies reveals that while infrastructure, technological tools and rules establish the foundations for objective safety, students’ feelings of safety depend on how well these measures align with a positive school climate and social environment.

Among recent works that examine aspects of objective safety in schools, the special issue entitled ‘Preventing School Violence and Promoting School Safety’ (published by the journal *School Mental Health*, 2021) stands out. This publication offers a comprehensive model for literature review and research synthesis, organised into five areas: conceptual foundations, the aspect of racial and ethnic diversity, training and roles of school officers, discipline and school climate, and issues related to bullying and peer victimisation.

The analysis shows that these areas emphasise a holistic approach to safety: infrastructure, behaviour monitoring, the system of rules and psychosocial support must function together rather than in isolation. This aligns with a three-dimensional model of safety, which is based on the following foundations:

- the physical environment and technological measures (cameras, access control);
- discipline and prevention strategies (clarity of rules, teacher involvement);
- school climate and the strengthening of social relationships.

Although traditional ‘target-hardening’ measures reduce objective threats, they can only promote subjective safety when combined with psychosocial interventions and positive relationships. For example, Mariani and Schiff (2025) state that ‘violence prevention efforts should move beyond target hardening to incorporate efforts that build school climate and support positive behavior for all students’ (p. 282).

The subjective sense of safety in school is a multidimensional construct shaped by students through their personal experiences, emotions and social interactions (Bosworth et al., 2011; Osher et al., 2021). Thatcher and Hoyle (2010) examined how objective safety (e.g. implemented surveillance systems) interacts with students’ psychological security and subjective experiences. This model was reinforced by Osher et al. (2010), who emphasised that objective measures (infrastructure, rules) must be evaluated together with students’ emotional, social and cultural dimensions of feeling safe.

In recent studies, Schildkraut et al. (2018; 2019; 2020; 2023) provide an in-depth examination of the implementation of school safety measures and their impact on both objective and subjective safety. The authors stress that while infras-

structural and technological tools (such as surveillance cameras, metal detectors or lockdown drills) are essential in reducing objective threats, their effect on students' subjective sense of safety is complex and uneven (Schildkraut, Muschert, 2019). For example, lockdown drills give some students a greater sense of security, while others experience increased anxiety, revealing that subjective safety is constructed individually through personal experience and emotion. This supports the goal of phenomenography, which is to reveal the diversity of how safety is experienced.

Schildkraut (2023) also emphasises that safety measures must be integrated with efforts to build school culture, stating that 'security measures cannot stand alone, they must be integrated with efforts to foster a positive school climate that supports student wellbeing' (p. 168). Subjective safety is more closely related to students' lived experience, emotions, their relationships within the community, trust in school institutions, and the ability to be heard and understood (Bosworth et al., 2011; Osher et al., 2021).

In the context of phenomenographic research, insights about subjective safety are especially important because phenomenography aims to reveal how different students experience and perceive safety in school. Unlike discourse analysis, which focuses mainly on linguistic expression, phenomenography is concerned with identifying the variation in how a phenomenon (in this case, safety) is experienced (Marton, Booth, 1997). Studies that highlight the sense of belonging, school climate, teacher care, and the quality of relationships (Bosworth, Judkins, 2014; Cohen, Espelage, 2020) provide the foundations for understanding the various ways students perceive safety.

Subjective safety in school is closely linked to students' individual experiences, emotions and social relationships. Bosworth et al. (2011) emphasise that 'perceptions of school safety are shaped by students' relationships with peers and adults, their sense of belonging, and their emotional experiences within the school environment' (p. 197). This suggests that the sense of safety is shaped not only by objective measures but also by the quality of relationships and the feeling of belonging to a community. The authors also note that 'students who feel connected and supported report higher levels of perceived safety regardless of the presence of security measures' (p. 198), revealing that even modern safety measures do not guarantee a sense of safety if students lack emotional connection or support. Similarly, Osher et al. (2021) state that 'subjective safety reflects students' interpretations of their experiences, including how fairly they are treated and whether they feel their voice is heard' (p. 67). This stresses that students' sense of safety depends on their lived experiences, in which the feeling of fairness and being heard is especially important. Furthermore, the authors stress that 'efforts to improve school climate and relationships may have a greater impact on students' sense of

safety than physical security measures' (p. 71). This indicates that strengthening subjective safety should prioritise the culture of relationships and the school microclimate rather than relying solely on technological or infrastructural measures. These insights are highly relevant to phenomenographic research, as they help identify potential categories of safety experience: for some students, safety may be associated with the presence of friends, while for others it may stem from the clarity of rules or the support of teachers.

In their study, Bosworth and Judkins (2014) emphasise that the sense of school connectedness is one of the key factors influencing students' subjective safety and psychosocial wellbeing. They observe that students who feel a strong bond with their school are more likely to trust both peers and adults in the school, which significantly reduces the likelihood of experiencing bullying, violence, or other forms of insecurity. According to the authors, 'students' perceptions of safety are strongly influenced by their sense of belonging and connection to the school community, beyond the presence of physical security measures' (p. 302), meaning that students primarily associate the feeling of safety with a sense of belonging to the school community rather than with physical safety measures. The study's findings show that a sense of connectedness fosters a positive school culture, in which students face less risk of social exclusion, discrimination or violence. The authors highlight that this connection is strengthened by a fair and consistent system of rules, caring teachers, and open communication channels, where students' voices are heard and respected. These insights are important for phenomenographic research, because they help explain that students' experiences of safety may vary: some may associate safety with a sense of belonging, others with the consistency of rules or teacher support. Identifying and analysing the diversity of these experiences is the central aim of phenomenographic research.

The subjective sense of safety in school is closely tied to students' experiences of connectedness, emotional wellbeing, and the quality of their social relationships. The study by Jian Li et al. (2025), which compared PISA 2018 and PISA 2022 data, showed that during the pandemic, students' subjective safety depended even more on their sense of belonging to the school community and the quality of social interactions than on physical safety measures. The authors argue that the school climate and the feeling of belonging are among the most important indicators of students' subjective wellbeing and sense of safety (Li et al., 2025). These insights are particularly relevant to phenomenographic research, as they reveal that students' experiences of safety can differ widely: some perceive safety through their relationships with peers or teachers, while others associate it with the ability to maintain meaningful social connections, regardless of formal security systems.

Phenomenographic research makes it possible to uncover the diversity of these experiences of safety and their interactions within the school environment.

The role of the school in ensuring safety is often discussed in terms of shaping the school microclimate (Wentzel et al., 2010). Recent studies highlight that the microclimate is one of the key factors in ensuring not only objective but also subjective student safety. Cohen and Espelage (2020) state that 'school climate interventions may be more effective for promoting safety than security hardware or personnel alone,' emphasising that the feeling of safety arises more from social justice, the fair enforcement of rules and interpersonal relationships, than from technological measures. The study by Gao and Meng (2023) confirms that the microclimate is directly linked to reducing the risk of bullying and violence, and increases students' subjective sense of safety and emotional wellbeing. These insights are important for phenomenographic research, as they allow for the investigation of how students experience the school microclimate differently, and how they perceive safety within that environment. The microclimate becomes the context in which various ways of experiencing safety are revealed, ranging from the clarity of rules to the quality of relationships and the sense of belonging to a community.

The school's role in ensuring safety is also frequently discussed in terms of the sensitivity of teachers and administrators (Osher et al., 2010). Studies emphasise that teachers' responsiveness to students' needs, their ability to notice emotional signals, create an inclusive atmosphere, and consistently address inappropriate behaviour are significant factors that contribute in different ways to students' experiences of safety (Gregory et al., 2016; Cohen, Espelage, 2020). These insights are relevant to phenomenographic research, as they enable the exploration of how different students experience safety, depending on their relationships with adults, their trust in the institution, or their perception of the fairness of behavioural rules.

Preventive programmes in schools (such as 'Second Step' and 'KiVa') also provide opportunities for diverse student experiences of safety (Espelage et al., 2019). Students may experience safety as inclusion in decision-making, discussion and rule creation, or as passive protection within formal programmes. A phenomenographic study allows for the identification of the full range of these differences in experience, and helps determine how students perceive their own role in creating a safe environment.

Phenomenographic studies in education show that students' experiences of the same phenomenon can differ significantly, i.e. the identification and categorisation of these differences is the core of the research (Marton, Booth, 1997; Åkerlind, 2005). Therefore, in this study, the literature on the school microclimate, the sense of belonging, objective measures and preventive programmes serves as a contex-

tual framework for understanding possible variations in safety experiences. However, the main focus is on ways in which students themselves describe their experiences of safety. This is particularly important when examining regional, social and cultural differences in how students experience safety, which this phenomenographic analysis seeks to uncover.

## **2. Research methodology**

Methodological approach of the study. A qualitative study based on a phenomenographic approach was conducted in order to reveal the different ways in which students experience and perceive safety at school. The aim of the study was to determine how students experience safety in diverse ways, what aspects differentiate those experiences, and what categories of perception can be identified in their statements.

A phenomenographic approach was chosen, because it allows for the investigation of phenomena from the participants' perspective, revealing the different ways in which people (in this case, students) experience the same phenomenon, i.e. safety in school. Unlike phenomenology, which focuses on identifying the essence of a phenomenon, phenomenography seeks to highlight the diversity of experiences and to determine descriptive categories that show how the phenomenon is perceived in varied ways. This approach is particularly suitable when the aim is to generate understanding that can be applied in practice, for example, to improve educational policy or enhance the school microclimate.

The founders of phenomenography, Marton and Booth (1997), emphasised that phenomenographic research is oriented towards 'describing the variation in ways of experiencing the world', and that only by understanding this variation can we create practices that are grounded in people's lived experiences. They argued that phenomenography aims to uncover the ways in which people see, experience, understand or conceptualise various phenomena in the world. Åkerlind (2005) further stressed that the goal of phenomenography is not only to identify categories of perception, but also to reveal how these categories are interrelated, forming what is known as the outcome space, a structure that reflects the relationships among all identified ways of experiencing the phenomenon.

Sample of the study. The research sample consisted of 56 students (26 boys and 30 girls) from six schools: three located in urban areas, and three in rural areas. Schools were selected using purposive sampling in order to ensure the inclusion of students from diverse social, cultural and geographical contexts. This allowed for the identification of potential differences in the experience of safety, depending on

## THE DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF SAFETY...

environmental characteristics, social structure, school size, and the nature of the school community.

The urban schools varied in size, and were located in different municipalities, including both central and suburban educational institutions. The rural schools were also chosen to reflect regional diversity. Participants were students in grades 10 to 12, as this age group is considered more aware of their experiences and capable of reflecting on more complex aspects of safety.

The selection was based on the principle of voluntary participation, while also aiming to ensure that each school's sample was proportionally distributed by gender and grade. This helped ensure a sufficiently diverse dataset, and allowed the phenomenographic study to uncover different ways in which students experience safety. The study sought to explore the influence of regional differences on the diversity of students' experiences of safety, particularly by comparing the contexts of urban and rural schools.

**Data collection method.** The data were collected during March and April 2024 using two complementary methodologies:

(1) Students' written reflections, in which they described their experiences of safety at school in a free-form narrative. Students were presented with open-ended questions, encouraging them to reflect on their personal experiences: 'Describe a situation when you felt completely safe at school. What contributed to that?', 'When did you feel unsafe at school? What caused that?', 'What does a safe school mean to you?' These reflections captured the students' individual thoughts and experiences in their own words, providing space to freely express both positive and negative aspects of safety. This method is particularly suitable for a phenomenographic study, as it enables the analysis of authentic, personally experienced forms of safety.

(2) Two focus group discussions with students from grades 10 to 12 (seven to eight participants per group). The discussions followed a set of open-ended guiding questions that encouraged free exploration of various safety experiences: 'How would you describe a safe school environment?', 'What factors most help you feel safe at school?', 'What, in your opinion, prevents you from feeling safe at school?', 'How do you think the school could improve student safety?' The focus groups allowed observation of how students' experiences and expressions of safety emerged in a group context. These discussions helped to highlight differences in experience, clarify nuances of understanding, and reveal how students reflect on their sense of safety in interaction. Although structured by open-ended guidelines, the discussions allowed space for free participant expression and dialogue, enabling the inclusion of diverse perspectives.

Both methods were chosen to ensure data triangulation, and to reveal diverse perspectives on students' experiences of safety. The written reflections helped to gain a deeper insight into personal, individual experiences, while the focus groups exposed socially contextualised perceptions and differences.

Methods of data analysis. The data were analysed according to the principles of phenomenography as defined by Marton and Booth (1997), Åkerlind (2005), and Bowden (2000). These authors emphasise that phenomenographic analysis aims to reveal the various ways in which a phenomenon (in this case, safety in school) is experienced, and to describe these in the form of categories that reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives of the participants. The steps in the analysis were as follows:

- Familiarisation with the data: repeated reading of written reflections and transcripts of discussions, listening to audio recordings, and taking notes in order to grasp the overall context of the data (Marton, Booth, 1997).
- Identification of different ways of experiencing safety: distinguishing how participants describe their experiences, and what defines the various aspects of their perception of safety (Åkerlind, 2005).
- Grouping the experiences into categories of description: forming descriptive categories that reflect the diversity of experiences and highlight both the differences and similarities between them (Marton, Booth, 1997; Bowden, Green, 2005).

Construction of the outcome space: the final structure that illustrates the relationships between the descriptive categories and the full range of how the phenomenon is perceived (Marton, Booth, 1997; Åkerlind, 2005). The data were analysed manually and with the help of NVivo 12 software, in order to organise coding and compare groups of perceptions. During the data analysis, the AI tool OpenAI ChatGPT (April 2025 version) was used in the initial phase of organising textual data. The tool helped summarise frequently occurring concepts, thematic clusters, and recurring keywords from students' reflections and discussions. However, all categories and their interpretations were developed manually by the researcher in line with phenomenographic principles. The AI did not make independent decisions regarding category formation; it served solely as a supportive tool for structuring the initial data. The main categories of experience identified included: physical safety, psychological safety, moral safety, sources of insecurity (e.g. bullying, violence, discrimination), and strategies for ensuring safety (e.g. seeking help, identifying trusted individuals, self-regulation strategies). For example, recurring student statements about feeling safe when they could speak freely in class were assigned to the 'psychological safety' category. Meanwhile, statements highlighting teachers' ability to respond to problems and their accessibility were assigned to the 'role

of teachers and administration' category. The goal was not to quantify the number of responses, but to reveal the different modes of experience and their meaning. Responses mentioning multiple dimensions of safety simultaneously (e.g. both the quality of school facilities and friendly relationships) were assigned to several categories to preserve the complexity of the experience. These overlaps were analysed separately to identify which dimensions tended to co-occur. Once the categories had been identified, their interrelationships were analysed. This made it possible to construct the 'outcome space', i.e. a structure that reflects the interactions between the dimensions. It was found that psychological safety connects the other dimensions of safety, like physical, moral, social and institutional support. Thus, it was designated as the central axis in the model. Initially, seven experience patterns were identified, but during later analysis, they were merged into five conceptually integrated dimensions, as some reflected the same core of experience (e.g. the sense of belonging and friendly relationships were combined under the dimension of 'social inclusion and community').

The analysis followed principles commonly applied in phenomenographic research, which focus on identifying variations in experience rather than analysing frequency or linguistic expression (Marton, Booth, 1997; Åkerlind, 2005). Regional factors were also considered: data from urban and rural schools were compared, to reveal contextual differences. Rural students more often emphasised interpersonal closeness, community spirit and personal care from teachers, while urban students more frequently referred to technological measures, formal support systems and institutional structures. These differences were integrated into the analysis of each dimension.

**Ethical considerations.** The study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles: informed consent was obtained from students and their parents or guardians, following a clear explanation of the study's aims, the purpose of data use, and the conditions for ensuring confidentiality. Participant anonymity was guaranteed, meaning student names were not mentioned, and locations or schools were referred to using general terms (e.g. 'urban school', 'rural school'). All data were stored in encrypted format and accessible only to the researcher. During focus group discussions, a safe emotional environment was ensured: participants were reminded that they could decline to participate or stop their response at any time if the questions caused discomfort. No information was collected that could identify students' families or the specific circumstances of their schools. The research was carried out in accordance with Lithuania's research ethics evaluation guidelines (Order No 22952 of the Chief Official for Academic Ethics and Procedures 'On the Approval of Guidelines for the Evaluation of Compliance with Research Ethics', 2021).

**Reliability of the study.** Reliability was ensured through data source triangulation (written reflections + focus groups); coding verification was conducted with a second researcher who reviewed 20% of the dataset; and consultations were held with school psychologists to interpret the categories of experience.

**Limitations of the study.** The data reflect the experiences of students from specific contexts (urban and rural schools), and therefore cannot be considered representative of the entire student population in Lithuania. Some students may have felt uncomfortable speaking openly about sensitive aspects of safety, particularly during focus groups. The quality of the written reflections varied depending on students' ability to express their thoughts in writing, so some of the data were fragmentary or concise.

### **3. Research findings**

The construction of the model proceeded in several stages. First, based on phenomenographic principles, different expressions of students' safety experiences (descriptive categories) were identified. These categories were then grouped into thematic areas reflecting dominant aspects of experience. Each dimension emerged as a synthesis of several related themes. The model was not created based on a predetermined structure; it emerged from the data through a systematic analysis of reflections and discussions, following the principle that safety is a dynamic and overlapping phenomenon.

The research data revealed that students' subjective experiences of safety in school fall into several key dimensions: the dimension of physical safety, psychological safety and emotional wellbeing, moral safety and the sense of justice, social inclusion and the feeling of connectedness, and the role of the school administration and teachers in creating a safe environment.

**Psychological safety and emotional wellbeing.** This dimension reflects students' experience of inner stability, trust in their environment, and protection from bullying, discrimination or verbal abuse. Students emphasised the importance of being heard, feeling respected, and having the freedom to express their thoughts and emotions without fear. The dimension was reinforced by a positive school climate, friendly relationships with peers, and attentiveness from teachers.

THE DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF SAFETY...

*Table 1. Quotes and themes supporting the dimension Psychological safety and emotional wellbeing*

| Themes  | Quotes   |
|---|--|
| The absence of bullying, discrimination and verbal abuse          | 'I feel safe at school because no one bullies me' (C1)<br>'The most important thing is that no one laughs at the way I speak or how I look' (C2)<br>'When there is no bullying, I can study peacefully and be myself' (C3)   |
| Creating a positive micro-climate in the classroom and the school | '[...] I felt safe because this was ensured by the school's internal organisation [...] a productive and welcoming atmosphere had been created' (C4)<br>'There was a good and safe atmosphere in my environment [...]'<br>'The environment was suitable, the students were kind' (C5)<br>'[...] a productive and welcoming atmosphere had been created' (C6)<br>'The school leadership and teachers provided a suitable environment for learning [...]' (C7) |
| The ability to freely express thoughts and emotions               | '[...] creating conditions in the institution that allow a child to grow, develop, and not be constantly restricted in their personal growth' (C8)<br>'The school must ensure that a child can study there peacefully and without fear' (C9)<br>'It matters that I can freely say what I think in class'<br>'I am not afraid to speak because everyone respects my opinion' (C10)  |
| Sources of the sense of safety outside the school environment     | 'I felt reasonably safe because the sense of safety came from home, where I could feel and truly was completely safe. As a result, the thought of being unsafe never even occurred to me, and this did not affect my experience at school' (C11)<br>'I felt safe because I received a lot of support at home' (C12)<br>'My family gave me confidence, so I felt brave at school as well' (C13)   |

The themes outlined in Table 1 of the study reveal the multilayered nature of students' subjective experiences of safety at school, and the close interconnections between them. First and foremost, the absence of bullying, discrimination and verbal abuse emerges as a fundamental condition for all other dimensions of safety. Students (e.g. C1, C2, C3) stated clearly that only in an environment free from bullying or humiliation can they feel safe and learn in peace. It is noteworthy that students in rural schools emphasised more frequently community spirit as a natural form of protection against bullying, whereas urban students highlighted the importance of formal prevention measures.

Creating a positive microclimate in the classroom and school (C4–C7) is closely tied to the absence of bullying. The data showed that students perceive the microclimate as a friendly and harmonious environment where interaction is based on respect, teacher attentiveness, and mutual understanding. Rural school students placed a greater emphasis on teachers' personal care and genuine interest, while urban students more often referred to institutional efforts. Another prominent theme was the ability to freely express thoughts and emotions (C8–C10), which is a direct outcome of a positive microclimate. Students reported that in a supportive and friendly atmosphere, they feel free to speak and express their opinions, and feel heard. Students in rural schools more frequently highlighted the role of community openness in enabling self-expression, while urban students emphasised the importance of safe spaces or institutional structures that make such expression possible.

A significant contextual factor in the study was the presence of sources of safety outside school (C11–C13). Students reported that the sense of safety originating from family or home environments strengthened their ability to feel safe at school. Emotional support from family served as an additional foundation that helped students cope better with challenges within the school community. This role was equally emphasised in the responses of both urban and rural students, although rural students more often described the family and the school community as a unified system of support.

All the themes in the table form an interconnected network. The absence of bullying contributes to the development of a positive microclimate, which in turn enables free self-expression. These internal school experiences are further reinforced by sources of safety from the home environment. Regional differences revealed that in rural schools, the experience of safety is more strongly grounded in community closeness and personal relationships, whereas in urban schools it is shaped more by formal measures and institutional structures.

Social inclusion and sense of community. This dimension relates to the feeling of belonging to the school community. It was particularly important for students in rural schools, who emphasised friendships, a general atmosphere of familiarity, and open communication. Urban students sometimes experienced social exclusion due to the size of the school or a sense of anonymity. This dimension is closely linked to emotional wellbeing.

THE DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF SAFETY...

Table 2. Quotes and themes supporting the dimension  
*Social inclusion and sense of community*

| Themes  | Quotes   |
|---|--|
| Close relationships with friends                        | 'I got along well with my classmates and teachers' (C14)<br>'From primary school to graduation, we maintained a strong and good bond with our classmates [...]' (C15)<br>'We were always friendly with our classmates, and that gave me a sense of safety' (C16)   |
| Involvement in school activities (e.g. student council) | '[...] I was a member of the student council [...] many events on prevention topics were organised and many guests were invited to support this goal' (C17)<br>'By participating in the council, I felt like an important part of the community' (C18)<br>'Organising events helped me get to know the school and the people better' (C19)   |
| Openness of the community                               | 'At school I always had someone to turn to if something happened' (C20)<br>'Child safety means feeling fully supported' (C21)<br>'At school [...] I was constantly cared for, teachers always tried to create the warmest possible atmosphere, we would drink tea together, go on trips, they noticed if something was wrong, and always asked whether any teacher or student had mistreated me' (C22) |

The themes presented in Table 2 reveal how students subjectively experience safety at school through social relationships, involvement in school life, and the openness of the community. These themes form a tightly interwoven network, where each element reinforces the others, and together they create a general sense of safety at school. Certain regional differences were also observed, indicating varying experiences of social inclusion among students in urban and rural schools.

Close relationships with friends were identified as a fundamental source of safety. Students emphasised that friendship, mutual trust and longstanding positive relationships with classmates made them feel safe both during lessons and outside them (C14, C15, C16). Students from rural schools mentioned more often a sense of unity across the whole class or school, where 'everyone knows everyone', while urban students more frequently described relationships in terms of smaller groups or circles of friends. Second, involvement in school activities, such as the student council or event organisation, enhanced students' self-esteem and sense of belonging (C17, C18, C19). Urban students tended to emphasise formal roles and institutional forms of participation, while in rural schools the focus was more often on the communal significance of events and closer ties among all members of the school community. Community openness was understood as the school's ability

to provide help, care and emotional support (C20, C21, C22). Students in rural schools highlighted more frequently sincere, personal attention from teachers and other community members, whereas urban students more often referred to formal systems and structures that ensured the availability of support.

All the themes are closely connected: close friendships strengthen engagement, while involvement in activities deepens relationships and fosters community openness. An open community creates the conditions for both friendly relations and active participation to flourish. Regional differences show that in rural schools, social safety is more strongly grounded in community closeness and personal relationships, whereas in urban schools it is more reliant on structural mechanisms and formal measures. This forms a model of subjective safety in which security arises from social interaction, communal ties, and the opportunity to be heard and feel valued.

Moral safety and the sense of justice. Students felt safe when the school ensured clarity of rules, fair enforcement and just conflict resolution. This dimension was weakened by ability-based segregation, administrative indifference and inconsistency. Students appreciated it when problems were addressed based on moral principles rather than formalism.

*Table 3. Quotes and themes supporting the dimension  
Moral safety and the sense of justice*

| <b>Themes</b>  | <b>Quotes</b>   |
|--|---|
| Clarity of rules and their fair application                      | ‘The most important thing is that everyone is treated equally, regardless of their grades’ (C23)<br>‘A safe school, to me, is when the rules apply equally to everyone’ (C24)<br>‘Justice at school means that everyone has equal opportunities’ (C25)  |
| Principled approach by the administration in resolving conflicts | ‘I understand safety as the proper resolution of problems’ (C26)<br>‘It’s important that the school solves problems fairly, not just for appearances’ (C27)<br>‘I felt safe when the administration responded honestly’ (C28)   |
| Ability-based segregation and its impact on the sense of safety  | ‘Students are grouped into lower and higher streams based on ability. Being in the lower stream, I was treated accordingly; some classmates from the higher streams showed a prejudiced attitude, assuming my abilities were poor. I felt uncomfortable and limited during lessons [...] Over time, it made me feel uneasy around higher-achieving students, afraid of being misunderstood’ (C29)<br>‘I felt that I was being judged not as a person, but as a grade’ (C30)<br>‘I felt ashamed to answer because I felt less worthy compared to others’ (C31) |

## THE DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF SAFETY...

The themes presented in Table 3 show that students' subjective sense of safety at school is closely linked to the quality of social relationships, involvement in community life, and the openness of the school community. These aspects interact with one another, forming an integrated structure of safety experience. Some regional differences were observed, revealing variations in how social inclusion is experienced in urban and rural schools.

Close relationships with friends were one of the main sources of safety. Students emphasised that positive relationships with classmates and teachers provided emotional stability and a sense of belonging (C14, C15, C16). Students in rural schools more often highlighted long-term friendships and close bonds that served as a kind of communal support. Urban students also acknowledged the importance of friendship, but their descriptions of relationships were more often fragmented or tied to smaller peer groups. Participation in school activities, for example, involvement in the student council or organising events, allowed students to feel important and heard (C17, C18, C19). Urban school students placed a greater emphasis on formal structures and their roles within them, while rural students highlighted the communal importance of activities where participation was associated with closer ties among all members of the school community. Community openness was reflected in students' ability to seek help freely, knowing that teachers noticed problems and genuinely cared about their wellbeing (C20, C21, C22). This theme was especially prominent in rural schools, where students more frequently emphasised the personal and human attention of teachers and community members. In the responses of urban students, there were more references to formal structures that ensured access to support.

These three themes form an interconnected model of safety experience: close friendships encourage engagement in community activities, and an open community provides the conditions for relationships to grow and strengthen. Regional differences showed that in rural schools relationships were more grounded in community closeness and warmth, while in urban schools they were shaped more by structural and formalised interactions. This results in a unified, yet regionally distinct, model of students' subjective perception of safety grounded in social inclusion and community connectedness.

The dimension of physical safety. For students, physical safety referred to the condition of the school building, technological measures (e.g. cameras, fences, alarm systems), and preventive actions (e.g. police lectures). Urban students placed more emphasis on technological aspects, while in the experience of rural students, physical safety was more closely associated with human closeness.

Table 4. Quotes and themes supporting the dimension *Physical safety*

| Themes   | Quotes  |
|--|---|
| The condition of the school building and infrastructure ('so that plaster doesn't fall from the ceiling', 'the rooms are renovated') | 'Plaster or peeling paint definitely should not fall on your head during lessons: the building must be adapted for safe work' (C32)<br>'[...] good conditions were provided so that nothing would happen to the child (the rooms are comfortable, renovated)' (C33)   |
| Safety technologies (fences, alarm systems)  | '[...] it was safe not only morally but also physically'<br>'The security devices installed at school helped me feel safe' (C34)<br>'The installed cameras and locks gave me a greater sense of security' (C35)   |
| Preventive events (visits by police officers, bullying prevention)   | '[...] I felt safe because of the work of police officers who came for preventive purposes, giving lectures on the harm of bullying and prevention...' (C36)<br>'Police lectures reminded us how important it is to respect each other' (C37)<br>'Preventive events helped me understand how to behave in unsafe situations' (C38)                          |
| Possession of physical force   | 'I practised martial arts and was able to defend both myself and others' (C39)<br>'I felt unsafe because I was still young and unable to defend myself' (C40)<br>'I have defended someone who was being laughed at more than once; the conflict was defused before it escalated' (C41)<br>'I felt safe because I was strong and could protect myself' (C42) |

Students' subjective experience of physical safety at school is multifaceted and based on both environmental conditions and personal abilities, as well as community efforts to ensure a safe learning space (see Table 4). This experience was also influenced by regional differences, revealing different safety practices in urban and rural schools.

The condition of the school building and infrastructure was perceived as the primary factor for physical safety. Students (e.g. C32, C33) emphasised that a properly maintained, safe environment strengthens the sense of safety: renovated, orderly rooms that ensure no risks to health or life. Students in urban schools mentioned more frequently modernised infrastructure and technical solutions, while rural students paid more attention to building maintenance, basic comfort, and order. Safety technologies played a significant role in shaping the experience of physical safety, especially in urban schools. Here, students stressed more often the

THE DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF SAFETY...

importance of technological measures such as cameras, locks and alarms (C34, C35). Students in rural schools mentioned these measures less frequently, placing more emphasis on the human factor, teachers' attentiveness, and community spirit, as sources of safety.

Preventive events, such as visits by police officers or bullying prevention lectures (C36–C38), were considered important tools for strengthening trust in the school's efforts to create a safe environment. Students in urban schools referred more often to such activities as a systematic and planned part of ensuring safety, while in rural schools the communal and inclusive significance of events was emphasised.

Finally, having physical strength was understood as a personal way to ensure one's safety, regardless of region. Students who practised martial arts or were able to defend others (C39, C41, C42) stated that this helped them feel stronger and safer. Those who felt physically weak (C40) experienced feelings of insecurity more often. It is notable that students in rural schools mentioned community support as a supplement to physical safety somewhat more frequently, while urban students highlighted individual strategies.

The experience of physical safety for students was grounded in a complex interplay of environmental quality, technological solutions, community actions, and personal abilities. Regional differences showed that urban schools place a greater emphasis on technological and infrastructural safety, while rural schools rely more on human connections and community as sources of physical safety. The themes are interconnected: appropriate infrastructure and technology form the foundation of safety, preventive events strengthen knowledge and trust, and personal abilities complement the system with an individual sense of security.

The role of the administration and teachers. Students associated safety strongly with the ability of teachers and the administration to notice problems, respond in a timely manner, be accessible, and provide support. The sensitivity of class teachers, the work of social educators and psychologists, and the principled approach of the administration, were identified as key sources of a sense of safety.

*Table 5. Quotes and themes supporting the dimension  
Role of administration and teachers*

| Themes                               | Quotes  |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Teachers' ability to notice problems | 'The school leaders and teachers [...] always helped whenever questions or problems arose [...]' (C43)<br>'I knew that they [the teachers] could help, and you can always turn to them when problems arise' (C44)<br>'When feeling the need to seek help and understanding [...] one must not be afraid to approach those working at the school, knowing that help will always be provided' (C45) |

| Themes  | Quotes  |
|---|---|
| Accessibility and support from class teachers                               | <p>‘Examples of exemplary teachers-class tutors who cared not only about how quickly to conduct the lesson but also about the child’s life at school, how they felt there, and whether anyone was mistreating them’ (C46)</p> <p>‘The class tutor was always ready to help us in any situation’ (C47)</p> |
| The contribution of the administration, social educators, and psychologists | <p>‘[...] I felt safe because this was ensured by the school’s internal organisation and the work of social educators [...]’ (C48)</p> <p>‘There was a social worker and a psychologist at the school who always helped resolve problems when they arose’ (C49)</p>                                       |

Students’ responses revealed (see Table 5) that the role of the administration, teachers and other specialists is crucial in shaping a subjective sense of safety at school. Safety arises from sensitive problem detection, accessibility and ongoing support. While these aspects were generally evaluated positively, the responses also revealed certain regional differences.

Teachers’ ability to notice problems was important in both urban and rural schools; however, students in rural schools more often emphasised a closer relationship with teachers, their genuine concern, and their ability to recognise not only formal but also personal difficulties (C43, C44). Urban students highlighted the opportunity to seek help when needed, but mentioned less frequently examples of ongoing, spontaneous teacher attentiveness (C45). The accessibility and support of class tutors were particularly valued in the rural school context, where students more frequently mentioned tutors’ sensitivity, and efforts to ensure emotional safety and to create a friendly microclimate (C46, C47). Urban students referred to this aspect somewhat less often, or associated it more with formal roles. The contributions of the administration, social educators and psychologists were important in both groups, but urban students emphasised more strongly the availability of formal services (e.g. the importance of psychologists or social educators, C48, C49), whereas rural students stressed the personal relationships with these specialists and their sincere care. The role of the administration and teachers in students’ subjective experiences of safety was inseparable from their sensitivity, accessibility and ability to foster a trust-based environment. Regional differences showed that students in rural schools experience more often closer, more personal relationships, while in urban schools, formal safety mechanisms are more emphasised. These themes form an interconnected network in which each factor strengthens the others and collectively shapes the sense of safety at school.

Presented below is a model of students’ subjective experiences of safety (the ‘outcome space’ diagram) (see Figure 1), which illustrates the relationships between the dimensions.



*Figure 1.* A model of students' subjective experiences of safety

*Source:* The author

The five-dimension model succinctly encompasses the key elements of subjective safety experience, minimises the risk of overlap, and aligns with the phenomenographic principle of illustrating diverse ways of experiencing a phenomenon rather than artificially segmenting them. In phenomenography, the categories (dimensions) identified show the different ways participants experience the phenomenon. Therefore, overlap is natural and even necessary, as subjective perceptions of safety are formed through complex combinations of experiences (for example, psychological safety is inseparable from social inclusion, and moral safety intertwines with the role of the administration).

The model of students' subjective experiences of safety ('outcome space' diagram) developed through the study shows that safety at school is a multilayered, complex phenomenon for students, in which five dimensions overlap and complement one another.

## **Discussion**

The research results reveal that students' subjective safety at school is a complex phenomenon shaped through five closely interconnected dimensions: physical safety, psychological safety and emotional wellbeing, moral safety and the sense of justice, social inclusion and a sense of community, and the role of the administration and teachers. These dimensions overlap, forming a coherent system in which psychological safety serves as a central axis. This aligns with the prin-

ciples of phenomenographic analysis (Marton, Booth, 1997; Åkerlind, 2005), as the study not only identified the variety of experiences, but also demonstrated how different modes of perceiving safety interact.

The results confirm the view established in the literature that objective measures (e.g. infrastructure, technology) are important but insufficient for ensuring subjective safety (Schildkraut, 2023; Osher et al., 2010). Students emphasised more frequently the quality of the microclimate, a sense of belonging to the community, and the sensitivity of teachers and the administration as essential sources of safety. This reflects the findings of Bosworth et al. (2011) and Cohen and Espelage (2020) that subjective safety is formed through social relationships and emotional support, not solely through physical security measures. This study supports the conclusion of Osher et al. (2021) that emotional connectedness to school is a key determinant of students' subjective sense of safety. However, unlike some earlier studies, this research shows that even with strong physical safety measures (e.g. surveillance cameras), psychological safety in urban schools can remain fragmented, particularly when interpersonal support is insufficient.

The model of students' subjective experiences of safety showed that subjective safety is not a homogeneous construct. It is created through the interaction of physical, moral, social and emotional factors, and the experience of safety depends on individual student experiences, the quality of relationships, and the school culture. The structure of the model corresponds with phenomenographic principles (Marton, 1981), because it does not isolate categories of experience, but reveals their interaction and the multifaceted nature of experience. As Cohen and Espelage (2020) emphasise, microclimate interventions (e.g. clarity of rules, teacher care, openness of communication channels) may have a greater impact on students' safety than strict technological measures, which is also confirmed by the study's findings.

The dimension of physical safety, consistent with the literature (Schildkraut, Muschert, 2019), shows that students' subjective safety is inseparable from material measures, such as the quality of infrastructure and technology; however, the study also revealed that for students in rural schools, human closeness was more important than technology. Psychological safety and emotional wellbeing occupy a central position in the model, as this dimension connects other aspects of experience. This aligns with the school climate theory of Cohen et al. (2009), which considers emotional safety a key factor for student wellbeing. Students stated clearly that the absence of bullying, respect, and a sense of justice contribute directly to emotional stability. Moral safety and the sense of justice relate to the fair application of rules and just conflict resolution, with its importance emphasised by students from both urban and rural schools. These results correspond with the research by Thornberg (2006), which stresses that school rule enforcement must be

based on moral principles rather than mere formalism. Social inclusion and a sense of community are closely linked to psychological safety in the model, as friendly relationships, a sense of belonging, and the opportunity to be an active part of the community strengthen students' experiences of safety. The literature (Osher et al., 2020) also highlights social inclusion in schools as a fundamental factor of subjective safety, and the study revealed regional differences: rural students emphasised human connections, while urban students highlighted structural forms. The role of the administration and teachers, as demonstrated by both the model and the literature review (Gregory et al., 2016), shows that the ability of teachers, tutors, administrators, social educators and psychologists to identify problems, respond in a timely way, and provide support, is one of the primary sources of students' sense of safety.

The model developed reflects the concept of safety as a multidimensional construct identified in the literature (Cornell, Mayer, 2010), and demonstrates that students' subjective experience of safety at school is formed through the interaction of physical, emotional, moral and social factors, all influenced by regional and cultural contexts. The strength of the model lies in its ability to reveal an integrated rather than a fragmented perception of safety, aligning with the real experiences of students.

The analysis of regional differences suggests that the experience of safety is not a universal phenomenon, but is 'embedded' within the cultural fabric of the school. This means that in urban schools, where structured and formal prevention mechanisms dominate, students require deliberate attention to emotional support. In contrast, rural schools, where natural social cohesion is stronger, tend to generate safety more organically. The phenomenographic approach thus helps to explain why identical safety models do not function equally across all school settings.

The discussion results highlight the need for a holistic approach to safety policy, where infrastructural and technological measures are combined with efforts to strengthen the relationship culture, promote community and improve the school microclimate. Schools are recommended to increase their focus on social inclusion, moral justice and the capacity of teachers and the administration to respond sensitively to students' needs.

The construction of the model proceeded in several stages. First, based on phenomenographic principles, different expressions of students' safety experiences (descriptive categories) were identified. These categories were then grouped into thematic areas reflecting dominant aspects of experience. Each dimension emerged as a synthesis of several related themes. The model was not created based on a predetermined structure; it emerged from the data through a systematic analysis of reflections and discussions, following the principle that safety is a dynamic and

overlapping phenomenon. The findings indicate that effective school safety policies should be differentiated according to context: in rural schools it is important to strengthen community-based resources (e.g. peer support initiatives), whereas in urban schools it is essential to develop emotionally safe spaces where students feel heard, seen and supported. In practice, this could mean prioritising different types of interventions, and focusing more on social-emotional learning programmes in some schools, and on the accessibility of teachers and support professionals in others.

The five-dimensional model developed in this study can serve as an analytical framework for examining students' safety experiences in other contexts as well (e.g. in vocational schools, minority-serving institutions, or international settings). It allows researchers and practitioners to analyse not only whether students feel safe, but also how they experience safety, a key step beyond binary assessment (safe/unsafe) towards a deeper understanding of experiential diversity.

## **Conclusions**

Students' subjective experiences of safety at school are multifaceted, and encompass physical, emotional, social and moral aspects. Students experienced safety through adequate school infrastructure, technological measures (e.g. cameras, alarms), the quality of the microclimate, friendly relationships with peers, the care from teachers and the administration, and the freedom to express their thoughts openly. Safety was also associated with individual strategies, the ability to defend oneself, active participation in community activities, and seeking trusted individuals. Moreover, the study revealed that students' experiences of safety are not isolated from the broader social context. Family support played an important role in strengthening students' ability to feel safe at school. Regional differences highlighted varying experiences: rural students grounded safety more in community, close relationships with teachers and peers, and personal attention and care from teachers. In contrast, urban students emphasised more frequently formal safety mechanisms, technological tools and the availability of support services. The results revealed that students' subjective safety is constructed through the interaction of personal experiences, social relationships and the regional context, with modes of experience varying according to the social and cultural environment.

The model of students' subjective experiences of safety developed through the study reveals that subjective safety at school is formed through the interaction of five closely related dimensions. The model aligns with the principles of phenomenographic analysis by uncovering different ways students experience safety, and how these experiences interact. The dimensions overlap, forming an integrated

system in which psychological safety and emotional wellbeing serve as the central axis connecting other aspects of safety:

- The physical safety dimension: the foundation of safety, based on the proper condition of the school building, technological measures, and preventive activities that ensure objective physical safety.
- Social inclusion and sense of community: students experience safety through belonging to a community, having close relationships with friends, feeling support, and being able to participate in school life.
- Moral safety and a sense of justice: manifested through clarity of rules, fair enforcement, just conflict resolution, and the absence of bullying and discrimination.
- The role of the administration and teachers: students associated subjective safety with the ability of teachers, tutors, administrators, psychologists and social educators to identify problems, respond and provide support.
- Psychological safety and emotional wellbeing: the central dimension, formed through the interaction of other safety aspects, a synthesis of physical, social and moral factors, along with the efforts of adults.

The model revealed that students' subjective safety is a dynamic and multilayered phenomenon in which each dimension reinforces others. Regional differences showed that students in rural schools placed a greater emphasis on community closeness and personal relationships with teachers, while students in urban schools more often highlighted the importance of formal measures, technological solutions and structural mechanisms.

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