

## BEYOND REACTION: TEACHER COMPETENCE PROFILES AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS IN THE PREVENTION OF HATE SPEECH IN SCHOOLS

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**Abstract.** The study examines the relationship between teachers' competences in supporting students exposed to hate speech and the perception of safety within the school environment. It seeks to identify variations in teachers' competence profiles and to determine how these profiles are associated with the prevalence of hate speech incidents and students' subjective sense of security. The empirical basis of the study is a large-scale survey conducted among primary and secondary school teachers in Poland (N = 2,975). The research employed comparative statistical analyses, including Mann-Whitney U tests, chi-square tests of independence ( $\chi^2$ ), and latent profile analysis (LPA). These methods enabled the identification of competence-related clusters and the assessment of their associations with the occurrence of hate speech and institutional responses within schools. The results indicate that teachers with higher socio-educational competences significantly more often participate in specialized training on recognizing and counteracting hate speech, apply formal intervention procedures, and engage in inter-institutional cooperation. In contrast, deficits in competences are associated with lower participation in preventive training, limited familiarity with intervention protocols, and a greater likelihood of non-reporting of hate incidents. LPA revealed five distinct competence profiles, ranging from *Reactive and Unprepared* to *Proactive and Competent*, the latter being associated with the lowest prevalence of hate speech and the highest levels of student-perceived safety. The study underscores the need for differentiated teacher training programs tailored to varying competence levels, the standardization of intervention procedures across schools, and the promotion of a reporting culture to reduce the incidence of hate speech. This study contributes to the literature by empirically linking teachers' competence profiles with both the prevalence of hate speech and students' perceived safety. It extends the understanding of how teacher competences function as a protective factor in educational environments and offers evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice.

**Keywords:** teachers' competences; hate speech; student safety; school environment; competence profiles.

## INTRODUCTION

The school constitutes the second most influential environment, after the family, in shaping young people's development. Contemporary schools are not only spaces for education but also crucial settings for students' emotional, relational, and social lives. In the context of the growing prevalence of hate speech, symbolic violence, and social exclusion, schools increasingly become places of tension, fear, and distress. Empirical studies indicate that nearly every second primary school student has experienced violence in or around the school environment [Poszwa and Myślińska 2020, 16]. Research by Sitarczyk and Dudziak (2024) further demonstrates that more than 70% of students experience psychological violence in the form of name-calling and ridicule. While peer violence occurs most frequently at the primary level, it is also reported among secondary school students [Chmura-Rutkowska, Buchnat, et al. 2022, 194]. In extreme cases, such experiences may lead to suicidal attempts [Orłowska 2024].

Adolescents facing exclusion and violence often lack sufficient personal resources to cope effectively with such challenges. As H. Rugała observes, the teacher – both as an institutional actor and an active participant in school life – shapes the climate of the school and builds interpersonal relations [Rugała 2020, 20]. Teachers thus serve as the first line of support: individuals capable of recognizing subtle signals of distress and responding adequately. This role requires not only goodwill but also specific emotional, communicative, and socio-educational competences. Effective teacher support in situations of psychosocial threat necessitates an understanding of students' emotions, their origins, and their role in identity formation. A competent teacher is characterized by moral courage, responsibility, and commitment, combined with knowledge of relational and systemic processes within the classroom and the school as a whole [Kwiatkowska 2008, 30].

Competence may be defined as a distinctive property expressed through the ability to act adequately at a level determined by social standards [Czerepaniak-Walczak 1997, 87-88]. Competences are inherently individual, as they are always linked to a specific person, but also dynamic, manifesting themselves in practical action and relational contexts. For this reason, the concept has gained wide popularity in describing professional qualifications, including those of teachers. Limiting competence merely to skills or abilities does not fully capture its meaning, although procedural knowledge ("knowing how") remains a crucial element. A more comprehensive approach defines competence as the harmonious integration of knowledge, skills, understanding, and motivation [ibid., 88].

The literature on teacher competences highlights various categories. A common typology distinguishes: (1) subject-matter competences, reflecting

expertise in the taught discipline, positioning teachers as experts and advisors; (2) didactic-methodological competences, concerning the use of diverse teaching strategies and methods, such as project-based learning or teamwork, situating teachers as instructional advisors; and (3) educational competences, encompassing communication, relationship-building, and problem-solving tailored to students' developmental stages, which position teachers as educational guides and life mentors [Taraszkievicz 2001, 175].

In the context of hate speech at school, educational competences acquire particular significance. They enable teachers to recognize early warning signs of peer violence, implement appropriate intervention strategies, and foster a climate of trust and safety within the classroom. Educational competences thus constitute the foundation of prevention and intervention against hate speech, while simultaneously supporting young people in coping with emotions and conflicts in peer relations.

Nevertheless, research reveals that many teachers do not feel adequately prepared to counteract hate speech and other forms of violence, as lack of knowledge and contextual support hinders effective intervention [Konsok-Dusche, Wettstein, Fischer, et al., 2024, 9]. Effective prevention requires the engagement of the entire school community [Pyzalski 2024, 148-49]. Findings from studies conducted in Berlin schools indicate a substantial need for teacher training and professional development in the area of counteracting hate speech. Respondents emphasized the importance of building competences necessary for identifying manifestations of this phenomenon and for undertaking effective interventions in the everyday functioning of the school environment [Krauze, Wachs, Bilz, et al. 2023, 1535]. The study conducted by Boutsia (2023) showed that educational initiatives in Greek schools effectively increased students' awareness and empathy towards refugees, but their impact was limited by teachers' lack of preparation and the persistence of negative social attitudes. Against this backdrop, the present article seeks to empirically analyze the relationship between teachers' competences in supporting students exposed to hate speech and students' perceived safety. The goal is to identify the associations between teachers' competences, the prevalence of hate speech, and students' sense of security in the school environment.

## 1. RESEARCH METHOD AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The study was conducted within the framework of the educational and informational campaign "*I Do Not Hate – I React*", jointly organized by the Provincial Police Headquarters in Radom, the Mazovian Board of Education, and the Faculty of Law and Administration at Kazimierz Pułaski University of Radom. The research procedure began with the application of the diagnostic survey method, utilizing a structured questionnaire.

The survey was administered to 2,975 teachers from primary and secondary schools located in the Mazovian region of Poland. Data analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0 and jamovi 2.4.11. Nominal data were presented as frequency distributions and expressed in percentages, while ordinal and quantitative data were summarized using descriptive statistics. The significance threshold was set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

To compare two groups on ordinal data, the Mann–Whitney U test was employed. For comparisons involving more than two groups, the Kruskal–Wallis H test was applied. For categorical data, the chi-square test of independence or Fisher’s exact test (when expected frequencies were  $< 5$ ) was used.

To identify latent subgroups (profiles) within the sample, a Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) was conducted. Model selection was based on the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC)—commonly recommended for latent variable models—as well as entropy values. Entropy ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating better classification accuracy. Values  $\geq 0.80$  were interpreted as indicative of good classification, while values  $\geq 0.60$  were considered acceptable [Asparouhov and Muthén 2014].

In addition, to model the relationships between binary dependent variables and predictor variables, logistic regression analysis was conducted. For all analyses reported in this study, the level of statistical significance was consistently set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

## 2. TEACHERS’ COMPETENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF HATE SPEECH AND STUDENTS’ PERCEIVED SAFETY AT SCHOOL

Table 1 presents the results of a comparative analysis of teachers classified into groups with and without specific competences, with reference to selected dependent variables. Responses from teachers who indicated that hate speech did not occur in their schools were excluded from the analyses. 21.6% ( $n = 642$ ) of respondents stated that no cases of hate speech directed against students occurred in their schools, and 48.6% ( $n = 1446$ ) reported no cases directed against teachers. Responses indicating that students did not approach teachers with hate-related problems were also excluded (24.5%;  $n = 730$ ).

The data indicate that in the group of teachers possessing competences to support students, internal training sessions (WDN) were organized more frequently, whereas in the group lacking such competences, cases of hate speech directed both against students and against teachers were more common.

Dependent variable	No competences (n = 184)	With competences (n = 2791)	Z	p	r
Does the school where you work organize internal WDN training aimed at strengthening teachers' competences in supporting students with psychosocial difficulties?	Mean rank = 901.38; Mdn = 4.00; IQR = 1.00	Mean rank = 1526.67; Mdn = 5.00; IQR = 1.00	-10.45	<0.001	0.19
Are there cases of hate speech directed against students in your school?	1667.08; 3.00; 2.00	1476.19; 3.00; 2.00	-3.04	0.002	0.06
If yes, how often?	1277.83; 2.00; 1.00	1158.73; 2.00; 2.00	-2.27	0.023	0.05
Are there cases of hate speech directed against teachers in your school?	1844.48; 3.00; 1.00	1464.50; 2.00; 2.00	-6.08	<0.001	0.11
If yes, how often?	854.53; 3.00; 1.00	756.82; 2.00; 2.00	-2.55	0.011	0.07
Do students approach you with such problems?	1033.12; 2.00; 1.00	1128.89; 2.00; 2.00	-1.78	0.075	0.04
Do you agree that the school should deal with such problems exclusively within its own organization?	1377.68; 2.00; 1.00	1495.27; 2.00; 1.00	-1.87	0.061	0.03

Table 1. Comparison of groups distinguished by competences with respect to the occurrence of hate speech in school. Source: Author's own research.

In the group of teachers possessing competences to provide support to students, a significantly higher percentage participated in training/workshops preparing them to conduct conversations with students experiencing hate speech and with its perpetrators. A larger proportion also indicated the existence of response procedures and inter-institutional cooperation compared to the group lacking such competences. These results are presented in:

Question	Response category	No competences	With competences	$\chi^2$	p	$\phi/VC$
Have you participated in training/workshops preparing you to conduct conversations with students experiencing hate speech and with perpetrators?	No: 122 <sup>a</sup> (66.3%)	910 <sup>b</sup> (32.6%)	86.53	<0.001	0.17	
	Yes: 62 <sup>a</sup> (33.7%)	1881 <sup>b</sup> (67.4%)				
Are there formal response procedures for such situations in your school?	No: 12 <sup>a</sup> (6.5%)	81 <sup>b</sup> (2.9%)	78.48	<0.001	0.16	
	Yes: 115 <sup>a</sup> (62.5%)	2412 <sup>b</sup> (86.4%)				

Question	Response category	No competences	With competences	$\chi^2$	P	$\phi/VC$
Is there broader inter-institutional cooperation in addressing such problems in your school?	No: 40 <sup>a</sup> (21.7%)	377 <sup>b</sup> (13.5%)	54.14	<0.001	0.13	
	Yes: 40 <sup>a</sup> (21.7%)	1387 <sup>b</sup> (49.7%)				
	Difficult to say: 104 <sup>a</sup> (56.5%)	1027 <sup>b</sup> (36.8%)				

Table 2. Frequency analysis with chi-square test of independence for the relationship between competence-based group membership and the provision of teacher training as well as responses to hate speech in school. Source: Author's own research.

Note. Values in the same row not sharing the same superscript differ significantly at  $p < 0.05$  (Bonferroni correction).

Table 3 presents a comparison of the analysed groups with respect to the entities to which hate-related incidents in schools are reported. Among teachers possessing competences, a significantly higher proportion indicated that such incidents were reported to psychologists compared to teachers lacking competences. For other entities, no statistically significant differences were observed. In both groups, cases of hate speech were most often reported to the school principal and pedagogues. Teachers without competences were more likely to declare that such incidents were not reported to anyone than those with competences.

To whom do you report such incidents of hate speech?	No competences	With competences	$\chi^2$	P	$\phi$
Principal	132 (71.7%)	2127 (76.2%)	1.89	0.169	0.02
Psychologists	107 (58.2%)	1846 (66.1%)	4.88	0.027	0.04
Pedagogues	131 (71.2%)	2124 (76.1%)	2.26	0.132	0.03
Parents	99 (53.8%)	1696 (60.8%)	3.50	0.061	0.03
Not applicable – no such cases occurred	18 (9.8%)	383 (13.7%)	2.30	0.130	0.03
Not reported to anyone	6 (3.3%)	9 (0.3%)	–	<0.001	0.10
Other	10 (5.4%)	128 (4.6%)	0.28	0.596	0.01

Table 3. Frequency analysis with chi-square test of independence for the relationship between competence-based group membership and reporting of hate-related incidents to various entities/institutions. Source: Author's own research.

### 3. TEACHER PROFILES, STUDENT SAFETY, AND THE OCCURRENCE OF HATE SPEECH IN SCHOOLS

A comparative analysis was conducted of teacher profiles in terms of responses concerning students' perceived safety and the occurrence of hate speech in schools (Table 4). As in the previous analyses, responses from teachers who indicated that hate speech did not occur in their schools were excluded.

The analysis revealed that, according to teachers classified within Profile 2, students felt safer, teachers were more capable of supporting students with difficulties, and cases of hate speech directed both at students and teachers were reported less frequently compared to other profiles. Moreover, in Profile 2, hate speech against teachers occurred significantly less often than in Profiles 1 and 3, while hate speech against students was less frequent than in Profiles 1, 3, and 4. In Profiles 3 and 5, teachers reported being more capable of supporting students and were more convinced of students' sense of safety compared to Profile 4. Teachers in Profile 1 reported lower confidence in students' safety and their own capacity to provide support compared to Profile 3, and cases of hate speech against students were more frequent. In Profile 5, teachers were more capable of supporting students compared to Profile 1, and hate speech against students was less common. Teachers in Profile 3 were more convinced that hate-related problems should be solved exclusively within the school organization compared to those in Profile 5. For the item concerning students' disclosure of problems, post-hoc analysis revealed no significant differences between profiles.

Variable	Profile 1	Profile 2	Profile 3	Profile 4	Profile 5	H	p	$\eta^2$	Post-hoc*
Do you think that students in your school feel safe?	Mdn = 4 (IQR = 1)	5 (1)	4 (1)	4 (0)	4 (1)	226.22	<0.001	0.08	2 > 1,3,4,5; 1 < 3; 4 < 3,5
Are you able to support students with psychosocial difficulties?	4 (1)	5 (1)	4 (1)	4 (0)	4 (1)	350.86	<0.001	0.12	2 > 1,3,4,5; 1 < 3,5; 4 < 3,5
Are there cases of hate speech directed against students in your school?	3 (1)	3 (2)	3 (2)	3 (2)	3 (2)	47.87	<0.001	0.02	2 < 1,3,4; 1 > 3
If yes, how often?	3 (1)	2 (2)	3 (1)	3 (1)	2 (1)	86.28	<0.001	0.03	2 < 1,3,4,5; 1 > 5
Are there cases of hate speech directed against teachers in your school?	3 (1)	2 (2)	2 (1)	2 (1)	2 (1)	109.79	<0.001	0.04	2 < 1,3,4,5
If yes, how often?	3 (1)	2 (2)	3 (1)	3 (2)	2 (2)	41.75	<0.001	0.01	2 < 1,3
Do students approach you with such problems?	2 (1)	2 (2)	2 (1)	2 (1)	2 (2)	11.18	0.025	0.00	X
Do you agree that the school should solve such problems exclusively within its own organization?	2 (1)	2 (1)	3 (1)	2 (1)	2 (1)	11.05	0.026	0.00	3 > 5

Table 4. Comparison of profiles in terms of students' perceived safety and the occurrence of hate speech in school. Source: Author's own research.

Note. Post-hoc analysis performed using Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction. Comparisons between profiles are presented at  $p < 0.05$ . X – post-hoc analysis revealed no significant differences between profiles at  $p < 0.05$ .

The latent profile analysis conducted among teachers ( $N = 2,975$ ) yielded five distinct patterns of attitudes towards counteracting hate speech and ensuring student safety. The results point to a marked heterogeneity of competence levels, institutional preparedness, and the intensity of responses to hate-related incidents. What follows is an analytical characterisation of the identified profiles, with attention to their respective capacities and limitations.

The first profile, designated as *reactive and unprepared*, encompasses teachers exhibiting low levels of competence in addressing hate speech, operating within environments devoid of structured response procedures, and encountering a relatively high frequency of hate incidents. Their actions are largely ad hoc, emerging only in reaction to concrete events, and remain unsupported by systemic frameworks or prior preparedness.

The second profile, labelled *proactive and competent*, is composed of teachers who demonstrate a high degree of readiness to intervene, supported by comprehensive procedures and extensive inter-institutional cooperation. These individuals stand out not only for their heightened awareness of the problem but also for their capacity to implement preventive measures in a consistent and integrated manner, ensuring coordinated responses to manifestations of hate speech.

The third profile, termed *intentionally limited*, is characterised by moderate competence and the partial implementation of procedures, a situation largely attributable to constrained organisational resources. Teachers in this category engage in selective and context-dependent actions, adapting their interventions to the institutional realities they face, yet remain unable to enact a fully comprehensive strategy of counteraction due to structural barriers.

The fourth profile, described as *passive and indifferent*, comprises teachers with minimal engagement, whose anti-hate activities are sporadic and lacking in clear procedural frameworks. This group is marked by limited sensitivity to the issue of hate speech and by the absence of a systematic approach to safeguarding student wellbeing.

Finally, the fifth profile, referred to as *potential allies*, encompasses teachers with medium to high levels of competence, whose professional stance suggests promising developmental trajectories in the field of anti-hate practices, but whose efforts are curtailed by insufficient institutional support. Their orientation indicates a readiness to deepen engagement and expand effective practices, contingent upon the provision of adequate resources and organisational structures.

#### 4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis of teacher profiles confirms substantial heterogeneity in terms of competences, institutional readiness, and approaches to addressing hate speech incidents. Similarly, Bilz et al. indicate that “teachers apply a broad range of strategies, including both educationally oriented interventions and external collaborations” [Bilz, Wachs, Wright, et al. 2024, 7]. The findings of this study thus demonstrate that even within a single educational system, strategies vary considerably – ranging from incidental responses to comprehensive systemic measures.

The reactive and unprepared profile reflects a low level of competence combined with the absence of structural support frameworks. Wachs et al. emphasizes that teachers with lower self-efficacy toward intervention reported weaker classroom climate and less consistent responses to hate speech [Wachs, Castellanos, Wettstein, et al. 2023, 5084]. Likewise, in the Polish context, Szczepaniak-Kozak and Adamczak-Krysztofowicz observe that “teacher responses often take an incidental form and are not embedded in procedures” [Szczepaniak-Kozak and Adamczak-Krysztofowicz 2021, 21]. In such conditions, interventions remain ad hoc, thereby reinforcing students’ perception of impunity.

In contrast, the proactive and competent profile combines a high level of awareness with a readiness for systematic intervention. This finding aligns with the outcomes of the HateLess programme, where “structured procedures and preventive strategies led to a significant reduction of online hate speech and improved intervention capacity” [Wachs, Wright, and Gámez-Guadix 2024, 5]. Bilz et al. likewise argue that “comprehensive teacher responses are most effective when embedded in institutional cooperation frameworks” [Bilz, Wachs, Wright, et al. 2024, 9]. Similar conclusions are drawn by Jonczy-Adamska in Poland, who stresses that “the level of anti-discrimination awareness among teachers determines their capacity for effective responses” [Jonczy-Adamska 2015, 15].

The intentionally limited profile illustrates situations in which teachers’ actions are selective and dependent upon available resources. A similar challenge has been observed in Chile, where “pre-service teachers expressed that hate speech prevention requires institutional support from the Ministry of Education, beyond individual teacher effort” [Marolla-Gajardo and Plaza 2025, 12]. Within the Polish context, Toczyski et al. note that “teachers’ competences in the field of digital safety are assessed as lower than those of students” [Toczyski, Grudzień, and Sopyło 2022, 35], which constrains their ability to act systematically.

The passive and indifferent profile exemplifies minimal engagement and weak sensitivity to the issue. Higher social dominance orientation was

directly associated with more frequent perpetration of both offline and online hate speech, and this association was partly mediated by lower empathy and higher moral disengagement” [Wachs, Gámez-Guadix, Wettstein, et al. 2024, 1280]. The authors emphasize that social dominance orientation not only directly predicts hate speech perpetration, but also operates indirectly through key psychological mechanisms. “A multilevel mediation path model revealed that social dominance orientation had a direct effect on offline and online hate speech perpetration. Moreover, social dominance also had indirect effects via low levels of empathy and high levels of moral disengagement” [Castellanos, Wttstein, Wachs, et al. 2024]. In turn, Rumińska-Szalska underlines that “empirical analyses tend to focus more on students than on teachers’ preparedness and competences” [Rumińska-Szalska 2023, 95], which may foster pedagogical passivity towards hate speech.

Finally, the profile of potential allies highlights a group of teachers who possess relevant competences, yet whose actions are constrained by institutional shortcomings. Markowitz and Bouffard (2025) emphasize that the greatest potential for lasting systemic change in education lies in teacher preparation, as this stage provides the opportunity to introduce and strengthen social, emotional, and cultural competencies. Similarly, Włodarczyk notes that “the ubiquity of hate speech content may reduce young people’s sensitivity to the problem” [Włodarczyk 2014, 123]. In the context of teachers, this suggests that without systemic support they may develop a sense of desensitization to the scale of the phenomenon.

In sum, the findings of this study corroborate the body of literature indicating that effective counteraction to hate speech requires the simultaneous: (1) strengthening of individual competences, (2) cultivation of a supportive classroom climate, and (3) implementation of coherent institutional frameworks. Without systemic support, it is unrealistic to expect teachers to shift from reactive attitudes to proactive and competent practices which, as empirical research consistently shows, are the most effective [Bilz, Wachs, Wright, et al. 2024, 7-9; Wachs, Wright, and Gámez-Guadix 2024, 5; Marolla-Gajardo and Plaza 2025, 12; Markowitz and Bouffard 2025; Szczepaniak-Kozak and Adamczak-Krysztofowicz 2021, 21; Jonczy-Adamska 2015, 15; Toczyski, Grudzień, and Sopyło et al., 2022, 35; Rumińska-Szalska 2023, 95; Włodarczyk 2014, 123].

## 5. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study highlight the need for multi-level interventions supporting teachers in counteracting hate speech. First, professional training should be differentiated and tailored to teachers’ varying competence levels. Instead of uniform programmes, modular formats should be implemented to address the

needs of both teachers with low readiness for intervention and those who already possess advanced competences but require further knowledge and tools.

Second, schools must standardise response procedures and promote a culture of reporting incidents. Consistent protocols not only enhance students' sense of security but also reduce the risk of arbitrary and ad hoc interventions.

Third, systemic and institutional support is essential. Even highly competent teachers may face burnout or desensitisation if their actions are not embedded within broader inter-institutional cooperation. Clear ministerial guidelines, partnerships with non-governmental organisations, and nationwide programmes are necessary to sustain consistent school-level strategies against hate speech.

Finally, practical implications also extend to the development of social-emotional competences among both teachers and students. The integration of social-emotional learning (SEL) into teacher preparation programmes can provide durable reinforcement of schools' capacities to respond to verbal violence and social exclusion.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study enriches the international literature by linking teacher competence profiles to the prevalence of hate speech and students' perceived safety. The latent profile analysis revealed five patterns – ranging from reactive disengagement to proactive competence – each reflecting the interplay of personal dispositions and institutional scaffolding.

The evidence points to three principal implications. First, teacher training must be differentiated to address varying competence levels. Second, institutional frameworks require consistent procedures and inter-institutional collaboration. Third, policy-level support is indispensable, as without systemic reinforcement, even highly motivated teachers risk desensitisation and burnout.

Future research should broaden this scope, testing cross-national similarities and refining comparative insights into how different educational systems can empower teachers as frontline actors against hate speech.

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