

TEACHERS AS HEALING FACILITATORS:
MEDIATION FOR STUDENT WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCEВЧИТЕЛІ ЯК ФАСИЛІТАТОРИ ЗЦІЛЕННЯ:
МЕДІАЦІЯ ДЛЯ БЛАГОПОЛУЧЧЯ ТА РЕЗИЛІЄНТНОСТІ УЧНІВ

УДК 378:22

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/ip/87.16>Стаття поширюється на умовах
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The ongoing war in Ukraine has exposed millions of children to traumatic experiences, displacement, and educational disruption, creating urgent challenges for their mental health and development. Research indicates that nearly 70% of Ukrainian children have encountered war-related trauma, with up to one-fifth showing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and almost half experiencing psychological distress. In this context, schools emerge as vital protective environments where teachers play a transformative role as mediators of healing, resilience, and recovery. It is worth noting that adolescence represents a particularly challenging stage, marked by intensified emotional experiences, instability, and heightened sensitivity and vulnerability, alongside tendencies toward impulsive, attention-seeking, and extreme behaviors. This article explores the concept of teachers as “bridges of healing,” highlighting their role not only in academic instruction but also in psychosocial support, emotional regulation, and cultural mediation. Drawing on resilience theory, trauma-informed pedagogy, and cross-cultural research, it emphasizes how teachers foster belonging, trust, and adaptive coping strategies through everyday practices and structured interventions. Case studies from Ukraine and international contexts illustrate how teachers integrate mindfulness, storytelling, peer collaboration, and culturally relevant pedagogy to stabilize learning environments and strengthen resilience. The discussion underscores the dual importance of formal training programs and teachers’ informal adaptive practices in shaping student well-being and educational outcomes. The article concludes by calling for policy frameworks and teacher education programs that prioritize mediation as a core competency, ensuring that schools function as inclusive, supportive spaces for recovery and growth. Teachers, positioned at the intersection of education and psychosocial care, are essential in transforming classrooms into communities of healing and resilience.

Key words: teacher mediation, resilience, trauma-informed pedagogy, school, cultural heritage, psychosocial support.

Триваюча війна в Україні призвела до того, що мільйони дітей зазнали травматичного досвіду, вимушеного переміщення та переривання освітнього процесу, що створює серйозні виклики для їхнього психічного здоров'я

та розвитку. Дослідження свідчать, що близько 70% українських дітей стикалися з воєнними травмами, при цьому майже п'ята частина демонструє симптоми посттравматичного стресового розладу, а майже половина переживає психологічні труднощі. У цьому контексті школа постає як ключове захисне середовище, де вчителі відіграють трансформаційну роль посередників зцілення, стійкості та відновлення. Варто зазначити, що підлітковий вік є найбільш кризовим, так як саме цей період характеризується підвищенням рівнем переживань, труднощів, нестабільністю емоцій, підвищенням рівнем вразливості, чутливості та разом з тим імпульсивності, демонстративності, максималізму тощо. Війна ставить додаткові виклики та труднощі й значно підвищує негативні психоемоційні переживання. У статті розглядається концепція вчителя як «мосту зцілення», що підкреслює його роль не лише в академічному навчанні, але й у психосоціальному підтримці, управлінні емоцій та культурному посередництві. Спираючись на теорію резильєнтності, підходи травмоорієнтованої педагогіки та міжкультурні дослідження, автори показують, як вчителі формують почуття належності, довіри та адаптивні стратегії подолання через щоденні педагогічні практики й спеціальні інтервенції. Приклади з України та міжнародного досвіду ілюструють інтеграцію уважності, казкотерапії, колективних проєктів і культурно релевантної педагогіки, що стабілізує навчальне середовище та посилює стійкість. У статті підкреслюється подвійна важливість як формальних програм підготовки вчителів, так і їхніх неформальних адаптивних практик для зміцнення добробуту та освітніх результатів учнів. У висновках наголошується на необхідності політичних рішень та освітніх програм, які роблять медіацію ключовою компетентністю педагога, забезпечуючи, щоб школа була простором добробуту, відновлення та розвитку. Вчителі, що поєднують освітню та психосоціальну підтримку, є головними у створенні простору для зцілення та розвитку стійкості.

Ключові слова: вчитель, медіація, стійкість, травмоорієнтована педагогіка, школа, культурна спадщина, психосоціальна підтримка.

Introduction. The ongoing war in Ukraine has had profound and negative impact on children and adolescents, exposing them to high levels of trauma, displacement, and disruption in education. Recent reports indicate that approximately 70% of Ukrainian children have experienced war-related trauma, with 17–22% showing clinically significant symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and nearly half displaying signs of general psychological distress, including anxiety, fear, and sleep disturbances [10]. According to UNICEF, an estimated 1.5 million children in Ukraine are currently

at heightened risk of developing serious mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as other psychosocial difficulties that may have long-term implications for their well-being and development [14]. Research consistently demonstrates that exposure to armed conflict amplifies children's physiological and psychological stress responses, disrupting their ability to regulate emotions and adapt to adversity, while simultaneously increasing the likelihood of chronic psychological disorders later in life [3;4].

For Ukrainian children, the impact of war extends far beyond the immediate experience of violence. Many have endured repeated displacement, ongoing insecurity, and direct exposure to traumatic events, which can accumulate into layers of toxic stress. Feelings of fear and helplessness are compounded by the fragmentation of social relationships, the forced separation from peers and extended family members, and the weakening of community support networks. Moreover, the destruction of schools and educational infrastructure through missile strikes, air raids, and shelling has deprived countless children of the protective environment that education typically provides [3,5]. Schools, which often function as stabilizing spaces that foster social connection, continuity, and a sense of normality, are now frequently inaccessible, unsafe, or severely disrupted.

This convergence of displacement, insecurity, trauma, and educational disruption creates a complex matrix of vulnerability. Without timely interventions, the cumulative effect of these experiences may not only hinder children's psychological and emotional development but also compromise their academic trajectories and long-term capacity for social integration. Addressing these challenges therefore requires holistic responses that combine immediate psychosocial support with sustained investment in rebuilding education systems as protective spaces that contribute to healing, resilience, and the restoration of cultural and social continuity.

Beyond the immediate effects of armed conflict, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as parental separation, domestic violence, and loss of social support networks further compound the risk of long-term mental health problems [2, p. 78; 3, p. 101]. These circumstances have disrupted formal schooling, depriving millions of children of consistent education and social engagement. Consequently, schools are called upon to function as protective environments, where educators provide not only academic instruction but also psychosocial support, emotional stabilization, and cultural continuity [3, p. 110; 4, p. 23].

Historically, education focused on knowledge transmission and cognitive development. However, contemporary educational theory emphasizes the necessity of addressing students' holistic development, integrating cognitive, social, emotional, and cultural dimensions of learning. Teachers are no longer solely conveyors of information; they are mediators who navigate the intersection of instruction, emotional support, and community-building. In contexts affected by trauma, such as Ukrainian schools during wartime, this mediatory function becomes central to ensuring that students develop resilience, adaptive coping strategies, and a sense of belonging [3, p. 115; 5, p. 52].

Empirical studies underscore that teacher-mediated interventions can significantly improve students'

emotional regulation, social skills, and academic outcomes. Evidence from social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, trauma-informed pedagogies, and culturally responsive education demonstrates that teachers who intentionally integrate psychosocial support into their classrooms foster safer, more inclusive learning environments [4, p. 40; 6, p. 500]. In Ukraine, where children face repeated disruptions, displacement, and ongoing insecurity, the teacher's role as a mediator is essential for mitigating the psychological impact of war and maintaining academic continuity [3, p. 115; 5, p. 55]. The primary aim of this study is to examine the role of teachers as mediators in fostering student well-being and resilience within trauma-affected educational contexts. The study focuses on Ukrainian schools, analyzing how teacher-mediated strategies support emotional stability, social cohesion, and adaptive coping, and how these strategies can be integrated into daily academic instruction. By highlighting the multifaceted role of teachers in war settings, this research seeks to inform educational policy, teacher training programs, and psychosocial support initiatives [3, p. 120; 5, p. 55].

Theoretical framework and research methods.

The literature on educational mediation has evolved over the past several decades. Early programs focused primarily on peer war resolution, bullying prevention, and negotiation skills, aiming to reduce interpersonal tensions within school environments. While these interventions remain valuable, contemporary scholarship frames mediation as a multidimensional role, encompassing psychosocial support, cultural responsiveness, and trauma-informed pedagogy. The pedagogical meaning of mediation can be framed through three main educational objectives: resolving conflicts, preventing their recurrence, and enhancing personal development. Ultimately, its broader purpose is to foster harmonious coexistence within schools and to cultivate a culture of peace. As Boqué [4] emphasizes, mediation represents a step toward achieving social cohesion by involving all parties in a conflict, encouraging inclusivity, validating multiple perspectives of reality, and promoting autonomous decision-making and accountability—key elements of democratic participation. Similarly, Bonafé-Schmitt [2] views mediation not merely as a technique for solving disputes but as a profoundly educational process for everyone involved, helping to build new bonds of solidarity within the community. In this sense, the positive outcomes of mediation may extend beyond the school environment, influencing society more broadly through the transfer of learned competences. Scholars argue that the evaluation of school mediation programs is crucial for ensuring their quality. Only through such assessments can we identify whether mediation is truly effective, understand its educational benefits, and address its challenges [1].

Educational mediation extends beyond conventional conflict resolution and classroom management. It encompasses trauma-informed pedagogy, psychosocial support, and cultural mediation, enabling students to process emotions, manage social conflicts, and integrate challenging experiences into their personal and communal environment [4, p. 40; 6, p. 512]. This continuous and embedded process allows students to engage in learning while feeling secure, supported, and understood.

Exposure to negative life events (NLEs) and potentially traumatic events (PTEs) is widespread among children and adolescents, influencing social, emotional, and cognitive development [3, p. 125; 7, p. 380]. NLEs are uncontrollable stressors that disrupt routines and emotional stability, whereas PTEs involve exposure to actual or perceived threats to life or physical safety. Research consistently shows that cumulative exposure to adverse events predicts higher rates of anxiety, depression, behavioral issues, and difficulties in peer relationships [8, p. 12; 3, p. 135]. In Ukraine, children frequently encounter both NLEs and PTEs due to war, displacement, and social instability, which underscores the need for teacher-mediated support. [8, p. 12; 5, p. 60].

Teacher-mediated interventions draw from multiple theoretical strands, including social-emotional learning, trauma-informed education, and culturally responsive pedagogy. SEL frameworks emphasize self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making as critical competencies for student resilience [6, p. 500; 7, p. 380]. Trauma-informed approaches guide educators in recognizing trauma symptoms, responding empathetically, and integrating structured supports to prevent retraumatization [4, p. 45]. Cultural mediation enables teachers to validate students' cultural identities, maintain continuity in learning experiences, and facilitate inclusion in diverse or disrupted classroom communities [3, p. 130; 5, p. 60]. Resilience theory provides the foundation for understanding teacher-mediated interventions.

Resilience is conceptualized as a dynamic process whereby individuals achieve positive adaptation in response to adversity, influenced by personal characteristics, relational networks, and environmental contexts [3, p. 45; 5, p. 15]. Protective factors such as supportive relationships, opportunities for meaningful engagement, cultural continuity, and emotional validation play a critical role in promoting resilience. Teachers act as mediators of these protective factors by modeling empathy, reinforcing social-emotional skills, guiding reflective practices, and establishing predictable classroom routines that promote safety and stability [5, p. 30; 6, p. 500]. Resilience refers to the capacity to endure and grow in the face of severe hardship [7]. Originating within developmental psychology, the term was initially applied to describe

children who, despite experiencing chronic adversity and trauma such as neglect or abuse, demonstrated the ability to withstand harmful consequences and recover effectively. From a contemporary multisystem perspective, resilience develops through the constant interaction of multiple interdependent systems—ranging from biological to ecological—that evolve across the lifespan as part of a complex adaptive system [8]. Recent studies further stress that resilience must be understood holistically: adaptive success in one domain (e.g., developmental stage, health, or specific context) does not automatically translate into resilience across all areas [8].

Despite extensive theoretical development, scholars continue to highlight knowledge gaps in identifying the specific mechanisms that drive resilience and in understanding its diverse manifestations across contexts. These gaps limit the design of targeted interventions aimed at strengthening resilience in young people, especially those who have been exposed to trauma and displacement.

Main results. The findings of the qualitative study highlight the diverse ways in which teachers mediate resilience and foster well-being in trauma-affected Ukrainian schools. Drawing from 35 semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, three major categories of teacher-mediated strategies were identified: stabilization, connection, and empowerment. These categories capture the immediate psychosocial needs of students and the broader educational goals of supporting learning continuity, identity preservation, and the cultivation of resilience in contexts of war and displacement.

Stabilization strategies emerged as the most frequently reported and observed form of teacher mediation. Teachers consistently emphasized the importance of creating predictable classroom structures in environments where unpredictability and danger are part of daily life. Routines, such as beginning lessons with brief grounding activities, maintaining consistent schedules, and using visual cues for transitions, provided students with a sense of safety and normalcy. Mindfulness techniques—such as breathing exercises, brief moments of silence, or guided visualization—were incorporated into the school day to help students manage anxiety and physiological stress reactions triggered by air alerts or memories of bombardment.

Adaptive lesson planning further contributed to stabilization. Teachers described designing lessons that could be flexibly modified depending on interruptions caused by displacement or security threats. In some cases, activities were shortened, group-based, or adapted to accommodate fluctuating student attendance. This ensured continuity of learning while minimizing the sense of disruption. Classroom observations confirmed that these measures reduced behavioral incidents, improved concentration, and supported emotional regulation. Notably, 68% of

teachers reported stabilization strategies as essential to maintaining both emotional security and academic continuity, underscoring their dual role in promoting resilience and sustaining educational outcomes under conditions of crisis.

The second key domain, connection strategies, reflects the central role of relationships, peer collaboration, and shared cultural practices in resilience-building. Teachers actively fostered social bonds through cooperative learning structures, restorative circles, and peer mentoring initiatives. These approaches encouraged students to listen to one another, articulate their needs, and co-construct solutions to conflicts in supportive ways. Teachers noted that fostering peer solidarity reduced isolation and reinforced students' sense of belonging, which is particularly crucial for those who have been displaced from their communities.

The incorporation of storytelling and cultural heritage emerged as one of the most innovative and impactful practices within this domain. Teachers integrated local folklore, songs and artistic traditions into classroom activities, allowing students to process trauma symbolically and to re-anchor themselves in cultural continuity. Storytelling sessions created opportunities for students to share personal or family narratives, often connecting them to broader historical or cultural themes. Creative workshops, including drawing, theatre, and music projects, further reinforced these connections. As one teacher explained, "when students sing traditional songs together, they feel they are not just surviving the war, but carrying forward something greater than themselves." Interviews indicated that over 70% of teachers observed improved engagement, stronger classroom cohesion, and greater emotional openness when cultural narratives were incorporated into mediation practices.

These findings match the broader resilience research that emphasizes the culturally embedded nature of adaptation. In trauma-affected settings, cultural heritage serves not only as a resource for emotional expression but also as a protective factor that strengthens identity and belonging. Thus, connection strategies illustrate how mediation extends beyond interpersonal conflict resolution to become a vehicle for communal healing and cultural affirmation.

The third category, empowerment strategies, highlights the importance of cultivating students' sense of agency in contexts where feelings of powerlessness are common. Teachers reported that involving students in decision-making processes—such as shaping classroom rules, choosing project topics, or rotating leadership responsibilities—fostered autonomy and accountability. Peer mentoring was particularly effective: older or more resilient students supported younger or more vulnerable peers, creating reciprocal relationships that reinforced competence and empathy.

Teachers also embedded empowerment in academic learning. For example, inquiry-based projects encouraged students to explore issues relevant to their communities, while reflective exercises helped them identify personal strengths and coping skills. Integration of mindfulness into cognitive tasks—such as pausing to reflect before problem-solving—further enhanced students' emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility. Classroom observations confirmed that empowerment practices promoted adaptive coping skills, self-confidence, and collective responsibility. Teachers noted that around 62% of students involved in empowerment-oriented activities displayed visible improvements in resilience, leadership, and self-efficacy, often extending these behaviors beyond the classroom into family and community contexts.

Empowerment strategies also demonstrated a restorative dimension: by positioning students not merely as recipients of support but as active contributors, teachers restructured classroom dynamics into participatory and democratic spaces. This not only enhanced individual resilience but also fostered collective responsibility, aligning with the broader goal of education as a foundation for peace, inclusion, and civic engagement.

Taken together, these findings suggest that Ukrainian teachers, working under extreme adversity, have transformed their roles into that of "bridges of healing." By combining stabilization, connection, and empowerment, they foster resilience at multiple levels—individual (emotional regulation and agency), social (peer solidarity), and cultural (identity and heritage). The data demonstrate that mediation, when broadened beyond conflict resolution, can serve as an integrated pedagogical approach that supports both psychosocial recovery and academic achievement.

The outcomes observed in this study resonate with resilience theory, particularly the multisystem perspective, which views adaptation as emerging from dynamic interactions between individuals and their environments. Teachers' strategies highlight how classroom practices can mobilize protective resources, buffer against trauma, and create opportunities for growth. Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of embedding cultural heritage into mediation, as it not only supports recovery but also strengthens continuity between past, present, and future for displaced and traumatized youth.

The study demonstrates that teachers act as "bridges of healing," integrating trauma-informed pedagogy, social-emotional learning (SEL), and cultural heritage into everyday classroom practice. This supports earlier research that conceptualizes mediation not merely as a tool for conflict resolution but as a broader educational process that promotes coexistence, peacebuilding, and social cohesion. Teachers' mediation strategies also align with resilience

theory, which emphasizes the interaction between individual, social, and cultural systems in shaping adaptive outcomes.

By stabilizing classroom environments through routines and mindfulness, teachers provided students with a sense of safety and predictability, mitigating the destabilizing effects of displacement and bombardment. Connection strategies, particularly those incorporating storytelling and cultural heritage, reinforced identity and belonging, highlighting the culturally embedded nature of resilience. Empowerment strategies further enabled students to reclaim agency and develop leadership skills, counteracting feelings of helplessness common in contexts of war.

These findings underscore the need to reconceptualize schools not solely as institutions for academic learning but as communities of healing and resilience-building. Educational policy in Ukraine and similar conflict-affected contexts should explicitly recognize the psychosocial role of schools. This requires policies that:

Rather than being treated as an optional add-on, psychosocial support and mediation should be mainstreamed into national curricula and school policies. This aligns with World Health Organization recommendations on supporting children's mental health amidst conflict. Given teachers' central role in fostering resilience, teacher training emerges as a critical area of intervention. The study's findings suggest that many teachers already employ creative and effective mediation strategies, but these are often developed informally or through personal initiative rather than formal training.

Conclusions. Teachers in trauma-affected educational settings, particularly in Ukraine, emerge not only as facilitators of academic knowledge but also as critical mediators who bridge the space between instruction and psychosocial support. The study's findings underline the transformative role teachers play in ensuring that schools function as safe and healing environments during periods of disruption and collective trauma. By adopting evidence-based, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive practices, teachers contribute to students' resilience, foster well-being, and sustain inclusive, supportive learning spaces.

This mediatory role extends beyond the traditional conception of teaching. In times of war, displacement, and chronic uncertainty, the classroom becomes more than a site of formal learning; it becomes a community of care. Teachers who integrate stabilization strategies—such as predictable routines, trauma-sensitive lesson planning, and mindfulness exercises—help students regain a sense of safety and control over their daily lives. These small but consistent practices act as protective buffers, enabling children and adolescents to regulate emotions, reduce stress, and continue engaging with academic content despite external instability.

Equally significant are connection strategies, which highlight the relational and cultural dimensions of resilience. Storytelling therapy, collaborative activities, restorative practices, and the integration of cultural heritage serve not only as educational tools but also as therapeutic interventions. They validate students' experiences, foster belonging, and reinforce identity at a time when social ties and cultural continuity are under strain. This integration of cultural narratives into pedagogy illustrates how education can sustain both individual healing and collective memory, strengthening communities affected by trauma.

Empowerment strategies reveal another essential dimension of teacher mediation. By encouraging agency, decision-making, and peer mentoring, teachers position students as active participants in their recovery and learning processes. Such practices cultivate adaptive skills, self-confidence, and problem-solving capacities—core competencies for resilience in adverse conditions. Empowerment also aligns with broader democratic and peacebuilding goals, as it instills values of participation, responsibility, and solidarity.

Taken together, stabilization, connection, and empowerment form a triadic framework of teacher-mediated resilience. These domains reflect the multi-system perspective of resilience theory, which emphasizes the interaction between individual capacities, social networks, and cultural resources. Teachers act as bridges across these systems, enabling students to draw upon internal strengths, relational support, and cultural identity as they navigate adversity. In this way, schools in trauma-affected contexts are not only institutions of education but also communities of healing and resilience-building.

Despite these valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the qualitative nature of the study, based primarily on interviews and classroom observations, limits the generalizability of findings. While rich in depth, the sample size of 35 teachers provides a context-specific perspective rather than a comprehensive picture of practices across Ukraine or other war-affected regions. Second, the reliance on teacher self-report introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, where participants may have emphasized successful strategies over challenges or failures. Third, the absence of direct student voices means that the conclusions largely reflect teacher perceptions rather than student experiences of mediation and resilience. Finally, the study did not include data, which would be necessary to assess the sustainability of teacher-mediated interventions and their long-term impact on resilience and well-being.

Given these limitations, future research and policy efforts should prioritize several key areas. First, large-scale mixed-method studies should be undertaken to capture both teacher and student perspectives, providing a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of mediation in trauma-affected schools. Including

quantitative measures of resilience, well-being, and academic outcomes would strengthen the evidence base and allow for cross-country comparisons.

Second, longitudinal studies are necessary to determine whether teacher-mediated strategies produce lasting effects on resilience and psychosocial well-being, particularly as the context of war and recovery evolves. This would also help to identify which practices are most sustainable and scalable.

Third, systematic teacher training and professional development should be institutionalized. Programs need to incorporate mediation skills, trauma-informed pedagogy, and cultural competence while also providing ongoing supervision and support to prevent teacher burnout. Such programs should be designed collaboratively with educators to ensure cultural relevance and practicality in war-affected schools. Finally, community-based and cultural approaches should be further integrated into mediation practices. Storytelling, arts, and heritage-centered activities represent powerful, low-cost tools for healing and resilience that can be embedded into school curricula. Collaboration with local cultural practitioners, psychologists, and community leaders can further enhance the impact of such approaches.

Ultimately, the conclusion is clear: teachers who act as mediators in trauma-affected settings play a pivotal role in shaping not only the academic trajectories of students but also their emotional recovery, identity affirmation, and adaptive capacities. Their work demonstrates that education can serve as both a protective factor and a catalyst for resilience in times of profound disruption. By supporting and preparing teachers in this role, society invests not only in individual student outcomes but also in community cohesion and national resilience. In Ukraine and beyond, empowering teachers as mediators offers a pathway to transform schools into spaces of healing, belonging, and hope.

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Дата першого надходження рукопису до видання: 09.09.2025
Дата прийнятого до друку рукопису після рецензування: 27.10.2025
Дата публікації: 20.11.2025