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How do teachers and students deal with conflict? An analysis of conflict resolution strategies and goals

¿Cómo gestionan realmente los conflictos el profesorado y el alumnado? Un análisis de las estrategias y metas de resolución de conflictos

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Abstract

The public concern about school violence paints a threatening picture of students and overall relations at school, particularly in Secondary Education. However, from a constructive conflict resolution perspective as well as from student-voicing points of view, an analysis free of adult bias seems crucial to ensure the proper management of school conflicts. Hence, research has been conducted, applying situational questionnaires to 1768 pupils and 211 teachers from 16 Spanish Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO) schools in the Canary Islands and Asturias to better understand conflict resolution strategies and goals. Results showed that students are more frequently inclined to choose an Integrative and Discomfort-Avoiding coping style, advocating for Long-term goals, whereas their teachers primarily opted for coercive techniques (verbal and emotional abuse) and Short-term goals. The study concluded that students presented more constructive solutions to conflicts than teachers, underlining the need to educate teachers in these matters to improve their management of conflicts and become models for constructively addressing conflicts in the classroom.

Keywords: conflict resolution; school; secondary education teachers; secondary education students.

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Resumen

La alarma social generada en torno a la violencia escolar dibuja una imagen violenta del alumnado y de la convivencia escolar, especialmente en Secundaria. Sin embargo, desde la perspectiva positiva del conflicto y de la voz del alumnado se hace necesario un-análisis libre de sesgos adultos acerca de la gestión de los conflictos escolares. Por ello, se analizaron las estrategias y metas de resolución de conflictos aplicando cuestionarios situacionales a 1768 estudiantes y 211 docentes de 16 centros escolares de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (ESO) españoles de las comunidades de Canarias y Asturias. Los resultados indicaron que el alumnado eligió con más frecuencia el estilo Integrador y Evitador del Malestar y se mostró más de acuerdo con Metas a Largo Plazo, mientras que su profesorado se decantó más por técnicas coercitivas (violencia verbal y emocional) y Metas a Corto Plazo. Se concluye que el alumnado manifiesta soluciones más constructivas ante los conflictos y se subrayan las necesidades formativas del profesorado para mejorar su gestión ante los conflictos y servir de referente para su resolución de forma positiva.

Palabras clave: resolución de conflictos; escuela; docente de secundaria; estudiante de secundaria.

Introduction and objectives

Although data show that school coexistence is generally good in Spain (Ministerio de Educación, 2010), the media and teachers' groups periodically decry cases of serious school violence (e.g., physical bullying, verbal abuse of students or teachers, damage to teachers' belongings…). This social alarm is reinforced in a line of research which, in addition to highlighting extreme events, links their authorship to the students (or their families) and points to the teachers and part of the student body as victims (e.g., in Sequera-Molina, 2020). In addition, the label of violence in the study covers conflicts of different severity (from talking during class time to physical aggressions), leading to identify the concepts of violence with that of school conflict (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2011). In contrast, situations in which students are victimised by teachers are overlooked (Córdoba-Alcaide et al., 2016), as are internal conflicts among teaching staff (Manesis et al., 2019), while the school is exempt from any responsibility in the generation of conflicts (Ministerio de Educación, 2010).

According to the review conducted by Hakvoort et al. (2019), this negativist approach, focused on examining and correcting inappropriate student behaviour, was predominant until the first decade of the 21st century. Not surprisingly, Merma-Molina et al. (2019), examining 806 plans from all Spanish communities, found that most coexistence plans carried out at schools, lacking an adequate diagnosis, have focused almost exclusively on students (Olmos-Migueláñez et al., 2017). However, since the second decade, they have been shifting their course towards the needs of schools, taking all members of the educational community into account (Grau-Vidal et al., 2016; Hernández-Prados et al., 2020).

Moreover, in recent years, a positive view of conflict is gaining ground. From this approach, school conflict is understood as an interpersonal event that involves opposition in terms of disagreements about behaviours, values, or points of view by

different actors in the educational context (Ceballos-Vacas et al., 2012; Díaz-Better, 2016). In fact, there is no organization without conflicts, since disagreements and disputes are inevitable (Levi-Keren et al., 2022). Thus, conflicts can be seen as a normal part of school life (Obraztsova, 2018; Valente & Lourenço, 2020). In addition, conflicts are not necessarily harmful as they serve to reveal hidden needs which, if resolved constructively, can improve and develop the organization (Manesis et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2021), offering invaluable opportunities for learning (Parker & Bickmore, 2020).

From this positive vision, and within the framework of a democratic school culture, the entire educational community, and especially teachers and students (Hakvoort et al., 2019; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004, 2014), must develop their knowledge and skills for the positive resolution of conflicts. These abilities involve: 1. Understanding conflicts as an inherent, and not always negative, part of life; 2. Being able to differentiate concepts such as conflict, aggressiveness, and violence; 3. Knowing a wide repertoire of strategies to cope with conflict; and 4. Learning skills to encourage empathy and self-control in stressful situations (Levi-Keren et al., 2022; Olmos-Migueláñez et al., 2017; Santamaría-Villar et al., 2021). In this sense, teachers have an essential role in conflict prevention and intervention. On the one hand, because their teaching practices can contribute to generating a positive climate and, on the other hand, because they can act as role models and intermediaries for the constructive resolution of conflicts (Valdés-Cuervo et al., 2018).

Therefore, this study considers the urgency of an analysis of conflict management by both teachers and pupils in ESO (Spanish Compulsory Secondary Education). This stage was chosen because it takes place during adolescence, in the midst of the natural process of construction of the future adult identity, when they are learning the rules of coexistence and developing their values and social skills (Feldman, 2020). Moreover, adolescence is emphasized by uncertainties and great changes, involving the need for social belonging to a peer group and an undeniable family distancing, which may entail conflicts with adult authority and peers (Meeus, 2021; Ceballos-Vacas et al., 2016). On the other hand, ESO is a radical departure from primary school, as pupils are given the opportunity to make their first academic decisions (choice of electives), but they are also required to follow a very fragmented curriculum, distributed among a very large teaching team and with a more distant relationship with the teaching staff (García-Moya et al., 2019).

Furthermore, students must face a number of emotional, social and academic challenges. At the same time, the asymmetrical relationship with the adult authority in the school often ignores their voices (Finefter-Rosenbluth et al., 2021). Bear in mind that conflicts are more frequent if there is a negative school climate and students feel unfairly treated (Grau-Vidal, 2016; Llorent-García et al., 2021; Murphy et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2018). All this prepares the ideal breeding ground for the characteristic teenage opposition to adult authority embodied in the school's teaching staff and rules (Ceballos-Vacas et al., 2012; Nieto-Campos et al., 2022). This rebelliousness is often interpreted negatively, adding to the problematic image of adolescence. However, pupils are rarely given the opportunity to give their own version. In accordance with this, the present study is based on a positive view of the conflict and is committed to including not only the voice of the teachers, but also that of the students.

Balancing teacher and student voices on the frequency of different types of school conflicts

Analysis biased towards adult perception has placed teachers on the right side and in the role of victim and students on the wrong side and in the role of aggressor. Consequently, most of research has focused on student-on-student or on student-on-teacher aggression; specifically, 70% of publications in Spain (Pérez-Fuentes, 2011), even though pupils don't perceive themselves as aggressive and point out that teachers are sometimes authoritarian (Ministerio de Educación, 2010). There has also been a tendency to distort the student's point of view, by interrogating them almost exclusively about events in which they are initially burdened with the role of aggressor. As a result of this bias, a perception of students as the only responsible for school conflicts has prevailed. This analysis is substantially modified when students are asked about all types of school conflicts, also including situations in which the teachers or the school system have the role of aggressors (Córdoba-Alcaide et al., 2016; Finefter-Rosenbluth et al., 2021).

Another common bias has been to categorise as "attacks against teachers" student conflicts with adult authority (so characteristic of adolescence) of different nature: those directly addressed to teachers (e.g., damage to teachers' belongings, threats, insults, etc.) and those of simple sabotage to the rules of the school system. In fact, those last conflicts may simply manifest disagreement or defiance of the regulations or customs established in the school (e.g., non-compliance with dressing rules, talking during class time, not doing homework, cheating in an exam…) (Ceballos-Vacas et al., 2021a; Obraztsova, 2018). In this context, teachers' perceptions are a key factor, as most conflicts (especially disruptions), rather than being seen as aggressions towards teachers, could be interpreted as symptoms of student dissatisfaction that may be due to a variety of reasons (difficulties in teaching-learning process, personal or family issues…) (Jurado de los Santos et al., 2020).

According to this view, these conflicts related to the rejection of the school system are significantly the most common conflicts in ESO (Ceballos-Vacas et al., 2012). However, the low emotional intensity in their experience would indicate that the students simply try to "skip" the rules that they do not like. Specifically, the most recurrent are disruptions in the classroom (Nieto-Campos et al., 2022), although again it should be underlined that they must not be confused with school violence, as disruptions are probably the product of demotivation and boredom (Córdoba-Alcaide et al., 2016). Nevertheless, from the teachers' perspective, these are very serious cases (Larsson et al, 2022) because they interfere with their work and affect them emotionally (Yang et al., 2021).

This former type of conflicts would be followed in frequency by conflicts between peers (e.g., social exclusion, verbal or physical bullying, etc.). The least common (although also the most emotionally intense) are direct conflicts between pupils and teachers in both directions. In addition, students report more episodes from teachers towards students than vice versa, both in ESO (Ceballos-Vacas et al., 2012; Nieto-Campos et al., 2022) and primary school (Córdoba-Alcaide et al., 2016). However, it is quite possible that teachers are also unaware of causing harm to students through their actions like mocking, requesting excessive academic demands, punishing by lowering grades, showing favouritism or resentment, teacher laziness, non-intervention in conflicts between peers… (Córdoba-

Alcaide et al., 2016; Domínguez-Alonso et al., 2017). In short, the perspectives of teachers and students show many contradictions, some of which are as important as others for improving school coexistence. It is therefore necessary for the school community to be aware of the different views and to address conflicts constructively.

Management of school conflicts by teachers and pupils

In order to turn conflict into an educational tool, the analysis of management skills of the main actors involved is a key point: how do teachers and pupils actually deal with conflict? In other words, which are their resolution strategies in order to face conflicts and which are the goals they intend to achieve by doing so. Conflict resolution strategies are traditionally summarised in three styles related to specific goals (Malm & Löfgren, 2006), which are considered in this study in a very similar way. One constructive, *Integrative* style of cooperative coping, focused on identifying the problem and finding a joint solution and two non-constructive styles; one of *Domination*, of authoritarian confrontation, focused on satisfying one's own needs, and the other of *Avoiding Discomfort*, subordinated to the other party to the conflict (Ceballos-Vacas et al., 2021a).

Integrative style comprises five strategies: negotiation (discussing to reach a middle ground between the parties), mediation (seeking a third party to reach a consensus), adaptation with understanding (accepting the other's position with conviction) and persuasion (convincing the other by making them see the convenience for him/herself). *Dominator* style includes two strategies: power assertion (defending one's own position, without violence) and violence (physical, verbal or emotional violence). And, finally, *Discomfort Avoider* style involves other two strategies: evasion (ignoring, downplaying, or resolving the conflict without the involvement of the other party) and acceptance with submission (accepting another position without conviction to avoid confrontation).

Regarding the goals that are guiding the implementation of coping strategies, Tamm et al. (2018) refer to the following categorisations: self-oriented (focused on own interests), other-oriented (focused on others' interests), mutuality (focused on both), appeal to rules (relies on rules) and no disagreement (avoiding disagreement to preserve the relationship). These categories partially intersect with those proposed here, grouped in two dimensions: *Long-term goals* in the pursuit of lasting and sustained changes (e.g., to improve coexistence) and *Short-term goals* seeking swift (false) and temporary closure of the conflict (e.g., to escape from a problem) (Ceballos-Vacas et al., 2021a). *Long-term goals* comprise change with internalisation (inducing reflection to convince), academic value (achieving academic accomplishments), rule compliance (respecting norms or values), relational (preserving an interpersonal relationship) and compensation (repairing or compensating for the damage caused to the victim). And in *Short-term goals*: avoidance (to stop suffering the discomfort associated with the conflict) and punishment (castigating whoever is responsible for the conflict).

Bayraktar and Yilmaz (2016) noted that primary teachers are more in favour of constructive strategies, as did Obraztsova (2018) with respect to all educational levels, although she clarified that this preference is followed by avoidance strategies. The tendency to passivity of teachers is endorsed by Elizalde-Castillo (2010), suggesting

inhibition in the face of bullying situations in secondary school, as they do not detect or do not know how to cope with these complex situations (Amnistía Internacional, 2019). On the other hand, Buendía-Eisman et al. (2015) and Maeng et al. (2020) point out that, in order to deal with the most serious pupil behaviours (physical or verbal abuses, threats...), the use of sanctioning strategies also continues to be used: shouting at the pupil, throwing them out of the classroom, expulsion, sending them to the head of studies or threatening them with consequences in their grades or qualifications… According to adolescent students, these punitive measures are used to a greater extent than teachers acknowledge (Ministerio de Educación, 2010).

All of this goes against the teacher's modelling role (Murphy et al., 2018). Moreover, these strategies may be effective at the time but, as they pursue a short-term goal (swift closure), they do not actually solve anything, as they perpetuate the conflicts (Valdés-Cuervo et al., 2018). Levi-Keren et al. (2022) highlighted teachers' difficulties in conflict management and negative teacher-student interaction. According to Talis Report (OECD, 2020), around 50% of teachers in all OECD countries reported feeling unprepared to manage the classroom; in particular, in Spain this percentage is as high as 60%. These results emphasise the need for teacher training on the nature of conflict and its appropriate management (Galindo-Domínguez et al., 2022). Since the most effective practices are non-violent, such as reasoning or establishing agreements, promoting communication and participation in decision-making (Grau-Vidal et al., 2016).

The divergence in perceptions continues with respect to the strategies employed by the pupils. For example, Díaz-Better (2016) stated that teachers are mostly of the opinion that students deal with conflicts with their peers by means of physical violence, while their pupils claim that they tend more to seek agreements and verbal confrontation. The predominance of constructive peer-to-peer strategies was also found by Caba-Collado and López-Atxurra (2013), though violent and passive strategies were also prevalent. Concurrently, Tamm et al. (2018) noted that adolescents in general tend to more negotiation and other-oriented and mutuality goals than to coercion and self-oriented goals. Nevertheless, adolescents reported more self-oriented goals and strategies when situations were more severe. Furthermore, in the family context, Rodríguez-Ruiz and Rodrigo (2011) found that both parents and adolescents point to long-term goals, especially to relational goals and positive assessment of the other, while short-term goals as avoidance were the least mentioned. These results suggest the achievement of long-term goals in late adolescence.

Another aspect that deserves to be highlighted is the effectiveness of the instrument used, given that from adolescence onwards (with the improvement of cognitive skills) the most prevalent strategy is negotiation (Laursen et al., 2001). However, observational techniques, which require real social skills, reveal a much greater use of coercive techniques. Situational questionnaires are another alternative to reduce social desirability and not to underestimate the use of domination strategies (Ceballos-Vacas et al., 2021a). They also have the advantage of growing in realism (Burger et al., 2015) and ecological validity, in line with current trends in authentic assessment (Aldrup et al., 2020). Therefore, this study uses situational instruments to explore the perception of teachers and pupils.

In sum, the present study is aimed to analyse which styles and categories of conflict resolution strategies are most frequently used by teachers and students, as well as the

styles and categories of goals with which they have the highest degree of agreement, determining the differences between the two groups with respect to all of the above. Regarding conflict resolution strategies, it's expected that the situational questionnaires tend to reduce *Integration* and to increase *Dominator* style responses, both for teachers and students, showing a mixture of these styles combined with *Discomfort Avoider*. However, teachers are supposed to be more prone to *Integration* style than students, since adolescents are still learning those sophisticated strategies (Tamm et al., 2018). Consequently, as for goals, teachers and students are expected to be more inclined towards *Long-term goals*. Nevertheless, teachers are again supposed to show more long-term orientation than students.

Method

The research has been carried out as an expost-facto study, with a quantitative, exploratory, and descriptive nature.

Participants

A total of 1768 ESO students (53.5% male and 46.5% female, with 50.5% from years 1 and 2 and 49.5% from years 3 and 4) participated in the study. Likewise, 211 teachers (62.1% female and 37.9% male) of the same students taking part in the study, with an average experience of 16.85 years. The study was conducted through a non-probabilistic incidental sampling, selecting Spanish schools in the autonomous communities of the Canary Islands (north, centre and south of the island of Tenerife) and Asturias (western, central and eastern areas), mostly state-run (88.4%) and urban (63.4%) according to the OECD (2012). These two communities have been selected because of their divergent socio-economic conditions and educational results (e.g., on pupil/teacher ratio, dropout rate and academic achievement) (Pérez et al., 2019) in order to balance the effect of these variables.

Instruments

The Cuestionario Situacional de Estrategias y Metas de Resolución de Conflictos Escolares (Ceballos-Vacas et al., 2021a) was applied in its teacher and student versions. Its purpose is to assess the management of school conflicts in contextualised scenarios, providing details about the setting (public/private) and the feelings of people involved, that are natural and close to their experience. To this end, six very common conflict situations are presented, adapting the wording to each group in its own version. Three of them refer to conflicts among peers: A student interrupts another while doing an exercise in class; a classmate insults another student at recess; and a group rejects a classmate and does not allow them to be with them. The other three address conflicts between the adult authority in the school and the pupils: A teacher is too demanding and gives hardly anyone a pass mark; a teacher is angry with a pupil because they have answered back in a defiant manner in class; and a teacher is annoyed with a student because he/she is often absent from class. In each situation they are asked about:

1. Frequency of use of eight categories of conflict resolution strategies in a five-point Likert scale (1-*Never*; 2-*Rarely*; 3-*Sometimes*; 4-*Often* and 5-*Always*). Four Integrative style strategies: negotiation, mediation, adaptation with understanding and persuasion. Two in Dominator style: power assertion and violence (note that all the situations include verbal-emotional violence strategies, except in one of the peer-to-peer situations of physical violence in the student version: "Giving a shove"). And two in Discomfort Avoider: evasion and acceptance with submission.

2. The degree of agreement with seven categories of the goals is rated on a five-point Likert scale. (1-*Totally disagree*; 2- *Slightly disagree*; 3-*Moderately agree*; 4-*Strongly agree* and 5-*Totally agree*). Five in Long-term goals style: change with internalisation, academic value, rule compliance, relational and compensation. And two in Short-term goals: avoidance and punishment.

The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), using the Maximum Likelihood method to extract the factors and Promix as the rotation method, extracted three factors (Integrative, Dominator and Discomfort Avoider) that confirmed the previous structure and explained 87.55% of the variance for the teacher version (*KMO* = .895; $\chi^2_{(28)}$ = 1108.128; $p \leq .000$) and 72% for that of the student body (*KMO* = .697; $\chi^2_{(28)}$ = 3406.58; $p \leq .000$). With respect to the goals, the AFE extracted two factors (Long-term goals and Short-term goals) which also confirmed the structure and explained 90.57% of the variance in the teacher's version (*KMO* = .919; $\chi^2_{(21)}$ = 1769.55; $p \leq .000$) and 71.83% in the student's version (*KMO* = .880; $\chi^2_{(21)}$ = 4875.07; $p \leq .000$).

Reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, obtaining a value of α = .96 in the teachers' version and α = .87 in the students' version, considered "good" and "excellent", respectively. For the resulting strategies factors the values were α=.79 (Integrative), α=.87 (Discomfort avoidance) and α=.74 (Dominant) for teachers' version and α=.79 (Integrative), α=.74 (Discomfort avoidance) and α=.68 (Dominant) for students' version. And for the goals factors were α=.87 (Long-term goals) and α=.94 (Short-term goals) for teachers' version and α=.87 (Long-term goals) and α=.68 for students' version. All these values are considered "acceptable" to "good" according to George and Mallery (2003). The analysis of convergent validity through Pearson's correlation between the factors of strategies and goals with the categories that configure them, indicated Pearson's correlation values in the expected sense with correlational values above .70 ($p \leq 0.00$ bilateral) in both cases, for teachers' and students' versions.

Procedure and Data analysis

The research team contacted ESO schools in the communities of the Canary Islands and Asturias by e-mail, requesting authorisation to apply the questionnaire, obtaining positive responses from 16 schools (11 state-run and 5 private). The team was also in charge of administering the questionnaire to the students in the classrooms during the tutorials, with an approximate time of 20 minutes. Teacher questionnaires were delivered and collected three weeks later. Previously, a letter of presentation had been sent to the teachers and families of the students, specifying the objectives and instructions, insisting on its anonymous nature, and requesting the signature of an informed consent. The

whole procedure was performed in accordance with the standards of CEIBA (Research Ethics and Animal Welfare Committee) of the University of La Laguna.

Descriptive analyses (means and standard deviations) were carried out for the styles and categories of conflict resolution strategies and goals in both versions of the questionnaire. Comparative analyses were also performed using Student's t test to identify significant differences in intra-group comparisons. In each analysis, the condition of homogeneity of variances was considered (Levene's test). When the differences between groups were significant, the effect size was calculated with Cohen's d, interpreting its magnitude according to the criteria stated by Cohen (1988); low size $.0 < d < .20$; medium-moderate $.20. < d \leq .50$; and high $d > 50$, although it was considered that even a small effect size can have practical significance (Kirk, 1996). Finally, the inter-group comparative analyses were carried out with the general linear model for repeated measures, taking the conflict resolution styles and goals of teachers and pupils as an intra-subject factor (considering that both groups are linked to each other), and the conflict resolution styles and goals of teachers and students as an intra-subject factor (considering that both groups are mutually interlinked). In each analysis, we checked whether the assumptions of sphericity (Mauchly's W) and homogeneity (BOX-Levene) were met, taking the *F* values of the Pillai trace otherwise.

Results

First, the descriptive results of central tendency and variability on the styles and categories of conflict resolution strategies for teachers and students are presented. Intra-group comparative analyses between strategic styles and categories in teachers and students and between both groups are also shown. Second, the same analyses as above are presented for the styles and categories of conflict resolution goals.

Descriptive statistics and comparative analysis of styles and categories of conflict resolution strategies in teachers and students and between both groups

Teachers and pupils approached the resolution of school conflicts through a wide range of strategies (see Tables 1 and 2 below). Teachers generally scored lower frequency averages (around *rarely*) than the students (between *rarely* and *sometimes*).

Teaching staff perceived that they used the Dominator style ($M = 2.41$; $SD = .55$) more frequently than average, followed by Discomfort Avoider ($M = 2.21$; $SD = .46$) and Integrative ($M = 2.04$; $SD = .49$), although in all cases they were slightly above *rarely*. A significant difference in favour of the Dominator ($t_{(191)} = -15.865$; $p < .000$) and Discomfort Avoider ($t_{(191)} = -6.392$; $p < .000$) styles stood out compared to Integrative, with a high effect size, and of Discomfort Avoider compared to Dominator ($t_{(191)} = 7.953$; $p < .000$), with average effect. However, the strategy most commonly used by teachers was domineering, violence (verbal or emotional) with a frequency close to *sometimes*, showing a significantly higher use of this strategy compared to the rest. This was followed by several strategies used slightly more than *sometimes*; the integrative persuasion (more frequently than the rest, except for violence) and negotiation (higher than mediation, adaptation with understanding and power assertion), the discomfort avoider evasion

(higher than mediation, adaptation with understanding and power assertion), along with acceptance with submission and the domineering power assertion (higher than mediation and adaptation with understanding). Finally, integrative strategies mediation and adaptation with understanding were situated between *never* and *rarely* (see Table 1).

Table 1

Means, standard deviations and comparative analyses of conflict resolution strategy categories of Integrative, Dominator and Discomfort Avoider styles among teaching staff.

Strategy categories in each style	*M* (*SD*)	Comparison strategy category	*t*	*p*	*d*
Integrative style					
Negotiation	2.23 (0.70)	Mediation	11.602	.000***	0.695
		Adaptation with understanding	12.773	.000***	0.740
		Persuasion	-2.502	.013**	0.127
		Power assertion	3.494	.000***	0.250
		Violence	-14.464	.000***	0.720
Mediation	1.81 (0.49)	Persuasion	-17.691	.000***	0.959
		Power assertion	-7.328	.000***	0.489
		Violence	-23.855	.000***	1.565
		Evasion	-10,548	.000***	0.799
		Acceptance with submission	-12,483	.000***	0.803
Adaptation with understanding	1.77 (0.53)	Persuasion	-14.700	.000***	0.999
		Power assertion	-8.000	.000***	0.545
		Violence	-22.346	.000***	1.587
		Evasion	-9.749	.000***	0.845
		Acceptance with submission	-11.722	.000***	0.849
Persuasion	2.31 (0.55)	Power assertion	6.972	.000***	0.428
		Violence	-13.590	.000***	0.647
		Evasion	2.748	.000***	0.188
		Acceptance with submission	3.716	.000***	0.166
Dominator style					
Power assertion	2.07 (0.57)	Violence	-15.993	.000***	1.054
		Evasion	-3.746	.000***	0.258
		Acceptance with submission	-4.339	.000***	0.272
Violence	2.72 (0.66)	Evasion	14.241	.000***	0.864
		Acceptance with submission	17.210	.000***	0.835
Discomfort Avoider style					
Evasion	2.21 (0.51)				
Acceptance with submission	2.22 (0.53)				

Note: * p < .050; ** p < .010; ***p < .000

Students perceived a more frequent use of the Integrative style ($M = 2.67$; $SD = 0.56$), with significant differences in its favour compared to Dominator ($M = 2.56$; $SD = 0.76$; $t_{(1419)} = 4.7095$; $p < .000$) and Discomfort Avoider ($M = 2.55$; $SD = 0.51$; $t_{(1394)} = 6.718$; $p < .000$) styles, with a high effect size, although in all styles the frequency lied between *rarely* and *sometimes*. The students chose *sometimes* for the domineering strategy power assertion and the integrative negotiation and adaptation with understanding (higher than mediation, persuasion, violence, evasion and acceptance with submission). Between *rarely* and *sometimes*, they leaned towards the discomfort avoidance strategies evasion and acceptance with submission (higher than mediation, persuasion, violence and acceptance with submission), followed by the integrative persuasion (higher than violence and mediation) and mediation (higher only than violence). Finally, violence (physical, verbal, or emotional) was rated *rarely*; the strategy that students reported using least frequently, in contrast to teachers (see Table 2).

Table 2

Means, standard deviations and comparative analyses of conflict resolution strategy categories of Integrative, Dominator and Discomfort Avoider styles among pupils.

Strategy categories in each style	***M* (*SD*)**	**Comparison strategy category**	***t***	***p***	***d***
Integrative style					
Negotiation	3.01 (0.75)	Mediation	35.904	.000	0.920
		Persuasion	35.151	.000	0.870
		Violence	29.571	.000	1.147
		Evasion	19.274	.000	0.633
		Acceptance with submission	21.362	.000	0.707
		Adaptation with understanding	-34.168	.000	0.935
Mediation	2.31 (0.77)	Persuasion	-3.626	.000	0.991
		Power assertion	-29.972	.000	0.911
		Violence	7.548	.000	0.271
		Evasion	-13.134	.000	0.304
		Acceptance with submission	-9.35	.000	0.298
Adaptation with understanding	3.03 (0.68)	Persuasion	31.902	.000	0.942
		Violence	30.762	.000	1.221
		Evasion	21.463	.000	0.701
		Acceptance with submission	25.660	.000	0.778
Persuasion	2.37 (0.72)	Power assertion	-32.646	.000	0.862
		Violence	11.197	.000	0.355
		Evasion	-11.124	.000	0.316
		Acceptance with submission	-6.913	.000	0.221
Power assertion	3.04 (0.83)	Violence	51.681	.000	1.130
		Evasion	20.469	.000	0.630
		Acceptance with submission	20.766	.000	0.705

Strategy categories in each style	*M* (*SD*)	Comparison strategy category	*t*	*p*	*d*
Domination style					
Violence	2.09 (0.85)	Evasion	-20.835	.000	0.666
		Acceptance with submission	-16.681	.000	0.574
Discomfort Avoider style					
Evasion	2.58 (0.60)	Acceptance with submission	3.694	.000	0.097
Acceptance with submission	2.52 (0.63)				

Note: * p < .050; ** p < .010; ***p < .000

The comparative analysis between the two groups showed significant differences in terms of styles, with a higher frequency perceived by the students with respect to Integrative style ($F_{(1,1486)}$ = 175.197; p <.000), with an average effect size (η^2 = .488) and Discomfort Avoider ($_{F\,(1,1486)}$ = 69.251; p <.000), with a small effect size (η^2 = .272). Students reported significantly more use than teachers of the constructive strategies negotiation, mediation, and adaptation with understanding, in all cases with large effect sizes. In addition, they perceived that they tended to opt more often for avoidance and acceptance with submission, both with average effect size. Finally, they also estimated a higher use of power assertion, with a high effect size. Teachers, on the other hand, only showed a higher use of violence, also with a large effect size (see Table 3).

Table 3

Contrast analysis of the categories of conflict resolution strategies between teachers and students

Style	Strategy categories	*t*	*p*	*d*
Integrative	Negotiation	-11.873	.000***	1.075
	Mediation	-7.265	.000***	0.774
	Adaptation with understanding	-23.185	.000***	2.066
	Persuasion	-2.069	.000***	0.093
Dominator	Power assertion	-11.948	.000***	1.362
	Violence	8.428	.000***	0.827
Discomfort Avoider	Evasion	-7.505	.000***	0.664
	Acceptance with submission	-6.894	.000***	0.515

Note: * p < .050; ** p < .010; ***p < .000

Descriptive statistics and comparative analysis of styles and categories of conflict resolution goals in teachers and students and between both groups

Teachers and students agreed on very different categories of school conflict resolution goals (see Tables 4 and 5). Both agents showed average values around moderately agree.

The teaching staff presented average agreement, above *moderately agree*, with the Long-term goals style (M = 3.16; SD = 0.80), and the same went for Short-term goals (M = 3.09; SD = 0.77). The comparative analyses among teachers indicated greater agreement with Long-term goals ($t_{(191)}$ = 2.984; p <.003), with an average effect size. The academic value goal, between *moderately agree* and *strongly agree*, presented a degree of agreement significantly higher for the goals change with internalisation, rule compliance, relational, compensation, avoidance, and punishment. With other Long-term goals, the agreement is located around *moderately agree*; this was the case of rule compliance (higher than the relational, compensation and avoidance goals), changes internalisation and relational (higher than compensation and avoidance) and compensation. Short-term goals were positioned slightly higher than *moderately agree* along with punishment (higher than compensation and avoidance) and close to said level with avoidance (see Table 4).

Table 4

Means and standard deviations and comparative analyses of conflict resolution goal categories of Long-term goals and Short-term goals styles among teachers.

Goal categories in each style	*M (SD)*	Comparison goal categories	*t*	*p*	*d*
Long-term goals					
Change with internalisation	3.13 (1.12)	Academic value	-7.163	.000***	0.295
		Compensation	4.580	.000***	0.230
		Avoidance	4.365	.000***	0.158
		Rule compliance	9.174	.000***	0.272
		Relational	9.745	.000***	0.502
Academic value	3.43 (0.90)	Compensation	14.304	.000***	0.643
		Avoidance	12.481	.000***	0.525
		Punishment	8.574	.000***	0.301
		Relational	4.008	.000***	0.229
Rule compliance	3.20 (0.86)	Compensation	8.661	.000***	0.359
		Avoidance	7.118	.000***	0.251
Relational	3.02 (0.71)	Compensation	3.394	.000***	0.164
		Avoidance	4.639	.000***	0.062
Compensation	2.91 (0.75)	Punishment	-9.373	.000***	0.375
Short-term goals					
Avoidance	2.97 (0.89)	Punishment	-5.345	.000***	0.267
Punishment	3.20 (.075)				

Note: * p < .050; ** p < .010; ***p < .000

The student body presented a pattern similar to that of the teaching staff, showing greater agreement with the style of Long-term goals (M = 3.43; SD = 0.62), between moderately agree and strongly agree, with a significant difference ($t_{(191)}$ = 41.420; p <.000), and a large effect size, compared to the style Short-term goals (M = 2.48; SD = 0.60), which was situated between slightly disagree and moderately agree. Specifically, they also cited greater agreement (between moderately agree and strongly agree with the Long-term goals academic value, rule compliance and relational, with a degree of agreement significantly higher than with the goals change with internalisation, compensation, avoidance, and punishment. Likewise, for the goals change with internalisation and compensation, slightly above moderately agree, they presented greater agreement than avoidance and punishment (see Table 5).

Table 5

Means and standard deviations and comparative analyses of conflict resolution goal categories of Long-term goals and Short-term goals styles among pupils.

Goal categories in each style	*M* (*SD*)	Comparison goal categories	*t*	*p*	*d*
Long-term style					
Change with internalisation	3.36 (0.82)	Academic value	-4.469	.000***	0.099
		Rule compliance	-6.795	.000***	0.147
		Relational	-6.151	.000***	0.135
		Avoidance	10.458	.000***	0.250
		Punishment	32.905	.000***	1.049
		Compensation	4.442	.000***	0.109
Academic value	3.45 (0.79)	Avoidance	15.748	.000***	0.364
		Punishment	39.681	.000***	1.184
		Compensation	6.845	.000***	0.146
Rule compliance	3.46 (0.66)	Avoidance	17.991	.000***	0.408
		Punishment	46.144	.000***	1.219
		Compensation	4.992	.000***	0.128
Relational	3.46 (0.80)	Avoidance	15.311	.000***	0.382
		Punishment	34.996	.000***	1.546
Compensation	3.37 (0.67)	Avoidance	11.908	.000***	0.294
		Punishment	42.494	.000***	1.169
Short-term style					
Avoidance	3.17 (0.69)	Punishment	29.749	.000***	0.882
Punishment	2.53 (0.78)				

Note: * p<.050; ** p<.010; ***p<.000

The comparative analysis between the two groups showed significant differences in terms of styles. The students cited greater agreement with Long Term Goals style ($F_{(1,1386)} = 17.242$; $p < .000$), with a low effect size ($\eta^2 = .084$). On the contrary, teachers were more likely to agree with Short term Goals style ($F_{(1,1386)} = 20.4921$; $p < .000$), with a low effect size ($\eta^2 = .099$). As for goal categories, students claimed to agree with Long Term Goals (relational and compensation) significantly more than teachers, in both cases with large effect sizes, and change with internalisation and rule compliance, with low effect sizes. Teachers, on the other hand, only presented a higher agreement with punishment, also with a large effect size (see Table 6).

Table 6

Contrast analysis of the categories of conflict resolution goals between teachers and students

Style	Goal categories	*t*	*p*	*d*
Long-term goals	Change with internalisation	-3.325	.001**	.234
	Rule compliance	-3.178	.002**	.313
	Relational	-8.317	.000***	.581
	Compensation	-6.888	.000***	.601
Short-term goals	Avoidance	-2.856	.005**	.041
	Punishment	9.883	.000***	.404

Note: * p < .050; ** p < .010; ***p < .000

Discussion

From a democratic perspective and positive conception of conflict, school conflicts show that it is necessary to pay attention to the needs of the entire educational community to improve coexistence (Hakvoort et al., 2019; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004, 2014). Moreover, situations of disagreement can constitute invaluable opportunities for personal and social development and growth (Manesis et al., 2019; Parker & Bickmore, 2020; Yang et al., 2021), especially for adolescent students. The role of teachers is essential, as they must serve as a model for addressing conflicts in a positive way (Valdés-Cuervo et al., 2018).

In order to analyse how Spanish teachers and students act in conflicts, and thus resolve the contradictions in their respective perceptions, a situational questionnaire (adapted for teachers and pupils) was used that confronts both groups with familiar scenarios in which to judge the frequency of their behaviour and the degree of agreement with the goals they pursue. This type of questionnaire has the advantage of reducing the usual social desirability associated with traditional questionnaires and not underestimating coercive responses (Ceballos-Vacas et al., 2021a).

Our results showed caution in the teachers' responses, indicating a low overall frequency (around *rarely*) of use of the different strategies. Partially contrary to what was expected, the most frequent styles were *Dominator* and *Discomfort avoider*, which casts serious doubts on the suitability of the teacher as a constructive model (Murphy

et al., 2018). It is of particular concern that violence (verbal or emotional) was the most common response, which is in line with the persistence of punitive strategies in secondary school cited by Buendía-Eisman et al. (2015) and Maeng et al. (2020), and with the perceptions of adolescent students (Ministerio de Educación, 2010). In our view these punitive responses are related to teachers' difficulties in conflict management (Levi-Keren et al., 2022; OECD, 2020).

The use of the *Discomfort Avoider* style is supported by the passivity of teachers in the face of confrontations between students, as pointed out by Elizalde-Castillo (2010), probably because of not knowing how to deal with those situations as mentioned before. Finally, the *Integrative* style scored significantly lower than the previous ones, although the strategies for persuasion and negotiation stood out. Teachers showed the same moderation when expressing their degree of agreement with the goals they intended to achieve, opting in general for *moderately agree*. Although, in line with our expectations, they are more inclined towards *Long-term goals*, especially for the academic value category, while rule compliance also stood out; both goals being closely related to the school system. The preference for achieving long-term results contrasts with the priority choice of non-constructive strategies (punitive and turning a blind eye) that perpetuate conflicts by attempting to resolve them through short-lived quick fixes (Valdés-Cuervo et al., 2018).

As it was expected, and even though the adult view dictates "student violence", the participating students, in agreement with Caba-Collado and López-Atxurra (2013) and Tamm et al. (2018), were more prone to use constructivist strategies. Like those of the teaching staff, their responses were moderate, although less timid, between *rarely* and *sometimes*. However, there was a clear predilection for integrative strategies, especially for negotiating and internalising the position of others, combined with the imposition and firm defence of their own standpoint. This would confirm the students' version (of negotiation and verbal confrontation) found by Díaz-Better (2016), with violence as the strategy with the lowest frequency, in eloquent contrast with its preferential use by teachers. Concurrently, it would confirm that adolescents are indeed learning the rules of coexistence and developing their values and social skills (Feldman, 2020). With respect to the goals, the students' responses generally fell between *moderately* and *strongly agree*, showing a similar pattern to that of the teaching staff, also in line with our expectations, tending towards *Long-term goals*, as suggested by Tamm et al. (2018) and Ceballos-Vacas et al. (2016). In particular, showing agreement with academic value and rule compliance, as well as teachers. Although a typically adolescent goal was also added, relational, linked with the importance of belonging to their peer group at this stage (Meeus, 2021; Ceballos-Vacas et al., 2016).

In any case, ESO students proved to be capable of constructive conflict resolution, although they often preferred to avoid problems or to impose themselves (Caba-Collado & López-Atxurra, 2013). Fortunately, however, punitive strategies seemed to be their last resort and they were less likely surprisingly to use such strategies than their teachers. They showed themselves also more flexible in changing their minds and accepting other people's positions (adaptation with understanding) compared to their teachers' apparent rigidity and unwillingness to accept their students' points of view and mediation Regarding goals, the comparison between teachers and pupils provides even more conclusive

results: The student body not only conducts itself more constructively, but also agrees more with *Long-term* goals than the faculty. Another unexpected result that deserves to be highlighted, since negative teachers' perceptions may be triggering nonconstructive responses to cope with conflicts, even if dealing with minor conflicts as disruptions (Jurado de los Santos et al., 2020; Larsson et al, 2022).

In light of these results, it would be of great interest to clarify whether the type of strategies and goals depend on the nature of the conflict situations (Tamm et al., 2018). On the part of students, on their conditions of symmetry or asymmetry. Thus, students may act with more dominance with peers (symmetry situation), but with more constructivist or avoidance strategies when they face adult authority (asymmetry situation). Whereas, on the part of teachers, it may rely on the type of conflict (with adult authority or between peers). Thus, they may opt for more dominance strategies when they feel that students defy them or the school rules (Larsson et al., 2022), ignoring students' voices (Finefter-Rosenbluth et al., 2021); and with more avoidance (Díaz-Better, 2016) or integration strategies when conflicts only involve students (Bayraktar & Yilmaz, 2016; Obraztsova, 2018).

Conclusions

The data obtained refute the myth of violent students and highlight their demotivation and boredom (Córdoba-Alcaide et al., 2016) through their recurrent disruptive behaviours in the classroom (Domínguez-Alonso et al., 2017; Nieto-Campos et al., 2022). In the same line, it was found that adult biases distort the vision of conflict in schools, projecting a negative image of secondary school pupils. A view that is not found if teachers and students are listened to with an unbiased methodology and with less social desirability (Ceballos-Vacas et al., 2021a), which has helped bringing current punitive practices in school system to light. However, the student body does not have an idyllic image either and definitely requires training, as it tends to impose its position, accepting other people's positions without agreeing with them and avoiding problems.

In conclusion, some profound considerations emerge. Firstly, we would have to conclude that the education system has failed in terms of the formation of a tolerant, respectful, and peaceful citizenship and of the establishment of a democratic school (Ministerio de Educación, 2010). As it has been shown, the shortcomings of the teaching staff as a model of conflict resolution are evident in terms of the scarcity of constructive strategies and the worrying presence of strategies of verbal and emotional violence, if not passivity, which have an impact on the formation of a negative school climate which increases conflicts as students feel unfairly treated (Álvarez-García et al., 2013; Murphy et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2018). This is compounded by the inadequacy of these practices to achieve long-term goals, which also reveals conceptual gaps in conflict management.

Therefore, it will be essential to redefine intervention models for coexistence, focusing not only on students but also on teachers, as it cannot be taken for granted that they already possess suitable competences (Grau-Vidal et al., 2016; Hernández-Prados et al., 2020). In the context of schools, developing skills to engage with conflict with empathy and tolerance are professionally important qualities of a teacher (Levy-Keren et al., 2022;

OECD, 2020). Moreover, "efforts should develop suitable teacher-training programmes on how to address conflicts, making teachers aware that they themselves can be the source of the emerging conflict" (Larsson et al, 2021, p. 800). Thus, it is urgent to raise the need for teacher training in both initial and in-service training to improve their social and emotional competencies (Bisquerra-Alzina & García-Navarro, 2018; Galindo-Domínguez et al., 2022; Olmos-Migueláñez et al., 2017).

Finally, it is noted that the biases of the adult perspective are distorting the vision of conflict at school, projecting a very negative image of ESO students. This representation does not correspond to the results obtained by listening to the voice of students and teachers, using situational questionnaires. This methodology, in line with authentic assessment (Aldrup et al., 2020), is less loaded with social desirability and not biased by adult parameters, which has helped to bring to light punitive practices in force in schools today. Nevertheless, an in-depth analysis of school coexistence is a priority, applying sensitive methods, such as case studies, that allow us to capture the complexity of each school culture. This is the only way to reveal the intricate relationships that determine how and why a punitive or caring approach to school coexistence is chosen (Ceballos-Vacas & Trujillo-González, 2021b).

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