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School Mediation under the Spotlight: What Spanish Secondary Students Think of Mediation

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MEDIAZIONE SCOLASTICA SOTTO I RIFLETTORI: QUALI STUDENTI SECONDARI SPAGNOLI PENSANO ALLA MEDIAZIONE

Abstract

Educational professionals and policy-makers need to update their strategies to address and prevent school violence. Mediation has proved to be a useful tool for peace-building in different countries by developing individuals, their relationships, and the school climate. However, little research has assessed mediation practices. This study aims to evaluate mediation through the perceptions of secondary school students in Spain in order to highlight strengths and weaknesses of school mediation programs. It specifically aims to learn from the assessment by those who attended mediation and to detect whether there exist any significant differences regarding gender and school year. To do this, we conducted a survey study, and data from 1,198 students were collected by means of an ad hoc questionnaire. A descriptive-inferential study shows the high level of agreement between the students, who rate mediation positively, in particular, those who have used mediation for conflict resolution. Regarding necessary improvements, it is imperative to offer more

information about the mediation services provided by the educational centres, to train the entire educational community and to broaden the role played by mediation, which has still to unleash its potential.

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1. Introduction

The study of violence and living together within the educational context began in the 1970s with Olweus's work in Sweden (Olweus, 1998). But it was in the second half of the 1990s when the awareness regarding the need for a systematic attention to school climate was more explicit. Thus, coordinated and continuous efforts in education in pursuit of a culture of peace and of living together were adopted by the European Council and resolutions, declarations and recommendations addressed to prevent school violence proliferated in the educational systems of Member States. The European Commission, also in the 1990s, launched projects to foster an education for living together (Blaya & Ortega, 2006). It was in this context that Eric Debarbieux and Caherine Blaya founded the European Observatory of School Violence in 1998.

The concept of living together at school gathered more and more attention and evolved until it became a primary objective within the educational system (European Commission, 2009; García-Raga & López, 2014). Accordingly, schools should promote innovative strategies that teach students to participate, to manage conflicts, to reach consensus, to express feelings and emotions, and, ultimately, to live together in accordance with democratic values in school and society.

In this regard, most European countries have been designing programs to improve living together in schools. According to a report by Smith (2003), under the CONNECT program, and a subsequent study (Smith, Pepler, & Rugby, 2004), some relevant European initiatives are the Anti-Bullying Program in Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), the Amsterdam School Safety Project (the Netherlands), the Sheffield Anti-Bullying Project (England), the Irish Nationwide Intervention Program against Bullying Behavior in Schools (Ireland), and the Anti-violence Interventions in Italian High Schools: Development of Models and Evaluation (Italy).

Most of these plans respond to the need to address bullying (Boulton & Boulton, 2011) and they incorporate conflict prevention and manage-

ment strategies so that it does not escalate and turns living together into a serious problem. We highlight peer mentoring programs and, particularly, mediation, a strategy which allows those involved in a conflict to confront it by talking to each other with the help of a third party. However, the advantages of mediation go beyond conflict resolution, as shown in many studies, both empirical (Cowie & Wallace, 2000; García-Longoria, 2002; Villanueva, Usó, & Adrián, 2003; Nix & Hale, 2007; Torrego & Galán, 2008; Grande, 2010; Moral & Pérez, 2010; Turnuklu *et al.*, 2010; Paulero, 2011; Ibarrola-García & Iriarte, 2014) and theoretical (Bonafé-Schmitt, 2000; López, 2007; García-Raga, Martínez-Usarralde, & Sahuquillo, 2012; Pulido, Martín-Seoane, & Lucas-Molina, 2013; Tucker & Maunder, 2015). Mediation promotes student participation, strengthens interpersonal relationships, prevents violence and stimulates democratic citizenship skills and values (Puig-Gutiérrez & Morales-Lozano, 2015; Sánchez-Blanco, 2015). Whatsmore, it fosters dialogue, participation, decision-making, and responsibility-taking (Munné & Mac-Cragh, 2006; García-Raga & López, 2010).

Interestingly, mediation practices seem to achieve more successful outcomes when the students become the mediators of their fellow classmates' conflicts. These initiatives have a long tradition in Anglo-Saxon countries (Cowie & Sharp, 1996; Cowie & Wallace, 2000; Burrell, Zirbel, & Allan, 2003; Garrard & Lipsey, 2007) and are based on the idea that peers are sources of knowledge and active members of the educational community, capable of promoting actions for social and moral development in their schools (Fernández, 2008, p. 142). Apparently, peer-mediators have a positive impact on mediation as they are better at connecting with other peers than adults (Cohen, 2005; Cowie & Fernández, 2006; Nix & Hale, 2007).

Unfortunately, few programs have evaluated the effectiveness of mediation in Europe (Smith, 2003; Torrego & Galán, 2008; García-Raga *et al.*, 2016). Without evaluations, it is difficult to determine whether the educational purposes of mediation are achieved. Along with Smith (2003), Pérez-Pérez (2007), and Torrego & Galán (2008), we consider that the evaluation of school mediation practices is necessary to develop quality programs. Only then will we be able to determine the efficacy of mediation, its educational repercussions and its obstacles. Accordingly, this study addresses these issues within the framework of a broader investigation, which was supported by Generalitat Valenciana (Spain, GV/2015/048).

2. Method

2.1. *Aims*

This research aims to learn from the assessment of school mediation done by secondary school students from ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education in Spain with students aged 12 to 16) and Bachillerato (High School with students aged 16 to 18). The specific objectives are:
• to highlight school mediation strengths and weaknesses from the participants' perspective;
• to detect whether there are significant differences in evaluating mediation according to the participants' gender and/or academic year;
• to determine the features of school mediation sessions from the users' perspective;
• to know the evaluation of those who used mediation in their schools.

2.2. *Sample*

We used a non-probabilistic criterion sampling to avoid adverse effects on the research. Two requirements were essential: schools should have implemented mediation at least two years prior to the study and they should be using mediation in secondary education. Both experience in mediation and students' maturity to assess it were clue.

We asked several organisations that promote living together to give us access to any educational centres that met these requirements. These included the Centre of Training, Innovation and Resources for Teachers in Valencia; the City Council of Alicante; the Adviser's Office for Living Together in Navarra; the Institute for Living Together and Success at School in the Balearic Islands; the Education and University Office in the Canary Islands (Living Together Department) and the Adviser's Office of Living Together in Aragon.

Some other educational centres reached us through CONVIVES Association (Spain), which works to promote positive living together at school and had disseminated our project.

Then, we contacted the coordinators of the mediation teams of each school and those willing to participate were included in the study. We requested the participation of ESO and Bachillerato students from different academic years and, if possible, groups of students for each one of the different years.

In the end, 1,198 students from eighteen Spanish state secondary schools participated. 541 boys (45.4%) and 650 girls (54.6%) made a total of 1,191 students, as seven people did not respond to this item. The higher percentage of girls is minimal and a non-significant difference. Regarding the academic year, ESO represented 89.8% of the participants, while the remaining 10.2% came from Bachillerato (see *Tab. 1*).

Table 1. – Breakdown of the sample by academic year.

Course	Frequency	Percentage
1st year of ESO	212	17.8
2nd year of ESO	272	22.8
3rd year of ESO	345	28.9
4th year of ESO	242	20.3
1st year of BACH	68	5.7
2nd year of BACH	54	4.5

2.3. *Instrument*

An *ad hoc* questionnaire was used to gather the students' opinions (García-Raga & Grau, 2016) following these criteria: conceptual definition, literature search, writing of items, collection of empirical evidence regarding the internal validity of the test (validation by experts) and verification of the instrument reliability. For that purpose, we established the following stages: (a) theoretical and conceptual approach to school mediation; (b) instrument design; (c) expert judges' evaluation according to importance and relevance criteria; (d) instrument implementation (pilot study); and (e) analysis and discussion of results.

The first draft, with 46 questions (45 close-ended and 1 open-ended) was based on the theoretical study of school mediation and the revision of other questionnaires related to this topic (Ibarrola-García & Iriarte, 2012, pp. 219-243).

Once we validated its content (construct validity), it was subjected both to the judgment of 10 experts for logical validation and to a pilot study for empirical validation in which 153 students of a state secondary school in Valencia (Spain) participated. 47.7% of the participants were male and 52.30% were female, with ages ranging from 12 to 19. This school had a remarkable track record in mediation (7 years) and the students' input contributed to refine items and clarify some statements.

Once the data were introduced in the statistics programme SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), we analysed their reliability using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient. As a result, it was necessary to remove 2 items of the instrument and, after that, its reliability as a whole exceeded the minimum required in non-cognitive tests ($\alpha = 0.72$).

Additionally, the research team considered that one of the questionnaire parts should change its format to be more straightforward, even though no questions were removed. The reason was that 15% of the pilot study participants left some questions unanswered. Thus, a definitive survey of 66 Likert-type items was presented. The questionnaire was organized into three parts according to the type of audience: questions for all students (items 1-19), questions for those attending mediation services (items 20-42), and questions for student-mediators (items 43-66). Questions regarding the evaluation of mediation had four Likert-type response options for all audiences on a scale ranging from 1 to 4 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree).

2.4. *Procedure and data analysis*

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20.0, was used for the descriptive and inferential analysis. The study endeavoured to know students' opinion and assessment of all components and dimensions of the mediation service provided in their schools. After verifying that the sample distribution was normal, we conducted an ANOVA test in order to find significant differences across gender and academic year among independent samples.

3. Analysis and interpretation of results

Below are the results from the first two blocks of the questionnaire. We aim to portray the opinion and evaluation of all students, as well as those who attended mediation, with regards to all the components and aspects of their school mediation service.

Regarding the school mediation service (items 5-8), a high percentage (65.5%) claimed they were unaware of what school mediation was about, whereas 34.5% were familiar with it. Participants followed a similar trend when asked whether they knew about mediation services at their schools: 33.4% knew it existed whereas 66.6% did not.

Only 50.5% of the students stated they had received training, compared to 49.5% who gave a negative answer. Workshops (74%) and courses (68.6%) in the centre, attendance to seminars (67.5%), tutoring training (67.5%) and participation in sessions (65.6%) were the most used training options.

Focusing on the evaluation of mediation (items 9-18), overall, students agreed with questions about mediation and its usefulness in the school context with a score of 2.83 on average for all items. *Table 2* shows the mean score for each of the items. The standard deviation underlines the low variability of the distributions from the measures obtained, since practically all data follow the same tendency which indicates the sample is homogeneous. However, items 13 and 15 (standard deviation 1.168 and 1.420 respectively) show a greater variability and, thus, these distributions qualify as heterogeneous.

Table 2. – *Overall evaluation of mediation by participating students.*

Item	Mean	SD
9. Mediation is used by students in my school to resolve conflicts.	3.25	.785
10. I believe mediation has served to reduce the number of sanctions in my school.	2.73	.773
11. Mediation has increased respect among peers.	2.65	.784
12. Mediation has encouraged dialogue between peers.	2.71	.797
13. Mediation has improved relations between students and teachers.	2.57	1.168
14. Mediation has increased student participation in conflict resolution at school.	2.81	.785
15. Mediation has made it possible to resolve small conflicts that would have eventually become more serious issues.	3.10	1.420
16. Since mediation started to be used in my school, teachers can better teach their subjects.	2.37	.796
17. I believe mediation has improved living together in the educational centre.	2.83	.752
18. Conflicts can be resolved through mediation.	3.31	.751

As seen in *Figure 1*, the use of mediation as a resource to resolve conflicts (item 9) received a high score (X = 3.25). Similarly, item 15, mediation as a tool for resolving small conflicts that could become more serious issues, received a high mean score of 3.10. Finally, item 18 received a high score of 3.31, showing that most of the students consider mediation as a method for conflict resolution.
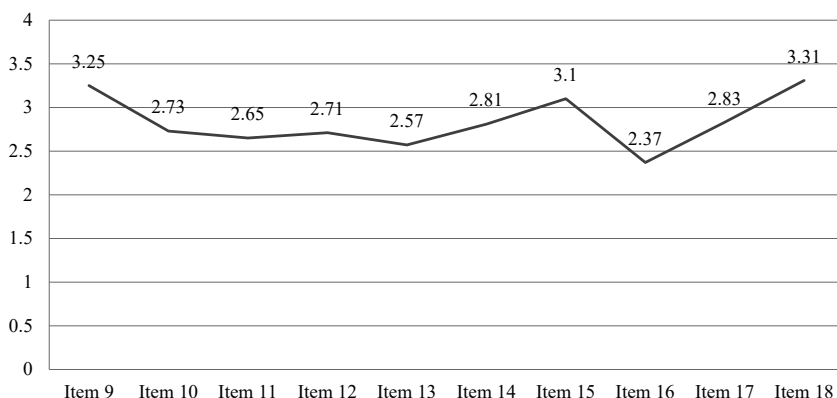
Figure 1. – Overall evaluation of mediation by the participating students.

The items with lower but positive ratings were item 11 (X = 2.65), mediation being responsible for increasing respect between peers, and item 13 (X = 2.57), mediation improving relations between students and teachers.

A detailed analysis of the results from these 10 items allows drawing some comparisons according to gender. As shown in *Table 3*, only items 9 (mediation is used by the students of my school to resolve conflicts) and 11 (mediation has increased the respect between peers) show significant differences. In both cases, girls agreed more with the statements. However, both groups have an average score above 3 for the first item and below 3 for the second.

Table 3. – Overall evaluation of mediation according to gender.

Item	Average boys	Average girls	Sig. ANOVA
Item 9	3.12	3.34	.000**
Item 10	2.68	2.76	.075
Item 11	2.59	2.69	.029*
Item 12	2.66	2.75	.078
Item 13	2.57	2.63	.391
Item 14	2.77	2.85	.091
Item 15	3.08	3.18	.224
Item 16	2.38	2.36	.667
Item 17	2.79	2.86	.118
Item 18	3.27	3.35	.070

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

If we compare students according to their academic year (see *Tab. 4*), there are significant differences in items 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16 and 17. These differences are generally between first-year ESO students and second-year Bachillerato students, with the former agreeing more than the latter with each of the statements of these items, apart from item 10.

Table 4. – *Overall evaluation of mediation according to academic year.*

ITEM	AVERAGE ESO 1st year	AVERAGE ESO 2nd year	AVERAGE ESO 3rd year	AVERAGE ESO 4th year	AVERAGE BACH 1st year	AVERAGE BACH 2nd year	SIG. ANOVA
Item 9	3.41	3.38	3.21	3.12	2.98	2.94	.000**
Item 10	2.88	2.79	2.65	2.60	2.91	2.63	.000**
Item 11	2.81	2.67	2.55	2.64	2.65	2.48	.004**
Item 12	2.86	2.74	2.67	2.63	2.68	2.61	.044*
Item 13	2.63	2.63	2.58	2.57	2.57	2.56	.983
Item 14	2.86	2.88	2.81	2.74	2.76	2.71	.306
Item 15	3.38	3.20	3.17	2.91	2.93	2.94	.009**
Item 16	2.50	2.45	2.32	2.29	2.26	2.21	.012*
Item 17	2.97	2.86	2.80	2.76	2.77	2.65	.020*
Item 18	3.42	3.32	3.29	3.30	3.15	3.33	.194
GLOBAL AVERAGE	2.97	2.90	2.80	2.76	2.76	2.70	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

At the end of this block, students were asked whether they would recommend mediation (item 19). 62.4% would not recommend it while 37.6% would. 4.6% of the sample did not respond to this question. According to sex, 39% of the boys would recommend mediation compared to 33.2% of the girls.

The students who attended the mediation service represent 12.8% of the total sample (153 students of which 77 are girls and 76 are boys). They were mostly second- and third-year ESO students (42 in both cases), followed by first- and fourth-year ESO students (33 and 27 respectively). Bachillerato students attended mediation the least, only five first-year and four second-year students. Regarding frequency attending mediation, 50.3% of the sample attended once, 25.2% twice, and 7.7% three and four times.

As for the causes of conflict (see *Fig. 2*), rumours are the main cause (59.20%), followed by physical fights (37.70%) and insults (34%). Minor causes are cultural (13.30%) and emotional (18.60%) reasons.
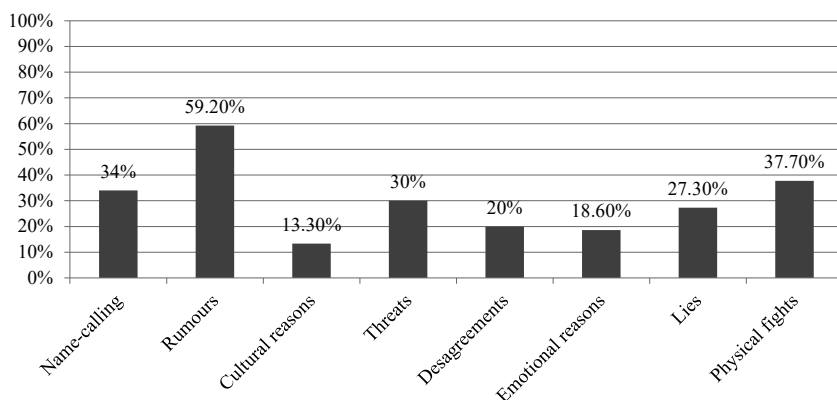
Figure 2. – List of causes that lead to conflict.

Regarding the students reasons for attending mediation, we highlight those responses that were most frequently selected. 55.4% of the students selected the option «I attended mediation because I believe problems must be talked about». 51.9% needed to resolve a problem and 47.7% wanted to prevent their parents from becoming aware of a problem they had had. In contrast, only 25% selected the option «I attended mediation because I felt that I was responsible for an uncomfortable situation for me».

The results for item 23 (who were the mediators?) show that a single student as a mediator was the most frequently used option (53.3%), followed by a teacher and a student together (48.5%) and the counsellor of the centre (40%). The option of a single teacher was the least common among students (20.8%).

Table 5. – Evaluation of mediation by students who attended mediation sessions.

Item	Mean	SD
24. Mediation prevented me from being punished.	2.59	.985
25. Mediation allowed me to keep a problem secret.	2.38	1.108
26. Mediation helped me out of a problem.	2.74	1.070
27. Mediation has allowed me to relate better.	3.00	.918
28. When I participated in mediation, I understood that I had to repair the damage caused.	2.79	.957
29. I am satisfied after participating in the mediation process.	2.85	.868
30. I have learned to better listen to others because of mediation.	3.01	1.863

31. Mediation has helped me better understand others' perspectives.	3.02	.898
32. Mediation has helped me express my feelings.	2.71	.944
33. Mediation has made it easier for me to get to know others in a better way.	2.90	.885
34. Mediation has allowed me to know myself better.	2.76	.913
35. Mediation has helped me communicate with others in a better way.	2.78	.895
36. Thanks to mediation I reflect on the different ways a conflict can be resolved.	2.90	.925
37. Mediation has improved my creativity.	2.63	.983
38. Mediation has helped me be more respectful of others.	2.88	.939
39. After having this experience, I would recommend mediation to a friend.	3.06	.956
40. If I had a problem with someone again and did not find a solution, I would use mediation again.	3.14	.902
41. The skills I have learned by participating in mediation can be applied to other situations in my life (family, friends …).	3.01	.947
42. I would like to see more mediation in society.	3.07	.908

Finally, the evaluation of mediation in this block (items 24-42) was very positive, as no item was evaluated below 2 points (out of 4). Students who used the mediation service considered it to be a good tool to address conflicts in the educational centre, with an overall average of 2.85. Standard deviation shows the sample's low variability with items data ranging from 0.8 to 1.1, except for item 30 (1.863), which reveals a higher dispersion and heterogeneity (see *Tab. 5*).

Figure 3 shows that the best-rated item was 40 (if I had a problem with someone again and did not see a solution, I would go back to mediation), with a mean score of 3.14 (on a scale of 1 to 4). This item was followed by items 42, regarding the need to use mediation in society (X = 3.07), and 39, recommending mediation to a friend (X = 3.06). Item 25 (mediation allowed me to keep a problem secret) with a score of 2.38 and item 37 (mediation has improved my creativity) with a score of 2.63 had the lowest, though still positive, scores.

According to gender, there are no relevant differences among the students who used mediation. There are, however, significant differences regarding the academic year (see *Tab. 6*). In general, students from lower grades agreed more with each of the statements.

Overall, students who attended mediation valued the service positively as an interesting alternative to confront, manage and resolve conflicts in their schools. Besides, they considered it transferable to society at large.
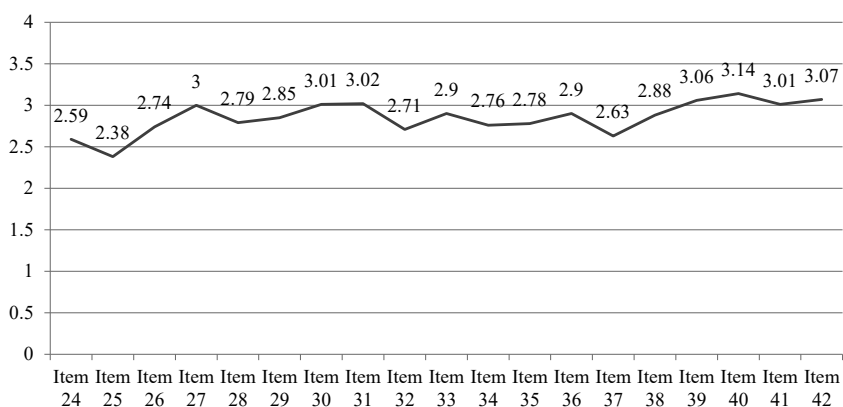
Figure 3. – Evaluation of mediation by the students who came to mediation sessions.

Table 6. – Evaluation of mediation by students who attended mediation sessions according to academic year.

Item	Average ESO 1st year	Average ESO 2nd year	Average ESO 3rd year	Average ESO 4th year	Average BACH 1st year	Average BACH 2nd year	Sig. ANOVA
				Course			
Item 24	2.59	2.73	2.55	2.61	1.80	2.50	.547
Item 25	2.59	2.49	2.24	2.13	2.00	3.00	.423
Item 26	3.10	2.92	2.47	2.35	2.40	3.50	.027*
Item 27	3.34	3.03	3.05	2.61	1.75	3.25	.005**
Item 28	3.07	2.72	2.79	2.74	2.00	2.50	.263
Item 29	3.10	2.95	2.71	2.65	2.00	3.50	.030*
Item 30	3.11	3.27	2.87	3.65	2.60	3.00	.682
Item 31	3.07	3.08	2.95	3.09	2.40	3.25	.664
Item 32	2.83	2.84	2.61	2.74	2.00	2.25	.373
Item 33	3.14	2.95	2.82	2.78	2.20	3.25	.245
Item 34	2.97	2.84	2.63	2.83	2.20	2.25	.335
Item 35	3.07	2.97	2.71	2.48	1.60	2.75	.005**
Item 36	2.96	3.11	2.87	2.70	2.20	2.75	.294
Item 37	2.86	2.81	2.37	2.65	1.80	2.75	.103
Item 38	3.24	3.14	2.76	2.57	1.20	3.00	.000**
Item 39	3.11	3.39	2.79	2.96	2.60	3.50	.083
Item 40	3.21	3.36	2.89	3.09	3.40	3.00	.334
Item 41	3.00	3.24	2.87	3.00	2.20	3.25	.219
Item 42	2.93	3.22	3.05	2.96	3.60	2.75	.518

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The first objective of this research was to learn about the perceptions of secondary students about mediation. Their opinion was generally favourable.

When examining the part of the questionnaire addressed to all students (users and non-users of mediation), the majority strongly agreed with the usefulness of mediation in the school context because it serves to resolve conflicts. As indicated by Villanueva, Usó, and Adrián (2013), mediation is a strategy that makes the management of conflicts possible and, therefore, can prevent violent situations. This idea is also shared by Ibarrola-García and Iriarte (2013), based on the perceptions of teachers as mediators. From this perspective, mediation will have positive effects in the school climate, as Hansberry and Hansberry (2018) claim when they display the key points to the development of peer mediation programmes.

However, the score was lower when participants were asked whether they would recommend mediation to other students. Most likely, many of the students had not participated in mediation, so that, we guess this would increase if there were more information about mediation in the educational centres. In consonance with the results, only 34.5% of students knew about this service. According to García-Longoria (2002), it is critical that students are informed of the mediation service at their school so they can use it whenever they need it. Therefore, there is room for improvement on the dissemination of the mediation service among students. This aspect has been highlighted in other studies that have evaluated mediation experiences (Pulido *et al.*, 2014).

Strikingly, the data show that the amount of mediation training is also very low in relation to the total of responses obtained (50.5%). It makes sense given that the most widespread model of mediation in secondary education only trains the student-mediator and, thus, a small group of students. However, if our ultimate goal is to contribute to a culture of mediation that creates a better atmosphere of living together, mediation training should be provided to all students and even to the entire educational community. As Boqué states (2018, p. 78), the mediation team must be highly qualified, but if the rest of the educational community does not know about basic aspects of mediation, the likelihood of a limited use increases.

Our second objective was to seek strengths and weaknesses in mediation. One of the key strengths is how mediation contributes to conflict resolution, seen as an effective tool by the participants. Students think that the solutions agreed during mediation were appropriate, in line with the results obtained in the research conducted by Sezen and Bedel (2015). Notwithstanding, the key question is not the solutions, but the learning

of conflict management skills, which are usually promoted within the students by mediation programmes, as shown by Turk's meta-analysis (2018). On the other hand, its weaknesses are a lack of information and of training regarding the mediation service. Therefore, we propose to circulate more information about the services and to increase training actions in order for mediation to work more successfully.

And yet, the benefits from the students' perspective are evident in this study. So far, the effectiveness of mediation has become visible within the realm of interpersonal relationships. The first thing unresolved conflicts damage is communication between those in dispute and, therefore, their relationships. The school context is an ideal setting for young people to forge positive friendships and social relationships with their peers. In order to do this, however, they need a very important skill: knowing how to live together with a diversity of mindsets and different ways of feeling, being and doing. In this sense, the main objectives of mediation are to redress damage and to reconcile or restore ties between the parties. Therefore, according to the results obtained in this study, mediation seems to achieve this latter objective, in line with related research, such as that conducted by Pulido, Martín-Seoane, Calderón-López, and Lucas-Molina (2015).

Another positive finding is that student-teacher relationships improve according to the participants, despite receiving lower scores (item 13). Nonetheless, here we find a greater heterogeneity among scores, as shown by standard deviation. In this respect, item 15, «mediation has made it possible to resolve small conflicts that would have eventually become more serious issues», also shows a higher dispersion in the participants' answers.

Focusing on those attending mediation, only 12.8% used mediation services at their schools. This is striking as conflicts are frequent. Perhaps the lack of awareness around this service abovementioned has some influence. It is important to highlight that only 7.7% of the students attended mediation more than twice.

Interestingly, a high percentage of the students who attended mediation would recommend it to other students. These results are consistent with those obtained in other studies (Cowie & Wallace, 2000; Torrego & Galán, 2008; Grande, 2010; Moral & Pérez, 2010; Nothhafft, 2012; Ibarrola-García & Iriarte, 2014; García-Raga, Bo, & Boqué, 2017).

When examining the sources of conflict that led to the use of mediation, forms of verbal (insults and rumours) and physical aggression predominate. Sentimental disagreements and disputes, which are common during adolescence, rank second, followed to a much lesser extent by conflicts based on cultural differences. These data clearly point to direct violence, in its various manifestations, as the main cause of conflict between adoles-

cents. It is not surprising that mediation is effective in such situations, as it works on communication between the opposing parties by using, for example, empathy, active listening, dialogue and consensus. There are studies that show that school mediation reduces aggressiveness (Jones, 2001) and verbal violence (Farell, Myer, & White, 2001).

Among the reasons for attending mediation, more than half of the students used this service because they either believed the problems should be discussed or needed to resolve a problem. However, a relatively high percentage did not want their parents to know they had had a problem. Therefore, we can detect reactive, active and proactive reasons. In the first case, students' reasons ranged from being afraid that it would affect them badly if adults intervened, to wanting to avoid negative consequences within their own peer group, being afraid that things would worsen, feeling depressed or even wanting to vent. Other students stated pragmatic reasons, such as the need to resolve the problem or, perhaps, because a teacher sent them to mediation or the mediators insisted on it. More proactive attitudes involved the need for justice, the conviction that things are solved by talking, the need to reach an agreement or the fact of caring for the other person. In this group, we can find people who understand that conflicts are a natural part of life and therefore they need to have resources to manage these conflicts autonomously and constructively. Finally, a very small group of students admitted having attended mediation to skip class.

Some of the strengths are that students would return to mediation if they had an interpersonal problem again, they consider it beneficial to friendship and the great majority would recommend it to a friend. However, even though word-of-mouth diffusion is effective, its scope is certainly limited. Therefore, studies such as the present paper should contribute to a better understanding of mediation. The data provided here favourably support this practice in school.

Regarding the differences observed according to gender, mediation was evaluated more positively by girls, although the scores were less significant when assessing the responses of the students attending mediation. A study by Naylor and Cowie (1999) addressed this factor and reflected on the possibility that these differences were present as a result of the roles transmitted by families and of the context with regard to women and men, associating helpful behaviours with the feminine role. Additionally, Moral and Pérez (2010) suggest in their research that opinions about mediation provided by girls tend to be more favourable than those provided by boys.

As for the differences by academic year, evaluations were, in general, more positive in the lower grades of secondary education as the sample of students attending mediation from these years was higher.

In summary, students consider school mediation advantageous and an opportunity that enables them to manage their own conflicts. However, those who came to resolve their conflicts highlight the major benefits. This situation is understandable because the students who experience first-person school mediation are more capable to detect its educational potential.

Still, despite the evaluations positive results, mediation still must unleash its full potential. Some authors, such as Ballard, Holtzworth-Munroe, Applegate, and D'Onofrio (2011), claim that school mediation does not escape the underutilization that mediation suffers in other areas.

At present, mediation is mainly applied to resolve conflicts between students. It is not used for issues related to structural conflicts or to traditions rooted in the school culture, both of which are a hidden source of conflict. In this sense, we believe that the trajectory and the role of school mediation have only begun. We would like to conclude by expressing our commitment to continue extending the culture of mediation in schools beyond the resolution of conflicts between people and in certain circumstances and, thus, we reiterate the need to perform training actions aimed at the entire educational community. Additionally, we would like to stress that this is an ongoing research. For any subsequent analysis we would like to extend this sample, contemplate other data-collection instruments combined with the questionnaire and take into consideration the opinions of other stakeholders from the educational community so that we can contrast them with the students' opinions and conduct a more comprehensive study.

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Riassunto

I professionisti dell'educazione e i responsabili delle politiche devono aggiornare le loro strategie per affrontare e prevenire la violenza nelle scuole. La mediazione si è rivelata uno strumento utile per la costruzione della pace in diversi paesi promuovendo lo sviluppo degli individui, le loro relazioni e il clima scolastico. Tuttavia, poche ricerche hanno valutato le pratiche di mediazione. Questo studio mira a valutare la mediazione prendendo in considerazione la percezione degli studenti delle scuole secondarie in Spagna, al fine di evidenziare punti di forza e di debolezza dei programmi di mediazione scolastica. Lo scopo specifico è quello di imparare dalla valutazione di coloro che hanno vissuto i processi di mediazione e scoprire se esistono differenze significative per quanto riguarda il genere e l'anno scolastico. Per fare ciò, abbiamo condotto una indagine e sono stati raccolti dati intervistando 1.198 studenti mediante un questionario specifico. Uno studio descrittivo-inferenziale mostra l'alto livello di accordo tra gli studenti che valutano positivamente la mediazione per la risoluzione dei conflitti. È importante offrire maggiori informazioni sui servizi di mediazione forniti dai centri educativi, formare l'intera comunità educativa e ampliare il ruolo svolto dalla mediazione.