

Conflicts and Climate of Coexistence from the Perspective of Families of Children in Secondary Education Centres

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Abstract: This article addresses the perception held by families with respect to the climate of coexistence and conflicts in seven public (state) and private schools in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Our objective was to analyse the knowledge and assessment of families about an event, the climate of coexistence and conflict, which *a priori*, has held a prominent position in both media and research in the last two decades, which has sometimes appeared to create an image of invasive over-preoccupation in the education system. This study focuses on families with children in the second cycle of secondary education, post-compulsory (baccalaureate) for three years. The effective sample was 375 fathers and mothers, using a questionnaire as the evaluation instrument. Our results open up important questions regarding this phenomenon, which deserves reflection, because while on the one hand there is a significantly higher percentage of parents who acknowledge having witnessed violence or conflicts among students (and even among teachers) they do not appear to assign importance to this phenomenon, since there is a significant proportion of parents who consider that the general climate of coexistence is good and positive for the education of their children.

Key words: school conflict, co-existence, school & family, bullying

1. Introduction

The organizational climate of the school does not correspond to a homogeneous reality. That is to say, the meanings that are built around the school centre are generally concerned with school micro-spaces such as the classroom, relations between teachers, and meetings with parents. From this perspective, microclimates frequently coexist in a school (Figure 1), which corresponds to the predominant perceptions that arise in the interaction between members of the school community with a given event or situation.

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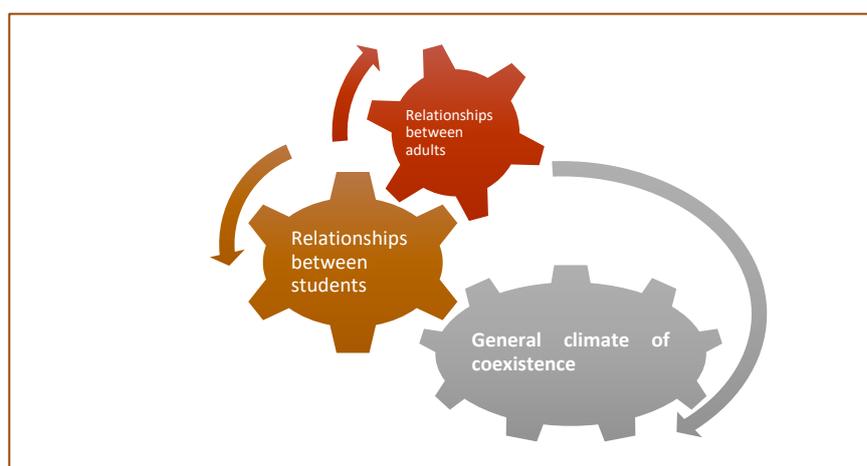


Figure 1 The Organizational Climate of an Educational Centre (Adapted From Franco Pombo, 2016)

Thus, the presence of microclimates is recognized, and these are consistent within the school's organizational climate. The nature of this climate is directly related to the perceptual world, which is nuanced by the subjectivity of each one of the members of the educational organization. Moreover, it should be understood as a multidimensional construct unified by the structure, size, flows, and modes of communication; leadership styles; motivation systems; reward and innovation; and the perceptive vision of these elements that is held by the individuals involved.

2. State of the Issue

There are numerous studies that in one way or another explore the relationships between school climate and family, focusing on a variety of social and geographical contexts, among the most recent of which we can cite Glass, Kohli, Surkan, Remy, & Perrin (2018); Kim (2018); Moratto Vásquez, Cárdenas Zuluaga, & Berbesí Fernández (2017); Muniz (2017); Nkuba, Hermenau, & Hecker (2018); Ozer, Lavi, Douglas, & Wolf (2017); and Schroeder, Morris, & Flack (2017). With the exception of the latter, all of these studies address the very diverse relationships between family and factors such as school climate and bullying. However, in general they do not address the more fundamental question of how the family perceives the school climate, and, in particular, if the family has a similar awareness of something that we often take as an a priori assumption, that is, the existence of a climate of hostile coexistence and/or violence.

Based on these considerations, the particular approach adopted in this study is to analyse the perceptions of one of the sectors of the educational community, that is, the family. To achieve this, we have sought — given the deprived sociocultural context in which the study is developed — to capture this perception by using a minimum number of direct questions that are as understandable and as unambiguous as possible. We wanted to be sensitive to the problems and requirements that Arribas (2004) has already described in a very didactic way in order to avoid the difficulties that have been demonstrated in many questionnaires.

To this end, we focused on three questions that are very direct and easy to understand by our target population, i.e., families from culturally and economically deprived social environments:

- Have you witnessed conflicts, aggressions, or fights between students in your child's school?
- What is your overall assessment of the climate of coexistence in your child's school?

3. Methodological Notes

3.1 Objectives

- To analyse the perception of families about the conflicts and climate in their children’s schools
- To study the relationship between the type of centre and the socioeconomic level of the families.

3.2 Population & Sample

- Population: 14.457 fathers/mothers
- The effective sample, having taken into account the cases containing certain types of errors in the answers, was 375 fathers/mothers of children attending state (public) and private schools (Table 1) across 3 socioeconomic levels (Table 2).

Table 1 Families by Type of School

	Frequency	Percentage
STATE (public)	333	88.8
PRIVATE	42	11.2
Total	375	100.0

Table 2 Families by Socioeconomic Level

	Frequency	Percentage
LSEL: Low socioeconomic level	145	38.7
LASEL: Low-average socioeconomic level	188	50.1
ASEL: Average socioeconomic level	42	11.2
Total	375	100.0

3.3 Instruments

a) For the dependent variable, i.e., perception of climate/conflict, we used items 36, 37, and 50 (Figure 2) of the School Climate for Family Questionnaire (original name in Spanish: Cuestionario de clima escolar para familia) employed by Franco Pombo (2016), adapted from the Battery of instruments for assessing school climate in primary schools (original name in Spanish: Batería de instrumentos para la evaluación del clima escolar en escuelas primarias) used by Gutiérrez Marfileño (2010), with a Likert-type response scale ranging from:

3 = STRONGLY AGREE; 2 = AGREE; 1 = DISAGREE; 0 = STRONGLY DISAGREE

In this educational institution	3	2	1	0
36. During the years I have spent at my school I have observed physical and verbal aggressions, and even threats, among students.				
37. During the years I have spent at my school I have observed physical and verbal aggressions, and even threats, among adults who work in the educational institution.				
50. In general I think that this educational institution has a good climate in which my children can study and learn without problems.				

Figure 2 Selection of items analysed (Taken from Franco Pombo, 2016)

b) The socioeconomic level of families (SEL) was established through a process of self-definition guided by the proposal set out by components of the social stratification survey, applied by the Institute of Statistics and Census of Ecuador (2011) in a sample of 9,744 homes. This corresponded to 812 census sectors distributed in the domains of Quito, Guayaquil, Cuenca, Machala, and Ambato, which allowed for characterizing the SEL of

Ecuadorians, and is used as a basis for research studies in the social field in Ecuador.

4. Results

The conditions of normality and homoscedasticity were not met, and so we proposed the use of a nonparametric analysis.

4.1 Conflict Perception and Climate Assessment

Table 3 There are Physical and Verbal Aggressions, and Even Threats, among Students

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	60	16,0
Disagree	89	23,7
Agree	121	32,3
Strongly Agree	105	28,0
Total	375	100,0

Table 4 There are Physical and Verbal Aggressions, and Even Threats, among Adults

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	77	20,5
Disagree	96	25,6
Agree	93	24,8
Strongly Agree	109	29,1
Total	375	100,0

Table 5 The Educational Institution Has a Good Climate

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	15	4,0
Disagree	32	8,5
Agree	103	27,5
Strongly Agree	225	60,0
Total	375	100,0

It is observed that although the % of fathers/mothers who have seen aggression among students (Table 3) and adults (Table 4) is high, this does not appear to influence the perception of the general climate of coexistence (Table 5). This became statistically significant when we dichotomized the three variables (Tables 6-7):

Table 6 Descriptive Variables Dichotomized

	N	Media	Standard Deviation
V36 DICOTOMIC: aggression between students	375	1,60	.490
V37 DICOTOMIC: aggression between adults	375	1,54	.499
V50 DICOTOMIC: general perception of the climate of coexistence	375	1,87	.332

Table 7 Binomial Test

		Category	N	Prop. Observed	Prop. Tested	Exact significance (bilateral)
V36 DICOTOMIC: Aggression between students	Group 1	Few agresions between students	149	.40	.50	.000**
	Group 2	Frequent aggressions between students	226	.60		
	Total		375	1.00		
V37 DICOTOMIC: Aggression between adults	Group 1	Few aggressions between adults	173	.46	.50	.148
	Group 2	Frequent agresions between adults	202	.54		
	Total		375	1,00		
V50 DICOTOMIC: General perception of the climate of coexistence	Group 1	Good climate	328	.87	.50	.000**
	Group 2	Negative climate	47	.13		
	Total		375	1.00		

4.2 Relationship with Type of Centre: Public/Private

Table 8 Mann-Whitney test

	Type of school	N	Average range	Sum of ranges
V36: Aggression between students	Public	333	190,52	63444.50
	Private	42	167.99	7055.50
	Total	375		
V37: Aggression between adults	Public	333	190,72	63509,50
	Private	42	166,44	6990,50
	Total	375		
V50: General perception of the climate of coexistence	Public	333	185,44	61750,00
	Private	42	208,33	8750,00
	Total	375		

Table 9 Significance of Mann-Whitney U-test

	V36	V37	V50
Mann-Whitney U	6152,500	6087,500	6139,000
Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)	.187	.157	.140

a. Group Variable: type of school

For responses to any of the three interrogative indicators we did not detect any relationship with the type of centre, either public or private (Tables 8-9).

4.3 Socioeconomic Status

We only found a significant relationship between socioeconomic level and the perception of conflicts between adults in the sense that families of a lower socioeconomic level reported to having witnessed a greater number of conflicts between adults in their children's schools (Tables 10-11).

Table 10 Kruskal-Wallis Test

	Socioeconomic level	N	Average range
V36: Aggression among students	LSEL	145	196,69
	LASEL	188	185,77
	ASEL	42	167,99
	Total	375	
V37: Aggression among adults	LSEL	145	206,56
	LASEL	188	178,51
	ASEL	42	166,44
	Total	375	
V50: General perception of the climate of coexistence	LSEL	145	196,72
	LASEL	188	176,73
	ASEL	42	208,33
	Total	375	

Table 11 Kruskal-Wallis Test Statistics^{a,b}

	V36	V37	V50
Chi-squared	2,635	7,866	5,831
G1	2	2	2
Sig. asymptotic	.268	.020**	.054

a. Kruskal Wallis test

b. Group Variable: Socioeconomic level

4.4 Relationships between Perceptions of Aggression/Conflict and Climate of Coexistence

Although in strict sense the criteria for a linear regression analysis were not met, thus precluding the need for this analysis, we were able to confirm the existence of a general trend in which the perception of aggressions and conflicts between students and adults are not variables that determine the general perception of the climate of coexistence (Tables 12-13).

Table 12 Correlations

		V36	V37	V50
V36: Aggression between students	Pearson's correlation	1	.507**	.051
	Sig. (bilateral)		.000	.322
V37: Aggression between adults	Pearson's correlation	.507	1	.022
	Sig. (bilateral)	.000		.676
V50: General perception of the climate of coexistence	Pearson's correlation	.051	.022	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	.322	.676	
	N	375	375	375

** . Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

Table 13 Simple Lineal Regression

Predictor variable	Perception of the climate of coexistence (V50)					
	F	R ²	B	Error type.	β	ρ
Aggression between students (V36)	.985	.003	.04	.04	.051	.322
Aggression between adults (V37)	.175	.000	.016	.038	.022	.676

5. Discussion & Conclusions

A number of studies have explored the issue of coexistence in schools, including violence and bullying, with many of these dedicated to studying the interaction between certain parental variables and the phenomenon of aggression itself. However, relatively few basic studies have been found that analyse whether families perceive this problem (without the assumption that they have this perception), whilst asking them directly about their perception of the existence of the phenomenon and about their perception of the general climate of coexistence in the centre.

We have found how our families significantly perceive the existence of aggressions and conflicts among students, and to a lesser extent among adults. In the latter case — in spite of the perception of such conflicts failing to reach values of statistical significance — this is still noteworthy from both an experiential and professional point of view in the context of teaching. It is very significant that more than half of the parents recognize the existence of aggressions, arguments, or conflicts among the adults who work in the educational institution.

There is no significant correlation between the frequency of conflicts and the assessment of the climate of coexistence in the centre, although there is a strong correlation between the perception of conflict between students and the perception of conflict between adults.

As a conclusion we emphasize the need to reflect on the fact that although 83.5% of the parents surveyed perceived the existence of aggressions and conflicts between members of the educative community, this does not seem to influence the general perception of the climate of coexistence, which they significantly consider to be good / very good. This is difficult to interpret, although we could speculate that the conflict is internalized as something not so serious in spite of its frequency among both students and adults working at the centre, which is compatible with the results of Schroeder, Morris, & Flack (2017) linking the perception of bullying to one's own parental personality.

Or, perhaps more simply we could suggest that, as a hypothesis for scrutiny in future work, although certain phenomena are perceived to occur by parents, they do not, in general, come to be regarded as elements that could have a negative impact on the climate of coexistence. We did not find any significant differences in these perceptions depending on the type of centre (public/private), which runs counter to what we might have expected to occur on the basis of empirical intuition.

A relationship has been found between the perception of conflict between adults and the socioeconomic level of families, in so far as the fact that conflict is perceived most by those families of low socioeconomic status, who may be more involved in phenomena of that nature.

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