Intercultural and Interreligious Competences of Youth: A Case Study in a Secondary School in Barcelona

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Abstract: The growing diversity of today's societies has generated increasing interest across different subject areas that aim to help make these societies fairer and more inclusive. The constant increase in migrations and the broadening of the concept of diversity and its intersections, together with social challenges and the acceptance of this diversity, mean this issue needs to be dealt with, especially in the educational sphere. This research uses a case study to assess the perception and experience of cultural and religious diversity among young people at a state secondary school in the city of Barcelona, Spain. The case is analyzed through a mixed method, using quantitative data obtained through the exploitation of two scales, and qualitative information gained from a reflective pedagogical activity. The results show that students display attitudes of respect and acceptance of cultural and religious diversity while recognizing discriminatory behavior in the society in which they live. A salient point was that a more positive perception of interculturality and interreligiosity was observed in students from non-Spanish family backgrounds than among those born in the country.

Keywords: intercultural competence; interreligious competence; interculturality; interreligiosity

1. Introduction

The diverse, globalized world in which we live and coexist requires that everybody, especially the younger generations, develop cognitive, emotional, and social skills to allow intercultural and interreligious dialogue. The plurality that characterizes today's societies poses major challenges in recognizing increasing diversity with an ever-greater presence.

While the education system is not the only place where this cultural and religious diversity is manifested, it is fair to say that school is a particularly suitable place to deal with it. In fact, it is one of the most meaningful places where the largest number of multiple interactions between young people take place (De Vallescar 2011).

There are several reasons why this issue is important and why it needs to be dealt with. One of them lies in the fact that the growing diversity of today's societies has generated increasing interest across different subject areas in exploring cultural and religious diversity from multicultural and intercultural perspectives. The constant increase in migration and the expansion of the concept of diversity to now include intersectional factors of a socio-cultural, religious, gender, age, ability, and health nature, together with the social and institutional challenges involved in accepting it, have accentuated the pressing need to deal with this issue (Burgués et al. 2016).

In this respect, in 2015, the United Nations (UN 2015) put forward a common plan of action called Agenda 2030. This proposes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) aimed at dealing with some of the most pressing challenges facing today's world. The aim of Agenda 2030 is to deal with a wide range of global issues, from eradicating poverty to protecting the environment and fostering fairer, more inclusive societies able to improve the lives of all their members.

These goals, which as the UN points out, must be approached across the board, address the educational sphere directly. For this reason, we highlight here those that are related closely and unavoidably to our topic.

- Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG 4).
- Reduce inequalities among vulnerable populations, paying special attention to children, migrants, refugees, the elderly, and disabled people (SDG 10).
- Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development (SDG 16).

The purpose of this paper is to inquire into young people's appreciation of cultural and religious differences and how they experience this diversity in their everyday lives. To achieve this, we concentrated on a state school located in a neighborhood of the city of Barcelona with a long tradition of receiving migration.

Without a doubt, the expression of cultural and religious diversity is intricately linked to migratory processes; in fact, this is one of the most relevant and widely studied factors. Migration has always existed because of people moving about for reasons of a social, economic, political, employment, or environmental nature, among others. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (International Organization for Migration 2022), the number of people changing their place of residence is constantly increasing, from 172 million in the year 2000 to 281 million in 2022, currently accounting for 3.6% of the global population (2022).

In Spain, cultural diversity has emerged as a distinctive feature of society in recent decades. However, it is important to point out that Spanish society has been multicultural throughout its history, due to the coexistence of groups with different languages, cultural practices, and religious beliefs (Aguilar Idáñez and Buraschi 2023).

1.1. Intercultural Focus in Education

Intercultural education has been an ongoing issue in the educational sphere, especially in terms of thought and practice in education. The idea of interculturality has referred to a certain ideal associated with educational reform movements or improving education. It has also been linked to mutual exchange and enrichment or to cooperation between groups and individuals (Aguado and Mata 2017; Aguado and Sleeter 2021). This constant presence has often made it a confused term, interchangeable with others such as multiculturalism, transculturalism, or pluriculturalism.

In this respect, the concept of intercultural education has its origins in the last century in Europe and North America, with the recognition of the need to cope with ethnic and cultural diversity in the education system. Thus, in the Anglo-Saxon world, the most widely used term is multiculturalism, while in Spain and Latin America, the term interculturality prevails.

In Spain, this concept has changed significantly over time, evolving from an interpretation aimed initially at support for minorities towards a broader focus that takes on board the principles of inclusive, public education. The founding pillars of this concept are striving for social justice, fostering equality, and redefining diversity, which is no longer seen just as a shortcoming or an exception, but as an intrinsic, constant feature of our societies. Thus, intercultural education sets out to foster inclusive, fair coexistence within a framework of legal equality. Multiculturalism, meanwhile, refers to a more descriptive view of perceived differences.

Therefore, for some authors, intercultural education is a pedagogical approach rather than a model to reach or a way of describing programs, teachers, schools, or resources. A framework for interpreting educational realities that allows a deeper understanding of what is thought, said, and done about cultural diversity (Aguado and Mata 2017; Mata et al. 2021; Santos Rego 2010) is required.

The development of theory and practical reflection on interculturality has gone in step with migratory flows, which in Spain appear on a large scale, though with fluctuations,

from the year 2000 onwards (Ceriani Cernadas 2021). In any case, while migration is a crucial factor, the interest it arouses cannot be reduced solely to this fact.

A review of the bibliography shows that intercultural education was conceptualized as a dialogue-based pedagogy to introduce students to knowledge, facts, and positive views of religious pluralism in civil society (Santos Rego 2017). Considerable efforts have also been made to structure the contributions from different disciplines and theoretical currents that deal with diversity with proposals for intervention and educational innovation Other significant contributions concern education for public participation and teacher training (Mata and Ballesteros 2012; Melero et al. 2021). Also noteworthy is the critical approach to racism, xenophobia, and discourses of hate (Quirós et al. 2021; Osuna and Olmo 2019). The intercultural focus discussed here could be described as:

> "(. . .) socio-cultural processes aimed at educating free, autonomous people, capable of critical thought and active participation in society. It promotes educational practices aimed at each member of society, instead of being aimed specifically at isolated groups defined a priori according to social categories. It proposes a model for analysis and action that affects all dimensions of educational processes. (. . .) Its ultimate goal is social justice and equality" (Aguado and Mata 2017, p. 22)

This context highlights the importance of processes and results and the relational aspect of educational experiences. Hence, the importance of dealing with abilities, competences, or factors that make these possible in actual practice.

1.2. Intercultural and Interreligious Competence

There are many definitions and ways of describing intercultural competence, depending on language and culture (Deardorff 2020; Spitzberg and Changnon 2009). The literature shows that some of these places stress on various aspects like the stages in the development of intercultural competence, the role played by language, the place of identity, and the part played in these by motivation and full attention (Bennett 1986; Ting-Toomey 2010).

In this respect, Deardorff (2020) understands that "intercultural competence refers to the skills, attitudes, and behaviors needed to improve interactions across difference, whether within a society (differences due to age, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, political affiliation, ethnicity, and so on) or across borders . . ." (p. 7).

Therefore, intercultural competence means abilities, knowledge, or training to allow proper behavior in a particular context (Leeds-Hurwitz 2013). According to this approach, this competence has cognitive (knowledge), attitudinal (doing) and affective (being) components. Knowledge means getting to know other cultures, which is the first learning to develop intercultural competence; learning to do is shown in interaction with people in other cultures, and finally, learning to be is based on thinking about the social being that every individual is as part of the world. Therefore, this is not a single concept, but several competences that are put together make it possible to act to promote a healthy intercultural environment (Council of Europe 2023). In practice, this means the capacity to recognize and respect differences, communicate effectively, adapt to diverse cultural circumstances, and resolve intercultural conflicts constructively (Vilà et al. 2022).

Thus, intercultural skills are based on the recognition of human rights like equality, dignity, participation, inclusion, identity, and mutual respect (Deardorff 2020). They are therefore of key importance in constructing relations that make difference natural and as a way of preventing and dealing with possible conflicts. In short, the exercise of these competences allows the formation of an intercultural sensitivity that is necessary in education for modern societies.

Obtaining these skills involves three main aspects:

(a) Becoming aware: in practice, this makes it possible to develop an ability for thoughtful, creative observation in diverse situations and cultural exchanges.

(b) Informed knowledge of the principles in play in interactions between people from diverse cultures.

(c) Assertive skills and behaviors in these intercultural situations.

A basic part of intercultural competence is interreligious skills, revolving around the ability to recognize, respect, and include people with religious or spiritual beliefs different from those of most of the population living in a region. As the Arigatou Foundation (2008) argues, cultural and religious diversity must be experienced from childhood, with an open attitude in an atmosphere of harmony, respect, and affection rather than fear or feeling a threat to one's own traditions.

Bennett (1986) proposes that people range from ethnocentric cultural positions to ethnorelative cultural positions, proposing the existence of five stages: negation, defense, minimization, acceptance, and integration/adaptation. Abu-Nimer (2001) adapts these stages to people's attitudes towards coexistence with other religions, creating the Interreligious Sensitivity Scale (IRRSS), a very useful tool for exploring youth perceptions of different beliefs.

The stages proposed by Abu-Nimer are presented on a continuum that goes from *Denial*, a phase in which one's beliefs are considered the only valid ones, ignoring other options, towards *Adaptation/Integration*, a stage at which people accept and respect different beliefs, demonstrating empathy and contributing to respectful coexistence. This instrument helps to understand the opinions and attitudes in relation to other cultures and beliefs and work so that students can develop their intercultural and interreligious competencies and contribute to building a culture of peace (Abu-Nimer 2001; Holm et al. 2012).

2. Method

This work is a single case study to understand the peculiarities and complexities of a particular context, at a specific time and place, by using a range of sources and data (Stake 1995). Specifically, it is a case study of an instrumental nature, setting out to understand a broader empirical phenomenon, meaning the intercultural and interreligious competence of the young people at a specific school in Barcelona, as part of a wider research project and seeking other explanatory information (Yin 2014). The case is analyzed through a mixed method, using quantitative data obtained through the exploitation of two scales, and qualitative information gained from a pedagogical activity with the students.

The school selected is a public secondary school in the city of Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain) located at the northern end of the city, in the neighborhood "La Prosperitat" (Nou Barris district). The institution provides secular education and fosters among its students and their families the development of democratic values like freedom, diversity, solidarity, and rejection of all kinds of discrimination based on ethnicity, origins, socio-economic level, or religion.

The Nou Barris district of Barcelona has a long tradition of welcoming migrants, especially during the second half of the 20th century, when an intense urbanization process occurred as a result of migration from the rest of Spain to large industrialized cities, such as Barcelona. More recently, Nou Barris has been the usual destination of the new migratory flows that characterized recent decades. It is currently one of the areas with the largest foreign-born population. The origin of its residents is mainly Latin American countries, followed by Morocco, Pakistan, China, and Eastern Europe such as Romania, Ukraine, and Georgia.

The history of the creation of the educational center is rooted in a tradition of migration and of neglect by the authorities and government. In the mid-eighties, the school was set up in response to the need in La Prosperitat for a secondary school to cater for the neighborhood's young people for the neighborhood's young people. The opening and development of this educational center were made possible thanks to pressure and demands by neighborhood organizations at the time. Residents managed to play a highly active role, insisting that the educational administration provide better resources, more facilities, smaller classes, and a stable teaching staff. As a result of this strong neighborhood participation, the center is named Galileo Galilei, and since then, it has promoted democratic values and social inclusion.

Two scales were combined in a single questionnaire with 43 items, distributed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Item distribution.

Types of Items	Number of Items	Questionnaire Percentage
Sociodemographic data	9	20.9%
Intercultural Competence Scale	19	44.2%
Interreligious Competence Scale	15	34.2%
Total	43	100%

The sample consulted using the scales was made up of 98 young people in secondary education, aged from 13 to 17, with a mean age of 15. 46.9% identified as female, 52% as male, and 1% as non-specific. As regards cultural origin, 21.1% of the students were from families of Spanish origin and 72.9% had origins in other European countries.

The group taking part in the pedagogical activity where the qualitative information was gathered was made up of 45 young people in the 4th year of ESO, obligatory secondary education, aged from 15 to 17.

3. Results

The quantitative and qualitative results are presented below to describe and better understand the construct studied in the case analyzed.

3.1. Results of the Questionnaire Applied to the Students

3.1.1. Results of the Scale of Intercultural Competences

The intercultural competence scale includes 19 items, and its reliability is 0.796 in Cronbach's Alpha, suggesting that the instrument has an appropriate level of internal consistency. Table 2 presents the items of the questionnaire and the corresponding descriptive statistical analysis.

The first part of the scale collects information about students' preferences in choosing their friends and what aspects they attach greater or lesser importance to. In general, no significant differences were observed between the students who identify as female or male in their opinions, but some differences were seen between people belonging to families of Spanish or foreign origin on some of the topics analyzed.

Regarding the gender of people, they make friends with, the vast majority (91.8%) of young people say they do not consider this a factor in their choice, but there are differences when comparing the opinions of people from families of Spanish origin (92.9%) and those from other countries (88.5%). In response to the question about the gender of their current friends, 88.46% of students from families of local origin say they have friends of their own sex and others, while young people from families with origins in other countries show a lower percentage, with 74.3% of friendships of a gender other than their own.

Regarding their friends' sexual orientation, 85.7% of students attach little or no importance to this factor in their relations. However, comparing according to the gender with which they identify, there are differences: while 95.7% of people identified as female consider sexual orientation to be of little or no importance when they make friends, this percentage goes down to 78.4% among young people identified as males.

Political beliefs or economic factors do not appear to be significant in making friends: 77.6% of students consider political ideas of little or no importance, and 96.9% say people's money does not matter when it comes to being their friend.

Regarding their friends' cultural origin, 93.9% of the young people consulted say they attach little or no importance to this factor, and no considerable differences were seen when comparisons were made by family origin or gender of the students taking part in the study.

The religion of the people with whom young people have relations does not seem to be an influential factor in choosing their friends, as 96.9% of the participants in the study

say they attach little or no importance to it. No differences were observed between families of Spanish and foreign origin.

Table 2. Scale of intercultural competence results.

Items	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard Deviation
To be my friend, the following topics are important: (Not at all = 1; Very = 5)				
The money she/he has.	1.00	3.00	1.1020	0.39297
Her/his gender	1.00	5.00	1.2551	0.77740
Her/his religion	1.00	3.00	1.1327	0.42202
Her/his cultural origin	1.00	5.00	1.2041	0.68803
Her/his political beliefs	1.00	5.00	1.6837	0.99065
Her/his sexual orientation	1.00	5.00	1.4694	0.99694
A person's cultural origin makes me avoid...				
Starting a conversation with him/her.	1.00	5.00	1.3367	0.78575
Having them as part of my group of friends	1.00	5.00	1.2245	0.69654
Being my best friend.	1.00	5.00	1.1939	0.71303
Having a romantic relationship.	1.00	5.00	1.6224	1.10775
I have insulted or treated other people inappropriately... (Never = 1; Many times = 5)				
For having a different amount of money from mine	1.00	5.00	1.1429	0.51773
For being of a different gender to me	1.00	5.00	1.1735	0.57482
For having different beliefs to me	1.00	5.00	1.2143	0.64616
For being from a different culture from me	1.00	4.00	1.1224	0.48195
For having a different sexual orientation from me	1.00	5.00	1.2653	0.71148
About your friends...				
They're all the same gender as me.	1.00	2.00	1.2245	0.41939
They are only from my class.	1.00	2.00	1.0816	0.27521
They're all from the same culture as me.	1.00	2.00	1.0612	0.24097
What would you think if a family member or friend of yours married a person from a diverse cultural group from your own?	1.00	5.00	3.8163	0.67879

Concerning human relations in general, the scale used has several items related to cultural origin and how this may influence young people in distinct aspects of their lives. When starting a conversation with other people, cultural origin is not an issue for students, as 89.8% of them attach little or no importance to this factor.

The young people say a person's family culture of origin does not stop them from being part of their group of friends or their best friend, as 93.9% say that they do not attach any importance to this factor in their relations. People's cultural origin also does not

influence students in their romantic relationships, since only 10.2% said that they would take this variable into consideration when starting a relationship.

Young people say that if one of their friends or relatives married a person from a culture different from their own, they would consider it normal (86.7%) or they would not mind (6.1%), while only 4.1% would recommend that they not do it, depending on the religion. Comparing the responses of people whose family origin is not Spanish, differences arise in relation to this question, as while 80.8% of these young people would see relations between people from diverse cultures as normal, among students from families of non-Spanish origin, this figure rises to 90%.

The scale focused on intercultural competence includes items in which the young people are asked about the negative attitudes of people they consider different from them in different ways, such as gender, sexual orientation, economic circumstances, culture, or religious beliefs.

Most of the students taking part in the study say they have not insulted or mistreated other people for being of a different gender to them (95.9%) or having a different sexual orientation (91.8%). Comparison between groups belonging to families of diverse cultural origins reveals a certain divergence: while an average of 90.4% of young people with a Spanish cultural background state that they have not engaged in negative behaviors for reasons of gender or sexual diversity, this percentage comes to an average of 95% among students from families with of non-Spanish origin. Regarding the different economic circumstances of people they relate to, 98% of the young people taking part state that this is not a factor that causes negative attitudes on their part.

Belonging to different cultures to their own does not cause negative behaviors among the students, 95.9% of whom agreed on this point. Possible differences between families of diverse cultural origins are analyzed, 92.3% of young people of Spanish backgrounds state they have not insulted or mistreated people from cultures different from their own, a percentage that rises to 97.1% among students with family backgrounds in cultures from other parts of the world.

Regarding negative attitudes towards other people with religious beliefs different from one's own, 94.4% of the young people taking part said that they had not acted inappropriately due to differences in religious or spiritual ideas. If students' responses are compared by their family cultural background, 92.3% of the people from families of Spanish origin and 96% of people from backgrounds in other countries said they had not insulted or behaved negatively due to differences in their beliefs or religion. The results for this question make it possible to go into the subject of the second scale used with young people at the school studied, which focuses on interreligious competence.

3.1.2. Results of the Scale of Intercultural Competences

The scale of intercultural competence consists of 15 items and has a reliability rating of 0.646, which can be considered adequate, counting the number of variables and the sample taking part. The scale used was the IRRSS (Interreligious Sensitivity Scale), devised by Abu-Nimer (2001), based on the model by Bennett (1986). This Likert-type scale consists of 15 statements for which respondents must choose between five levels, from complete agreement (level 5) to complete disagreement (level 1), and its results place the person or group at a particular stage (Vilà et al. 2022). This paper analyzes the responses to some of the questions in the instrument and the possible differences between the young people in the case study. Table 3 shows the descriptive analysis of the results of the scale used:

Table 3. Scale of interreligious competence results.

Items	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard Deviation
It's okay to meet new people if they don't have beliefs different from mine.	1.00	5.00	4.1020	1.38094
It is unnecessary to receive information from any religion.	1.00	5.00	4.0816	1.08098
I have never had contact with people of beliefs other than mine.	1.00	5.00	4.5612	1.04602
My beliefs are the best.	1.00	5.00	4.1429	1.24354
Deep down, all beliefs put forward the same principles.	1.00	5.00	2.9082	1.30097
People whose beliefs differ from mine are a threat.	3.00	5.00	4.8673	0.42202
All beliefs carry the same values of peace, honesty, compassion, justice, etc.	1.00	5.00	2.8673	1.41886
I learn better about different religions when I personally know people who practice them.	1.00	5.00	3.9898	1.08879
All believers pray.	1.00	5.00	1.9592	1.14800
Everyone has the right to practice their religion, regardless of what it is.	1.00	5.00	4.6735	0.89414
It is good that there are students with different beliefs in my high school.	1.00	5.00	4.6327	0.81718
I would pray with a person of another faith, if asked.	1.00	5.00	2.6122	1.44759
If I lived abroad, I would like to take part in religious events in the country, because that would enrich my beliefs.	1.00	5.00	2.3367	1.12097
I do not rule out taking part in a religious event of any religion.	1.00	5.00	2.6531	1.31684
People whose beliefs differ from mine are not highly intelligent.	2.00	5.00	4.8469	0.52469
Does your school work on people's spirituality (inner world)?	1.00	2.00	1.2449	0.43224
Do you have any training in religion?	1.00	2.00	1.6735	0.47135
If your answer is "yes", where did you learn religion?	1.00	3.00	2.1875	0.73193

Along with the items in the scale, the young people were asked about their spiritual and religious education, both at school and outside, as shown in Figure 1:

Regarding the group's perception of whether they receive education in matters related to spiritual development at their school, 75.5% said they did not receive any, while 24.5% said they did. When the responses were compared by family background, some differences were seen: 84.6% of Spanish-background students said they had education in spiritual development at school, while this percentage is lower (71.4%) among young people from other backgrounds.

Regarding religious education, most students (67.3%) said they had received it mainly outside of school (43.8%), at school, and in other places (37.5%) and a percentage lower (18.8%) at school. This result varies when young people with a Spanish family background are differentiated, as they say they have primarily received religious education at school

and elsewhere, while students from other national backgrounds say they have primarily received it outside school.
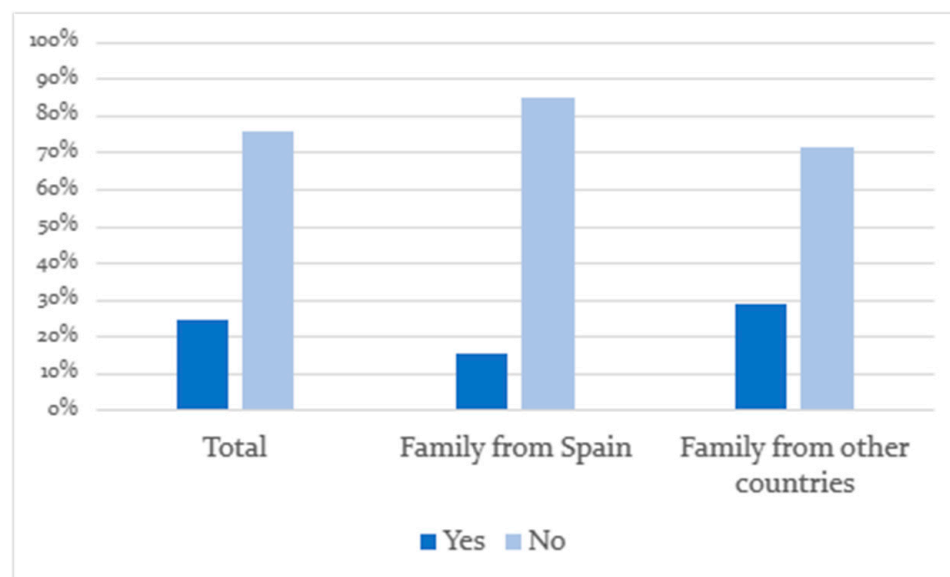
Figure 1. Spiritual work at school according to family cultural background.

Most of the young people taking part (88.6%) agree that at their school, there are students with different beliefs, a percentage that falls to 73.1% among people with families of Spanish origin and rises to 91.4% among those from families originating in other countries in the world.

The students consulted strongly disagree that their beliefs are the best (72.5%) and that people with beliefs other than their own are less intelligent (94.9%) or even less a threat (96.9%). No significant differences were observed between young people from families with a Spanish cultural background and those from other backgrounds.

Students mostly agree (90.8%) with the idea that people have the right to practice their religion, regardless of what it is, with differences between Spanish-background students (84.6%) and those from other backgrounds (92.9%). This trend is repeated in the statement that one learns better about different religions if one knows people who practice them, as while most agree (70.4%), young people with Spanish family backgrounds display a higher percentage of agreement with this idea (77%) than those from non-European backgrounds, 67.1% of whom agree with the statement.

Finally, another result from the scale used is that, about the statements that all beliefs involve the same principles and values of peace, honesty, compassion, justice, etc., the young people choose intermediate options where they opt to neither agree nor disagree, showing an equidistant opinion in this respect.

3.2. Results of the Pedagogical Activity with Young People

The following categories were considered in analyzing this part: (a) Awareness and powers of observation. (b) Informed knowledge of differences between people of diverse cultures. (c) Abilities and behaviors.

The educational activity run is diagnostic in nature, aiming to figure out the level of development of competence in intercultural and interreligious dialogue among the young people. This involved working with 15 students from each of the three groups in the 4th year of ESO (obligatory secondary education, a total of 45 students.

The proposed intervention consisted of a conversation after watching a short video to identify the intercultural and interreligious competences the young people use in their interpersonal relations. After a brief explanation of the activity and putting the students into small working groups (three for each class), they watched the video and were given a sheet with a series of trigger questions.

The video gives a detailed view of a typical day in the life of two young people, Sara and Fatima. Through a series of domestic scenes, it shows how each of them gets ready for a job interview. On the way to the interview, Fatima, unlike Sara, must face a series of discriminatory situations. The video shows the interview itself and how it goes badly for Fatima in such a way that the viewer can imagine how each of the characters felt at the end of the day.

Regarding the differences between what happens to each character, students had no difficulty in spotting situations of everyday discrimination, finding the factors on which different, asymmetrical treatment was based. Thus, they were able to recognize the hierarchy of differences that shape some situations in everyday life that they see as familiar. Their responses show they see a direct, stereotyped link between headscarf, religion, and a specific country of origin, even assigning a nationality and identity.

"Sara is treated like a normal person, but Fatima is treated differently."

"They're treated differently in the same situations. Sara is Spanish and Fatima is Moroccan". (4A)

They attribute the different, discriminatory treatment to a clearly racist society in which education plays an important part, whether as a place where this discrimination takes place or as a place to mitigate it.

"Because of the racism in society and that we're sometimes brought up in" (. . .) "We believe it happens because you're brought up wrong from an early age because you aren't born RACIST" (. . .) "It comes from a lack of manners and respect". (4A–4B)

Regarding the effects these situations have on them, they talk about sadness, frustration, pain, or loneliness for those suffering from them. Also, about indifference and alienation for those not exposed on an everyday basis to these discriminatory stereotypes and behaviors.

"Sara is indifferent because she doesn't suffer from racism, but Fatima is excluded" (. . .) "So, maybe, sad and angry at the same time. It would seem very unfair to us" (. . .) We'd feel extremely disappointed because nobody deserves to go through situations like this because of their religion". (4C–4B)

All the groups say they have experienced or seen situations of discrimination or racism like those in the video. However, they find it hard to find and verbalize possible responses or solutions other than almost automatic, predictable ones. For example, when they were asked to choose a moment in the video that described what they had been talking about, most chose the moment when a small child insulted the girl in the headscarf, or when nobody sits next to her on the bus.

"Parents should bring up their children better in this respect. . . To resolve this, we should teach small children that we have to respect and accept all religions and cultures". (4B)

The following section presents a comparison of the results obtained in the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study with existing theories on the topic being researched.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

In the quantitative and qualitative data collection processes, the young participants shared their perceptions and opinions about how they experience cultural and religious diversity, confirming the importance of education in diverse environments to help develop these life skills for the well-being of all. cultures and societies.

The analysis of the results of the questionnaire completed by the young people shows that the responses are "predictable" or "politically correct", as they reveal their perception of what is expected of them. They are aware of what to say under the adult and institutional gaze, and in this respect, the school is a good example of this and an ideal place for training this skill deliberately. Most of the young people consulted displayed in their responses a respectful, non-discriminatory attitude towards cultural and religious diversity. However, other studies on this subject show that bullying at school due to cultural and religious differences stays a highly palpable reality and a pressing issue, contradicting the responses given by the students (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional de España 2023; Karaman 2023; Villa et al. 2020; Paraušić 2017). However, it must be said that school is also a fundamental socialization environment in the lives of young people, probably more significant than any other during adolescence. Therefore, school is a privileged space where they have the opportunity to interact with different individuals and where they learn, practice, and rehearse future adult roles that they will need to assume in various settings.

A determining and learned factor is discrimination. Although there is currently greater awareness of this issue, it is something that persists and manifests itself strongly in several ways, making it challenging to achieve equal treatment in terms of social justice among individuals and groups. Therefore, intolerance towards what is different is structurally perpetuated on a daily basis in various contexts, especially when it comes to religion or cultural traits, often associated with migration. In this regard, media and leaders frequently resort to fear and insecurity in the face of diversity, constructing scenarios and hate-filled narratives that shape people's capacity for relationships (Hellgren and Zapata-Barrero 2022). As a result, ignorance and fear become closely intertwined, cementing stereotypes and prejudices that are difficult to eradicate.

With regard to the differences encountered between students with Spanish-culture family backgrounds and those with backgrounds from non-European countries, in general terms, the latter group displays more open attitudes to coexistence with cultures and beliefs different from their own, matching the findings of a range of research which concludes that people with backgrounds other than the white western norm appear more comfortable in contexts with a wide diversity of nationalities, cultures and religions (Zapata-Barrero and Hellgren 2023). This probably happens because they can empathize with those who have also experienced situations of discrimination. In this context, the homogenizing tendency of the school does not help to develop the intercultural and religious competencies that are needed to interact and build new bonds with other people.

In the pedagogical activity analyzed here, the responses are in a similar direction, though they lack nuances to make some stereotypes an issue. When young people are asked how they would feel in similar situations a certain empathy can be seen, but they have difficulty in giving answers able to resolve or cope with the situations.

About attitudes (doing), students state that they are open to coexisting with people of diverse cultures and beliefs, and in fact, most of them do so in their everyday lives. Specifically in relation to interreligious competence, the group of young people could be situated, according to Abu-Nimer's proposal (2001), in the fourth stage (acceptance), characterized by recognizing and appreciating different beliefs, accepting and respecting the right to hold and practice diverse beliefs. This result is very positive, since it shows that young people have overcome the three previous stages and will be able to reach the last one, integration/adaptation, in which, in addition to accepting and respecting different beliefs, they will be able to develop the ability to act appropriately towards different beliefs and religions, with an empathetic and pluralistic vision.

Regarding the competences linked to knowledge (knowing), the young people can be seen to have a certain mastery of these, though this knowledge is more on a rational than a sensitive level. This is probably because intercultural and interreligious issues are pressing because they concern governments and institutions, especially educational institutions as they are ultimately the ones that must deal with problems of coexistence and discrimination. Faced with this, the responses offered so far to deal with this issue are to supply resources,

programs, or predesigned pedagogical content that does not always fit into education for sensitivity and empathy.

Helping young people develop sensitivity involves providing rich pedagogical experiences that embrace and challenge their own attitudes and privileges. Only in this way can society progress towards an intercultural and interreligious education that is truly transformative, capable of perceiving diversity not just as a resource or a problem, but as an opportunity for change when cultures come into contact in the same space (Maza 2020). For this reason, all educational spaces must be considered, whether formal, such as school, or informal, such as free time, sports, music, the neighborhood, or different social interactions. A public space, such as a park, is an environment that promotes interaction, much more naturally than in a formal space.

The Council of Europe's Intercultural City Program (ICC) has played a fundamental part in introducing interculturality into the European political context and therefore at the world level. The context of the case study described here is important to highlight the measures taken by the Catalan government in a territory concerned to foster and develop intercultural and interreligious competence among its children and young people, helping in this way to build a fairer, more peaceful, and inclusive society.

This study contributes to academic literature on the intercultural and interreligious competencies of youth, by presenting the case of a secondary school in Barcelona, a diverse city where diverse cultures and beliefs coexist and interact every day.

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