Prevention of verbal aggression in sixth and seventh-grade students through socio-emotional education in schools in Boyacá – Colombia

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Abstract

Keywords: Socio-emotional Education, School Conflict, Verbal Aggression.

This article originated from the research process of the thesis titled "Socio-emotional Learning Pedagogical Program for the Prevention of Aggression in Sixth and Seventh-Grade Students in Three Schools in Boyacá, Colombia." Grounded in students' perceptions of aggression, the study employed a qualitative methodological approach aimed at interpreting student discourse and behavior. This approach facilitated an exhaustive analysis of the participants' language (Romero & Martínez, 2023). ATLAS.ti software was utilized to code the data and establish semantic networks and emerging categories.Through this analysis, the researcher determined that verbal aggression is the most frequent form of aggression among students, having become normalized in both classroom discourse and reality. The findings demonstrated that verbal aggression acts as a catalyst for other forms of aggression (physical, relational, and psychological). Furthermore, it was evident that students lack the necessary tools to manage these conflicts. Consequently, there is a recognized need to strengthen socio-emotional skills to foster preventive actions (Moreira et al., 2023) through practical, meaningful approaches that promote the appropriation and correct application of these competencies (Steward et al., 2022).

INTRODUCTION

School violence has established itself as a priority field within educational research due to its profound impact on school coexistence and student emotional well-being. Within this phenomenon, verbal violence occupies a central role due to its high prevalence and the inherent difficulty in timely recognition and intervention, as it lacks the overt visibility of physical aggression. Consequently, practices such as insults, mockery,

offensive nicknames, threats, humiliations, and discriminatory expressions constitute daily occurrences that are frequently minimized or naturalized in many educational contexts.

Far from being an isolated phenomenon, verbal violence is a manifestation of the social and cultural dynamics surrounding the school. In this regard, various studies agree that educational institutions act as spaces for the symbolic reproduction of power relations, social discourses, and interaction models learned in other contexts, such as the family, the community, and the media (UNESCO, 2022).

In this framework, school violence has become a critical research area due to its negative effects on coexistence and emotional health. In Colombia, there is evidence of an increase in cases of violence and aggression within educational institutions. This is reflected in the indicators from the Unified Information System for School Coexistence (SIUCE), where reported Type II cases rose from 19 nationwide in 2020 to 4,749 in 2024. Similarly, Type III situations, classified as criminal offenses, rose from 6 cases in 2020 to 3,058 in 2024. Furthermore, a total of 1,995 cases of verbal violence have been recorded across various national institutions (MEN, SIUCE Annual Report, 2024).

In the specific context of Boyacá, a department characterized by its cultural and geographical diversity, social dynamics, family structures, and local traditions directly influence school coexistence and student communication patterns (Munevar et al., 2023). Therefore, it is essential to analyze verbal violence from a sociocultural perspective to understand how students' everyday discourses are shaped by their environment.

The primary purpose of this article is to reveal student perceptions of verbal school violence from a sociocultural perspective. The study focuses on the discourse of sixth and seventh-grade students from three institutions in Boyacá, Colombia, emphasizing their everyday language and its relationship to their specific context. Through this analysis, the study seeks to identify socio-emotional tools that contribute to effective emotional management (Hernández-Flórez, et al 2020). It is noteworthy that students in these grades are navigating adolescence, a critical period of human development marked by physical, emotional, and social transitions. During this stage, adolescents construct their identity and develop social interaction skills, making them particularly vulnerable to dynamics of exclusion, stigmatization, and aggressions such as verbal abuse, which negatively impact school dynamics.

From this perspective, Socio-emotional Learning (SEL), based on the framework proposed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), serves as a robust theoretical foundation for preventing school violence. This approach promotes the development of competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, empathy, social skills, and responsible decision-making, which contribute to the reduction of aggressive behaviors and the promotion of a healthier school climate (CASEL, 2020; Chávez-Martínez & Salazar-Jiménez, 2024).

Complementarily, Bisquerra (2020) expands this view through the field of emotional education, defining it as a continuous and permanent educational process aimed at enhancing emotional competencies as an essential element of integral human development. Emotional education should not be viewed as a one-time intervention but as a transversal axis of the school curriculum designed to prevent social issues such as violence, bullying, and verbal abuse.

Furthermore, Bisquerra (2020) emphasizes that emotional education must focus on primary prevention, understood as early intervention before risk behaviors emerge. Applied to the school context, this perspective involves training students in socio-emotional skills from an early age, strengthening empathy, respect for diversity, and non-violent communication. These competencies are fundamental to counteracting

verbal violence, particularly during adolescence, when peer influence and everyday language play a pivotal role.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was conducted through a qualitative methodological approach, which facilitated the uncovering of perceptions, emotions, and meanings held by sixth and seventh-grade students across three public institutions in Boyacá, Colombia, regarding school aggression. The results indicated that the primary cause of violence is linked to verbal aggression (Hernández et al., 2024), as attributed by the participants themselves based on their lived experiences within the school environment (Dávila, 2022).

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews to explore student perceptions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021) and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, ensuring situated and coherent data gathering (Flick, 2023; Maxwell, 2022), supplemented by participant observation. The interview and focus group instruments were validated by five experts who evaluated the questions based on criteria of Clarity, Pertinence, and Relevance. Following their endorsement, the process proceeded, thereby ensuring the study's internal coherence (Maxwell, 2022).

The analytical process was structured into three primary phases, (1) Collected data (interview transcriptions) were reviewed and organized according to the research objectives and pre-established categories, identifying recurrent themes or patterns (Medina et al., 2023). (2) Information was coded to facilitate systematic organization, leading to the generation of semantic networks (Ramírez-Martínez & Bustos-Velazco, 2021). (3) Using the organized categories, the findings were analyzed to reveal underlying meanings and implications, addressing identified regularities by articulating them with existing theories and literature (Jiménez-Moreno et al., 2022).

ATLAS.ti software, version 10, was utilized to organize and code the information manually and through automated tools. This included AI-assisted functions for suggested coding or autocoding of categories, providing additional algorithmic perspectives (Soratto et al., 2020). Finally, a triangulation process was implemented through systematic cross-referencing and contrasting of data obtained from surveys, focus groups, and participant observation. This facilitated the comparison of generated categories and patterns to identify significant confluences and divergences.

RESULTS

Within the qualitative analysis, semantic networks were generated to visualize the emerging categories derived from the pre-established category: "Students' Perceptions of School Aggression."

Figure 1. Students' Perceptions of School Aggression
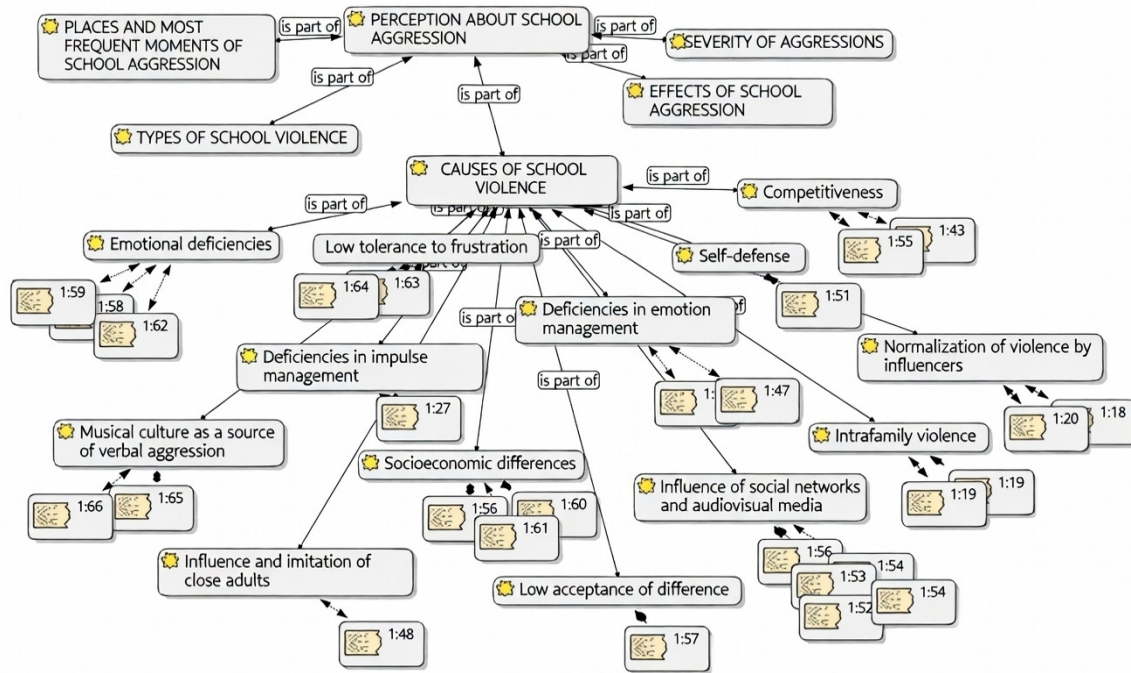
Source: Developed by the author (2025).

Within this semantic network, a series of emergent categories were identified, highlighting the multifaceted causes of violence. One significant category revealed by the analysis pertains to the impact of music as a source of verbal aggression. This finding underscores how discourse culture influences student behavior within the school setting. Specifically, certain musical themes characterized by apologies for sexual objectification, racial prejudice, and general discrimination are internalized by adolescents, who then transpose these elements into their school discourse, negatively affecting their language and interpersonal relationships (Muñoz-Troncoso et al., 2023). Consequently, verbal aggression becomes legitimized as a normative standard within everyday social interactions.

Furthermore, the normalization of violence has been exacerbated by social media and digital influencers. The use of derogatory phrases and "filler words", often perceived by students as "cool" or humorous, fosters a hostile environment and a subsequent lack of mutual respect. This highlights the pervasive impact of digital content and constant exposure to aggressive behavioral models (Cowan et al., 2022).

Similarly, other emergent categories from the study demonstrate that adolescents are influenced by various external factors that trigger verbal violence. These findings suggest an urgent need to introduce alternative discourses centered on empathy and emotional understanding. Such a shift is contingent upon students developing emotional competencies, which serve as the foundation for socio-emotional skills. Through education, students can be motivated to identify, accept, and regulate both their own emotions and those of others, utilizing these as instruments for healthy and empathetic coexistence (San Martín-Ureña & Tapia-Peralta, 2023).

Figure 2. Word Cloud: Definition of Aggression

Note: *The terms remain in their original Spanish as provided by the participants to preserve the cultural and linguistic nuance of their lived experiences. The prominence of words such as Verbal, Insultos (Insults), and Burlas (Mockery) highlights the prevalence of verbal aggression in the school environment*.
Source: Developed by the author (2025).

The word cloud derived from the emergent category "Definition of School Aggression" illustrates that verbal aggression is the predominant form. Students in the sixth and seventh grades across the three participating educational institutions consistently report, both within and outside the classroom, the frequent use of profanity, hurtful nicknames, mockery, and insults. These coarse and aggressive expressions have become a standard feature of daily dialogue among students, leading to psychological intimidation for some peers.

The study confirms that the category with the highest semantic weight is verbal aggression, defining its dominance in student interactions and revealing a normalization deeply rooted in all three school contexts (Wilson & Smirles, 2020). Although this type of aggression often goes unnoticed because it does not result in physical injury or medical leave, these findings underscore the urgent need for mechanisms to strengthen students' socio-emotional skills and improve school climate policies (Varela et al., 2023). This necessity is further corroborated by the semantic network of the emergent category: "Relevance of Socio-emotional Skills in Preventing School Aggression."

Figure 3. Relevance of Socio-emotional Skills for Aggression Prevention

Source: Developed by the author (2025).

This semantic network reveals a growing recognition among school stakeholders and students of the essential role of socio-emotional competency training as a tool for fostering peaceful coexistence. From the students' perspectives, enhancing empathy, communication, and conflict management enables them to identify their own emotions and those of others, allowing for reflective responses to tense situations. Consequently, the institution functions as a protective agent by providing frameworks for socio-

emotional development and safe spaces for emotional containment (Cedeño et al., 2022).

The analysis further indicates that students acknowledge the necessity of socio-emotional training to prevent impulsive reactions and manage anger. They specifically highlight the importance of self-control, active listening, and peer mentoring as concrete methods to mitigate aggression. This suggests that students are capable of assuming responsibility for violence prevention when school environments validate emotions and provide secure, healthy channels for expression (Retto-López et al., 2024). These findings provide a roadmap for developing comprehensive and continuous formative processes. Rather than isolated lectures or individual interventions, socio-emotional training must be integrated into the institutional curriculum and management model, fostering a school culture based on respect, self-regulated behavior, and empathetic coexistence (Proaño-Muñoz et al., 2024).

DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that regarding the perceptions of sixth and seventh-grade students about school aggression, they define verbal aggression as the main and most recurrent form of violence generated in classrooms; although it is not recorded in concrete data, it has become a common action among adolescents who normalize it to such an extent that its effects become invisible. This type of aggression is viewed by the educational community as a generator of adverse emotional effects, stemming from a discrepant language that creates difficulties in adolescents that are not as visible as physical aggressions (Alonso-Rodríguez et al., 2025) but directly affect the emotional well-being of students. This coincides with the statements of UNESCO (2023), which warns that psychological and verbal violence is one of the most widespread forms of school violence, precisely because of its subtle nature and the difficulty of making it visible in formal educational systems and performing continuous monitoring.

In the Latin American context, and particularly in Colombia, several studies have been conducted maintaining that verbal aggressions are sustained by dynamics of symbolic power and the search for status among peers, where public humiliation and ridicule operate as mechanisms of social domination and power (Chaux 2021, 2023). These statements are articulated with the findings of the present study, where students recognize the recurrence of these behaviors, but simultaneously describe them as habitual within the school environment.

From a socio-emotional perspective, the findings can be interpreted in light of the CASEL (2020) conceptual framework, which refers to competencies such as self-regulation, social awareness, and decision-making that students must have to adequately manage emotions and prevent aggressions such as verbal ones in educational environments, as evidenced in the three schools subject to this research. The recurrence of verbal aggression suggests weaknesses in these competencies, especially in early adolescence, a stage in which peer recognition and identity construction acquire centrality. In this sense, verbal aggression not only reflects interpersonal conflicts but also limitations in skills such as empathy and assertive communication, configuring a form of violence that impacts self-concept, self-esteem, and school climate.

The absence or weakness in these competencies can favor impulsive responses, low empathy, and difficulties in peaceful conflict resolution (Bisquerra, 2022), which is why socio-emotional skills become protective factors against aggressive behaviors. Recent research has shown that systematic socio-emotional learning programs are associated with significant reductions in bullying behaviors and improvements in the classroom school climate (Taylor et al., 2021). Consequently, the findings of this study theoretically support the need to structurally integrate socio-emotional education within

the school curriculum, particularly in adolescence where sixth and seventh-grade students are positioned.

Regarding the implications, the results contribute to the reconceptualization of school violence, underlining that verbal and symbolic forms must be recognized as structural expressions of violence, not as minor or transitory manifestations; likewise, strengthening socio-emotional education through pedagogical learning programs that are contextualized and significant for students favors the assimilation and proper use of socio-emotional competencies (Stewart et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, the study presents limitations that must be considered in the interpretation of the results. Its qualitative approach prevents establishing broad statistical generalizations, although it allows for a deep understanding of the phenomenon from the perception of the actors directly involved in the research process. Furthermore, the geographical delimitation of the study restricts the transferability of the findings to other sociocultural contexts (Merchan & Hernandez, 2018). The absence of longitudinal measurements regarding verbal aggressions prevents evaluating the cumulative effects of these aggressions in the medium and long term, and it is possible that social desirability bias exists in some participant responses.

Finally, it is recommended that future research develop mixed methodological designs that allow for the quantification of the prevalence of verbal aggression and the analysis of its relationship with emotional variables. Likewise, it is suggested to evaluate the importance of contextualized socio-emotional pedagogical learning programs that contribute to the comprehensive prevention of verbal aggression in school environments.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis developed in this article allows for the conclusion that school violence, with a particular emphasis on verbal aggression, constitutes a complex, multicausal, and contextualized phenomenon that cannot be understood or addressed in isolation from the social, familial, and institutional environment. In coherence with studies conducted in Colombia by Enrique Chaux (2012, 2022) and reports from the Ministry of National Education (2023, 2024) through SIUCE, it is evident that manifestations of verbal violence tend to become normalized in daily school life, affecting emotional well-being, coexistence, and the classroom climate. This normalization coincides with recent Latin American findings (Romero & Martínez, 2023; Muñoz-Troncoso et al., 2023), which warn of the urgency for systematic and sustained interventions.

Secondly, the results confirm that the development of socio-emotional skills constitutes a key protective factor against aggressive behaviors. As proposed by the CASEL (2020) program and UNESCO (2022, 2023) guidelines, competencies such as self-regulation, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and empathy significantly reduce the probability of impulsive and violent responses. This relationship has been empirically supported by recent studies (Kang et al., 2022; Medina-Escorcia et al., 2025; Retto-López et al., 2024), which demonstrate that higher levels of socio-emotional competencies are associated with lower rates of aggression and greater school well-being.

Furthermore, it is concluded that emotional education, from the perspective proposed by Rafael Bisquerra (2000, 2003, 2012, 2020), transcends the remedial approach and is positioned as a preventive and formative process oriented toward the integral development of the student. From this perspective, it is not solely about intervening in the face of conflict, but about generating patterns that strengthen coexistence at all educational levels. Accordingly, restorative practices (Alonso-Rodríguez et al., 2025)

and structured socio-emotional learning programs (Arikan & Nesl, 2020; Kozina, 2021; Paolin, 2020) show sustained positive impacts on the reduction of aggressive behaviors and the improvement of the school climate.

Likewise, the findings highlight the decisive role of teachers and educational institutions in the consolidation of a culture of peace. Recent research (Gimbert et al., 2023; Pacheco et al., 2019) demonstrates that the emotional competence of teachers directly influences the classroom environment, the school climate, and the regulation of prosocial behaviors. This implies that any prevention strategy must include continuous teacher training processes that are coherent with the context and articulated with the Manuals of Coexistence and current regulations (Pérez & González, 2021).

Another relevant aspect is the need to adopt systemic and integral approaches. As noted by Oberlet et al. (2020) and the OECD (2021), isolated or short-term interventions have limited effects. Conversely, systemic approaches that integrate the curriculum, school leadership, family participation, and evaluative monitoring present higher levels of sustainability. In the Colombian context, experiences such as "Aulas en Paz" (Chaux, 2022) demonstrate that the rigorous and contextualized implementation of socio-emotional programs can generate significant transformations in school coexistence.

Finally, it is concluded that training in socio-emotional skills for students, in this case, adolescents, not only constitutes the mitigation of school violence but also strengthens their life project, active citizenship, and, primarily, the emotional and mental well-being of the students, in coherence with current educational demands. The reviewed evidence supports the need to consolidate public policies that explicitly integrate socio-emotional learning within the curriculum, with constant evaluation and institutional support.

In synthesis, the prevention of school aggression constitutes a transition from punitive approaches toward formative, preventive, and restorative models, grounded in emotional education and the systematic development of socio-emotional competencies; hence the importance of strengthening school aggression prevention pedagogical programs throughout the country.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the development or disclosure of the research results.

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