Article

Analysis of the Perception of Conflict and Its Positive Resolution in University Students

José Ángel Martínez-López [1], Jerónimo Molina Cano [1], Pilar Munuera Gómez [2,*] and Ana Maria Costa e Silva [3]

1   Social Work Faculty, University of Murcia, 30100 Murcia, Spain
2   Social Work Faculty, University Complutense, 28223 Madrid, Spain
3   Centre de Estudos de Comunicacao e Sociedade, University of Minho, 4710-057 Braga, Portugal
*   Correspondence: pmunuera@ucm.es

Abstract: This research aimed to analyze the perception of conflict in universities and the ways of dealing with it in relation to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. The research was developed from a quantitative approach in three universities in two European countries: the University of Murcia and Complutense University of Madrid (Spain) and University of Minho (Portugal). The sample consisted of 247 university students and the technique used was an ad hoc survey administered online. Among the main research results we can highlight that (a) the perception of conflict is mostly negative; (b) there are predictive variables in the positive view of conflict; and (c) university students clearly identify the peaceful resolution of conflicts with some of the Sustainable Development Goals. The main conclusions are that conflict is inherent to any organization and the university must be sensitive to the conflicts that occur within it. It is therefore necessary to create intra-university mediation services as a conflict resolution resource for the entire university community. Training and a positive view of conflict favors the construction of a citizenry capable of dialogue and of resolving the conflicts that arise in their adult life.

Keywords: conflict; students; university; resolution; mediation

1. Introduction

Conflict has always existed. Human beings have a social nature and our needs and interests depend, directly or indirectly, on those around us. Thus, when two or more people pursue the same or conflicting interests and collaboration is not possible, disagreements and, therefore, conflicts arise. Following numerous authors specialized in the subject, we started from the concept of conflict as a confrontation, an opposition, or a problem situation, where emotions are unbridled, placing the parties in two very different positions or positions with a clash or confrontation between them (Burton 1969; Álzate 1998; Coleman et al. 2014). The "problem" would be a conflict or circumstance with a momentary difficulty whose emotional aspects are under control, and the possible solutions to be developed are unknown. Disputes would be the "material of mediations", with a perspective of intervention closer to success than failure (Cobb and Rifkin 2017).

Every conflict has a dilemma, and the difficulty of choosing between two or more alternatives to a situation emerges. Thus, the possible formulas for conflict resolution are framed at a shallow emotional level that allows one to act coldly to the level of reasoning reached, which only depends on the person's final decision. In order to get out of the state of confusion, it is necessary to lower the emotions that overflow the situation and the perspective of the conflict (Redorta 2007). The present research explores these dilemmas and alternatives for resolving conflict on the part of university students, as well as the strategies for resolving their problems.

There is some difficulty in analyzing conflicts to determine their typology and direction; for example, a conflict of power-values-legitimacy can be found, since there are several

complementary modalities. In order to know its essence, it is recommended to know its history and the escalation process to which the adhesion of other conflicts is added (Kriesberg 1998). Following Kriesberg, conflicts follow a process of "escalation" towards aggravation, passing at some point through a situation of "deadlock" where uncertainty is high characterized by a situation of blockage (neither progress nor retreat). This situation is so relevant that from that moment on, the parties try to reach a compromise for its solution or the outcome of rupture or aggravation. This process occurs in the de-escalation phase, considered the third conflict cycle stage (Kriesberg 1998).

Conflict can determine social and human relationships. The vision of conflict can be very different according to the sociological paradigm it is based on. Thus, the functionalist perspective explains conflict harmoniously, as a critical element for social integration and consensus in society, acting as a social catalyst. However, from a Marxist or neo-Marxist approach, conflict emerges as an element of opposing interests of agents or social groups, favoring social change. From this point of view, conflict was a consubstantial element in the development of capitalist societies, especially in the Fordist stage. However, to the extent that it is institutionalized, it is not an element that calls society into question but one that serves to energize it based on facilitating vital opportunities for people everywhere, where rights are not rhetorical proclamations but guarantees for citizens, as Dahrendorf (1990) points out.

Dahrendorf (1990) also points out that modern social conflict is situated in the achievement of those rights that citizens consider necessary in a free and democratic society with equal opportunities. The existence of conditions of inequity within a society confronts diversity and favors inequality (Sen 2003), a triggering factor of social conflicts. In this context, it is necessary to attack the inequalities that restrict full citizen participation by social, political, or economic means, and recognize the rights that make up the citizenship status of every person. Numerous emotions and feelings form a breeding ground for the generation of conflicts. Hatred—one of the bases supporting the germ of conflict—just like love, requires an object. Conflict can only arise in the reciprocal action between object and subject; it always involves a relationship (Coser 1967).

There is increasing interest in encompassing conflicts and conflict resolution at a global level (Nos Aldás et al. 2021; Hope 2020). An example of this is the interest of the United Nations in developing a series of objectives that favor more equitable, just, co-responsible, and environmentally committed societies. This proposal aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development developed by the United Nations (2015) as an ambitious and universal program to eradicate poverty and existing inequalities through sustainable development by 2030 (Picado-Valverde et al. 2022). Goal 16 on "Peace, justice, and strong institutions" contained in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focuses on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building accountable and effective institutions at all levels. This goal should be seen as transversal to all the proposed goals, as its existence promotes the rest of the goals through its ten targets.

1.1. Analysis of University Conflicts

Conflict, aggression, and social influence, and the different Alternative Means of Conflict Resolution or Alternative Means of Dispute Resolution, have been the subject of thousands of studies from different scientific disciplines (Álzate 1998). The different classifications of conflict made by authors such as Simmel (1955); Coser (1967); Galtung (1975); Dahrendorf (1990), and others have considered conflict situations that are difficult to resolve, such as social conflict, class conflict, structural conflict, social inequality, or scarcity of resources.

The conflicts that arise in the university setting have unique characteristics that differentiate them from other conflicts in environments. That is, conflicts in the university are "inevitable" (Holton and Phillips 1995); they occur within and between the different strata that are part of the organization (Baldridge 1971; Gmelch and Carroll 1991; Barsky

2002). The parties involved in the conflict are students, teachers, and service managers or administrators (Hobbs 1974; Marsh 1982; Gibson 1995; Warters 1995; Miklas and Kleiner 2003; Barsky 2002), and although conflicts emerge from an internal character within the university community, they can also arise from external factors (Adeyemi and Ademilua 2012; Etim and Okey 2013). These conflicts have a maximum complexity where socioeconomic and political factors intervene, but they can also be linked to the student life cycle and the construction of their personality. Among the conflicts that occur most frequently and can be easily defined and addressed are:

1. *Legitimization.* From the perspective of negotiation, legitimacy is the recognition that the other party has genuine interests, issues that concern him/her, and emotions, and a right to be heard as an equal negotiator. It is understood that every participant of the university must be recognized as a person whose rights, expectations, and emotions are equal to those of others in conflict. To the extent that there is no legitimacy or recognition, there is no trust.

2. *Values.* Usually appear when differences are challenging to accept, and coercion is resorted to in overt cases or manipulation in less overt cases. Conflicts of values tend to polarize groups. Polarization is the creation of consensus on an existing pre-consensus opposed to another. Situations that could occur in the university due to this type of discrimination include social, cultural, religious, or sexual discrimination (Warters 1995), which would lead to difficulties in teamwork, lack of coordination, and a lack of respect in joint work in the different existing strata of the university. In addition, confrontations may occur due to ideological, religious, cultural, etc. issues (Gibson 1995).

3. *Information* is more complex than a simple misunderstanding, since it is considered to exist if someone reserves pertinent information in the information process. In this modality would be both a lack of information and non-relevant or erroneous information regarding the interaction, including "information overload" regarding any controversial point. Phenomena such as lying, secrecy, forgetfulness, rumor, confusion, persuasion, and even culture could be found to be based on information conflicts. Moore (2014) refers to it as "data conflict" when commenting on this type of conflict. Thus, the idea of information as communication or interaction is part of the systemic paradigm.

4. *Power.* The exercise of power can also be seen from the analysis of tactics, strategies, and ways of exercising power granted by a position or the struggle for power, i.e., competitiveness between equals, whether students, teachers, or non-teaching staff. Power has certain bases, which are those that allow its exercise and how it affects the entire university community.

The processes of hierarchy and domination are at the very core of society and, in turn, in the group and interpersonal relationships of the university. In this sense, the university advances in its internal democratization, moving from being a hierarchical institution to an organization with collaborative governance (Kern and Smutko 2021; Mueller et al. 2022), and promoting processes where the attitudes of managers are more dialogic among the different departments (Gmelch and Carroll 1991; Stanley and Algert 2007). Collaborative governance can lead to solutions to conflicts of interest, since one of the functions of the social hierarchy is to resolve such conflicts.

At the same time, processes of evaluation of teaching quality have been incorporated in which students can participate, intending to increase the quality of teaching and avoid undervaluing or sexual harassment (Warters 1995, vol. 73). Situations of harassment or bullying (Gómez-Galán et al. 2021) of students or between professors are exceptional cases that can be referred to the courts, with the consequent administrative sanctions and psychological treatment (Knight 1995), as well as the harassment of employees (Briefs 1992).

Among the phenomena that can occur are conflicts between departments due to ideological differences between professors, distribution of resources, discriminatory allocations (Miklas and Kleiner 2003; Gómez Ortiz et al. 2015; Li et al. 2020), etc. From the inappropriate use of power, normative conflict may arise from the transgression of a norm in some sense, and in some parties' perceptions of that fact.

5. *Scarce resources.* Linked to competition processes and deriving from power conflicts. Problems of scarce resources quickly evolve into power conflicts. Scarcity is critical for developing this conflict morphology, with important social connotations. Scarcity has apparent psychological effects on desire and motivation in the university organization. It can explain some of the behaviors that develop in the competitive processes that arise between teachers and students, when one of the subjects does not recognize this relevance. Conflict arises when an imbalance is produced, and this is perceived as an inequity. Among the phenomena concerning this type are job stabilization, academic promotion, scarcity of research resources, etc.

6. *Expectations.* Words such as "betrayal", "frustration", and "disloyalty" can describe the result of emotionally charged frustrated expectations, which can occur in the context of university relationships. Trust is the belief that our expectations will be met. This type of conflict is at the heart of interpersonal relationships. The positive management of this modality allows us to accept the possible frustrations caused by the non-fulfilment of expectations generated in the interactions of the relationships in the university.

7. *Self-esteem.* In some confrontations between components of the university, insults and verbal aggressions can be used, which are intended to attack the self-esteem of the other. Sometimes, expressions of devaluation are not manifested aggressively but in a very subtle way, such as, for example: "he is a professor/student incapable of doing what he proposes to do". Sometimes the appearance of violent or very violent reactions may be motivated by previous attacks on self-esteem. Simmel (1955) established that social life is interaction and communication. In order to communicate, it is necessary to identify and categorize each other, which leads to self-esteem being closely linked to social relationships.

8. *Attributive.* This conflict consists of the objective analysis of the attributions of responsibility of each of the parties. Mutual attribution of responsibility can lead to the escalation of the conflict. Numerous examples can be identified, such as holding responsible a teacher or student who was mistakenly responsible for fulfilling or performing particular work. This type is linked to conflicts of information and expectations.

This set of conflicts that are or may be related to legitimacy, values, information, power, of a normative nature, scarce resources, expectations, self-esteem, and attribution or inhibition allow intervention through individuals or small groups to resolve them once they are brought to mediation (Wall 1981; Redorta 2007). For Moore, the general framework of analysis is essential. This author expressed: "All conflicts involve specific people, and include relatively unpredictable dynamics of their development, competing interests, and tangible and intangible issues. These common components of disputes allow the creation of a general framework that is useful for generating questions and explanatory hypotheses about a given situation" (Moore 2014, p. 139).

1.2. Positive Conflict Management Strategies in the University

Training experiences have been developed for students in conflict resolution with an experiential focus to face existing conflicts in Cyprus (Reilly 2013), demonstrating the advantages of having this training for adequate confrontation of the existing conflicts in society. The learning model used was based on the learning theories initiated by Dewey (1933) and implemented by Kolb and Kolb (2018) recently, where experience, perception, cognition, and behavior are taken into account as the critical factor elements in the learning process. Students learned that successful conflict resolution requires changing perceptions, feelings, and actions (Fisher 2001), while helping to transform the way of dealing with the political trajectory of Cyprus, with its complex history and important geopolitical position (Reilly 2013). At the same time, universities have carried out projects to study and prevent conflicts at the international level, such as the Stanford University Conflict Studies Project in 1957 (Harty and Modell 1991).

Mediation and the role of a mediator as an impartial third party allow the development of positive conflict resolution strategies by facilitating informed and well-defined interventions with clear objectives (Wall 1981; Keashly and Fisher 1990). More recent research has

advocated the inclusion of external ethnogarants, or mediators with cultural, historical, and political ties to key decision-makers on each side, to facilitate peace (Byrne 2007). Lederach (1995) considers that mediation intervenes in problem-solving, effectively solving problems posed by individuals. From this perspective, the mediation process can provide us with a new perspective for understanding disputes and conducting the mediation process.

Intra-university or university mediation takes place in the university environment to resolve disputes or controversies that arise among its components, where agreements are reached that are satisfactory for all parties involved. These encounters are characterized by the principles of voluntariness, equity, confidentiality, equality/equity/impartiality, flexibility, good faith, recognition, and respect between the parties involved. This process is carried out by a professional specialist in mediation (mediator), who guarantees the quality of the process and the respect of all the principles. The purpose of this process is to allow communication transformation and to reach agreements where everyone wins. University mediation helps opposing parties to restore and develop healthy working relationships (Baldridge 1971; Holton and Phillips 1995; Barsky 2002; Dorado and Lorente 2015; Martínez-Martín and Lozano-Martín 2021).

At present, countries such as the United Kingdom have various universities where university mediation is being developed, such as Durham University; Cambridge; University Leeds; The University of Manchester; Bristol; St. Andrews; Oxford; University College London; University of York; the University of Sussex; and the University of Dundee, all of which have a mediation service open to all citizens. In the United States, several universities, including the following, have mediation services: the University of Washington; Indiana University Bloomington; The University of Memphis; and The University of Alabama, among others.

In Canada, the University of Ottawa (Office for the Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment of the University of Ottawa, University of Ottawa Faculty Association, Office of the Ombudsman), the University of St. Paul (Canadian Institute for Conflict Resolution), and Carleton University provide different mediation services, in different modalities, through professionals trained in mediation.

Globally, the University of Guanajuato (Mexico); the Faculty of Law of the National University of Cuyo (Argentina: Degree in Conflict Resolution and Mediation of the National University of Tres de Febrero); Otago University (New Zealand), and Australia (Gmurzyńska 2021) have mediation programs.

Studying university students' perceptions of conflicts and how they are managed can give us information about the perception of conflict and its resolution in the university. The perception of the practice of conflict resolution is the agent of change within the university community. Perception is a form of thought and immediate behavior, making it a synonym for consciousness. Furthermore, perception has a meaning of judgment, not only through sensory data but as pure intuition. The theory of representations explains, through social representations, how subjects perceive and give meaning to a reality according to their reference system, allowing them to exchange perceptions and concepts of a process and content composed of opinions, knowledge, and beliefs concerning an object (Moscovici et al. 2001; Gergen 2012; Jodelet 2008). In other words, the aim is to delve into the existing conflict dynamics in the institutional context of the university in order to establish strategies.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Objectives

This research aimed to analyze how university students value and perceive conflict and how they manage it (general objective). To this end, this objective was broken down into three specific objectives. First, to determine whether there is a favorable perception of conflict among university students, as well as to identify the profile of these subjects based on three dimensions: gender, academic year, and previous history of conflict (specific objective 1). Secondly, we determined whether there is a correlation between the positive assessment of conflict with variables related to the assessment of the origin of the conflict and

any link with the SDGs (specific objective 2). Finally, the third objective was to determine whether predictive factors favor university students' positive views of conflict (specific objective 3). This research followed (Beattie 1979), and the ethical research principles in the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.2. Procedure

This was a cross-sectional study conducted between January and June 2022 with a random sample of participants and convenience sampling in relation to the collaborating universities. In total, we included 247 undergraduate students from three European universities: the University of Murcia and Complutense University of Madrid, both in Spain, and the University of Minho, in Portugal. The instrument used was an ad hoc questionnaire composed of three blocks: (a) sociodemographic variables, (b) assessment of conflicts by university students, and (c) linking conflict resolution formulas with the SDGs.

The analysis of results was structured in three steps through the SPSS v. 24 program. First, a descriptive analysis of the profile of young university students was carried out on their perception of conflict. Subsequently, a cross-table analysis was performed based on the dependent variable, considering its chi-square significance level ($p < 0.005$). Thirdly, a binary logistic regression was performed to predict the variables that determine the positive valuation of conflict by university students through the "forward (Wald) model", eliminating all those variables that were not statistically significant.

2.3. Research Variables

The dependent variable of this research was the students' appraisal of the conflict. Positive or negative valuation of the conflict has elements that condition how these conflicts are managed. The independent variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile and descriptive study variables.

Variable	Reference
Sex	Men/Woman
Age	Continuous
Academic Year	1°, 2°, 3°, 4°, 5°, 6°
Personal consideration of needing training courses in conflict resolution	Yes/No
Assessment of the causes of conflicts	Conflict rivalry/non-compliance with rules/absence of authority, lack of knowledge to reach agreements, authoritarianism or abuse of power, communication problems, discriminatory attitudes, indifference to the other, love, disinterest in the other, lack of companionship, care, excess of affection, jealousy, attacks to personal identity or to the group of belonging, changes and transformations, desire of protagonism, selfishness, lack of respect
Problems that can lead to violence can be solved in other ways	Yes/No
Evaluation of the most common conflicts that young people have with people of other age groups	Due to devaluation or discrimination/due to romance or love affairs/due to opposing interests/due to lack of empathy or affinity/due to breach of trust or betrayals/due to differences in criteria or points of view/due to different ways of acting/due to impositions or authoritarianism
Have you had conflicts during your university years	Yes/No
With whom have you had conflicts during your university studies, if applicable?	Colleagues/faculty/administrative and/or service staff, university management bodies
Main behavior you used to manage previous conflicts in your university years	Threatening/ceding to the other/mediation/requesting mediation from others to reduce the conflict, shouting/mocking or scorn/denunciation
Assessment of whether mediation is the main tool to manage university problems	Yes/No
To which SDG do you think the implementation of an inter-university mediation service is related?	Health and wellbeing/quality education/reduction of inequalities/peace, justice and strong institutions

Source: survey, own elaboration.

3. Results

The sample was composed of 81.1% women and 19.9% men. While it is true that women are more represented in Spanish and Portuguese universities, there is a gender bias which was not determined by prior factors, since the sample was random and no attempt was made to ensure that there was a higher participation of women. The mean age was 21 years, and the median was 20 years. Most students studied degrees related to Social Sciences (99.0%), 97.7% were single, and 74.7% lived with their family of origin.

Concerning one of the critical questions of this study, whether university students consider conflict to be positive, a positive evaluation was reported by 26.7% of the participants. Conflict has two variants: peaceful or violent conflict resolution. Notably, 94.9% of university students considered that conflicts that end in violence are likely to occur among young people. More than half of the students (64.3%) reported an experience of conflict linked to the university environment. A higher percentage, 63.4%, stated that they need or consider it advisable to improve their training to deal with conflicts. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that 92.1% of the participants considered mediation to be an appropriate tool for resolving conflicts.

As it is shown in Table 2, An intra-university mediation service was considered by the respondents to mainly be connected with the SDGs "Quality Education" (56.5%) and "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions" (51.2%).

Table 2. Main descriptive results of the students and conflict assessment (in %).

	Woman	Men
Sex	81.1	19.9
	Media	**Mediana**
Age	21	20
	Sí	**No**
Finds conflict positive	26.7	73.3
Conflict occurs in young people that leads to violence	94.9	5.1
Need/need to improve training to deal with conflicts	63.4	36.6
Has had a conflict related to the university environment	54.4	45.6
Consider mediation as a tool for resolving conflicts in the university environment	92.1	7.9
With which SDG is intra-university mediation related (check 2 options)		**%**
Health and Welfare		46.4
Quality Education		56.5
Reduction of Inequalities		41.5
Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions		51.2

Source: survey, own elaboration.

Regarding the positive valuation of conflict, an essential element in promoting peaceful conflict resolution, a cross-table analysis was carried out using the chi-square $p < 0.005$, regarding the independent variables shown in the methodology.

Table 3 shows a robust correlation ($p \leq 0.001$) between the need/convenience of training courses in conflict management and the positive evaluation of these. Other variables that showed a connection with the positive valuation of conflict were academic courses and the methods used in the past to resolve conflicts ($p < 0.005$). These last two results strengthened the idea that the outcome of conflict in the past will determine the valuation that university students have of conflict, as well as their academic year and understanding that the university follows a process of adaptation.

Table 3. Results of cross-tables with the dependent variable: positive valuation of the conflict.

					Yes	No	Chi-Squared
Need/need to improve the way conflicts are dealt with					63.4	36.6	**
Course	**1°**	**2°**	**3°**	**4°**	**5°**		*
	23.5	35.2	38.5	2.4	0.4		
What behaviour was used to resolve conflicts in the past?							*
Threat					3.0		
Negotiation					36.2		
Giving in to the other					8.7		
Mediation					39.5		
Requesting mediation from another person					5.2		
Shouting					2.2		
Mockery and/or contempt					3.4		
Complaint					2.2		

* Sig (Significance level) = 0.05; ** Sig $\leq$ 0.001. Source: survey, own elaboration.

These three variables can predict the perception and valuation of the conflict as a positive phenomenon. Therefore, binary logistic regression was performed to identify the existence of predictor variables.

The binary logistic regression of the positive perception of conflict in university students presented a statistically significant model of x^2 = 68.553, $p < 0.000$. The model explained 41.0% of the variance (Nagelkerke's R2) and correctly classified 79.9% of the cases. The Hosmer–Lemeshow test showed no significant difference between the observed and predicted results in the model at $p = 0.653$.

As shown in Table 4, the variables included in the equation were (a) sex, (b) current grade, (c) personal opinion regarding needing training courses in conflict resolution, (d) assessment of the causes of conflicts, (e) opinion that problems that could lead to violence could be solved in other ways, and (f) assessment of the most common conflicts that young people have with people of other ages.

Table 4. Summary of the binary logistic regression model.

Positive Assessment of the Conflict					
	B	**Sig.**	**Exp(B)**	**95% CI Exp(B)**	
				Lower	**Higher**
Do you consider that you need training courses: Yes	1.927	0.000	6.867	2.523	18.184
Course: 2°	−1.172	0.019	0.310	0.116	0.828
Reasons for the conflict: Lack of authority	2.701	0.019	14.889	1.571	141.317
Reasons for the conflict: Discriminatory attitudes	−1.157	0.023	0.314	0.116	0.854
Reasons for the conflict: Love	2.955	0.011	19.205	1.984	185.992
Reasons for the conflict: Lack of respect	0.876	0.037	2.401	1.055	5.466
Reasons for conflict of young people with people of other ages: Conflict of interests	−0.964	0.016	0.384	0.174	0.834
Reasons for Conflict: Impositions or authoritarianism	−0.902	0.023	0.406	0.186	0.884
Constant	1.490	0.003	4.439		

eb = Exp (B). Source: survey, own elaboration.

The affirmative valuation of needing training courses had an Odds Ratio (OR) = 6.867 $^{95\% \text{ CI } [2.523-18.184]}$, $p = 0.000$; therefore, students are almost seven times more likely to have a positive perception of conflict if they consider that their training on ways to deal with conflicts should be increased.

In relation to academic year, OR = 0.310 $^{95\% \text{ CI } [0.116-0.828]}$, $p = 0.019$. Each year from the second academic year onwards, the likelihood of having a positive evaluation of conflict decreases by 0.3 times; therefore, those in the second year had a more positive perception of conflicts.

We found several predictor variables concerning the reasons why university students consider that conflict occurs. Firstly, those who considered the absence of authority to be a source of conflict had an OR = 14.889 $^{95\% \text{ CI } [1.571-141.317]}$, $p = 0.019$. This very high value showed almost 15 times the likelihood of having a positive view of conflict for those who considered the absence of authority to be an element of the generation of conflict.

In contrast, there was an opposite finding among those who considered discriminatory attitudes a reason for conflict. These students showed an OR = 0.314 $^{\text{IC}95\% [0.116 -0.854]}$, $p = 0.023$. The lower the possibility that the source of the conflict was due to discriminatory attitudes, the greater the predisposition towards the positive valuation of the conflict.

Love is one of the predictive variabes that showed higher values. Those who considered love as a source of conflict showed an OR = 19.205 $^{95\% \text{ CI } [1.984 -185.992]}$, $p = 0.011$. University students who considered that the source of the conflict may be love problems were up to 19 times more likely to perceive conflict as something positive.

In the case of lack of respect as the source of conflict, an OR = 2.401 $^{95\% \text{ CI } [1,055-5,466]}$, $p = 0.016$ was obtained.

Two other predictor variables were relevant among university students relating to people of other ages, although in both cases, they were negatively correlated. Contraposition of interests as a source of conflict with people of other ages had an OR = 0.384 $^{95\% \text{ CI } [0,174-0,834]}$, $p = 0.016$; thus, these students were slightly less likely to consider conflict as something positive. Similar results were obtained in the case of those who believed impositions or authoritarianism were a source of conflict, with an OR = 0.406 $^{95\% \text{ CI } [0,186-0,884]}$, $p = 0.023$; these students were slightly less likely to consider conflict as a positive element.

4. Discussion

The conception of conflict as an element of development and growth is crucial for constructing democratic, dialogic, and tolerant societies (Simmel 1955; Coser 1967; Cobb and Rifkin 2017). Conflict can be seen as an opportunity or as a risk. Depending on its valuation, the agents' behavior when intervening in or being affected by the conflict varies. Young university students are at a vital stage in developing their professional and learning competencies related to "knowing how to be". Conflict resolution in any sphere, including in the world of work, should be a transversal competence in any society, because living in society means living in conflicts, and these do not have to be considered harmful (Caravaca-Llamas and Sáez-Olmos 2012; Cordeiro and Cunha 2018).

The predictive variables of the positive valuation of conflict can be grouped into three themes: (a) subjective valuation of needing training courses in conflict resolution; (b) academic courses; (c) love, absence of authority, discriminatory attitudes, lack of respect, opposing interests, and impositions or authoritarianism as a source of conflict.

Those who consider training in conflict resolution important are up to seven times more likely to value conflict as something positive. Undoubtedly, this fact may be determined by the conflicts they have had in the past and how they were resolved. The internal complexity of the university setting gives rise to conflicts where conflicts of interest must be reconciled through negotiation to find stability as a means of preserving institutional values (Lomnitz 1977; Holton and Phillips 1995; Miklas and Kleiner 2003; Rommel and Bailey 2016). Our research showed that a significant number of students have had conflicts within the university context (54.4%), that 63.4% consider that they should acquire training to resolve their conflicts and that, in addition, a very high percentage (92.1%) considers

that mediation is the tool that would allow them to resolve their conflicts. Mediation encourages the communities involved to develop rules and protocols for resolving their disputes (Dorius 1993; Maines and Powell 1986) and, in this process, community relations are improved (Forester 1987; Shonholtz 1977).

Secondly, if we consider the academic year, those in the second year are more likely to value conflict as a positive element. This is interesting because these are students who have already developed an adaptive process for the university institution and are familiar with its dynamics. Perceiving conflict positively at this stage may be a turning point when building a personality that views this situation as positive, as well as its resolution. In addition, the university may have taken steps to create specific intra-university mediation services and/or favor the existence of collaborative governance in the university by improving its organizational dynamics (Kern and Smutko 2021; Mueller et al. 2022). The university can open its intra-university mediation services to civil society to facilitate teaching/learning processes, while contributing to expanding the spirit of mediation in society.

Conflicts in the university environment can be very varied. In some countries, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, race-related conflicts may arise (Garces 2012; Karen 2017). However, in our study, this was not been addressed due to the homogeneity of the sample and the low relevance of race in university conflicts in Spain and Portugal. However, it may become a determining variable in the future as a result of immigration.

The distinction made by Redorta (2007) and Álzate (1998) between conflict, problems, dilemmas, confusion, and disputes implies differences in how they are managed. The fact that some are inherent to society and difficult to solve allows the management of expectations about their possible solutions. Regardless of the type of conflict experienced, the way it is approached and managed by those responsible is important (Stanley and Algert 2007). Competence in positive management can help teachers, students, and staff build competencies in positive conflict management at the individual, group, social, and professional levels.

Finding the possible causes behind conflicts can cause them to be positively valued. These include the absence of authority and issues related to love, with those believing in these reasons being, respectively, 15 and 19 times more likely to have a favorable view of conflict. This is not unexpected since young university students are in a life cycle characterized by problems with authority, an element linked to the construction of their personality (Pinilla Sepúlveda and Agudelo 2011; Marsiske 2018; Motornaya 2019; Sancho 2022). Love-related problems are another characteristic of youth, and closely linked to emotions and feelings (Knox et al. 1999; Li 2021; Zhang 2022).

A lack of development of competencies to deal with conflict, such as "looking the other way", or relativizing them, can forge a negative attitude towards conflict leading to a spiral of repulsion towards conflict resolution. The university, as a space of openness to society, transference, and acting under the principles of democracy, tolerance, and criticism, cannot allow its graduates to finish their studies without equipping them with the skills to identify and manage conflicts. Furthermore, mediation training, as a measure for its resolution, can be fundamental in constructing a plural, diverse, and democratic society, consistent and congruent with opposing perspectives.

The results highlighted the opportunity to create structural services for conflict resolution aimed at the university community (Picado-Valverde et al. 2022). This would have several effects: (a) positive governance in the university; (b) training in positive conflict management; (c) instilling in future graduates transversal competencies in conflict resolution and mediation; (d) preventing and resolving conflicts within the university environment, and finally, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of Quality Education (number 4), Gender Equality (number 5), Reduced Inequalities (number 10), and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (number 16).

In this analysis, the need to incorporate specific intra-university mediation services can be seen in the correlation between the need/convenience of taking training courses, academic year, and the methods used in the past to resolve conflicts with the positive

assessment of conflict. That is to say, if those students who consider that it would be convenient for them to obtain specific training in conflict resolution have a positive valuation of conflict, as do those who continue their studies at the university, as well as the background or formulas they have used to resolve them in the past, universities could improve the disposition/perception of their students by creating spaces to resolve any dispute within the university environment as an alternative learning model to conflict resolution through the judicial route, and especially, through mediation, which could also include reparation in some cases.

Within the spectrum of controversies and possibilities raised by creating an intra-university mediation service, one fact goes beyond the university institution itself and encompasses all of us within the 20/30 Agenda and the SDGs. More than half of the students surveyed reported they would value the incorporation of intra-university mediation services, and this is connected to the SDGs "Quality Education" (56.5%) and "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions" (51.2%). This supports linking education with the construction of societies committed to peace. These university mediation services could act as an organizational structure to resolve social conflicts that arise in the university environment. However, in addition, their specialization as a mediation body impacts society's values and principles for the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

5. Conclusions

Conflict is inherent to every organization, including universities. Training is one of the most appropriate coping strategies according to experiences developed at the international level. The vision of conflict as something positive favors the construction of a dialogic personality capable of resolving those conflicts that arise in adult life.

Universities should invest time, resources, and strategies into the resolution of different conflicts, (information, legitimization, values, power, etc.), with the aim of building a diverse and plural dialogic society. These strategies are fundamental in education and especially in higher education to generate sociability, responsibility, and democratic citizenship, and favor the establishment of peace in society. This can advance the construction of social citizenship, the democratization of society, achieve the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations.

Universities, due to their social responsibility, cannot be oblivious to the conflicts existing in their community and can introduce mediation and education for coexistence as strategies to be followed. Intra-university mediation could be a measure chosen by most universities to instruct future graduates in the use of conflict prevention, management, and resolution mechanisms, and to sensitize them to a culture of peace. The training would be directed towards positive conflict management, mediation, and a culture of peace.

Alternative means of dispute/conflict resolution have been consolidated, defined by the different social, historical, and cultural constructions that exist. Among them, mediation stands out as an effective method for the resolution of controversies/disputes. The use of these means can be implemented in the different activities of the university community: teaching, research, knowledge transfer, and management.

Changes in structures always generate conflicts that need effective alternatives for their resolution. Mediation as a technique could be the safest and most effective strategy for conflict resolution in the university environment. This is supported by one of the main results obtained in this research: the positive predisposition of students toward conflict when they consider that they need training courses to deepen their understanding of the appropriate way to deal with conflicts. This form of intervention favors the development of human competencies, helps with conflict resolution, and stimulates the participation of institutions.

Today, intervention in conflict resolution is a source of employment or a growth industry in various sectors, whose origins can be found at Stanford University (1957, California, USA). It has been developed globally, including the first experiences of university mediation that are beginning to develop in Spain. The use of mediation in universities means offering

an effective response to resolve conflicts and respond to the needs of all its components, favoring its positive interpretation and forming people and professionals with the ability to solve problems peacefully within a model of society characterized by dialogue and a culture of peace.

References

Adeyemi, Taofeek, and S. O. Ademilua. 2012. Conflict Management Strategies and Administrative Effectiveness in Nigerian Universities. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* 3: 368–75.

Álzate, Ramón. 1998. *Análisis y Resolución de Conflictos: Una Perspectiva Psicológica*. Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco.

Baldridge, J. Victor. 1971. *Power and Conflict in the University*. New York: John Wiley.

Barsky, Allan Edward. 2002. Structural sources of conflict in a university context. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 20: 161–76. [CrossRef]

Beattie, Robert. 1979. ICPSR: Resources for the Study of Conflict Resolution: The Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 23: 337–45. [CrossRef]

Briefs. 1992. West Virginia Students Barred From Returning to Class. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 25: A4.

Burton, John W. 1969. *Conflict and Communication: The Use of International Relations*. New York: Macmillan.

Byrne, Sean. 2007. The Roles of External Ethnoguarantors and Primary Mediators in Cyprus and Northern Ireland. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 24: 149–72. [CrossRef]

Caravaca-Llamas, Carmen, and José Sáez-Olmos. 2012. La mediación: Herramienta para la gestión de conflictos en la escuela. *Revista de Educación Social* 16: 1–16.

Cobb, Sara, and Janet Rifkin. 2017. *Practice and Paradox: Deconstructing Neutrality in Mediation*. New York: Wiley, pp. 223–50.

Coleman, Peter T., Morton Deutsch, and Eric C. Marcus. 2014. *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Cordeiro, João Pedro Pina, and Pedro Cunha. 2018. Gestão de conflitos, comportamentos de comprometimento e de cidadania organizacional em contexto educativo: Contributos para a formulação de um modelo concetual. *European Journal of Applied Business Management* 4: 46–66.

Coser, Lewis A. 1967. *Continuities in the Study of Social Conflicto*. Nueva York: Free Press.

Dahrendorf, Ralf. 1990. *El Conflicto Social Moderno*. Milan: Mondadori.

Dewey, John. 1933. *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*. Lexington: DC Heath.

Dorado, Ana Gregoria Hernández, and Julio Lorente. 2015. Estudio sobre la gestión constructiva del conflicto en el alumnado de la Facultad de Trabajo Social de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid. *Cuadernos de Trabajo Social* 28: 245–56. [CrossRef]

Dorius, Noah. 1993. Land-use negotiation: Reducing conflict and creating wanted land uses. *Journal of American Planning Association* 59: 101–6. [CrossRef]

Etim, Victor, and Stella Maris Okey. 2013. Conflict management in the Nigerian university system. *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 3: 17–25. [CrossRef]

Fisher, Ronald J. 2001. Cyprus: Th e Failure of Mediation and the Escalation of an Identity-Based Conflict to an Adversarial Impasse. *Journal of Peace Research* 38: 307–26. [CrossRef]

Forester, John. 1987. Planning in the face of conflict: Negohttiation and mediation strategy in local land use regulation. *Journal of American Planning Association* 53: 303–14. [CrossRef]

Galtung, Johan. 1975. *Is Peaceful Research Possible? On the Methodology of Peaceful Research*. Copenhague: Ejlers.

Garces, Liliana M. 2012. Racial Diversity, Legitimacy, and the Citizenry: The Impactof Affirmative Action Bans on Graduate School Enrollment. *The Review of Higher Education* 36: 93–132. [CrossRef]

Gergen, Kenneth J. 2012. *Toward Transformation in Social Knowledge*. Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media.

Gibson, Jacqueline. 1995. "Can't We Settle This?" Student Conflicts in Higher Education and Options for Resolution. *New Directions of Higher Education* XXIII: 27–34. [CrossRef]

Gmelch, Walter H., and James. B. Carroll. 1991. The three Rs of conflict management for department chairs and faculty. *Innovative Higher Education* 16: 107–23. [CrossRef]

Gmurzyńska, Ewa. 2021. Analysis of the causes of conflicts at universities and alternative methods of resolving them. Part I: Mediation in academic disputes. *Studia Iuridica Lublinensia [Lublinian Legal Studies]* 30: 55–101. [CrossRef]

Gómez Ortiz, Viviola, Lyria E. Perilla Toro, and Angélica M. Hermosa Rodríguez. 2015. Moderación de la relación entre tensión laboral y malestar de profesores universitarios: Papel del conflicto y la facilitación entre el trabajo y la familia. *Revista Colombiana de Psicología* 24: 185–201. [CrossRef]

Gómez-Galán, José, Cristina Lázaro-Pérez, and José Ángel Martínez-López. 2021. Trajectories of Victimization and Bullying at University: Prevention for a Healthy and Sustainable Educational Environment. *Sustainability* 13: 3426. [CrossRef]

Harty, Martha, and John Modell. 1991. The first conflict resolution movement, 1956–1971: An attempt to institutionalize applied interdisciplinary social science. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 35: 720–58. [CrossRef]

Hobbs, Walter C. 1974. The "Defective Pressure-Cooker" Syndrome: Dispute Process in the University. *The Journal of Higher Education* 45: 569–81. [CrossRef]

Holton, Susan, and Gerald Phillips. 1995. Can't Live With Them, Can't Live. Without Them: Faculty and Administrators in Conflict. *New Directions for Higher Education* 92: 43–50. [CrossRef]

Hope, Kempe Ronald, Sr. 2020. Peace, justice and inclusive institutions: Overcoming challenges to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16. *Global Change, Peace & Security* 32: 57–77.

Jodelet, Denise. 2008. Social representations: The beautiful invention. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 38: 411–30. [CrossRef]

Karen, David. 2017. The legitimacy of elite gatekeeping. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40: 2263–74. [CrossRef]

Keashly, Loraleigh, and Ronald Fisher. 1990. Towards a Contingency Approach to Th ird Party Intervention in Regional Confl ict: A Cyprus Illustration. *International Journal* 45: 424–53.

Kern, Michael A., and L. Steven Smutko. 2021. Collaborative governance: The role of university centers, institutes, and programs. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 39: 1–22. [CrossRef]

Knight, Jonathan. 1995. The Misuse of Mandatory Counseling. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 17: B1–B2.

Knox, David, Caroline Schacht, and Marty E. Zusman. 1999. Love relationships among college students. *College Student Journal* 33: 149–49.

Kolb, Alice, and David Kolb. 2018. Eight important things to know about The Experiential Learning Cycle. *Australian Educational Leader* 40: 8–14.

Kriesberg, Louis. 1998. *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution*. Lanham: Rowman and Little filed.

Lederach, John Paul. 1995. *Preparing for Peace. Conflict Transformation Across Culture*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Li, Xueqing. 2021. Mobile-Mediated Communication in Romantic Relationships: The Effects of Communication Indicators and Love Attitude on Relationship Quality. *Cyberpsychology Behavior, and Social Networking* 24: 480–87. [CrossRef]

Li, Yongzhan, Yongxin Li, and Gloria Castaño. 2020. The impact of teaching-research conflict on job burnout among university teachers: An integrated model. *International Journal of Conflict Management* 31: 76–90. [CrossRef]

Lomnitz, Larissa. 1977. Conflict and Mediation in a Latin American University. *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 19: 315–38. [CrossRef]

Maines, D. R., and J. O. Powell. 1986. Thoughts on mediated disputes and their moral order. In *Mediation: Contexts and Challenges*. Edited by Joseph E. Palenski and Harold M. Launer. Springfield: US Departament of Justice, pp. 33–45.

Marsh, Robert M. 1982. Sources of Japanese University Conflict: Organizational Structure and Issues. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 26: 730–56. [CrossRef]

Marsiske, Renate. 2018. "La juventud desinteresada y pura": El movimiento estudiantil en la Universidad de Córdoba, Argentina, 1918. *Perfiles Educativos* 40: 196–215. [CrossRef]

Martínez-Martín, Rafael, and Antonio M. Lozano-Martín. 2021. Sustainability and Conflict Management in the University Environment. Analysis of Students of the Degrees in Labour Relations and Human Resources, and Social Work at the University of Granada (Spain). *Sustainability* 13: 13431. [CrossRef]

Miklas, Eric J., and Brian H. Kleiner. 2003. New developments concerning academic grievances. *Management Research News* 26: 141–47. [CrossRef]

Moore, Christopher. W. 2014. *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.

Moscovici, Serge, Kay Deaux, and Gina Philogène. 2001. Why a theory of Social Representations? In *Representations of the Social: Bridging Theoretical Traditions. Why a Theory of Representation*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 18–61.

Motornaya, Svetlana. E. 2019. Managing conflict situations for contemporary youth. Discourse and choice of strategy. *Revista ESPACIOS* 40: 1–5.

Mueller, Chad M., Jennifer Richardson, Sunnie Lee Watson, and William Watson. 2022. Instructional Designers' Perceptions & Experiences of Collaborative Conflict with Faculty. *TechTrends* 66: 578–89.

Nos Aldás, Eloisa, Alessandra Farné, and Tamer Al Najjar Trujillo. 2021. Communication for Peaceful Social Change and Global Citizenry. In *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*. Cham: Springer, pp. 100–12. [CrossRef]

Picado-Valverde, Eva Maria, Amaia Yurrebaso, Raquel Guzmán-Ordaz, Ana Belén Nieto-Librero, and Nerea Gonzalez-García. 2022. Approach Developed According to Sustainable Development Goals and Challenges for Future Professionals in Social Intervention. *Social Sciences* 11: 67. [CrossRef]

Pinilla Sepúlveda, Victoria Eugenia, and Nelvia Victoria Lugo Agudelo. 2011. Juventud, narrativa y conflicto: Una aproximación al estado del arte de su relación. *Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, niñez y Juventud* 9: 35–62.

Redorta, José. 2007. *Entender el Conflicto: La Forma Como Herramienta*. Barcelona: Paidos.

Reilly, David. 2013. Teaching conflict resolution: A model for student research in Cyprus. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 30: 447–65. [CrossRef]

Rommel, A., and M. Bailey. 2016. Conflict Resolution and Mediation Programs in Higher Education: Institutional Need, Benchmarking, Development, and Evaluation. Conflict Resolution and Mediation Benchmarking. January 1–16, Vol. 12. Available online: https://www.rit.edu/advance/sites/rit.edu.advance/files/docs/ (accessed on 15 November 2022).

Sancho, Roy González. 2022. Juventud: Entre la reproducción, el diálogo y la confrontación/conflicto con el mundo adulto. *Revista Rupturas* 12: 31–47. [CrossRef]

Sen, Amartya. 2003. *Nuevo Examen de la Desigualdad*. Madrid: Alianza.

Shonholtz, Raymond. 1977. *Review of Alternative Dispute Mechanism and a Government Proposal for Neighborhood Justice Centers*. San Francisco: Community Board Program.

Simmel, Georg. 1955. *Conflict and the Web of Intergroup Affiliations*. New York: Free Press.

Stanley, Christine A., and Nancy E. Algert. 2007. An exploratory study of the conflict management styles of heads in a research university setting. *Innovative Higher Education* 32: 49–65. [CrossRef]

Wall, James A., Jr. 1981. Review Section: Mediation: An Analysis, Review, and Proposed Research. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 25: 157–80. [CrossRef]

Warters, William C. 1995. Conflict Management in Higher Education: A Review of Current Approaches. *New Directions for Higher Education* 92: 71–78. [CrossRef]

Zhang, Deyu. 2022. Exploring the Major Psychological Problems and Their Causes in Love from the Perspective of Social Psychology. In *2022 8th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2022)*. Hong Kong: Atlantis Press, pp. 1581–84.