

Article

Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Competences in Adolescents in Barcelona and Melilla (Spain)

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Abstract: Contemporary societies are increasingly multireligious, multiethnic, and multicultural, but to what extent are they ready for coexistence? This paper evaluates the competencies for intercultural and interreligious dialogue in two very different contexts: Barcelona and Melilla, two cities with great ethnic and cultural diversity, in which it is easy to have contact with people of different cultures and religions. To this end, we worked with a total of 1353 adolescents and young people, and four scales were used to evaluate intercultural and interreligious sensitivity, conflict management skills, and prejudices towards unaccompanied migrant minors. The findings suggest that in neither of these two contexts do adolescents and young people form relationships with these minors, despite accepting religious diversity and being educated at school in topics relating to coexistence and spirituality. In fact, participants showed a high level of prejudice towards this population. Implementation of more effective intervention programs in both cities is therefore recommended.

Keywords: intercultural and interreligious dialogue; competencies; secondary education schools; contexts of diversity; young migrants; conflict resolution



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1. Introduction

Spain receives thousands of migrants from many different countries, distributed unevenly across the country. This study compares two cities that are very distant from each other and represent very different realities. Barcelona is internationally known as a highly cosmopolitan metropolis where people from different continents live together, while the city of Melilla, as it is located in North Africa, mostly receives migrants only from that continent, especially Morocco. Moreover, in Melilla, a large part of the population has both relatives and second homes in the latter country, and thus their contact with Moroccans is extremely common and they share the same culture, religion, and language. Thus, out of the almost 87,000 inhabitants of the city, over half (44,000) are Muslim and almost 11,000 are of Moroccan nationality ([Observatorio Andalusi 2023](#)). This study, then, focuses on two very different cultural contexts in which the presence of migrants can be seen in completely different ways.

In relation to the multicultural situation in Melilla, the heterogeneity of ethnicities and religions can also be observed in educational centers, with the classroom reflecting this reality. Thus, the city has seven Secondary Education and Vocational Training centers and only one concerted center, distributed throughout the different districts of the city, with cultural diversity being one of the most typical characteristics of the classrooms in all centers.

Therefore, the distribution of pupils, given the idiosyncratic multi-religious and pluralistic situation of the city and its surface area, which is only 12 km², means that pupils are heterogeneous in all schools. With regard to migrant pupils, it should be noted that in the years prior to the pandemic, i.e., before 2020, Melilla had a large number of pupils of Moroccan origin, who crossed the border every day to receive education in the city's classrooms. In addition, there was a large influx of unaccompanied minors that had overcrowded all the reception centers. For example, in 2017, 3757 unaccompanied minors were attended to (Consejería de Bienestar Social 2017). This situation has changed after the pandemic, as only 115 foreign minors were attended to in 2021 (Europa Press 2021). Moreover, the enrolment of unaccompanied migrant students is the responsibility of the Provincial Directorate of the city, which incorporates students into the classrooms according to its criteria, with information on this group of students being restricted (Ministerio de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones 2022).

On the other hand, Barcelona, as a cosmopolitan city, has a rich history of migration, contributing to its cultural and ethnic diversity. Over the years, Barcelona has seen significant immigration flows from European countries, North Africa, Latin America, and Asia. This diverse migration landscape has shaped the city's social fabric and was influential in the development of vibrant neighborhoods with distinct cultural identities. The city's appeal as a cultural and economic hub has led to a mix of expatriates, international students, and professionals settling in Barcelona. This diversity is evident in the variety of languages spoken, the presence of international businesses, and the multicultural events and festivals that take place throughout the city. Based on IDESCAT data from 2022, Ciutat Vella hosts 52% of Barcelona's foreign population. Other noteworthy districts include Sant Martí, concentrating 21% of Barcelona's foreign residents, Gràcia, also featuring a 21% foreign population, Nou Barris with 20%, and Sant Andreu with 15%. These districts serve as focal points in the focus of this study.

The findings presented here form part of a broader research project titled "Intercultural and interreligious dialogue for promoting a culture of peace among young people and unaccompanied migrant minors (MENA) in Barcelona and Melilla". The project was carried out by members of the Education Faculty at the University of Barcelona and the Education and Sports Sciences Faculty in Melilla (University of Granada) with the main objectives of analyzing adolescents' perceptions of unaccompanied migrant minors and developing intercultural competencies for interreligious dialogue. These competencies are considered to be a keystone of the development of a cohesive society, especially among young people.

Intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies are essential in the contemporary world, where relationships with people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds are part of everyday life. They are also key tools for conflict resolution and for building a culture of peace. The research team identified a series of components and dimensions that should form part of potential models of intercultural and interreligious competencies (Vilà et al. 2022): (a) attitudes towards other religions; (b) intercultural and interreligious conflict resolution strategies; and (c) levels of prejudice towards migrant people.

Contemporary societies are increasingly plural, with cultural and religious diversity being one of the main features of globalization, and while such diversity represents social wealth, it also gives rise to problems of coexistence (Martínez-Antequera et al. 2020). Thus, it is necessary to analyze and explain attitudes towards people of diverse ethnic, cultural, and/or religious origins, both migrants and minorities (Borghetti 2017; Deardorff 2006; Robertson 2008), since stereotypes and prejudices towards outgroups (Barba del Horno 2021) and "group stigmatization" (Moreno 2012, p. 50) create tensions and conflicts between groups (Belall Maudarbux 2016). For this reason, we see it as crucial to encourage interreligious dialogue with the aim of understanding others and creating agreement, which brings benefits to the well-being of all citizens (Obregón 2021). Research analyzing levels of religiosity indicates that it correlates positively with negative attitudes towards

migrants, i.e., the higher the level of religiosity the more negative the attitudes (Čačić Kumpes et al. 2012; Kumpes 2018; Stipišić 2022).

This plurality of beliefs and religions is also reflected in the classroom, and it is, therefore, important to work on intercultural competencies in education in order to strengthen coexistence among culturally diverse people (Arroyo-González and Berzosa-Ramos 2021), especially since formal education is one of our most influential tools for developing the values of tolerance and solidarity (Jiménez-Rodrigo and Guzmán-Ordaz 2016). For this reason, Sabariego et al. (2018) consider that the role of schools and other education centers, both formal and informal, is vital for enhancing knowledge of cultural and religious diversity and that this can be both personally and culturally enriching.

To this end, it is necessary to work with students on the development of intercultural sensitivity, understood as “people’s ability to give positive emotional responses and to control emotions that can harm the intercultural communication process” (Sanhueza et al. 2021, p. 256); female (Aguaded 2006; Vilà 2006) and migrant students (Sanhueza et al. 2021) being those who tend to show greater sensitivity towards other cultural groups.

In this line, various studies (Andreu and Ouhamid 2021) found that in socio-educational settings where intervention programs were implemented, the ability to work together and to communicate in different contexts improved (Tondok et al. 2022). In addition, racist behaviors towards cultural diversity were not observed, as these programs were shown to have a positive impact on attitudes towards the outgroup (Paluck and Shepherd 2012), with low levels of prejudice detected among participants (García et al. 2003). Such intervention programs, then, can decrease social isolation, increase mutual understanding and knowledge of others’ religions, and contribute to eliminating feelings of threat, thereby fostering contact among groups (Tondok et al. 2022). For this reason, schools should create opportunities for intercultural education, and this should be envisaged in the School Plan and applied at all levels.

Further, the frequency and location of interaction are important factors in the development of greater cultural sensitivity (Sanhueza et al. 2021). Thus, Kanas et al. (2015) found that increased contact among groups reduced negative attitudes towards the outgroup, since each learned more about the “other”, as Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) also observed. This is known as the positive contact effect, one of the most important variables in the development of intercultural sensitivity (Ruiz-Bernardo 2018).

Other studies, however, show no correlation between contact with members of other ethnic groups and positive attitudes towards the outgroup (Kanas et al. 2015), especially when the minority group is Muslim (Kanas et al. 2017; Thomsen and Rafiqi 2016). Vedder et al. (2017), for example, concluded that adolescents prefer to have friendships with peers who show cross-cultural attitudes similar to their own, thus acting as peer group socializing agents who encourage similar ethnic-racial beliefs in the ingroup (Rivas-Drake et al. 2014), which in turn creates social distancing from others. In this context of peer socialization, we should also analyse the attitudes of ethnic minorities toward the majority group since, as Navas et al. (2017) argued, these young people also present prejudicial attitudes toward the host population, and distancing from the “other” may also occur. Thus, Navas et al. (2006) found that, in both groups, the highest scores in prejudicial attitudes were observed amongst those who preferred segregation or exclusion of the outgroup.

A study by Navas and Rojas (2010) suggests that young people show more subtle than overt prejudice, displaying emotions related to insecurity and discomfort towards the outgroup (Segura-Robles et al. 2016; Segura-Robles 2017). Thus, attitudes towards the “other” play a central role, since they represent a first step towards understanding others and a first notion of how to make contact and develop a relationship with the unknown (Jensen et al. 2018; Puerta-Valdeiglesias 2004; Trujillo et al. 2005). Similarly, Page-Gould (2012) affirmed that adolescents with friendships from different cultural groups show more skills for coping with difficulties arising from multicultural coexistence, with more developed conflict resolution strategies.

Successful management of conflict (Leiva 2007) arising from relationships between people from different cultural, ethnic, and/or religious backgrounds is a crucial factor. In this regard, Sanvicén-Torné et al. (2017) and Poblete and Galaz (2017) conclude that, in schools where intercultural coexistence prevails, conflicts due to ethnic diversity are rare.

Adolescents use a range of coping strategies when faced with conflict. Frydenberg and Lewis (2000) identified various types: seeking a solution in the face of conflict, seeking social support (from family, peers, or professionals), avoidance strategies, distancing from the problem, and even aggression and/or anger (Borecka-Biernat 2018). Other studies have shown that gender has an influence on conflict management; thus, Çoban (2013), Verdugo-Lucero et al. (2013), and Reyes et al. (2017) found that the strategy most used by females was seeking support, while males often resorted to conflict avoidance. In relation to migrants, Kim et al. (2012) showed that people who have support from friends and family improve their feelings of acceptance towards others.

After conducting a literature review on the topics of intercultural and interreligious diversity and how students deal with conflict, the following objectives were set:

- To describe factors relating to coexistence, religion, and spirituality in contexts of cultural and religious diversity in high schools;
- To identify the degree of interreligious sensitivity among adolescents;
- To analyze adolescents' competencies for conflict management in the context of diversity;
- To ascertain the prejudices that these young people have towards unaccompanied migrant minors.

2. Results

This section presents our findings in the context of each city (Barcelona and Melilla) and its specific situation. Subsequently, the findings obtained from the students' responses in relation to diversity and their perceptions regarding their competencies are summarized.

2.1. Coexistence, Religion, and Spirituality in Diversity

Among participants' social relationships, it was notable that 63.8% had no contact or friendships with unaccompanied migrant youths. These data did not differ greatly between Melilla (62.7%) and Barcelona (64.3%), and there was no statistically significant difference ($X = 0.346$, $gl = 1$, $p = 0.556$, $\alpha = 0.05$); furthermore, they appear incongruent with the demography of the two cities, where citizens from other countries are found at all levels of society.

A total of 74.1% of participants stated that in their schools, they had been taught to live together with people from other countries and origins: 75% in Barcelona and 72% in Melilla, the difference being statistically insignificant ($X = 2.079$, $gl = 1$, $p = 0.149$, $\alpha = 0.05$). In terms of coexistence with people of different beliefs, understood as religious, spiritual, agnostic, and/or atheist beliefs, the majority of students (77.6%) stated that in their secondary school, they had been taught to live together with people of different beliefs. This figure was 79.6% in Melilla and 76.8% in Barcelona, and, despite the difference, it was not statistically significant ($X = 1.334$, $gl = 1$, $p = 0.248$, $\alpha = 0.05$). Finally, with respect to work undertaken on spirituality in secondary education, 62.9% of students stated that they had not worked on it at their school. In Barcelona, this percentage (59.9%) was slightly lower than in Melilla (69.9%), the difference being statistically significant ($X = 11.939$, $gl = 1$, $p = 0.001$, $\alpha = 0.05$).

Although participants reported a lack of education in spirituality, this was not the case for religion. The majority (68.7%) affirmed that they had received some kind of religious education. The percentage was higher in Melilla (75.7%) and slightly lower in Barcelona (65.7%), differences that were also statistically significant ($X = 13.313$, $gl = 1$, $p = 0.000$, $\alpha = 0.05$). Of those who stated that they had experienced religious education, 26.0% had received it at school, 38.5% out of school, and 35.5% both at school and externally. In Melilla, the majority of students (62.2%) had received it outside school (mainly at home or with family and friends), compared to 19.6% who had received it in school and 18.3% in both school and outside. In contrast, in Barcelona, the highest percentage of students (44.4%)

had received religious education both at school and in other contexts, with 29.4% only at school, and 26.2% only outside school. These differences were statistically significant ($X^2 = 129.356$, $p = 0.000$, $\alpha = 0.05$).

In light of these results, we may conclude that, in general, in the secondary schools of Barcelona and Melilla, where there is a high degree of cultural diversity, students feel that they have received sufficient education in living with diversity and the challenges it entails. They also perceived that they had adequate religious education, especially in Melilla, even when this was from contexts outside of school. However, they did not report that they related socially to young unaccompanied migrants, nor had they received education in spirituality in their schools, particularly in Melilla.

2.2. Interreligious Sensitivity

The Interreligious Sensitivity Scale collects information on the self-perception of young people regarding their orientations on religion and different beliefs. It has a total of 15 items. The theoretical minimum and maximum scores are 15 and 75, respectively. The mean found on the scale was 43.39 with a standard deviation of 10.19. Taking the reference values of the scale into account, it can be concluded that all participants were at the stage of accepting religious diversity, with some small differential traits.

As Table 1 shows, statistically significant differences depended on: the specific context; participants' perceptions of the education they had received at their high school in living with people with different beliefs and people born elsewhere; whether they had religious education or not (in or out of school); gender; and whether they had friends or acquaintances among unaccompanied migrant youth.

Table 1. Interreligious Sensitivity Scale statistics and comparisons.

Significant Differences		Mean	SD	Contrast Statistic	p-Value
Context	Barcelona	53.97	10.13	$t = 28.423$	0.000
	Melilla	38.77	5.84		
Have you been educated to live with people with different beliefs?	No	42.17	9.33	$t = 2.449$	0.015
	Yes	43.70	10.39		
Have you received religious education?	No	41.38	9.68	$t = 5.029$	0.000
	Yes	44.29	10.60		
Where have you received religious education?	School	46.66	5.52	$F = 3.917$	0.021
	Outside school	46.93	6.93		
	School and other contexts	49.63	7.48		
Gender	Female	50.28	6.63	$t = 3.783$	0.000
	Male	48.77	7.60		
Do you have friends who have migrated alone?	No	48.91	6.87	$t = 3.018$	0.003
	Yes	50.09	7.30		
Have you been educated to live with people of other countries and origins?	No	50.73	6.91	$t = -7.804$	0.000
	Yes	47.69	7.11		

Source: created by the authors.

The results indicate that the adolescents who live in Barcelona show greater religious sensitivity than those who reside in the city of Melilla. For example, the former value aspects such as “meeting new people with beliefs different from mine” or “all beliefs raise the same principles” more positively.

Furthermore, those students who claim to have been trained to live with people of different beliefs rely on statements such as “all beliefs raise the same values of peace, honesty, compassion, justice, etc.”, “it is good that there are students of different beliefs and religions at my institute”, or “if I lived abroad, I could participate in religious events in that country, enriching my beliefs.”

Those students who claim to have received religious training value aspects such as “all believing people pray” and statements such as “all beliefs raise the same values of peace, honesty, compassion, justice, etc.”, “it is good that there are students of different beliefs and religions in my institute”, or “if I lived abroad, I could participate in religious events in that country, enriching my beliefs” have great weight.

Regarding the place where they have received this training, the family context has the most impact on this aspect. Thus, this training brings them closer to assessments such as “people with beliefs different from mine are a threat” or “people with beliefs different from mine are not very intelligent.”

The girls present greater interreligious sensitivity. This is supported by statements such as “I learn better about different religions directly from contact with believers of those religions” or “it is good that there are students with different beliefs and religions in my institute”. In this sense, having friends who have migrated alone also affects religious sensitivity. However, none of the statements that make up the scale present significant statistical differences in this aspect, only in the overall assessment of the scale.

Finally, students educated to live with people from other origins, show again that “it is good that there are students with different beliefs and religions in my institute.” However, those who claim not to have received this education rely on statements such as “I have never had contact with people with beliefs different from mine, because I think it is not important to me.”

In summary, the profiles of the participants described below are at a more advanced stage of interreligious dialogue are girls with training in coexistence with people of different beliefs and origins, religious education (both in and out of school), with unaccompanied migrant friends and from Barcelona.

On the other hand, no statistically significant differences were found between students who perceived that spirituality was worked on at their school and those who did not ($t = 0.840$, $gl = 1344$, $p = 0.401$, $\alpha = 0.05$). However, surprisingly, students who indicate that they have no training in spirituality are more open to participating in events of other religions.

2.3. Conflict Management in Contexts of Diversity

The Conflict Management in Contexts of Diversity Scale has a total of 17 items. The theoretical minimum and maximum scores are 17 and 85, respectively. The mean observed on the scale was 55.88, with a standard deviation of 8.75.

In general terms, our findings showed that, when faced with conflict situations with people different from themselves, students tended to respond by turning to other people, (friends, teachers, professionals) and/or their beliefs. In other words, they used strategies typical of the coping style of seeking social support (Table 2).

Table 2. Conflict Management in Contexts of Diversity Scale statistics and comparisons.

Significant Comparisons		Mean	SD	Contrast Statistic	p-Value
Gender	Female	57.35	8.31	$t = 6.393$	0.000
	Male	54.29	8.90		
	Other	50.95	8.54		
Have you been educated to live with people of other countries and origins?	No	53.19	8.78	$t = 6.810$	0.000
	Yes	56.83	8.55		
Have you been educated to live with people of different beliefs?	No	53.19	8.78	$t = 6.810$	0.000
	Yes	56.83	8.55		
Has spirituality been worked on at your school?	No	55.10	8.65	$t = 4.223$	0.000
	Yes	57.17	8.82		
Do you have a religious education?	No	54.99	8.70	$t = 2.5445$	0.011
	Yes	56.29	8.76		

Source: created by the authors.

Among these results, statistically significant differences were found according to gender; whether students had received education in intercultural and interreligious coexistence at their high schools; spirituality; and whether they had received religious education (at school or outside).

For example, we can see that young people from both contexts the first thing they do when faced with a conflict is “I try to talk and find a solution.” However, this same action is carried out by girls more frequently than boys. Furthermore, the results show that girls, when faced with conflicts, look for ways to solve conflicts such as “I talk to other people to find out what they would do if they were in this situation” or “I call a close friend”, whereas boys make avoidance or confrontational decisions such as “I hope the problem resolves itself,” “I avoid this person,” “I yell or insult them,” or “I wait for the right moment to get revenge.”

Young people perceive that they have training to live with people from other countries and origins and this influences their way of managing conflicts. This is shown by obtaining higher scores in most of the items on the scale, with “the search for a solution” being the most valued. On the other hand, students who indicate that they have not had this type of training rely on statements such as “avoid that person”, “ignore the situation”, or “blame the other”.

Regarding training to live with people of different beliefs, those who have it always choose “I try to talk and find a solution.” On the other hand, those who do not have this training choose to avoid the situation or the person with whom they have had the conflict or to seek help from other people.

If we focus on training in spirituality, the data, although similar to the previous ones, we see that those who claim to have worked on spirituality, in addition to the actions related to the search for solutions, also show that a group differs in this aspect and that their position is to avoid conflict situations or flee from them. To this, we must add that for those who do not have this training, their responses revolve around waiting for the problematic situation to disappear by itself. Finally, we see that having training in spirituality also provides some different data to the aspects discussed above. The information obtained is more related to the aspect discussed in the previous paragraph about spirituality. Thus, the students who have had training in religion show that they try to find a solution; however, we see how they also search for help and sometimes even show a negative attitude, as they try to blame the other or try to get revenge whenever they find an opportunity.

In summary, the following profile of participants was able to manage conflict more effectively in diverse environments: girls who reported that they were educated in intercultural coexistence and spirituality in their high schools, and were educated in religion at the school or elsewhere.

In contrast, no statistically significant differences were found between Barcelona and Melilla ($t = 1.833$, $gl = 706$, $p = 0.067$, $\alpha = 0.05$), or for having contact or not with unaccompanied migrant youth ($t = -1.340$, $gl = 1347$, $p = 0.180$, $\alpha = 0.05$). However, in Melilla, young people in cases of conflict try to find someone (friend, family member, etc.) to help them resolve this incident. On the contrary, students from Barcelona are more prone to avoidance. Furthermore, those who indicate that they have interacted with young people who migrate alone when it comes to managing conflicts seek help to resolve this situation, while those who have not had contact prefer avoidance or direct confrontation.

2.4. Prejudice towards Unaccompanied Migrant Youth

The Prejudice toward Unaccompanied Migrant Youth Scale has a total of 19 items. The theoretical minimum and maximum scores are 19 and 95, respectively. The mean observed on the scale was 51.97, with a standard deviation of 14.04.

In general terms, the students were found to be prejudiced towards unaccompanied young migrants, with a mean score of 52, below the 57 that represents the scale’s intermediate theoretical score (see Table 3).

Table 3. Prejudice towards Unaccompanied Migrant Youth Scale statistics and comparisons.

Significant Comparisons		Mean	SD	Contrast Statistic	p-Value
Context	Barcelona	48.18	10.89	$t = 14.122$	0.000
	Melilla	60.65	16.39		
Gender	Females	50.91	14.40	$t = -2.787$	0.005
	Males	53.10	13.60		
	Other	54.59	12.22		
Have you been educated to live with people of other countries or origins?	No	53.31	13.48	$t = -2.079$	0.038
	Yes	51.50	14.20		

Source: created by the authors.

Among these results, statistically significant differences were found according to gender and the perception of having received education in intercultural and interreligious coexistence at high school.

Specifically in Melilla, these prejudices are observed when they affirm that “they receive more help than those who are born here”, “they bring diseases” or “they are sexist”. Compared to the students of Barcelona who affirm, on the contrary, that “with them we learn many things about their traditions”, “they have the same rights as the others”, or “they do not lower the level of their class”.

Focusing on the gender variable, we can see how the girls indicate that they “contribute to our society”, “they work to help their families”, or “they are not delinquents”. On the opposite side, the boys indicate that “they lower the level of their class”, “they do not collaborate with the economy of Spain”, or “they want us to have the same beliefs”.

Finally, those who claim to have been educated to live with people from other countries and origins show more positive attitudes, as is evident in statements such as “they help us live better because they contribute to our society”, “they are friendly because of their cultural values”, or “they do things right and wrong like anyone else.” On the other hand, those who have not had that education show that “they receive more help than those who were born here”, “they are delinquents”, or “they lower the level of their class”.

In summary, the profile of the participants who showed more prejudice towards unaccompanied immigrant youth were boys from Melilla who had not been educated at their schools to live with people from other countries and origins.

Surprisingly, there are no statistically significant differences between those who perceive that they were trained to live with people of different beliefs in their centers ($t = -1.779$, $g1 = 1347$, $p = 0.075$, $\alpha = 0.05$); nor do they perceive having worked on spiritual aspects or the inner world in their educational center ($t = -0.280$, $df = 1344$, $p = 0.780$, $\alpha = 0.05$), nor having interacted or not with young people who migrate alone ($t = 0.528$, $df = 1347$, $p = 0.598$, $\alpha = 0.05$). There are also no statistically significant differences in having prejudices towards young people who migrate alone, due to the fact of having religious training from the center or from other resources outside the center ($t = 1.179$, $g1 = 1348$, $p = 0.239$, $\alpha = 0.05$).

These data can be specified in that those who indicate having the training to live with people of other beliefs mostly affirm that “they like them”, “they do not lower the level of their class”, or “thanks to them we know other cultures and languages”. In contrast to these, we find those who, without this type of training, claim that they “do not contribute to society”, “they are criminals”, or “they lower the level of their class”. However, in both cases, they agree with statements such as “they take away our jobs” or “there are too many migrant minors who arrive in Spain.”

In reference to spirituality, those who have received training in this regard value that minor migrants “are friendly because of their cultural values” or “thanks to them we know other cultures and languages.” On the other hand, those who do not have this training in spirituality claim that “they bring illnesses” or “they take away our jobs.” As in the

previous case, both groups of students agree that “Spanish will be lost due to the use of their languages” or “they want us all to have the same beliefs.”

Focusing on those who claim to have known migrant minors, their assessments are along the lines of “they work to help their families”, “they have the same rights as others”, or “they seek a better future”. For their part, those who do not have this type of acquaintance agree that “they are sexist”, “they don’t like them”, or “they don’t contribute to our society”. Despite this, both groups agree in stating that “Spanish will be lost due to the use of their languages” or “too many minors arrive in Spain.”

3. Materials and Methods

A survey study was conducted using a questionnaire for adolescents in compulsory secondary education as the data-gathering instrument.

3.1. Population and Sample

The population under study was students in the 3rd and 4th years of compulsory secondary education in state and state-subsidized schools in the cities of Barcelona and Melilla.

The sample was selected by random cluster sampling, the clusters being the secondary schools in each of the districts of Barcelona and Melilla. The final sample consisted of 17 secondary schools in Barcelona and Melilla (see Table 4).

Table 4. Frequencies and percentages of the participating high schools by city.

City	High School	Frequency	Percentage
Barcelona	Vedruna	125	13.3%
	CC Arrels	96	10.2%
	Sagrado Corazón	72	7.7%
	Lleó XIII	36	3.8%
	Institut Salvador Espriu	157	16.7%
	Ins. Galileo Galilei	98	10.4%
	CC Santíssima Trinitat	53	5.7%
	CC Ramon Llull	34	3.6%
	Institut Teresa Pàmies	95	10.1%
	Ins. Infanta Isabel d’Aragó	61	6.5%
	Ins Pau Claris	111	11.8%
Melilla	Miguel Fernández	40	9.7%
	Leopoldo Queipo	19	4.6%
	Escuela Arte	33	8.0%
	Enrique Nieto	60	14.6%
	Rusadir	49	11.9%
	Virgen De La Victoria	208	50.6%

Source: created by the authors.

The final sample consisted of 1353 young people, 942 in Barcelona, and 411 in Melilla. The sample was relatively balanced in terms of gender, age, and school years for the stage of education under study: 54.7% were female, compared to 42.3% male and 3% other; and the average age was 15, within an age range of 13 to 20, with 74.4% from 13 to 15, 24.0% from 16 to 17, and 1.6% over 18. Lastly, the cities of residence were Barcelona and Melilla, with small percentages from the metropolitan area and Nador, respectively. Table 5 shows some slight differences in these frequencies between Barcelona and Melilla.

Table 5. Demographic variables: percentages by city.

Variable		Barcelona	Melilla
Gender	Female	53.5%	57.4%
	Male	43.4%	39.6%
	Other	3.1%	3.0%
Age	14–15	79.6%	65.5%
	16–17	20.3%	36.6%
	18–20	0.1%	4.9%
Country of family origin	Spain	54.1%	64.5%
	Other	45.9%	35.5%
City of residence	Barcelona	93.2%	
	Barcelona metropolitan area	6.8%	
	Melilla		95.5%
	Nador (Morocco)		1.5%

Source: created by the authors.

3.2. Data-Gathering Instrument

A self-perception questionnaire was created with the aim of identifying adolescents' intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies (Table 6). The questionnaire is composed of four components: (a) demographic and identification data; (b) Abu-Nimer's (2001) Interreligious Sensitivity Scale; (c) Frydenberg and Lewis's (2000) Conflict Management in Contexts of Diversity Scale combined with three scales on related areas (beliefs about friendship, relationships with people from other cultures, reasons for inappropriate behaviors and forms of conflict resolution); and (d) Etxeberria Balerdi et al.'s (2012) Prejudice towards Unaccompanied Migrant Minors Scale. Together, these elements made up a 60-item instrument whose scales were shown to be reliable by Cronbach's alpha (Table 3).

Table 6. Dimensions of the Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Competencies Scale.

Items	Scale	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Demographic and identification data (gender, age, family background, friends, school, year, and knowledge of religion, coexistence, and spirituality).	Nominal	10	-
Interreligious Sensitivity Scale (Abu-Nimer 2001).	5-point Likert	15	0.752
Beliefs about Friendship Scale	5-point Likert	6	0.805
Relationships with People from Other Cultures Scale	5-point Likert	5	0.841
Inappropriate Behaviors Scale	5-point Likert	6	0.828
Conflict Management in Contexts of Diversity Scale (Frydenberg and Lewis 2000).	5-point Likert	17	0.735
Prejudice towards Unaccompanied Migrant Minors Scale (Etxeberria Balerdi et al. 2012).	5-point Likert	21	0.865

Note: created by the authors.

The questions on demographic data aimed to gather contextual information and some independent variables that could be contrasted with the results, such as contact with diversity, formal education received, etc.

To construct the Interreligious Sensitivity Scale, a previous scale (the IRRSS) developed by Mohamed Abu-Nimer (2001) was taken as a model, as it is a useful instrument for exploring young people's self-perception of their orientations towards religion and different beliefs. This scale is based on Bennet's (1986) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). Bennet's model, in general terms, posits a continuum ranging from ethnocentric cultural positions to ethno-relative cultural positions. Abu-Nimer's scale takes this up and adapts it to the more specific context of religion and interreligious dialogue, proposing a spectrum ranging from more religion-centric positions towards more religion-relative ones; in other words, from postures that see one's own beliefs as the only valid ones

and, therefore, ignore other options, to postures that see every belief as valid in itself, thus accepting other beliefs and even being open to adopting different cultural and religious frames of reference (Abu-Nimer 2001). The Interreligious Sensitivity Scale, then, seeks to identify the group vision of differing beliefs, based on individual statements of personal attitudes towards religious differences. It is also important to mention that, as explained in the questionnaire and at the time of its application, beliefs are defined in a broad sense and include not only religious beliefs but also spiritual, agnostic, and/or atheist beliefs.

The Conflict Management Scale was based on a Spanish version of the Adolescent Coping Scale (ASC) developed by Frydenberg and Lewis (2000). This scale is a self-reporting instrument that asks young people to analyze and examine their coping behaviors when faced with conflict.

Lastly, the Overcoming Prejudice Scale developed by Etxeberria Balerdi et al. (2012) is an instrument for assessing stereotypes and prejudices towards migrants. The scale was developed on the basis of several studies carried out by the Red Cross, Barcelona City Council, the Basque Government, and the Council of Europe, among others.

3.3. Data-Gathering and Analysis Procedures

The questionnaire was administered during the months of May, June, and November 2021 with the support of the Barcelona Education Consortium, which facilitated contact with and access to the schools. The Education Consortium is a body that manages formal non-university education jointly with Barcelona City Council and the Catalan Government Education Department. In order to comply with University of Barcelona ethical research requirements and to protect the rights of students and faculty, a collaboration agreement was signed between the Consortium and the University of Barcelona. The Consortium provided access to the participating schools and obtained the consent of the families since those answering the questionnaire were minors. This allowed the research team to be present in school classrooms and to administer the questionnaire in person. Thus, the researchers were able to inform participants directly of the study's purposes and objectives and answer any questions arising from the application of the survey. It is also important to mention that the questionnaire was answered anonymously and that, as explained to the students, the information and data collected were used only for academic and research purposes. After the measurement instruments had been piloted and validated, the first analysis of definitive data was carried out during November and December 2021.

In Melilla, the procedure was similar in time and form, although the facilitating institution was the Provincial Directorate of the Education and Vocational Training Ministry. Once authorization to perform the study had been given, the research coordinators contacted the high school management teams. Two versions of the questionnaire were made (online and hard copy) and, depending on the schools' resources and preferences, one or the other instrument was used. Members of the research team went to the schools at two different times: first, students were informed of the purposes and nature of the research and the families' consent was obtained; and second, once written consent had been given, the questionnaire was administered, in most cases by teachers from the schools, as this approach was preferred.

Subsequently, a descriptive analysis of all the variables in the study was undertaken, focusing on the measures of central tendency and deviation for the quantitative variables and on the frequency of appearance of the categories for the qualitative. Hypothesis tests (Student's *t* for two independent groups and one-factor ANOVA) were also applied in order to establish differences in the scale scores according to the questionnaire's demographic and identification variables.

All these operations were performed with the SPSS statistical package, version 20.

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify intercultural and interreligious dialogue competencies among adolescents, defined by three dimensions (prejudice, conflict resolution, and

interreligious sensitivity), in two contexts with a large number of citizens from other countries (although it should be noted that Barcelona has a wide variety of people from many continents and countries, while in Melilla, foreign inhabitants are mainly from African countries, mostly Morocco and to a much lesser extent Senegal, Mauritania, and Algeria).

Regarding coexistence between different cultural groups, our findings show that adolescents in Barcelona and Melilla do not usually relate socially to unaccompanied migrant minors. These results concur with those of [Vedder et al. \(2017\)](#), who concluded that adolescents preferred to relate to and have friendships among peers with intercultural attitudes similar to their own, which may produce social distancing from outgroups with dissimilar cultural and religious beliefs ([Rivas-Drake et al. 2014](#); [Segura-Robles et al. 2016](#)).

Although the majority of students stated that they were taught to live with people from other origins and, to a lesser extent, had worked on spirituality at school, this had not fostered relationships with the unaccompanied migrant youth that they lived with on a daily basis. These findings raise questions about the hypothesis of contact with the outgroup ([Kanas et al. 2015](#)) and the positive contact effect put forward by [Pettigrew and Tropp \(2006\)](#), since the data from our study indicate that prejudice towards unaccompanied migrant minors continues to exist, and is in fact even greater amongst youth in Melilla, where, due to the specific characteristics of the city, there is considerable real presence of unaccompanied migrant minors in schools and the city at large. The prejudices and discriminations in Barcelona and Melilla can be seen in other studies ([Ajuntament de Barcelona 2023](#)).

One possible explanation of this is that, at this stage of full socialization, adolescents strengthen bonds of friendship with the ingroup, specifically with friends with whom they share similar beliefs and attitudes ([Rivas-Drake et al. 2014](#)), thereby producing a social distancing from the outgroup due to a lack of knowledge of the other, which can in turn lead to subtle prejudices manifested in feelings of discomfort ([Navas and Rojas 2010](#)) towards those peers they do not know. Therefore, for the contact hypothesis to minimize prejudice in young people, it must meet a series of requirements ([Pettigrew and Tropp 2006](#)), namely, equality of status, cooperative group work, common objectives, and institutional support. Unfortunately, not all these conditions can always be met in the classroom.

Turning to participants' cultural sensitivity, our data show differences between Barcelona and Melilla, with the students of the latter city perceiving, to a greater extent than those of Barcelona, that they had received education in intercultural and religious coexistence, although both groups, despite receiving such education, stated that they did not usually interact with unaccompanied migrant youth. For this reason, it is essential to develop interreligious and cultural sensitivity by implementing intervention programs in formal secondary education ([Andreu and Ouhamid 2021](#); [Sanhueza et al. 2021](#); [Tondok et al. 2022](#)), in order to prevent and/or modify stereotypical and prejudiced attitudes towards outgroups. These programs should also be included in the School Plan and implemented at all levels.

In terms of how students resolve conflicts in multicultural contexts, our findings indicate that females use more strategies of seeking support from others than males, findings that are in line with [Çoban \(2013\)](#) and [Verdugo-Lucero et al. \(2013\)](#), while males tend more towards avoiding facing conflict ([Reyes et al. 2017](#)). Moreover, students who reported that they had been educated to coexist with peers from other cultures also scored more highly in peaceful conflict resolution. These findings support the argument of [Sanhueza et al. \(2021\)](#) that cultural sensitivity should be worked on in the classroom since it improves relationships with outgroups. Also, [Andreu and Ouhamid \(2021\)](#) affirmed that intervention programs are one of the most important resources for developing positive attitudes towards interculturality and religious diversity in the classroom ([García et al. 2003](#); [Paluck and Shepherd 2012](#)) because by promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue, we can break down barriers of misunderstanding and stigmatization of outgroups ([Barba del Horno 2021](#); [Moreno 2012](#)).

Working on intercultural sensitivity and interreligious dialogue should, therefore, be undertaken at all stages and educational levels in order to build attitudes of tolerance and solidarity amongst all cultural groups, both in formal and informal education. This will result in both personal and cultural enrichment, as argued by [Sabariego et al. \(2018\)](#).

5. Conclusions

The results obtained in this study lead us to reflect on the importance of secondary education aiming to deconstruct prejudices towards unaccompanied immigrant minors, as the mere fact of sharing space and time in the classroom is not enough to develop cultural sensitivity. From the data analyzed here, we can conclude that most of the young people, both in Barcelona and Melilla, perceived that school had taught them to live with people from different cultures and religions. In fact, those who have received education in cultural and religious coexistence, as well as in spirituality, manage conflicts in plural contexts better than those who have not, although it is important to continue working in this direction. With respect to spirituality, students reported that they had not worked on this subject at school, although they had received religious education, and this was greater in Melilla than in Barcelona. Finally, students in Melilla had received religious education at school and more frequently outside school, specifically at home or with relatives.

As a complement, a series of measures are presented that can be positive to improve skills for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Firstly, the entry of migrant students into classrooms must be protected under a Reception Plan that promotes the elimination of communication barriers, as well as the participation of both migrant students and students of origin. To do this, activities must be carried out that enhance dialogue and knowledge of others among students.

In the classroom, teachers must promote cooperative work with heterogeneous groups in religion, ethnicities, skills, etc. In the playground, you can play different traditional games from the different countries of origin as a way to learn about customs, traditions, beliefs, etc. of the different ethnic groups that make up the class group.

It can be enriching to prepare a coexistence between parents and students in a playful atmosphere, in which each family prepares a typical meal from their country. Each of them will have the opportunity to explain to the rest when that food is prepared, what traditions they have, what their values are, their goals, etc.

In addition, the collaboration of the students could be counted on to be reference partners for the newly arrived students, with whom they can improve their linguistic competence, resolve their doubts, or ask social questions that may be different in their place of origin.

Finally, you can invite speakers from different backgrounds, both in regular and irregular situations, to tell what their culture, country, and traditions are like, and why they decided to change countries, etc. as a way of approaching and knowing the other.

With regard to the limitations of the study, it is necessary to further study attributive variables such as culture, religion, religious practice and socio-economic level variables that may be correlated. The study was not analyzed because the educational administration in Melilla did not consider it advisable to do so. Secondly, it would be necessary to increase the sample size in order to be able to generalize the results to the whole population. Thirdly, as future lines of research, these results could be enriched with those obtained through a mixed methodology, complementing these data with those obtained through a qualitative methodology, collecting information through interviews and discussion groups with secondary school students with different life experiences due to their different socio-economic and cultural contexts, given the multicultural characteristics of both cities, using a stratified non-probabilistic sampling.

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