

Self-Concept and the Psychosocial Classroom Environment: The Mediating Role of Conflict Negotiation

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between self-concept, conflict negotiation efficacy, and the psychosocial classroom environment in secondary school students. Based on the idea that students' self-perceptions may influence their interpersonal functioning and, consequently, how they interpret the school context, the study sought to address a gap in the literature on the joint articulation of these variables in an educational setting. A total of 673 secondary school students (10th, 11th and 12th grades) participated and completed measures of self-concept, conflict negotiation efficacy, and the psychosocial classroom environment. The data were analysed using structural equation modelling in order to test three direct relationships and one indirect effect. The results indicated a positive association between self-concept and conflict negotiation efficacy, as well as positive relationships between these variables and the psychosocial classroom environment. In addition, conflict negotiation efficacy showed an indirect effect in the relationship between self-concept and the psychosocial classroom environment, supporting the proposed mediation model. These results suggest that students with more positive self-concepts may be better prepared to negotiate interpersonal conflicts, which may contribute to a more favourable perception of the classroom environment. The findings underscore the educational relevance of promoting self-concept and conflict negotiation skills as part of strategies to improve experiences in the school context.

Keywords

Self-Concept, Conflict Negotiation, Psychosocial Classroom Environment, Secondary Education, Structural Equation Modelling, Mediation

1. Introduction

Self-concept is generally understood as the individual's perception of their own abilities, competencies and personal worth, constituting an important psychological resource for adjustment to the school context. In the educational literature, academic self-concept has been particularly valued because it is associated with learning processes, persistence, and adjustment, and is both an outcome and an antecedent of other educational indicators (Marsh & Martin, 2011). This dual function makes it a central variable when one seeks to understand how students position themselves in relation to the demands of school life. In addition, self-concept is not limited to a strictly cognitive or academic dimension; it also incorporates social and relational components that may influence how students interpret interactions in the school setting (Paiva & Lourenço, 2011).

Beyond the individual dimension, the relational and organisational context of the classroom plays a decisive role in students' psychological development. Research on classroom climate shows that the environment perceived by students is positively associated with social competence, motivation, engagement and academic achievement, and negatively associated with socio-emotional distress and externalising behaviours (Wang et al., 2020). More recently, Scherrer et al. (2023) showed that perceived dimensions of classroom climate are associated with changes in adolescents' academic self-concept and self-esteem, reinforcing the idea that the school context shapes the way students perceive themselves. In parallel, recent literature on school climate highlights that positive educational environments are based primarily on the quality of relationships, perceptions of safety and interpersonal support, elements that are particularly relevant for students' socio-emotional development (Vanderlei et al., 2025).

Within this framework, the psychosocial classroom environment can be understood as a relational space in which expectations, interactions, interpersonal support and emotional safety intersect. When this environment is perceived as positive, it tends to foster students' engagement and the quality of their relationships; when it is perceived as negative, it may undermine adjustment and school experience (Mastromatteo et al., 2023). Review studies on school climate instruments and dimensions show that this construct encompasses domains such as relationships, safety, discipline, and academic aspects, highlighting its multifaceted, psychosocial nature (González et al., 2023). Thus, understanding the classroom environment entails examining the quality of the interpersonal experiences that occur within it, as well as how students interpret these experiences.

Conflict negotiation constitutes another particularly relevant variable in the school context, especially because conflicts between peers are part of the everyday dynamics of classrooms. Approaches to mediation and conflict resolution show that dialogical and cooperative strategies can reduce tensions and foster safer, more constructive environments (Correia & Alves, 2025).

Lešková and Haburajová Ilavská (2023) found that peer mediation is perceived as an appropriate form of conflict resolution in the school environment and as a

resource that promotes positive coexistence. In a convergent way, the literature on conflict resolution in schools has emphasised that structured programmes tend to produce favourable effects on coexistence and on students' ability to deal with disagreements constructively. In this sense, conflict negotiation can be understood as a social competence that affects not only relational management but also the way students interpret their school context.

Despite the relevance of these domains, research remains less clear regarding the articulation of the relationships among self-concept, conflict negotiation, and the psychosocial classroom environment within a single explanatory model. Although there are studies linking self-concept to the school context and others valuing peer mediation and conflict resolution in the educational environment, there remains a gap in the integrated analysis of how self-concept may be associated with conflict negotiation and, through this, influence perceptions of the classroom environment (Correia & Alves, 2025; Lešková & Haburajová Ilavská, 2023; Marsh & Martin, 2011; Scherrer et al., 2023). This gap is particularly relevant because recent literature has shown that contextual and personal variables do not operate in isolation but interact, influencing school adjustment and students' well-being (Wang et al., 2020). Accordingly, the present study aims to make an innovative contribution to the literature by analysing the relationships among self-concept, conflict negotiation, and the psychosocial classroom environment, and by testing a model in which conflict negotiation serves as a mediating variable in the association between self-concept and perceptions of the school environment.

2. Theoretical Rationale

Taking into account the framework presented in the introduction, the present chapter discusses the theoretical rationale underlying the model under study, structured around three central constructs: self-concept, conflict negotiation, and the psychosocial classroom environment. First, the concept of self-concept and its relevance to school adjustment are presented; next, conflict negotiation is addressed as a central social competence in educational interactions; finally, the psychosocial classroom environment is discussed, highlighting the role of relational climate in students' school experience. From this review, the hypotheses guiding the empirical study are made explicit.

2.1. Self-Concept

Self-concept refers to the relatively stable perception that the individual constructs about their abilities, competencies and personal worth, constituting a central psychological resource for school adjustment. In the tradition of educational psychology, this construct has been conceptualised as multidimensional and context-sensitive, integrating academic, social, emotional and relational facets that do not operate in isolation but interact with development and the interpersonal demands of school. Within this framework, Cunha et al. (2016b) observed that self-concept is positively associated with students' negotiation efficacy, reinforcing the idea that

how students perceive themselves may influence how they deal with conflict situations in the school context.

The literature has consistently highlighted that academic self-concept is associated with achievement and school adjustment. Marsh and Martin (2011) showed that academic self-concept and academic achievement are reciprocally related, suggesting that the way students perceive themselves in learning influences their performance and, in turn, is influenced by that performance. This relationship is relevant because it reinforces the idea that self-concept is not only a consequence of school experiences, but also a factor that conditions future interpretations and behaviours. Thus, students with a more positive self-concept tend to engage more in tasks, persist in the face of difficulties and face educational challenges in a less threatening way (Scherrer et al., 2023).

Beyond the academic dimension, self-concept also includes social and relational components. Paiva and Lourenço (2011), in analysing academic achievement alongside self-concept and the classroom environment, showed that students' self-perception is related to their perception of the educational context and their school results. This evidence suggests that self-concept should be understood as a highly situated phenomenon, integrating the student's reading of themselves as a learner and as a relational subject. In this line, academic self-concept, although distinct from self-efficacy, may be influenced by contextual and interpersonal experiences, reinforcing its multidimensional nature (Gasparotto et al., 2018). Complementarily, studies have shown that these constructs are associated with one another and are related to adolescents' psychological adjustment (Nunes & Faro, 2021; Sacilotto & Abaid, 2021).

More recently, Scherrer et al. (2023) showed that the climate perceived in the classroom is associated with the development of adolescents' academic self-concept and self-esteem, suggesting that self-concept develops in interaction with the quality of the relational and pedagogical environment. The results of this study reinforce the idea that self-concept should not be reduced to a cognitive or achievement indicator, as it also encompasses how students feel valued, supported and recognised in the school context. Thus, a more positive self-concept may translate into greater readiness to deal with interpersonal demands, including conflict negotiation, and into greater openness to participation in the classroom space (Leme et al., 2024).

2.2. Conflict Negotiation

Conflict negotiation constitutes a relevant social competence in the school context, insofar as interpersonal conflicts are part of the everyday dynamics of interactions between peers and between students and adults (Leme & Carvalho, 2014; Lourenço & Paiva, 2025). In educational terms, this competence is not limited to the punctual resolution of disagreements; it involves the capacity for communication, listening, self-regulation, the search for solutions and constructive management of difference, aspects associated with the development of socio-emotional

and social competences in the school context (Costa & Fleith, 2019; Simões & Castro, 2018). When properly developed, conflict negotiation can promote more balanced relationships, a greater sense of belonging and a more positive school coexistence (Lešková & Haburajová Ilavská, 2023).

In a convergent manner, Correia and Alves (2025) showed that peer mediation training contributes to the development of specific knowledge and skills in the mediation process, as well as to self-reported improvements in students' performance in conflict situations. These findings reinforce the idea that conflict negotiation is a relational and educationally relevant learning process.

From a conceptual point of view, conflict negotiation differs from the simple reduction of conflict. Rather than assuming the elimination of disagreements, it is based on the premise that conflicts can be regulated through dialogical and cooperative means, preserving the relationship and strengthening students' capacity to interact in diverse contexts (Leme & Carvalho, 2014; Correia & Alves, 2025). Several authors emphasise the need to identify the causes of school conflicts and to develop strategies for managing relationships that prevent escalations of tension and promote constructive coexistence (Lešková & Haburajová Ilavská, 2023; Lourenço & Paiva, 2025; Valente et al., 2017). In this context, conflict management in the classroom depends not only on the dynamics between students but also on the personal and relational characteristics of teachers, which may influence the way conflict is prevented and regulated (Lourenço et al., 2023). This perspective is particularly useful for the present study, because it allows conflict negotiation to be framed as a competence that may be influenced by personal characteristics, such as self-concept, and that, in turn, may impact perceptions of the classroom environment (Lourenço & Paiva, 2025; Yamini et al., 2023).

The available evidence also suggests that conflict management and resolution programmes have favourable effects on school socialisation and the school's relational climate (Lešková & Haburajová Ilavská, 2023; Lourenço & Paiva, 2025). Recent studies indicate that school environments that promote constructive conflict management, dialogue and structured mediation practices tend to foster a culture of peace, social inclusion and the quality of interactions, making it more likely that students will interpret relational challenges as learning opportunities rather than threats (Moro & Vivaldi, 2024; Pinto da Costa et al., 2018).

2.3. Psychosocial Classroom Environment

The psychosocial classroom environment can be understood as the set of perceptions that students construct about the quality of relationships, emotional safety, interpersonal support and the organisation of the learning context (Paiva & Lourenço, 2011; Wang et al., 2020). It is not merely an institutional backdrop, but a relational space with a direct impact on students' school experience, motivation and well-being (Havik & Westergård, 2020; Soepudin et al., 2023). Contemporary literature on school climate shows that the relational and emotional dimensions of the classroom context are decisive in how students engage in learning and in-

interpret their school experience (Scherrer et al., 2023; Vanderlei et al., 2025). Beyond the impact on learning and interpersonal relationships, school is also a space for identity development and the formation of values, contributing to the construction of broader ways of being and relating throughout the student's educational journey. This perspective is compatible with approaches that emphasise the articulation between education, identity and values, even if their focus lies in other domains of psychological development (Lourenço et al., 2025).

Wang et al. (2020), through a meta-analysis, showed that classroom climate is positively associated with social competence, motivation, engagement and academic achievement, and negatively associated with socio-emotional distress and externalising behaviours. These results are particularly relevant because they demonstrate that the school environment influences not only achievement, but also broader psychological indicators. In practical terms, this means that a positive climate functions as a protective factor, whereas a negative climate may increase students' vulnerability to adjustment difficulties.

Jia and Cheng (2024) reinforce this perspective by highlighting the role of the teacher's emotional support and the psychosocial environment in promoting student engagement. When the classroom provides consistent emotional support, students tend to participate more, feel safer and develop better relationships with peers and teachers. Chen et al. (2023) also highlight the centrality of the quality of the teacher-child relationship, suggesting that teachers' perceptions and relational interactions are structuring elements of the learning environment. In a similar vein, Mastromatteo et al. (2023) showed that the relationship between children's physiological regulation and their school engagement is influenced by the classroom climate. The results show that in contexts perceived as less favourable, greater physiological self-regulation capacity is associated with higher levels of participation and engagement in school activities, thereby evidencing the link between the relational environment and children's psychobiological adjustment.

In addition, González et al. (2023) systematised instruments for assessing school climate, showing that this construct includes domains such as interpersonal relationships, safety, discipline and academic aspects. This multidimensionality confirms that the psychosocial classroom environment should be understood in an integrated way: perceptions of support, the presence of emotional safety and the quality of interactions constitute conditions that favour socio-emotional development and school participation. More recently, Vanderlei et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of a positive school climate, emphasising welcoming strategies and the promotion of belonging as central elements in building safe, emotionally supportive environments.

2.4. Articulation and Hypotheses

The articulation between self-concept, conflict negotiation and the psychosocial classroom environment becomes particularly relevant when one considers that school development results from the interaction between personal and contextual

factors. The literature shows that self-concept is sensitive to the relational context and to perceptions of classroom climate (Marsh & Martin, 2011; Scherrer et al., 2023; Paiva & Lourenço, 2011), while the quality of the school environment influences engagement, well-being and the way students see themselves (Wang et al., 2020; Soepudin et al., 2023; González et al., 2023). In parallel, conflict negotiation emerges as a social competence that can mediate students' relational experiences, promote more cooperative interactions, and reduce tensions in the school setting (Lešková & Haburajová Ilavská, 2023; Pinto da Costa et al., 2018; Lourenço & Paiva, 2025).

Within this framework, it is plausible to expect that students with more positive self-concepts will show greater efficacy in conflict negotiation, since they perceive themselves as more competent, more secure and more capable of acting in complex interpersonal contexts (Cunha et al., 2016b; Leme et al., 2024; Simões & Castro, 2018). In turn, greater efficacy in conflict negotiation may contribute to a more favourable perception of the psychosocial classroom environment, either because it reduces episodes of tension or because it fosters more positive relationships and a greater sense of belonging (Lešková & Haburajová Ilavská, 2023; Vanderlei et al., 2025; Moro & Vivaldi, 2024). In addition, the relational classroom environment may strengthen or weaken self-concept, suggesting a logic of reciprocal influence among the variables (Paiva & Lourenço, 2011; Rudasill et al., 2023; Scherrer et al., 2023).

Despite the relevance of these domains, research remains less clear regarding the articulation of the relationships among self-concept, conflict negotiation, and the psychosocial classroom environment within a single explanatory model. Although there are studies linking self-concept to the school context (Marsh & Martin, 2011; Sacilotto & Abaid, 2021) and work valuing peer mediation and conflict resolution in the educational environment (Pinto da Costa et al., 2018; Correia & Alves, 2025), a gap remains in the integrated analysis of how self-concept may be associated with conflict negotiation and, through this, influence perceptions of the classroom environment. This gap is particularly relevant because recent literature indicates that contextual and personal variables interactively influence school adjustment and students' well-being (Wang et al., 2020; Mastromatteo et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2023).

Thus, the present study proposes and tests a model in which self-concept is positively related to conflict negotiation and to the psychosocial classroom environment, and in which conflict negotiation acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between self-concept and environment. In this way, the model aims to contribute to a finer understanding of the psychosocial mechanisms underlying the school experience and to the identification of factors amenable to intervention in the educational context (Cunha et al., 2016b; Lourenço & Paiva, 2025; Wang et al., 2020).

On the basis of this theoretical framework, the following research hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Students' self-concept is positively related to their efficacy in conflict negotiation;

H2: Efficacy in conflict negotiation is positively related to the perception of the psychosocial classroom environment;

H3: Self-concept is positively related to the perception of the psychosocial classroom environment;

H4: Conflict negotiation mediates the relationship between self-concept and the perception of the psychosocial classroom environment.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

The present study included a convenience sample of 673 secondary school students recruited from seven schools in the district of Porto, northern Portugal. Participants were recruited in a school setting, with classes selected by the school administration according to organisational availability. The final sample comprised 29 classes, including three 10th-grade classes, sixteen 11th-grade classes, and ten 12th-grade classes. A total of 704 questionnaires were collected, of which 95.6% were complete and retained for analysis.

Participants ranged in age from 15 to 19 years ($M = 16.7$, $SD = 1.15$) and included 351 males (52.2%) and 322 females (47.8%). Regarding school grade, 75 students (11.1%) were enrolled in the 10th grade, 368 (54.7%) in the 11th grade, and 230 (34.2%) in the 12th grade.

3.2. Procedures

With the consent of school administrators and students' legal guardians, all procedures were conducted in accordance with ethical standards for research in education (Oates et al., 2021). Data collection took place between March and May 2025, with students taking approximately 20 minutes to complete the instrument battery. The researchers collected the data in a single session at each school. The objectives of the study were explained to the students, ensuring compliance with ethical protocols, namely anonymity, confidentiality of responses, and voluntary participation. It was also clarified that the collected data would be used exclusively for statistical analysis in this study. Thus, the sample collection complied with all ethical principles for research involving minors, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntariness. No sensitive data were collected, in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013). Only fully completed questionnaires were considered eligible for analysis.

3.3. Instruments

Three main instruments were used to collect data and assess variables related to self-concept, conflict negotiation, and the psychological classroom climate.

To assess students' perceived self-concept, the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale-2 (PHCSCS-2; Piers & Herzberg, 2002) was used, employing the

Portuguese version adapted and validated by [Veiga \(2006\)](#), which is widely used to assess adolescents' self-concept. The PHCSCS-2 consists of 60 items distributed across six factors: behavioural adjustment (BA; 13 items; $\alpha = 0.85$; e.g., "I do my schoolwork well"); intellectual status (IS; 13 items; $\alpha = 0.72$; e.g., "I am able to make a good impression on the class"); physical appearance (PA; 8 items; $\alpha = 0.74$; e.g., "I have a pleasant face"), anxiety (AN; 8 items; $\alpha = 0.70$; e.g., "I am often afraid"), popularity (PO; 10 items; $\alpha = 0.75$; e.g., "I have many friends") and satisfaction-happiness (SH; 8 items; $\alpha = 0.78$; e.g., "I would like to be different from what I am").

Each item was coded as either 1 or 2 (rather than 0 or 1), consistent with the coding scheme used in the database. Reverse scoring was applied to negatively worded items, with higher scores indicating a more positive self-concept.

To assess conflict negotiation in the school context, the Questionnaire of Negotiation Effectiveness of Conflicts in School (QENCE; [Cunha et al., 2016a](#)) was used to measure students' opinions and attitudes towards different aspects of the effectiveness of conflict negotiation in an educational context. The instrument comprises 21 items, answered on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The QENCE includes five dimensions: Negotiation Influence (NI; 5 items; $\alpha = 0.78$; e.g., "For a good negotiation I must consider that the other party is wrong"); Negotiation Climate (NC; 5 items; $\alpha = 0.72$; e.g., "I try to make my opponent feel at ease during the resolution of a conflict"); Negotiation Rationality (NR; 4 items; $\alpha = 0.81$; e.g., "I can accept criticism from my opponent"); Behavioural Firmness-Flexibility (BFF; 4 items; $\alpha = 0.80$; e.g., "I usually participate actively in negotiation situations"); and Constructive Solutions (CS; 3 items; $\alpha = 0.801$; e.g., "To achieve an agreement it is crucial to analyse the interests of each party").

To assess the classroom environment, the Psychosociological Classroom Environment Scale (APSA; [Veiga & Antunes, 2004](#)) was used to evaluate students' perceptions of the psychosociological climate in the classroom. In the present study, for the purposes of terminological standardisation, this variable is referred to as the psychosocial classroom environment, while the scale's original name is retained. The APSA consists of 22 items distributed across five factors: teacher's understanding authority in class (AC; 6 items; $\alpha = 0.81$; e.g., "Teachers explain which rules must be followed"); involvement in class (EA; 6 items; $\alpha = 0.84$; e.g., "I am always orderly and attentive in class"); affiliation in class (AF; 3 items; $\alpha = 0.78$; e.g., "It is easy for me to form a work group in class"); satisfaction in class (SA; 4 items; $\alpha = 0.83$; e.g., "I like classes in general"); and tasks in class (TA; 3 items; $\alpha = 0.80$; e.g., "I waste a lot of time in class"). Items are answered on a 6-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), also including reverse-worded items. Across all scales, the reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients reflect the internal consistency observed in the present study sample.

3.4. Data Analysis

The instruments used in the present study have previously established factorial

structures that have been validated in Portuguese samples. Therefore, the aim of the present study was not to revalidate the measurement instruments but to test the hypothesised structural relationships among the study variables. Accordingly, no exploratory factor analyses were conducted. The adequacy of the measurement model within the SEM framework was evaluated using the model-fit indices reported below while the internal consistency of the measures in the present sample was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the study variables.

In a preliminary descriptive analysis of the items, strict criteria were established to ensure data normality, with skewness limits below 2 and kurtosis below 7, as recommended by [Finney and DiStefano \(2013\)](#). Although students were nested within classes and schools, the primary objective of this study was to examine relationships among individual-level psychological constructs rather than between-class or between-school effects. Therefore, the structural equation model was estimated at the individual level, as the study focused on relationships among individual psychological constructs rather than contextual (classroom- or school-level) effects. The results of the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis were examined using SPSS/AMOS 29 software ([Arbuckle, 2022](#)). Attention focused on two main aspects: the overall model fit and the statistical significance of the regression coefficients obtained.

In this process, model fit indices and the magnitude of factor loadings were analysed, as they are considered fundamental for assessing the representativeness of the constructs. The adopted criteria included: χ^2 ; χ^2/df ratio; $\text{GFI} \geq 0.90$ ([Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1983](#)); $\text{AGFI} \geq 0.90$ ([Hu & Bentler, 1999](#)); $\text{CFI} \geq 0.95$ ([McDonald & Ho, 2002](#)); $\text{TLI} \geq 0.95$ ([Hair et al., 2019](#)); $\text{RMSEA} < 0.05$ ([Byrne, 2016](#)); and Critical N greater than 200 ([Marôco, 2021](#)). Standardised factor loadings were examined as indicators of the contribution of each observed variable to its respective latent construct. Although loadings of 0.40 or above are generally considered desirable ([Brown, 2015](#)), indicators with lower loadings were retained when justified by theoretical considerations and the overall measurement model demonstrated an acceptable fit.

Regarding the reliability of the results, given the sample size (greater than 300 participants) and the number of items analysed, Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 were considered indicative of adequate stability ([Marôco, 2021](#)). This threshold was used as a reference to ensure the robustness required for a detailed and reliable analysis.

Finally, to explore the strength and direction of the relationships between the different constructs, Pearson's linear correlation (r) was used. In this analysis, correlation values were interpreted as follows: below 0.200, very weak or negligible associations; between 0.200 and 0.399, weak associations; between 0.400 and 0.699, moderate associations; between 0.700 and 0.899, strong associations; and between 0.900 and 1.000, very strong associations ([Hair et al., 2019](#)).

4. Results

Once the validity of the scales had been established, as described above, a descriptive analysis of the data on the variables included in the model was conducted.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis) for the variables considered in the SEM analysis, showing that none exceed the defined limits for extreme criteria, which ensures the reliability of the estimates and the adequacy of the proposed model.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the variables analysed in the model.

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
phscs.po	10.000	20.000	16.34	2.573	-0.965	0.267
phscs.ba	13.000	26.000	22.89	2.718	-1.361	1.887
phscs.pa	8.000	16.000	12.72	2.261	-0.534	-0.441
phscs.is	13.000	26.000	20.93	3.094	-0.726	-0.009
phscs.an	8.000	16.000	11.93	2.083	0.023	-0.825
phscs.sh	8.000	16.000	14.07	2.173	-1.298	0.798
apsa.al	5.000	18.000	14.06	2.542	-0.693	0.683
apsa.sl	5.000	24.000	16.27	3.759	-0.893	0.804
apsa.el	10.000	34.000	23.33	4.925	-1.051	1.261
apsa.tl	3.000	18.000	12.10	3.413	-1.022	1.165
apsa.ta	6.000	36.000	26.88	5.111	-1.155	1.579
qence.cs	3.000	15.000	12.21	2.416	-1.187	1.981
qence.ni	7.000	25.000	17.70	4.047	-0.284	-0.620
qence.nc	8.000	25.000	18.50	3.005	-0.317	0.183
qence.nr	6.000	20.000	14.67	3.009	-1.199	1.646
qence.bff	7.000	20.000	17.87	2.459	-0.477	-0.336

Note: PHSCS-2 = Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale-2; APSA = Psychosociological Classroom Environment Scale; QENCE = Questionnaire of Negotiation Effectiveness of Conflicts in School; SD = standard deviation. Minimum and maximum values represent the observed scores obtained in the study sample and should not be interpreted as the theoretical score ranges of the respective scales. The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale-2 items were coded using the database coding scheme (1 = negative self-description; 2 = positive self-description), with reverse scoring applied to negatively worded items. Higher scores indicate a more positive self-concept.

Figure 1 presents the structural equation model (SEM) with the relationship among the variables. Considering the reference threshold values, the global goodness-of-fit indices of the proposed model are shown to be very acceptable: $\chi^2 = 182.028$; $p = 0.000$; $\chi^2/df = 1.802$; GFI = 0.966; AGFI = 0.954; TLI = 0.912; CFI = 0.926; and RMSEA = 0.035 (LO/0.026–HI/0.043), confirming that the model adequately represents the relationships between the variables observed in the empirical matrix. The Hoelter index values obtained in this study are appropriate and corroborate the adequacy of the sample size (464/0.05–506/0.01).

As shown in **Figure 1** and **Table 2**, the initial hypotheses of this study are supported.

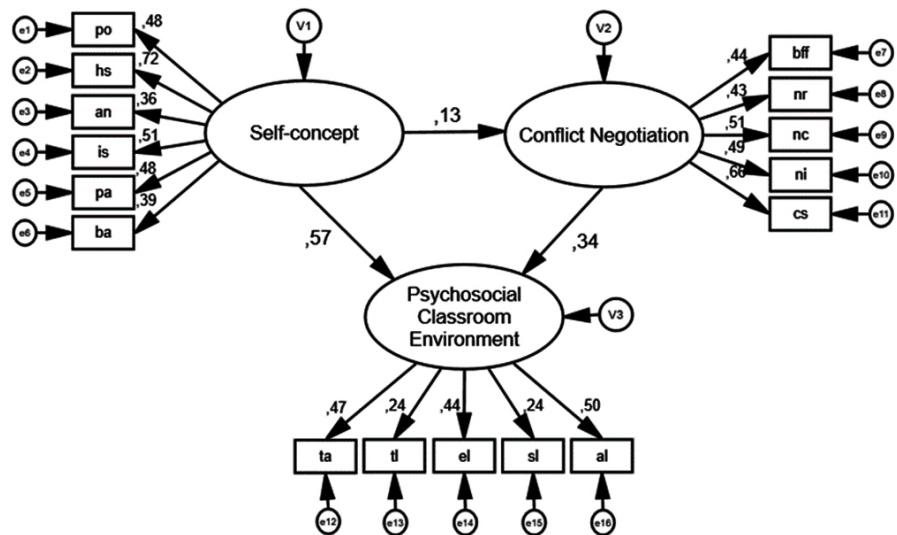


Figure 1. SEM model with the variables under study.

Table 2. Results of the structural relationships and factor loadings of the structural equation model.

Parameter estimates for the model			EnSV	ESV	EE	p
conflict negotiation	<---	self-concept	0.112	0.127	0.054	0.038
psychclassenvironment	<---	self-concept	1.126	0.568	0.181	***
psychclassenvironment	<---	conflict negotiation	0.777	0.345	0.176	***
qence.cs	<---	conflict negotiation	1.472	0.656	0.188	***
qence.ni	<---	conflict negotiation	1.857	0.494	0.262	***
qence.nc	<---	conflict negotiation	1.423	0.510	0.188	***
qence.nr	<---	conflict negotiation	1.213	0.434	0.174	***
qence.bbf	<---	conflict negotiation	1.000	-	-	-
apsa.sl	<---	psychclassenvironment	0.376	0.243	0.088	***
apsa.al	<---	psychclassenvironment	0.528	0.504	0.072	***
apsa.tl	<---	psychclassenvironment	0.338	0.241	0.080	***
apsa.el	<---	psychclassenvironment	0.889	0.438	0.136	***
apsa.ta	<---	psychclassenvironment	1.000	-	-	-
phscs.an	<---	self-concept	0.621	0.365	0.091	***
phscs.is	<---	self-concept	1.281	0.506	0.153	***
phscs.pa	<---	self-concept	0.885	0.479	0.109	***
phscs.hs	<---	self-concept	1.280	0.721	0.133	***
phscs.ba	<---	self-concept	0.875	0.394	0.125	***
phscs.po	<---	self-concept	1.000	-	-	-

Note: phscs = Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale-2; apsa = Psychosociological Classroom Environment Scale; qence = Questionnaire of Negotiation Effectiveness of Conflicts in School; EnSV = Estimated non-Standardized Values; ESV = Estimated Standardized Values; EE = Estimated Errors; p = Significance Level; *** ≤ 0,001.

The results confirm hypothesis H1, as self-concept has a positive and significant

effect on conflict negotiation ($\beta = 0.127$; $p = 0.038$). Similarly, hypothesis H2 is confirmed, as conflict negotiation is positively and significantly related to the psychosocial classroom environment ($\beta = 0.345$; $p < 0.001$). Likewise, hypothesis H3 is supported, with self-concept showing a positive and significant effect on the psychosocial classroom environment ($\beta = 0.568$; $p < 0.001$). Finally, hypothesis H4 is supported by the data, as conflict negotiation mediates the relationship between self-concept and the psychosocial classroom environment, presenting a positive indirect effect of approximately 0.044 ($a \times b$), obtained by multiplying the effect of self-concept on conflict negotiation ($\beta = 0.127$) by the effect of conflict negotiation on the psychosocial classroom environment ($\beta = 0.345$).

Overall, these results suggest that higher levels of self-concept are associated with greater effectiveness in conflict negotiation and a more positive perception of the psychosocial classroom environment, with conflict negotiation also contributing to the partial explanation of this relationship.

Furthermore, the results presented in **Table 3** show positive and significant correlations among the variables under study, reinforcing the consistency of the proposed model and confirming positive associations among the three constructs. A positive association was observed between the effectiveness of conflict negotiation and the perception of the psychosocial classroom environment ($r = 0.199$; $p < 0.001$), between self-concept and the perception of the psychosocial classroom environment ($r = 0.323$; $p < 0.001$), and between self-concept and the effectiveness of conflict negotiation ($r = 0.126$; $p = 0.001$).

Table 3. Pearson correlations between the variables under study ($n = 673$).

Variable	1	2	3
1. Self-concept	-		
2. Conflict negotiation	0.126**	-	
3. Psychosocial classroom environment	0.323**	0.199**	-

Note. The values presented correspond to Pearson's correlation coefficient (r); ** $p < 0.01$.

5. Discussion

The results show that the proposed model is empirically supported and that the relationships among self-concept, conflict negotiation, and the psychosocial classroom environment are not only statistically significant but also theoretically consistent. The main overall interpretation is that self-concept is associated with greater effectiveness in conflict negotiation and a more positive perception of the psychosocial classroom environment, with conflict negotiation also helping to explain part of this relationship. This articulation is particularly important because it suggests that the school experience results from the combination of personal resources and relational competences, rather than relying on a single factor.

H1. Self-concept and conflict negotiation

Hypothesis H1 was confirmed, as self-concept showed a positive and significant effect on conflict negotiation. This result is consistent with [Cunha et al. \(2016b\)](#),

who had already observed a positive association between self-concept and negotiation effectiveness in the school context, suggesting that students who perceive themselves more favourably tend to show greater confidence in dealing with difficult interpersonal situations. The most plausible interpretation is that a positive self-concept functions as a basis for personal confidence, self-regulation, and assertiveness, facilitating more constructive responses to disagreements. This interpretation is reinforced by Marsh and Martin (2011), who highlight self-concept as a psychological resource associated with adjustment and school persistence, and by Paiva and Lourenço (2011), who emphasise the relational and situated nature of self-concept in the educational context.

In addition, the result is supported by Leme et al. (2024), who demonstrated a relationship between self-concept and the resolution of interpersonal conflicts among pre-adolescents. Although the present study was conducted with secondary education students, the convergence between the two studies suggests a relatively stable developmental pattern: the more positive the self-concept, the greater the perceived competence to manage conflicts. Thus, H1 reinforces the idea that how students see themselves is a relevant antecedent of their relational competence.

H2. Conflict negotiation and psychosocial environment

Hypothesis H2 was also supported by the data, showing that conflict negotiation is positively related to the psychosocial classroom environment. This result is consistent with the literature on peer mediation programmes and school coexistence, which has shown that dialogic and cooperative practices promote safer, more predictable, and relationally positive environments. Lešková and Haburajová Ilavská (2023) state that peer mediation is perceived as an appropriate resource for conflict resolution and for promoting positive coexistence in the school setting, which helps to explain why students with greater negotiation competences tend to perceive the classroom more favourably.

Correia and Alves (2025) reinforce this interpretation by showing that training in peer mediation improves specific conflict intervention competencies and produces positive self-reported effects on students' performance. This means that conflict negotiation should not be understood merely as an individual ability to "solve problems", but as a factor that can contribute to the overall quality of the classroom relational climate. When conflicts are addressed constructively, tensions are reduced, expectations of relational justice increase, and a stronger sense of belonging is fostered, which explains the positive association observed in the present study. This interpretation is also compatible with Wang et al. (2020), who associate positive classroom climates with greater social competence, motivation, and well-being.

H3. Self-concept and psychosocial environment

Hypothesis H3 was also confirmed, as self-concept showed a positive and significant effect on the psychosocial classroom environment. This result suggests that students with more positive self-concepts tend to interpret the classroom as

a more favourable, safer, and more relationally supportive space. Scherrer et al. (2023) showed that perceived classroom climate is associated with the development of adolescents' academic self-concept and self-esteem, suggesting a reciprocal relationship between context and self-evaluation. In the present study, the direction observed suggests that the way students perceive themselves also shapes their interpretation of the context. This interpretation is consistent with Wang et al. (2020) and González et al. (2023), who highlight the relevance of relational dimensions, support, and emotional safety in the construction of classroom climate. Thus, H3 confirms that self-concept is not only a product of the school context but also an element that shapes how that context is experienced. This relationship helps frame the following hypothesis: a more positive self-perception may favour more effective engagement in conflict negotiation, a mechanism that, in turn, helps explain the relationship between self-concept and the psychosocial classroom environment.

H4. Mediation of negotiation

Hypothesis H4 was the most relevant contribution of the study, as the results show that conflict negotiation mediates the relationship between self-concept and the psychosocial classroom environment. This means that self-concept not only directly influences the perception of the environment but also shapes how students mobilise negotiation competences to deal with interpersonal tensions, and it is through this pathway that part of the effect on the environment is realised. In theoretical terms, this mediating role is particularly important because it integrates a dispositional factor, self-concept, with a relational mechanism, conflict negotiation, and with a contextual outcome, the perception of the school environment.

This result is supported by Cunha et al. (2016b), who had already shown that self-concept is associated with negotiation effectiveness, as well as by studies on mediation and conflict management in the school context, which highlight the impact of negotiation competences on the quality of coexistence and school climate, namely Correia and Alves (2025), Lešková and Haburajová Ilavská (2023), and Lourenço and Paiva (2025). The statistical mediation observed in the present study suggests that students with more positive self-concepts tend to feel more capable of negotiating conflicts, and that this capacity contributes to their perception of the classroom as a more favourable space. In other words, the mediating effect of conflict negotiation helps explain how students' self-perceptions translate into more positive perceptions of the psychosocial classroom environment.

Contributions, Limitations and Future Research

From a contributions perspective, the study adds empirical evidence to the literature by articulating, within a single model, self-concept, conflict negotiation, and the psychosocial classroom environment. The main contribution lies in demonstrating that conflict negotiation serves as a statistical mediator in the relationship between self-concept and the psychosocial classroom environment, thereby allow-

ing for a more refined understanding of the processes by which a personal psychological resource translates into more favourable perceptions of the school context. This result is relevant because the literature tends to analyse these variables separately, whereas the present study highlights their interdependence as a central aspect of the school experience.

In applied terms, the results support the relevance of school programmes that simultaneously promote self-concept and conflict negotiation competences. This is consistent with evidence from [Correia and Alves \(2025\)](#), [Lešková and Habura-jová Ilavská \(2023\)](#), and [Lourenço and Paiva \(2025\)](#), who highlight peer mediation, negotiation, and constructive conflict management as resources that promote coexistence and a positive school climate. Thus, educational intervention should not focus solely on the student as an individual, but also on the quality of their interactions and the opportunities for relational learning provided by the school context.

Regarding limitations, it is important to acknowledge that the sample was a convenience sample and restricted to secondary education, which limits the generalisation of the results to other levels of education or more diverse populations. In addition, the cross-sectional design precludes establishing strict causality, although the SEM model allows testing the plausibility of theoretical relationships. Although students were nested within classes and schools, the present study focused on relationships at the individual level, as its primary objective was to examine individual-level psychological constructs rather than contextual (classroom- or school-level) effects. Future research should consider multilevel structural equation modelling to investigate potential classroom- and school-level influences on the study variables. It should also be noted that the data were obtained through self-report, which may introduce social desirability and common method biases. Finally, the model focused on three main constructs and did not consider other potentially relevant variables, such as teacher support, class climate, family support, or academic achievement.

In future research, it would be useful to employ longitudinal designs to verify whether the explanatory role of conflict negotiation is maintained over time and across different stages of the school trajectory. It would also be pertinent to include other mediating or moderating variables, such as self-efficacy, peer relationships, parental support, or the quality of the teacher–student relationship, to deepen understanding of the mechanisms involved. Comparative studies across different levels of education or between distinct school contexts would also enable testing the model’s stability and determining whether the observed results are specific to secondary education or generalizable to other contexts.

6. Conclusions

This study shows that self-concept is not merely an internal perception that students construct about themselves; it is also a silent force that shapes how they face conflicts and how they experience the classroom. The results indicate that stu-

dents who perceive themselves more positively tend to negotiate conflicts more effectively and to interpret the psychosocial classroom environment more favourably, confirming the combined influence of personal and relational factors in the school experience.

More than that, the research demonstrates that conflict negotiation functions as an explanatory bridge between how students see themselves and how they experience school. This statistical mediating role is the core of the study: it is not enough to develop students who feel capable; it is also necessary to equip them with tools to transform that confidence into dialogue, cooperation, and constructive management of difference. When this occurs, the classroom ceases to be merely a space for instruction and becomes a place where students also learn to coexist, repair, listen, and grow.

The relevance of these results is clear. If the school is, in fact, a space for human development and not merely for the transmission of content, it must invest in the development of self-concept and in learning conflict negotiation as central dimensions of students' education. This requires more explicit attention from teachers, institutions, and educational policymakers to promoting relational competences and classroom contexts that are more conducive to dialogue and cooperation. To ignore these variables is to continue treating conflicts as noise; to value them is to recognise that, often, it is in how students relate to themselves and to others that the quality of school life is determined.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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