Subjective theories about school climate and violence in expert discourse from the press of 2022

Daniel Fuentealba-Jorquera
University of La Serena. Chile.
dfuentealba@alumnosuls.cl

Fabiana Rodríguez-Pastene-Vicencio
University of Playa Ancha. Chile.
fabiana.rodriguezpastene@upla.cl

Pablo Andrada
University of La Serena. Chile.
pablo.andrada@userena.cl

Pablo Castro-Carrasco[1]
University of La Serena. Chile.
Catholic University of Maule. Chile.
pablocastro@userena.cl

Vladimir Caamaño-Vega
Santo Tomás University. Chile.
vcaamano2@santotomas.cl

Verónica Gubbins
Finis Terrae University. Chile.
vgubbins@uft.cl

Claudia Carrasco-Aguilar
University of Playa Ancha. Chile.
University of Malaga. Spain.
claudia.carrasco@upla.cl

David Cuadra-Martínez
University of Atacama. Chile.
david.cuadra@uda.cl

Martina Zelaya
University of La Serena. Chile.
martina.zelaya@userena.cl

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[1] Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The return to face-to-face classes after the pandemic carried effects that triggered cases of School Violence (SV) in 2022. The newspaper was one of the media that addressed these cases and raised the issue to be discussed by its readers. In this media, letters to the editor are relevant as they show the readers' opinions on a current event, particularly that of experts or influential people from civil society. This type of public discourse in the press deals with argumentative theorizing on the phenomena of school violence and school climate (SC), so that it can be studied from subjective theories (ST). **Methodology:** Qualitative methodology was followed, using grounded theory. The analysis included a process of open and axial coding in the 10 letters to the editor selected. The means chosen for the collection of the sample was the Chilean newspaper *La Tercera*. **Results:** Among the findings, there was a superordinate ST that establishes insufficient coping with SV in the post-pandemic period. In addition, it was found that most of the STs are action initiators to address SC and SV. **Conclusions:** The experts' discourse presents theorizations about the accountability of adults and schools in the work done to address SV, and change on SC work. Students are portrayed as passive subjects, which could limit their moral development and participation in these contexts.

Keywords: School climate; School violence; Letters to the editor; Subjective theories; Journalistic genres.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Chilean educational scenario was unusual during the year 2022. This is because that year followed a period of school attendance recess due to the pandemic of the COVID-19 virus, Chile being the OECD country with the longest period of school closures (Izquierdo & Ugarte, 2023). The Centro de Estudios del Ministerio de Educación (2020) conducted a study to measure the effects of school closures during 2020 and 2021. The estimate showed a complex scenario, characterized by educational, social, digital, and economic gaps for students. In subsequent years, España (2022) used the same tool of the aforementioned study to analyze the gaps caused by the closures of educational establishments, and observed that confinement led to a greater loss of learning in municipal establishments and in students from low socioeconomic groups.

The lockdown, in addition to having negative effects on school learning, had a negative impact on psychosocial behavior in society (Cuadra et al., 2020), besides producing emotional difficulties in adolescents such as sadness, anxiety and apathy (Escobar et al., 2023). This indicates that students carried with them a negative burden in the pandemic that impacted their behavior and emotions.

The way in which school climate (SC) is conceived is quite diverse, ranging from conflict-free school life to punitive approaches to the "lack" of student discipline (López et al., 2023). The role of the family in SC has also been discussed, since it provides the basis for the resolution of conflicts that may arise in or outside schools (Bolaños & Stuart Rivero, 2019). Likewise, different educational actors perceive SC in different ways, so students focus the manifestations of verbal and social violence, and those in charge of management focus on ensuring coexistence (Becerra et al., 2020).

The approach in this research conceives SC as "the processes and results of the effort to build lasting peace among the members of the school community, based on pedagogical and management practices: inclusive, equitable and participatory practices that constructively address the conflict" (Fierro-Evans & Carbajal-Padilla, 2019, p. 13).

Given that the SC process begins in the childhood stage of students, it is possible that undesired forms of interaction may arise (Urbina et al., 2018). Physical and verbal conflict are two of the many aspects that SC work aims to avoid. These are related to the phenomenon of school violence (SV). Herrera-López et al., (2022) state that it refers to activities with the purpose of intimidating and assaulting people who belong to the community of a school.

Complaints for SV increased greatly in 2022. In March, the Superintendence of Education registered 881 complaints, most of which were related to mistreatment of students and, to a lesser extent, discrimination, behavior or situations of sexual connotation and mistreatment of adults from the educational community (Asociación de municipalidades de Chile, 2022). In July of that year, complaints increased to 2,968 (Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos [INDH], 2023; Rojas-Andrade et al., 2024). Thus, the negative burden on students' behavior and emotions had an impact on their return to attendance, due to the deterioration of their mental health (Ashraf et al., 2023; Chin et al., 2023; Mazrekaj & De Witte, 2024). Affected by the increase in school violence, the government of Chile focused its SC policies on areas such as conflict conciliation and peaceful development in the school socialization process (Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura [UNESCO], 2024). This resulted in decisions oriented to a return to face-to-face attendance and work on the development of socioemotional skills to build bonds in the educational community (Mineduc, 2022).

Through the mediation between civil and political society, the mass media, including the print media, can shape public opinions thanks to their social function (Blanco-Castilla & Cano-Galindo, 2019). The mass media are a political actor in educational debates (Cabalin et al., 2023) and can determine social interests and influence the political system, targeting the topic that the government's political agenda could legislatively aim at (Prieto-Andrés & Fernández, 2020). The above is framed within the process of mediatization that contemporary societies are undergoing in which the media increasingly modify more and more domains of society due to technological advances that make them ubiquitous and allow them to affect our daily practices (Hepp, 2022). In this line, there are authors who highlight the power of the media in educational public policy (Ansaldo, 2021), and postulate the existence of verifiable links of "mediatization effects" (Rawolle & Lingard, 2014) in the promotion and adoption of educational policies. Both the increase in violence registered from 2022 onwards, as well as the actions of the state (Rojas-Andrade et al., 2024), the union (Castro-Carrasco et al., 2024) and the responses of the different actors involved, received the corresponding media coverage. Coverage that, in fact, was far from innocuous. Thus, the media emphasize or make invisible certain frameworks for understanding reality in their narratives.

Letters to the editor belong to the journalistic genre of opinion and have subjective interpretations of reality by the readers of the newspaper (Jaakkola, 2021). In this regard, Pastor Pérez (2006) adds that they differ from other journalistic genres because those who write them are not journalists. However, the training of the professional and his or her trajectory are important in the eyes of the press, and are a key element for the

newspapers when choosing the authors who will provide space. The selection and publication of these articles reflect the frames on how to look at educational problems (Cabalin & Andrada, 2023) and also the watchdog role of the media on what enters the public debate (Fisher et al., 2019). In addition, there are selection criteria for letters to the editor, referred to as rules of relevance, concision, entertainment and authority, and they are characterized by privileging certain forms of expression (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002). In addition, it has been studied that authors are selected according to their social class, generally upper middle class (Carter & Clarke, 1962).

Letters to the editor are a means of expression, in which opinions are exchanged on a specific topic in the form of a forum for public debate (Ström et al., 2024). Each letter to the editor has an explanation of a fact and the authors support their position with arguments. Letters to the editor usually have an argumentative structure that matches the "if-then" conditional structure of the construct called subjective theories (ST). Groeben and Scheele (2000) define them as cognitions that correspond to the hypotheses that people use to explain or make sense of reality through their own models (Flick, 2023), whether individual or collective (Gutiérrez Villa & Cormack, 2023). STs are commonly presented in the discourse unveiling their surface structure, which means that analytical work is needed to reconstruct the deep structure of this theorization (Catalán Ahumada, 2016). On the other hand, STs have the potential to guide people's actions (Groeben & Scheele, 2020). Kindermann and Riegel (2016) refer to STs as structured intuitions that usually place a scope for action such as inhibiting, maintaining or initiating actions (Catalán Ahumada, 2016). The fact that a letter to the editor conveys STs would allow its vision to encounter with other people and in turn influence them with the expert's explanatory argument.

In recent years, the study of STs has focused on actors in the school community, such as pre-service teachers, practicing teachers and parents. The meanings of school time and educational inclusion have also been studied (Escobar et al., 2020), as well as the participatory role in SC (Cuadra-Martínez et al., 2021) or beliefs in language teaching (Hurytová, 2022) and physical education (McEntyre & Richards, 2023). However, there is not enough literature on social actors not directly involved in educational communities, such as experts or those involved in politics. This research contributes to fill this gap by studying the public discourse of specialists. The relevance of studying the discourse of experts lies in the fact that, when disseminated in the media, it can have an impact on public debate (Browne Monckeberg & Rodríguez-Pastene, 2019), as well as on the social construction of what the population believes about SV and SC. It has been found that some education journalists tend to downplay the political nature of their work, not so editors or newspaper owners (e.g., Marques et al., 2021), implying that they avoid questioning how their work can influence the legitimization of certain opinions and social representations (Santa Cruz & Cabalín, 2019).

2. OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study is to understand the STs on SC and SV of a group of experts in letters to the editor of a Chilean newspaper. The specific objectives are: to reconstruct the STs present in letters to the editor and to identify the type of action orientation of the reconstructed STs.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Type of study, methodology and design

The research design was descriptive and interpretive (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Creswell & Poth, 2018), with qualitative methodology (Flick, 2023). The analysis was conducted following procedures of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014) adapted for the identification and analysis of subjective theories (Catalán Ahumada, 2016). The elaboration of the STs was carried out through a reconstruction of the explanatory arguments (contained in LEs issued by experts) identifying their superficial and deep structure.

3.2. Sample

Sample collection began with the selection of a Chilean newspaper with a high digital presence in the year 2022. The newspaper was chosen using the digital reputation ranking provided by Scimago Media Rankings (2022). This allowed to identify three possible candidates: *La Tercera*, *El Mostrador* and *El Mercurio*. For feasibility criteria, it was decided to work with *La Tercera*, since its website offered greater access to reading and downloading documents.

Subsequently, all letters to the editor sections of all newspapers published in 2022 were reviewed within the digital platform of the newspaper *La Tercera*, and letters to the editor useful for the study were collected, i.e., all letters to the editor that had SV or SC as a topic.

To filter the number of letters published in 2022, the following inclusion criteria were established:

a) The date of publication, from March 1 to July 31, 2022, given that it is the semester closest to the start of classes after the return to face-to-face attendance in Chile. The first semester of 2022 is particularly relevant due to the increase in SV complaints with regard to previous years of lockdown (INDH, 2023);

b) b) The choice of only one letter to the editor per author, when he/she published more than one letter in that year. The consideration of "expert" in this study does not necessarily respond to academic criteria or a consolidated trajectory in SC or SV evaluated by the researchers in this study, but is assumed given that the newspaper has published letters recognizing them as having some degree of expertise in the subject, experience and/or "sufficient knowledge" (Pastor Perez, 2006, p. 395). In this regard, the role of expert in the corpus is a media construction, rather than an academic certification or a certification of experience.

Finally, an exploratory analysis of the basic structure of the STs in letters to the editor was carried out to identify whether they referred to SC, SV or both. Thus, from the 2016 letters to the editor published in the digital platform of *La Tercera* in 2022, 6 of the authors of this paper analyzed them and selected 23 that referred to SV and SC. Applying the first inclusion criterion in the sample showed that 12 of the 23 letters to the editor were published within the dates established as inclusion criteria, but 11 were published after July 31, 2022. This meant that 11 letters published outside the dates in the newspaper *La Tercera* were discarded. The application of the second inclusion criterion in the sample reduced the number of 12 letters to the editor to 10, due to the fact that one author was found with two letters, thus avoiding the overrepresentation of the ideas of a particular author over the rest, in order to ensure greater sample heterogeneity (Flick, 2023). The selection of the sample responds to the criterion of Information Power (Camic, 2021), which refers to the more information the sample contains that is relevant to the study itself, the smaller the number of the sample. This is because it is specific to the objectives of the study, the established construct of subjective theories that is used, and the variety of authors of letters to the editor.

3.3. Data analysis

In the data analysis, the processes of open coding, axial coding and theory development were carried out together with the interpretation of the results.

The open coding stage began with the categorization of the authors according to their profession, postgraduate degree and job position during 2022. Then, it continued with the transcription of the letters to the editor and their basic structure. The surface structure of a ST, also known as manifest —because of its explicit nature— is the one that is directly observable in the explanatory discourse about a phenomenon. While the deep structure —because of its latent nature— is the underlying structure from which the surface structure is generated (Catalán Ahumada, 2010). The terms "superficial" and "deep" have some similarity with Chomsky's

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transformational generative grammar (1957). This distinction makes it possible to analyze levels of explanatory connections so that surface structures (written or spoken discourse) are derived from more general underlying ("deep") structures. In the ST analysis this was done by generating explanatory sentences as codes generally of the type "if... then", "because of... then", among others, and thus accounted for the hypothetical argumentative structure (Catalán Ahumada, 2016) of the explanations contained in the letters to the editor, which identifies causes and consequences or effects (see example in Table 1).

Once the STs had been reconstructed, an analysis of the proactive nature of the STs expressed in the discourse of the experts was carried out (see Table 2). According to Catalán Ahumada (2010), the proactive nature of a ST can be classified in three ways; namely, action-inhibiting STs (they are arguments that lead to avoid actions), action-maintaining STs (arguments that justify the performance of actions for their continuity) and action-initiating STs (explanations that provide an urge to initiate new actions or to change them). It is worth mentioning that this process of identifying the proactive nature STs took place in the open and axial coding stage of grounded theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

In the subsequent stage, a relational analysis focused on axial coding of the sample took place (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). After open coding, it was decided to identify the predominant ST in all STs on SC and SV respectively. Having the ST with the highest hierarchy, the relational analysis of the STs, their relationships with the predominant idea and the elaboration of the axial coding scheme continued. This was done to establish the relationship between all the STs and the most predominant idea in the letters to the editor regarding SC and SV. Finally, an interpretative analysis of the results obtained from the scheme was carried out. Figure 1 shows graphically the stages of analysis followed in the methodology.

Figure 1. *Stages of Data Analysis*
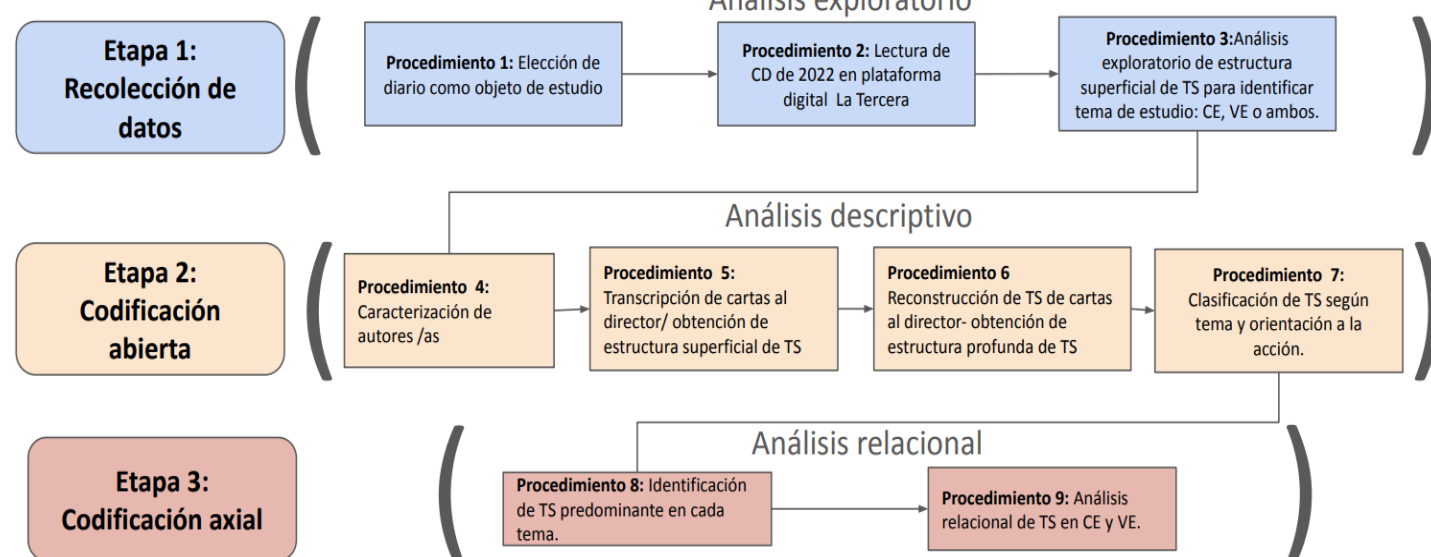
Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Bryant and Charmaz (2019) and Catalán Ahumada (2010).

3.4. Scientific criteria

As a scientific criterion of the research, a discussion of the analysis of the research findings was carried out among the research team by presenting these data to other researchers (Denzin, 1989). Qualitative "validity" understood in this study as the validation of the social construction of knowledge (Flick, 2023), the credibility of the information (given that the letters are publicly accessible) and transparency were achieved through the detailed description of the intersubjective analysis of the data carried out by more than one researcher for a procedural validity (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2019).
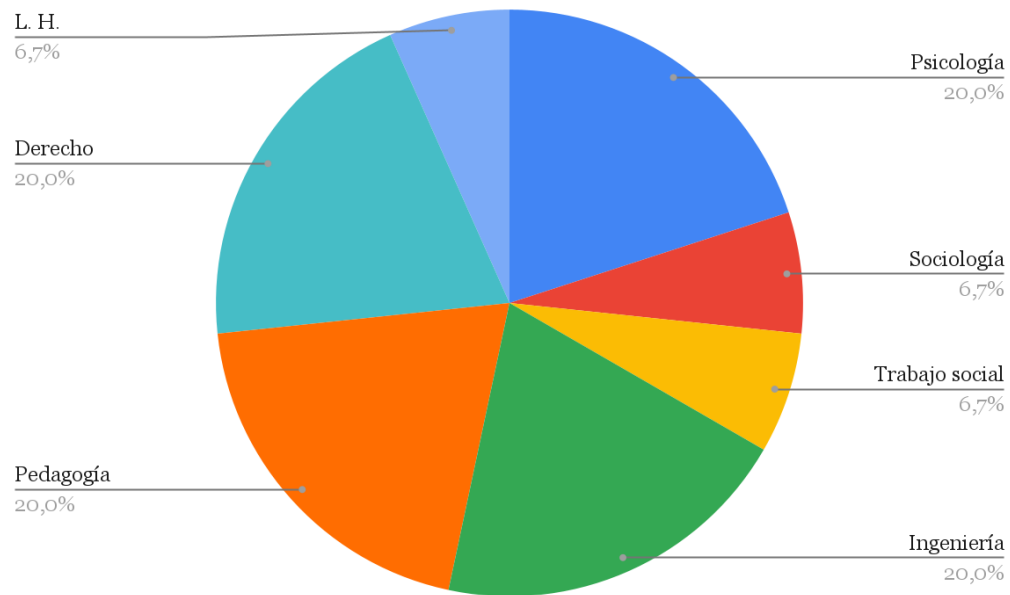
4. RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive analysis according to profession, discipline and position of the authors

The following figures were obtained according to profession, postgraduate degree and position:

Figure 2. *Original profession of the experts.*

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

According to Figure 2, the professions from which experts graduate are mainly led by Psychology, Pedagogy, Engineering and Law. They are followed by careers with lesser presence in the sample such as Social Work, Sociology and Bachelor's Degree in History.
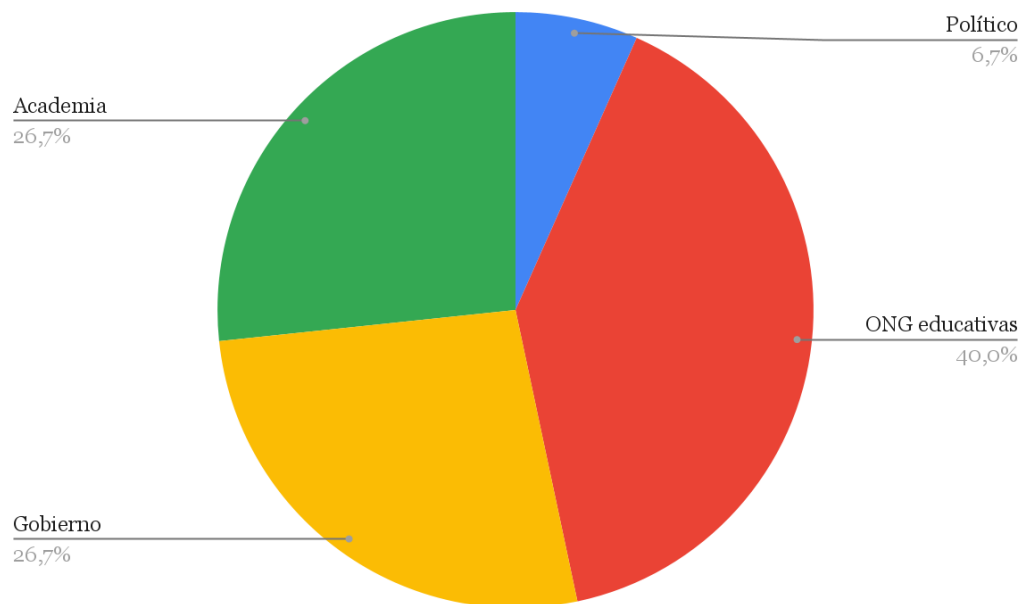
Figure 3. *Postgraduate training of experts.*
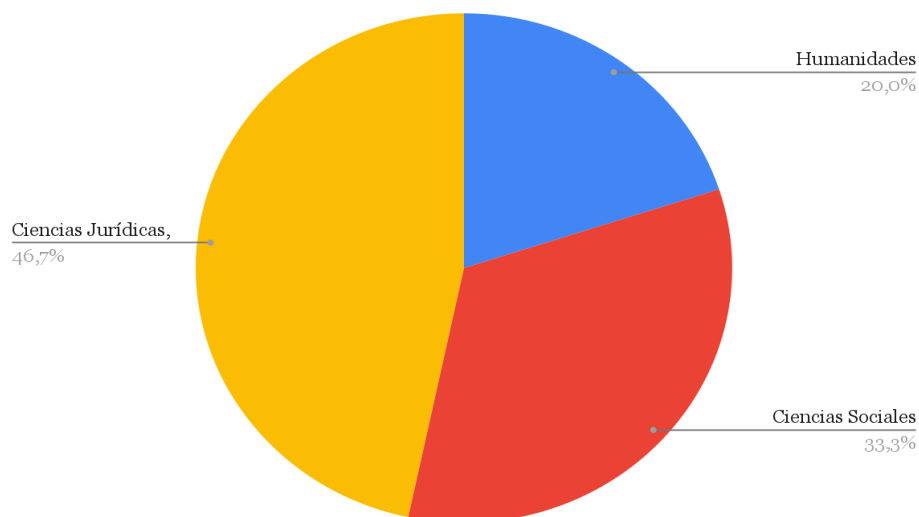
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The training disciplines of the experts as distributed in Figure 3 are led by legal, economic and administrative sciences. They are followed by social sciences and humanities.

Figure 4. *Field of work of the authors of the letters.*

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The data in Figure 4 show the work area of the authors of the letters. The positions held by each in 2022 are led by officials in educational NGOs, followed by an equal number of academics and officials in governmental organizations and finally politicians.

4.2. Subjective theories on school violence and climate

When classifying the STs in the letters to the editor, 5 letters were found referring completely to SC, 3 referred to SV and 2 referred to SC and SV. Once this was done, the classification of the STs found was carried out. These were 22; 11 referred to SV and 11 to SC. In the first stage of analysis, the STs were reconstructed from the segments of the press discourse. Table 1 shows an example of the reconstruction:

Table 1. *As an example, a reconstruction of subjective theories of experts in letters to the editor is presented*.

Textual quotation from a Letter to the Editor (surface structure)	Subjective theories reconstructed by researchers from the quotation (deep structure of the ST)
"It is urgent that the authorities not only take measures and policies inside the classroom, such as the recently announced by the Mineduc "Let's be a Community", which is very limited, by the way, but also establish a coordinated work to address the violent acts that we have seen outside schools. It is essential to involve citizens and work on a comprehensive agreement to address violence in educational contexts". (LE 10)	The situation of violence in schools is urgent, so the authorities must take measures not only inside the classrooms but also on the cases seen outside the schools. (ST 21) In order to face violence in the educational context, it is essential to involve citizens by working in a general agreement (ST 22).

Note: LE= Letter to the Editor. ST= Subjective theory.
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

### 4.2.1. Subjective theories of experts on the phenomenon of SV

The STs reconstructed were 11 that were related to each other in the conceptual model in Figure 5. A predominant ST was identified referring to "Inadequacy in coping with SV". The theorizations were categorized into: Aspects for improvement, Consequences and Causes. The latter refer to the situation of violence in schools due to the effects of the pandemic. The rules restricting the return to school generated social isolation, which affected children and adolescents academically and emotionally. Another cause indicates that adults are responsible for normalizing violent acts and not intervening, which according to experts is due to the fact that they solve their problems with violence on a daily basis and have less capacity to intervene because of the law: If adults solve their conflicts with more violence, then what happens in schools may be a reflection, so it is not surprising and we get used to it (ST 21-LE 10); There is little responsibility of parents because politicians and conventions try to ensure that their right can only be exercised through the law (ST 14-LE 6). Both inhibit adult action to change the situation around SV.

As a consequence of this phenomenon, specialists point out that both the insufficiency of tools and the negative effects on learning and emotions, together with the normalization of violent acts by adults, prevent providing the necessary attention for this problem.

The STs have suggestions tending to initiate intervention on the part of the reader in the face of SV. Experts state that principals of educational establishments can address SV cases through administrative and community adjustments in the educational community, such as implementing and updating regulations and socioemotional programs. Another suggestion is to reestablish attendance routines to counteract the effects of non-attendance during the pandemic: If there are high levels of SV, learning lag and deterioration in the cognitive, social and emotional development of students, then it is necessary to reestablish routines (ST 17- LE 8).

Another proposed solution is to improve the commitment of the educational community through a general agreement between citizens and authorities to address acts of violence inside and outside schools. This in order to reverse the habit and actively intervene: To confront violence in the educational context then it is essential to involve citizenship by working in a general agreement (ST 22-LE 10).

Figure 5. *General subjective theory on Inadequacy in coping with school violence (Axial coding).*
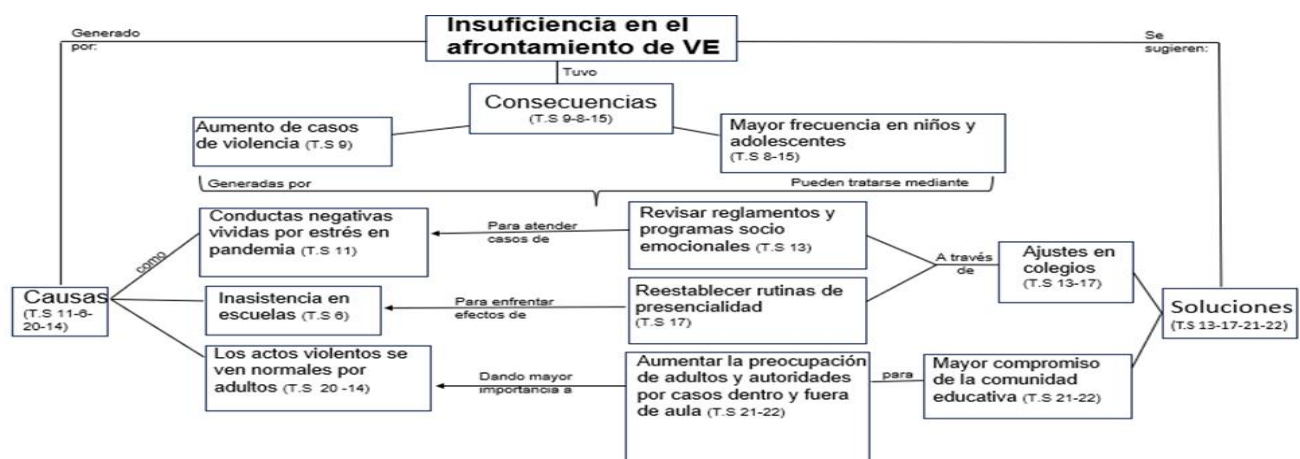
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

4.2.2. Experts' subjective theories about SC

The reconstructed theorizations were 11, which were related to each other in the conceptual model in Figure 6. The STs were categorized into Causes, Solutions and Context of the phenomenon. The experts present their theorizations based on the view that work in SC presents difficulties for its improvement due to the fact that the action is inhibited by a series of factors closely linked to the establishment and the work contexts.

As a cause, specialists refer to the existence of stress in educational communities as a result of standardized tests. Climate work actions are not carried out, due to the fact that academic performance is prioritized to be accountable in standardized tests over the integral development of their students: The SIMCE System[2] puts pressure on schools, which leads to stress in the communities, then the test does not contribute to learning or to solve climate difficulties (ST 1-LE 1); The work to improve school climate and socioemotional strengthening may regress because being poorly ranked in the SIMCE causes tension in the educational community (ST 16-LE 7). Another factor referred to is the lack of tools to improve coexistence. Specialists point out that this happens because adults do not carry out optimal climate practices, so that they lack tools for dialogue and problem solving.

As for the solutions, the experts suggest taking actions to change the situation of SC work by improving the participation of the educational community and the spaces for interaction between children and adolescents. Improving participation entails promoting collaboration among adults, so that they can develop tools for living together in the educational community. The approach to this solution is based on the belief that these must first come from adults in order to be taught to children and adolescents: The effort to educate children and adolescents (NNA, in Spanish) would have to start from adults, therefore, we are the ones who must incorporate tools for climate (ST 3-LE 2).

The educational community participates in the holistic development of students. However, according to experts, the educational system needs more support from the family and society to improve their education. The experts believe that adults have a greater responsibility in the education of children. Thus, any tool for climate must first come from adults and then be shared with children and adolescents. For this, participation is necessary, as a way of interaction among adults in the educational community.

The second element is to improve the interaction spaces in establishments. This is based on the belief that these spaces are necessary because the effects of the pandemic on young people are still present: Safe spaces must be created for the educational community, since the pandemic accelerated behaviors, as a result of stress and frustration (ST 12-LE 6).

Finally, the rest of the STs are focused on the context of SC work under two key moments: the pandemic as the cause of the lack of practice of social skills and the post-pandemic as the current time in which the aftermath of health crises and the effects on the socioemotional skills of students are experienced. Faced with this scenario, experts argue that interaction spaces can strengthen social skills in young people and allow for the development of social skills in the post-pandemic decline.

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[2] The Education Quality Measurement System (from Spanish, SIMCE) is a test implemented to measure the achievement of the contents and learning of the current curriculum.

Figure 6. *General subjective theory regarding School climate work (Axial coding)*

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

4.3. Type of action orientation of subjective theories

Table 2 shows the results of the analysis of the action orientation of the STs.

Table 2. *Action orientation of the Subjective Theories.*

Letter to the Editor	Expert Specialty	Subjective Theory	Subjects	Action orientation of the Subjective Theory
1	Social Sciences	(1) The SIMCE pressures schools, which leads to stress in the communities, so the test does not contribute to learning or to solving climate difficulties.	SC	Action-inhibiting
2	Social, Economic and Administrative Sciences	(2) As a consequence of the national political and social contingency, adults do not give examples of good climate practices, so we lack dialogue tools.	SC	Action-inhibiting
		(3) The effort to educate children and adolescents should start with adults. Therefore, we are the ones who should provide tools for climate.	SC	Action-initiating
		(4) If adults can build bridges to listen to children and adolescents, then by regulating emotions, climate agreements can be proposed to solve situations without violence.	SC	Action-initiating
3	Humanities / Social and Economic Sciences	(5) If we seek to develop children in a social, affective, physical, moral, spiritual and intellectual way, then the educational system requires the participation of the family and society.	SC	Action-initiating
4	Social, Economic and Administrative Sciences / Humanities	(6) For children, not attending school caused them immeasurable harm because it affects them emotionally and academically, resulting in cases of violence.	SV	Action-inhibiting
5	Social Sciences	(7) The students did not practice their social skills because they were in total or partial confinement.	SC	Action-inhibiting
		(8) Manuela does not know how to handle anger in this context because she lost control with her classmate when she found her notebook dripping with juice.	SV	No action orientation is indicated

		(9) The figures for post-pandemic violence increased by more than 500 cases, in contrast to the figures recorded before.	SV	Action-inhibiting
		(10) If one wants to feel safe in the school context, then it is necessary to provide spaces of containment and stability to develop unpracticed skills.	SC	Action-initiating
6	Social and Legal Sciences	(11) Dialogue today is not enough to deal with school violence, as a consequence of behaviors resulting from the stress and frustrations experienced because of the quarantine.	SV	Action-inhibiting
		(12) Safe spaces must be created for the educational community because the pandemic has accelerated behaviors as a result of stress and frustration.	SC	Action-initiating
		(13) If principals do not have the means to deal with situations of school violence, then internal regulations and social-emotional programs should be revised.	SV	Action-initiating
		(14) There is little responsibility on the part of parents because the politicians and the constitutional drafters try to ensure that their rights can only be exercised by means of the law.	SV	Action-inhibiting
		(15) The situation is critical because a phenomenon that used to occur only among adults has increased among minors and adolescents.	SV	Action-initiating
7	Humanities	(16) The work to improve school climate and social-emotional strengthening can become a setback because being poorly ranked in the SIMCE causes stress in them.	SC	Action-inhibiting
8	Social, Economic and Administrative Sciences	(17) If there are high levels of school violence, learning difficulties and deterioration in their cognitive, social and emotional development, then it is necessary to reestablish routines.	SV	Action-initiating
9	Social Sciences	(18) If the health crisis continues, then children's and adolescents' academic learning, socialization and socioemotional skills will also be affected.	SC	Action-initiating
		(19) It is imperative to have meeting spaces for young people because the Mineduc affirms in studies that confinement caused behavioral and emotional alterations due to distancing.	SC	Action-initiating
10	Social and Legal Sciences	(20) If adults solve their conflicts with more violence, then what happens in schools can be a reflection, so it is not surprising and we get used to it.	SV	No action orientation is indicated
		(21) The situation of violence in schools is urgent so the authorities should take measures not only inside the classroom but also on the cases seen outside schools.	SV	Action-initiating
		(22) To confront violence in the educational context, it is essential to involve the citizenry by working in a general agreement.	SV	Action-initiating

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Of the 22 STs identified, 12 are action initiating and 8 are inhibiting. No STs were found that maintain action, which could indicate a more conclusive position on the part of the experts regarding what can and cannot be done in terms of school climate and school violence. This is also attributable to the newsworthiness criteria present in this type of texts: Letters to the editor belong to the opinion genre, in which the authors are expected

to express judgments of a rather categorical nature that persuade the reader or at least generate discussion on the issue being addressed. As for possible differences between the role of the experts and the action orientation of the STs, no major differences were found. However, the 8 STs referring to school climate have an equal distribution of initiating and inhibiting STs, while those referring to school violence have a greater number of initiating STs (8) than inhibiting ones (4). Here a greater emphasis is observed in the proposals to address the challenges of SV, such as involving citizens, reestablishing previous routines or revising internal regulations. The only letters that were not classified as action-initiating or action-inhibiting were 2. This was because both STs correspond to hypothetical accounts of SV cases, in which the reason for a violent action is stated, but they do not include positions that persuade the reader to take action in the face of the referred issue.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The overall objective of this study was to understand the subjective theories on SC and SV of a group of experts in letters to the editor in one of the newspapers with the highest digital reputation in Chile according to *Scimago Media Ranking* (2022).

Based on a qualitative study, 10 letters to the editor were selected, in which experts from various disciplines proposed arguments (subjective theories) to explain and address school climate and school violence in the context of handling the COVID-19 pandemic and the return to face-to-face classes. It was found that professionals from various disciplines establish causes and consequences of SC and SV, in addition to proposing solutions or improvements of these school aspects in the letters analyzed. The above is a reflection of what Ray (2024) has considered a key attribute of professional identity: professionalism as the ability to adapt linguistic discourses and professional services to emerging social demands. Precisely, the COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the important challenges that humanity has had to face (Cuadra et al., 2020), so that professionals play a key role in managing and overcoming the emergency.

Letters to the editor published in mass media are an important means of social influence and, in the case of education, a topic that has been intensely demanded is the mitigation of SV and the improvement of SC (Medina Barahona et al., 2024). Thus, the argumentative discourses of professionals found in this dissemination channel constitute important exchanges of opinion establishing frames that can influence citizen knowledge, policies and educational micro-policies on how to coexist in schools (Ansaldo, 2021). For example, the recommendation of the experts referred to the revision of regulations and the reestablishment of routines. Understanding the journalistic treatment as a constructor of reality demonstrates the importance of the responsibility of the media, both in the task of informing and in its influence on the understanding of facts (Ferrada Montecinos & Segovia Lacoste, 2025). Since it is known that the letters that experts send to media directors have opportunities to introduce and support issues and perspectives to impact -in turn- the debate, formulation and implementation of public policies (Blanco-Castilla & Cano-Galindo, 2019). Regarding the evolution of the discussion regarding this matter in later years, in May 2024, Minister Nicolás Cataldo announced the updating of the National Policy on School Coexistence (PNCE, in Spanish), a project that has been developed precisely since 2022 and it is part of the Educational Reactivation Plan to reverse the negative effects of the pandemic not only in the academic field, but mainly, in school climate, as revealed by the figures registered after the return to face-to-face attendance.

Given the above, it can be deduced that the findings of this study probably guided citizenship actions, discourse and political decision-making (Browne Monckeberg & Rodríguez-Pastene, 2019). From this approach, the analysis of the experts' letters conducted in this study provides relevant information for decision-making at the level of educational and school policies. First, to highlight the shared perception that the policy decisions taken to address post-confinement school violence were insufficient. In this regard, the primacy of policies and plans aimed at addressing intra-school violence is argued.

Additionally, it is interesting that the letters analyzed omit the increase in situations of out-of-school violence that was observed in many educational establishments in Chile during the year 2022 (e.g., Turanovic et al., 2022). In this regard, the National Statistical Institute (INE, In Spanish) states that 1,200 cases of violence outside educational establishments were recorded in Chile in 2022 (15% more than in 2021).

Along with the above, through the reconstruction of experts' STs in letters to the editor, it is possible to understand the approaches that expert discourse has in one of the most important educational dimensions, such as SC (Kumar & Goel, 2024). Considering that people elaborate STs in everyday life and social interaction (Flick, 2018), letters to the editor are a journalistic genre of opinion (Greene & Zúñiga, 2024; Jaakkola, 2021) in which their readers can comment their scope and opinions on certain facts (Pastor Pérez, 2006; Ström et al., 2024), generating a possible reconstruction of the audience's STs, on SC and SV, from the arguments provided by the experts.

Another important result to highlight is the disciplines and professions of the authors who contributed with expert knowledge to these media. Of special interest is the fact that the Legal, Economic and Administrative Sciences have the highest number of letters to the editor on SC and SV, while the Humanities have the lowest number of letters to the editor on SC and SV. Although it should be considered that the experts who wrote the letters are in professional positions related to the educational system. This finding shows that the voices that appear in the public discourse on SV and SC correspond to sciences far from the educational field. This, considering that each of the disciplines that are taught, researched or transferred from universities have their own objective (Osorio-García-de-Oteyza & López-Rosado, 2024).

One possible explanation for this is that, despite the relevance of the Humanities in the field of education, technical and scientific rationality has predominated in the understanding and approach to education (Osorio-García-de-Oteyza & López-Rosado, 2024). There is a long-standing debate between the quality movement educational models —which approaches education from an economic and managerialist perspective— and quality debate, which understands education as an integral formation closely linked to pedagogy (Galioto & Henríquez Vásquez, 2021). From a media perspective, another explanation is that the mass media determine criteria for selecting authors according to their training and profession (Pastor Pérez, 2006). One of these criteria, especially important and reported decades ago, points out that opinion leadership is influenced by factors such as social class and ideological orientations (Carter & Clarke, 1962).

The first specific objective aimed to reconstruct the STs present in the letters to the editor in the press. With respect to the causes of SV, a supra-ordered ST was found —that is, one that subordinates and organizes other STs on SV (Catalán Ahumada, 2016)— that establishes an insufficient coping with SV in the post-pandemic period. In line with the above, numerous studies have reported a worsening of school climate and an increase in SV, along with difficulties in its management during and post-pandemic (Castro-Carrasco et al., 2024; Lobato Carvajal, 2023; Vidić et al., 2023).

Specifically, the isolation of the educational community as a protective measure from the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the experts who wrote the letters under analysis, is an important cause of violence in schools. Being isolated from their peers, the social development process of students in their school stage is limited, because they cannot adequately meet their needs for interaction. Therefore, their development is affected and they suffer psychological and social transformations (Orben et al., 2020). In the work of Nhamo et al. (2024), COVID-19 pandemic confinement resulted in students being exposed to increased domestic violence, lack of extrafamilial socialization, decreased social skills development, and impaired mental health, resulting in higher rates of SV and vandalism after returning to face-to-face classes (Orben et al., 2020).

In addition, these experts believe that SV is attributed to the inadequate conflict resolution of adults, so that student relational dynamics would reflect this. On this, current studies confirm the importance of modeling in

learning violence (Baron & Branscombe, 2016; Cosme, 2021). Students could learn to respond with violence in schools not only by imitating the behavior of adults —for example, their parents— but also of those who interact in social networks, on television and in relationship with peers. The latter, especially in adolescence, in which the influence of peers has been positioned as a social factor of importance in explaining behavior during this evolutionary period (Duell & Steinberg, 2018).

A deeper analysis of the above, brings to the center of the discussion the lesser elaboration of professionals' ST, with respect to the complex multi-causal scientific explanation of SV. This warns about the importance of continuing to improve the necessary articulation between (scientific) theory and professional practice during professional training. Especially, because professional knowledge emerges as a type of knowledge constructed in the actual practice of the exercise of the profession not always articulated —systematically and consciously— with scientific theory (Cuadra-Martínez et al., 2018), which could be reflected in this ST that was found.

Together with the above, these experts convey discourses in their STs that stand out as a consequence of SV the deterioration of learning and the development of post-pandemic socioemotional skills. In this regard, the scientific literature has described a global, multidimensional and severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with psychological effects at the emotional, behavioral, cognitive and social levels (Cuadra-Martínez et al., 2020). In the case of the educational process, Osman et al. (2024) point out that the modification of teaching to an online system resulted in a lower development of socioemotional skills, a greater cognitive load due to having to learn in digital media and a worsening of mental health due to the lack of face-to-face socialization. Along these lines, there is evidence of a significant and negative impact of SV on multiple school dimensions. For example, at the student level, the worsening of learning quality, school absenteeism, damage to mental health; at the organizational level, SV is associated with worse school climates and even hinders educational management (Karakuş, 2022).

As stated in the previous paragraph, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and SV in the educational system are much more complex to explain when considering the scientific literature. It is even likely that certain types of violence in a context of emergency due to a socio-natural disaster (e.g., a new pandemic) have differentiated effects on the different psychosocial dimensions of schools. Future studies could be aimed at testing this hypothesis.

In addition to the aforementioned, the normalization of violence as a consequence of SV, in the STs of the experts, is added. At this point it is important to note that the phenomenon of violence, in general, has been explained from different theoretical approaches. Among such approaches, sociocritical theories have argued that violence can be a mechanism of social control and domination of people's behavior. That is, societies can justify and normalize violence as a mechanism of social control (Foucault, 1972). In this sense, SV could be considered a reflection of the violence that exists in society and be justified as a mechanism of social control within the school (Hammaren, 2022). The closeness between this ST of the experts and the sociocritical theory of violence could be explained by the emphasis in some Latin American countries on the promotion of sociocritical pedagogies (Álvarez Giraldo et al., 2022). In accordance with the above and in the case of Chile, the study by Cuadra-Martínez et al. (2023) reported as part of their results that future teachers develop their professional identity during initial training in an important way based on the sociocritical teacher training model.

The suggestions of these experts to address SV point to the need for school principals to adjust SC regulations, improve socioemotional education programs, plan classroom attendance routines, and establish general agreements between citizens and authorities on how to address post-pandemic SV. Precisely in Cuadra-Martínez et al. (2020) it was found that one of the great difficulties in dealing with the pandemic was the lack of preparedness for this type of disaster and the lack of emergency plans. In this sense, it might be wise for schools to develop SV and SC coping plans especially adjusted for emergency education, based on the

experience with the COVID-19 pandemic. The recommendations of the experts could provide guidance on some general and necessary measures to consider, along with the scientific literature on the topic.

Regarding SC, similarly to the ST of SV, experts affirm that this educational dimension has not been sufficiently addressed, focusing its causes on the predominance of a curriculum that neglects socioemotional education and emphasizes academic achievement in standardized tests, together with a low development of socioemotional skills in adults. On this, the 2030 Agenda for Education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015) has considered the holistic development of the students as one of the educational approaches for sustainable development, and socioemotional education is mentioned as an educational dimension that schools should implement. However, the above remains an unfinished task (Setiawati & Ernawati, 2019). Also, this highlights how the accountability policy that characterizes the Chilean educational system, has placed as the center of educational quality the results in standardized learning tests over the comprehensive child-juvenile development and the promotion of a school coexistence that addresses conflict in a constructive manner (Fierro-Evans & Carbajal-Padilla, 2019). Thus, school life is regulated by performance standards defined by the state authority, leaving little room for educational agents to define improvement actions in other areas, such as school climate.

It can be observed that, among the professional knowledge under study and what is proposed by UNESCO (2015), there is consensus on the need for comprehensive student training. However, Bachler et al. (2023) and Islam Khan (2020) have suggested that the problem could be found in the limited tools that initial teacher training provides to these professionals to manage their own emotional world and that of their students. This could become more serious in a pandemic context, as referred to by experts in the letters to the editor. Along with this, Steinberg et al. (2009) have evidenced a complex human evolutionary development, which presents differences in psychosocial developmental maturity, for example, between moral development and social skills, the latter being the slowest to develop. This warns of the need to advance in the understanding of the socioemotional development of students and from there, improve or optimize the programs aimed at that, considering that the emphasis should be placed on socioemotional skills —ability to apply— (Steinberg et al., 2009), reduce risk behaviors and improve the well-being of students (Perlado & Trujillo, 2024). This same argument could explain why experts consider that adults have not sufficiently developed their socioemotional skills and justify the practical approach that socioemotional education must include.

The second specific objective was to identify the type of action orientation (Catalán Ahumada, 2016) in the approach to SC and SV of the experts' STs in the letters to the editor. It corresponds to an interpretative result of this study, where it is established whether the STs are initiators of actions to address SC and SV, maintainers of actions that are frequently carried out in this regard or inhibitors of practices aimed at working these educational dimensions. It was found that most STs are initiators of actions to address SC and SV. This result is relevant, as they not only mobilize the educational community to work with SC and SV, but also offer some general guidelines on how to initiate this process. In this sense, the experts in their letters to the editor act not only from a critical social stance on the functioning of the State, schools and adults, but also from the mediatization of contemporary societies, including general solutions based fundamentally on professional knowledge, regarding SC and SV. This is particularly important, given that the press transmits and mediates between civil society and politics significantly influencing (Prieto-Andrés & Fernández Romero, 2020), educational public policy (Ansaldo, 2021), over the influence of research (Castillo-Canales, 2024) by pointing out how to frame the problems and establishing which experts are the ones that deserve attention. Although the results also show that this emphasis on action aims more at decreasing SV due to the alarming increase in it —reactive or protective approach (e.g., Mann et al., 2024)— than at promoting positive SC as an aim in itself —promoting approach— (Rodas Flores & Gómez Contreras, 2024).

From a theoretical point of view, the knowledge of specialists goes hand in hand with a reflection on

professional practice to take action (Schön, 1998), which, in the case of the STs found in this research, aims to mobilize readers to generate an action. In this regard, a particularly interesting finding of this study is that the STs of the experts in the letters to the editor particularly mobilize adults and institutions, excluding the active participation of students.

In general, children and adolescents are referred to by these experts as passive victims —of the pandemic, SV, the incompetence of the State and adults— and not as active subjects, which could limit their participation in these contexts and their psychosocial development. In this regard, current educational paradigms and educational reforms have advocated teaching and learning methodologies that position the student in an active role (Centro de Perfeccionamiento, Experimentación e Investigaciones Pedagógicas, 2021). From this educational logic, students are protagonist agents of their learning and teachers should encourage the possibility of choice, self-determination and self-regulation (Lee, 2024). The foregoing indicates the need to reconcile in professional interventions -in this case of experts arguing about SV and SC in letters to a newspaper editor- and in the theoretical explanation of SC, the right balance between the rights, protection, care and participation of children and adolescents (Cabrolié et al., 2022).

Regarding the limitations of this research, there were difficulties in studying the relationships between experts' theorizations according to their training or discipline, because there were letters to the editor with more than one author in different disciplines. Studying the theorizations of experts in letters to the editor of a single author makes it easier to identify if there are noticeable differences in their public discourse in this medium. Other research can extend the study to other groups of political influence, because of the important role they play in educational decision-making. In the research project that frames this study dedicated to the public discourse on SC and SV post-pandemic, work has been done on this (e.g., Castro-Carrasco et al., 2024).

One strength of this study is that it allowed understanding important dimensions of the school (SC and SV) from the influence that the media and professionals have, in the construction of social thinking. The scope of the letters to the editor allows them to be shared to a large number of people, which helps to bring under the gaze of society (Browne Monckeberg & Rodriguez-Pastene, 2019) certain interpretations of SC and SV.

The aforementioned provides a ground for continuing to study the expert knowledge that is disseminated in various media especially about an important topic such as SV. More than ever, it is necessary to understand and systematize the integration of subjective, scientific and professional knowledge in order to face the complex challenge of improving the holistic quality of education.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS, FUNDING AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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AUTHORS:

Daniel Fuentealba-Jorquera
University of La Serena.
Professor of Spanish and Philosophy and Bachelor's degree in Education from the University of La Serena (ULS). Candidate for a Master's degree in Discourse Studies at the same institution.
dfuentealba@alumnosuls.cl
Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8644-9575
ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Daniel-Fuentealba-Jorquera

Fabiana Rodríguez-Pastene-Vicencio
University of Playa Ancha.
Journalist, Doctor in History (PUCV). She has worked consistently in the study of representations in the media through works related to gender, students, native peoples and migrants in the press. She has published a series of academic articles on the subject such as: "Interculturality and social representation: The Araucanía conflict in the Chilean press. Melinao and Luchsinger-Mackay cases"; "Social representation of immigrant women in Chilean digital newspapers"; "Gender violence: media treatment and analysis of the Nabila Rifo case in *La Cuarta and Las Últimas Noticias"*; and "Children and Adolescents in Mass Media: Construction of Stereotypes in Written Press and Television in Chile".
fabiana.rodriguezpastene@upla.cl
Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0843-7111
Scopus ID: https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57202945167
ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fabiana-Rodriguez-Pastene

Pablo Andrada
University of La Serena.
Doctor in Communication from Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona. Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Sciences, Universidad de La Serena, Chile. Researcher in the area of social sciences, specializing in the field of communication, education and culture. His research interests are media literacy and media and audience studies. He is co-editor of the book "Media Education in Latin America".
pablo.andrada@userena.cl
Índice H: 9
Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2887-5517
Scopus ID: https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57209657458
Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=GehDchAAAAAJ&hl=es&oi=ao
ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Pablo-Andrada-2

Pablo Castro-Carrasco
University of La Serena.
Catholic University of Maule.
Doctor in Psychology (PUC). Post-doctorate at the Child and Family Studies Deparment of the University of Leiden, The Netherlands. Professor at the University of La Serena. He has researched for two decades the processes of construction of subjective professional knowledge in education, mainly in the line of research on the subjective theories of teachers and experts on critical aspects of school and family education. Since 2006 he has researched and published on Chilean comprehensive policy, subjective theories, school climate and school violence.
pablocastro@userena.cl
Índice H: 23
Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8640-5820
Scopus ID: https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57211297165
Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=-AjeGuUAAAAJ&hl=es&oi=ao
ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Pablo-Castro-Carrasco

Vladimir Caamaño-Vega
University of Santo Tomás.
Psychologist, Master in Psychology, mention in Educational Psychology (ULS). His master's thesis was on teachers' subjective theories. He is currently co-researcher of the project "Subjective theories of teachers about teaching-learning time prioritized in the context of pandemic". He works as a school psychologist in an educational center. In his current professional practice he deals with difficulties of school climate and school violence by means of preventing and managing school climate.
vcaamano2@santotomas.cl
Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3111-4644
Scopus ID: https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=59254704100
ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Vladimir-Caamano-Vega

Verónica Gubbins
Finis Terrae University.
Doctor in Educational Sciences (PUC). Post-doctorate (in progress) at the Center for Studies on Society, Family, and School of the Institute of Human and Social Sciences, Federal University Ouro Preto, Brazil. Her lines of research are the relationship between socialization, family-school relationship, parental participation in school and reproduction of Educational Inequality from an ecoconstructivist-structural perspective. She has been a visiting researcher at the University of Berkeley (USA) and visiting professor at the University of Lleida (Spain). She is the author of two books on the topic of Family-Schools published under the blind refereeing process. She has been invited by two Wos journals to review a book on a comparative research in 9 countries of the world on Parenting and youth development (Educational Review).
vgubbins@uft.cl
Índice H: 20
Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2175-2941
Scopus ID: https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57188672913
Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=es&user=bXPfdUUAAAAJ
ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Veronica-Gubbins

Claudia Carrasco-Aguilar
University of Playa Ancha.
Doctor in Educational Sciences (UGR-Spain). Post-doctorate in the Department of Didactics and School Organization, School of Education Sciences at the University of Malaga, Spain. He has led different research funded by UNESCO, MINEDUC, OEI, among others, regarding school coexistence policies, and the ways in which schools implement them in their daily interaction. She worked on the critical analysis of the school violence law, analysis of school coexistence policies, performative impacts and educational policy implementation in school climate, both in Chile and Latin America.
claudia.carrasco@upla.cl
Índice H: 18
Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8768-2440
Scopus ID: https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57552810000&origin=recordpage
Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=es&user=SApybyoAAAAJ
ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Claudia-Carrasco-Aguilar

David Cuadra-Martínez
University of Atacama.
Master in Educational Psychology. Doctor in Psychology. He has written several research articles on professional identity, subjective theories, education and teaching and learning processes.
david.cuadra@uda.cl
Índice H: 19
Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0810-2795
Scopus ID: https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57201633979&origin=recordpage
Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=es&user=bjoiCq4AAAAJ
ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David-Cuadra-Martinez

Martina Zelaya
University of La Serena.
Translator English-Spanish. Master in Discourse Studies. Assistant for the Fondecyt Regular 1231667 project. Editorial assistant at Logos Magazine: Linguistics, Philosophy and Literature.
martina.zelaya@userena.cl
Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9543-580X
Scopus ID: https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=59467070300&origin=recordpage
ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Martina-Zelaya

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