Restorative practices in reducing school violence: a systematic review of positive impacts on emotional wellbeing

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Introduction: Restorative practices (RP) have been implemented in educational settings to reduce school violence and improve emotional wellbeing and group cohesion. This systematic review examines their effectiveness in the school context.

Method: We searched Scopus and Web of Science, selecting 13 studies that met specific inclusion criteria. The studies analyzed included diverse methodologies and populations, mainly from the United States and the United Kingdom.

Results: Findings indicate that RP reduces violence, improves emotional wellbeing, and promotes socio-emotional skills. However, the predominance of quantitative approaches and the need for longitudinal studies limit the in-depth understanding of their sustained effects.

Conclusion: RP positively impacts school climate, although further research in varied contexts and with mixed methodologies is recommended to assess its long-term sustainability. Schools should implement RP gradually, integrating students, teachers, and families. The implication of this study focuses on making visible alternative disciplinary approaches that not only regulate behavior appropriately but also foster a culture based on peace, inclusion and respect in the educational environment. The information obtained will help educational institutions to create informed policies and programs that promote a safe and inclusive environment, fostering the holistic development of students and supporting the creation of a culture of peace in schools.

KEYWORDS

bullying, emotional wellbeing, schools, restorative practices, systematic review, school violence

Introduction

Violence in the school environment remains an ongoing challenge in educational institutions globally. According to data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), collected in spring 2022, about 1 in 10 students in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCDE) countries reported feeling unsafe in their school 4 weeks before the assessment. In addition, 17% of respondents reported having witnessed a fight in the school environment that resulted in injury to someone (PISA 2022, 2023a). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) reports that every month, one in three students worldwide is bullied at school. In addition,

more than 36% are involved in physical fights with peers, and almost one third have been physically assaulted at least once in the past year (UNESCO, 2024). According to the official report of the International Non-Governmental Organisation "Bullying Without Borders," conducted between January 2022 and April 2023 in the Americas, Europe, Asia, Oceania, and Africa, bullying continues to increase worldwide. Currently, 6 out of 10 children face bullying or cyberbullying daily. Some of the countries that stand out for their higher rates are Mexico, where 7 out of 10 children and adolescents suffer from this problem daily; the United States, with a rate of 6 out of 10 minors affected; and Spain, which has registered a notable increase compared to previous research, positioning itself as the country with the most cases of bullying and cyberbullying in Europe (International NGO Bullying Without Borders, 2023). According to the PISA 2022 (2023b) report, 6.5% of Spanish students claim to have been victims of frequent bullying. Statistics on violent, aggressive, and bullying behaviors among students are alarming and have been categorized as a critical public health problem (González Contreras et al., 2021; Felip Jacas et al., 2024). This type of behavior affects not only the victims but also the aggressors and observers, generating a negative impact on the emotional and social wellbeing of all those involved, as well as on their academic and personal development (Eisman et al., 2020; Imuta et al., 2022). In response to this problem, education policies have often resorted to punitive and exclusionary approaches. However, these policies have proven insufficient to reduce violence in school settings (Welch and Payne, 2012; Lodi et al., 2021).

The RP have emerged as a promising alternative to managing violence and promoting peaceful and constructive coexistence within the school community (Esquivel Marín, 2018; Vincent et al., 2021; de Vicente Abad, 2023). This approach is based on the principles of Restorative Justice, which emphasize reparation of harm, accountability, and reintegration rather than the mere application of punishment (Zehr, 2015; Mas-Expósito et al., 2022).

The initial concept of Restorative Justice began to be discussed in the late 1970s, mainly in the United States, by small networks of American and European academics and practitioners. In the United States, these programs emerged in a community context, while in Europe, they were mainly oriented toward the criminal field (Pulido Valero, 2008). Restorative Justice aims to resolve conflicts by protecting victims and promoting social peace through dialogue and encounters between the parties involved. It seeks to make the offender assume responsibility, repair the damage and commit to modifying their behavior, becoming aware of the repercussions of their actions (Segovia Bernabé and Ríos Martín, 2008; de Vicente Abad, 2023).

As stated in the Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes (2006), restorative justice is an extensive concept defined by various practices that encompass processes centered on a restorative methodology, such as Victim-Offender Mediation, Positive Discipline, Restorative Counselling, and Peace Circles (McCold and Wachtel, 2002).

Studies in different countries have shown the benefits of this approach. For example, in English-speaking countries, restorative justice programs have been implemented in school settings, integrating various practices and exploring different approaches to addressing violence in educational institutions (McCluskey, 2010). In this line, Bonell et al. (2014, 2015) found that the implementation of RP in UK schools through inclusive intervention significantly reduced anxiety, stress, and aggressive behavior among students, as well as

fostered a climate of justice and respect in the classroom. Similarly, Prutzman et al. (2022) reported that RP in a New York school promoted cooperation and respect, creating an inclusive and participatory environment that improved students' social and emotional wellbeing.

In Canada, Reimer (2020) documented how students in a primary school perceived the school environment as a safe and supportive space, thanks to RP. These findings were supported by studies in the United States that showed that, by implementing these practices, a decrease in school violence and an improvement in students' emotional wellbeing were observed, reducing the perception of victimization and strengthening the sense of belonging (Eisman et al., 2020; Melendez-Torres et al., 2021).

In conclusion, RP in education is aimed at building positive relationships between students, teachers, and other members of the school community, providing tools for conflict resolution and the development of social–emotional competencies, such as empathy, responsibility, and emotional self-regulation (Filella et al., 2018; Rea and Saldarriaga Vélez, 2023). The global approach and the promotion of restorative practices to address conflicts in the classroom are evidence of progress toward overcoming the punitive model, promoting, in turn, a change in the social mentality (Albertí and Boqué, 2015).

Given the growing interest in implementing RP in the educational context and the need to address the high rates of school violence, this study aims to analyze, through a systematic review, the effectiveness of these practices in reducing school violence and their contribution to students' emotional wellbeing. The evidence gathered will enable educational institutions to develop informed policies and programs that favor a safe, inclusive, and conducive environment for the holistic development of students, contributing to the construction of a culture of peace in schools.

Restorative practices and emotional wellbeing in the classroom

Today's education systems are more diverse than ever, as they encompass a wide array of cultures, ethnicities, sexual identities, religions, and physical conditions. This diversity not only enriches the educational environment but also presents an opportunity to promote inclusion, acceptance, and mutual respect (Pérez-Jorge et al., 2021). Although it might be misconstrued that diversity directly leads to school violence, it is crucial to understand that it is often inadequate responses to diversity, rather than diversity itself, that foster conflict. Properly managed diversity can actually promote an enriching environment that minimizes conflict and enhances both student wellbeing and academic performance (Acosta et al., 2019).

In several developed countries, about 90% of students in compulsory secondary education report witnessing peer aggression, underscoring the need for effective interventions to manage coexistence in diverse educational settings (Filella et al., 2018). In the school setting, violent behaviors among adolescents are addressed through various interventions and protocols designed to combat violence. However, sometimes, these mechanisms do not achieve satisfactory results and fail to curb violent behaviors (Mascarell and Blanch, 2024). Historically, education systems have relied on punitive approaches to manage and respond to student misbehavior. These

strategies, known as 'zero tolerance policies, 'involve exclusionary measures such as suspensions and expulsions, which remove and isolate students who break the rules to maintain order in schools (Welch and Payne, 2012).

Many educational institutions have adopted policies that impose harsh punishments and exclusionary disciplinary practices, strategies that deprive students of valuable educational opportunities and can exacerbate existing social, economic, and health inequalities (González et al., 2019). However, approaches based on restorative justice, which seek to resolve conflict and restore relationships rather than merely punishing bad behavior, have proven effective in improving coexistence and reducing violence in diverse school contexts (Avivar-Cáceres et al., 2022). These approaches promote a more inclusive and supportive school environment, where conflicts are seen as opportunities for learning and improving the school climate.

In recent decades, much research has been conducted on the phenomenon of bullying and school violence, which has led experts in the field to develop a variety of programs aimed at combating this problem in educational settings (Rojas-Andrade et al., 2017), making visible the need to create protective, safe and healthy environments based on respect, dialogue and valuing the other, thus facilitating personal and social development (Blanchard Giménez et al., 2021).

Conflicts and unrest situations are an everyday reality in the school environment, presenting teaching and learning opportunities to manage them in a participatory way (de Vicente Abad, 2023). It is essential to adopt a holistic approach throughout the educational institution that focuses on repairing harm in conflict and violent or harmful behavior, such as bullying, and building and strengthening relationships. This approach should foster conflict management skills, both emotional and interpersonal, as well as non-violent communication, a sense of safety, respect, and wellbeing.

In recent years, a growing number of international schools have launched and evaluated initiatives and projects to promote the restorative approach RP constitutes a set of tools that allow for preventing, detecting, and managing conflicts in different contexts (family, educational, social, labor, judicial, and community), contributing to the improvement of coexistence and the strengthening of affective bonds between the individuals involved in such situations (Esquivel Marín, 2018). These initiatives are developed through (a) the formulation of cultural and disciplinary policies at the institutional level that supports students, teachers, and administrative staff with specific training; (b) an approach that favors the development of social and emotional skills, such as empathy, self-esteem, non-violent communication, and peaceful conflict management; and (c) the implementation of specific practices, with the collaboration of external facilitators, to manage and address episodes of bullying, conflicts, and inappropriate or violent behavior (Lodi et al., 2021).

Implementing RP in the school environment is linked to improving students' educational climate, conflict management, discipline, and socio-emotional development. These practices promote mental health and the integral development of students, addressing problems such as bullying (Mas-Expósito et al., 2022).

Different variants of restorative methods share key principles such as fairness, respect, responsibility, inclusion, and reintegration (Zehr, 2015; Senden and Galand, 2021). They are characterized by inclusive and collaborative processes that foster group cohesion, student participation, and values learning, as well as strengthen emotional and social skills, sense of belonging, and creativity

(Mas-Expósito et al., 2022; Bomm Weiler and de Freitas, 2023). This approach contributes to cultural change in institutions, fostering positive relationships and a healthier and more cohesive school environment through communication and dialogue (Bonell et al., 2015; Tumbaco-Quinatoa et al., 2023). Building strong bonds between teachers and students is crucial, as it has been identified as a key element for a successful educational experience and for strengthening teachers' competencies in establishing effective relationships with students (Cook et al., 2018; Duong et al., 2019).

These transformative and reconstructive methodologies can turn schools into spaces that promote restoring human relationships, allowing them to become authentic learning communities. These alternatives make it easier for students to identify and properly manage their emotions, thus promoting considerate behavior towards others. Conflicts are perceived as opportunities, focusing on helping students to understand the harm caused, take responsibility for such behavior and commit to making positive changes. Incorporating restorative justice practices in the school setting contributes to forming values based on principles that reinforce the sense of community, improve relationships, promote reparation of harm, and foster empowerment and responsibility of all involved. Thus, socio-emotional education is promoted, and the competencies and skills are highlighted in the educational curriculum (Bomm Weiler and de Freitas, 2023). Democratic societies, therefore, require educational experiences that foster a culture of peace, forming students capable of transforming conflicts into dialogue and consensual solutions (Medero et al., 2021). In addition, school-based interventions that integrate modifications to the educational environment with promoting social and emotional skills have shown promise in reducing aggressive behavior and other behavioral problems. Knowledge, the ability to generate ideas and creative options in various situations, and emotional and communicative self-regulation skills, such as active listening and assertiveness, are essential for managing conflict effectively (Benítez Moreno et al., 2024).

Given the significant impact that RP can have on coexistence and emotional wellbeing in the school environment, it is essential to comprehensively understand their specific benefits in reducing conflict and fostering a safe and positive school environment. This study aims to analyze, through a systematic review, the effectiveness of RP in improving school coexistence and their contribution to students' emotional wellbeing. The need to obtain evidence on their efficacy responds to the urgency of having alternative disciplinary approaches that not only manage behavior appropriately but also promote a culture of peace, inclusion, and respect within the educational community. Knowing the results of these practices will allow educational institutions to develop informed, evidence-based policies and programs to support their implementation, with the aim of creating school environments that are more inclusive, safe, and conducive to the holistic development of students. Thus, this study has two general objectives: on the one hand, to conduct a systematic review of the literature on the effectiveness of RP in reducing school violence by analyzing studies that measure the decrease in incidents of school violence following the implementation of RP. On the other hand, we seek to explore the impact on students' emotional wellbeing by exploring research linking RP with improvements in indicators of emotional wellbeing, such as reductions in anxiety, stress, and depression.

Method

To develop this systematic review of the impact of RP on reducing school violence and improving emotional wellbeing, rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies. First, only studies published after 2000 were considered, given that the use of RP in school settings has gained relevance in the last two decades, when many educational institutions began to explore alternatives to traditional punitive approaches (Bonell et al., 2015). This period allows for a selection of up-to-date studies aligned with recent developments in RP. Regarding study design, we included research that applied experimental, quasi-experimental, and observational methodologies, specifically randomized controlled trials (RCTs), quasi-experimental studies with control groups, and pre-post designs, all of which focused on evaluating the effects of RP. Case studies were also selected that, using qualitative methods, provided an in-depth understanding of individual experiences and the impact of these practices on school dynamics. This criterion allowed us to integrate studies with a mixed approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative results, which is relevant in a topic that involves complex aspects of coexistence and emotional development in the school environment (Eisman et al., 2020; Melendez-Torres et al., 2021). However, opinion articles, theoretical reviews, and studies without empirical data were excluded.

To ensure a comprehensive analysis of the effect of RP on the educational community, only studies focused on school populations that included students, teachers, or administrative staff were selected. This selection criterion encompasses both primary and secondary education, as it is at these stages that challenges related to school violence and the development of social–emotional competencies are significantly evident, allowing for a comprehensive view of the impact of these practices in the school context (Reimer, 2020; Prutzman et al., 2022).

In addition, the selected studies had to directly address the effects of RP on school violence and students' emotional wellbeing, which were assessed through indicators such as the reduction of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. Only research that analyzed these specific aspects was included, thus excluding studies that did not provide results directly related to school violence or emotional wellbeing (Avivar-Cáceres et al., 2022; Chatlani et al., 2023). Methodological quality criteria were also established to ensure the studies' robustness. Studies with a clear description of the sample, the use of validated measurement instruments,

and rigorous statistical analysis were selected. Studies with imprecise methodologies or whose results could not be reliably attributed to RP were excluded from the analysis (Clark et al., 2023). Finally, to facilitate full access to the relevant literature, only studies published in English and Spanish were included, thus avoiding linguistic limitations that might prevent a comprehensive analysis of the findings in this field.

Selection criteria

To respond to the general objective set out in the study, a methodology based on the Systematic Review of the literature was designed. The methodology defined a series of inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1) based on the design of the search equation, using Scopus and Web of Science as databases.

By selecting studies published after 2000 that employ experimental and quasi-experimental methodologies, we have attempted to identify the most recent and methodologically rigorous trends in implementing RP. This temporal and methodological delimitation intentionally excluded less conventional approaches and theoretical studies that, while valuable for understanding the underlying theory, do not provide direct empirical data on the effectiveness of RP in improving school coexistence. Furthermore, by limiting the inclusion to studies in English and Spanish, the intention was to focus the analysis on the most impactful and relevant research published mainly in these languages. However, this may imply a restriction regarding the cultural and geographical diversity of the studies. These methodological decisions, necessary to maintain a clear focus on the aim of this study, may imply significant limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results and suggest the need for future research that expands the inclusion criteria to encompass a broader range of perspectives and contexts.

Literature review

The study selection process for this systematic review was carried out following the guidelines of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) model to ensure completeness and transparency at each stage. Firstly, an in-depth search was carried out in the Scopus and Web of Science databases, using keywords related to the study's object and the Boolean operators AND and OR to structure the search. The initial search equation for Scopus was: ("restorative practices" OR "restorative justice") AND ("school

TABLE 1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Year of publication	2000 onwards	Studies before 2000
Design	Randomized controlled trials, quasiexperimental studies, observational studies, case studies	Opinion articles, theoretical reviews, and studies without empirical data
Type of participants	Students, teachers, and administrative staff in school contexts	Studies with participants outside the school setting
Variables of interest	Impact on school violence and emotional wellbeing	Studies related to other dimensions
Quality of the methodology	Studies with precise methodology, validated instruments, and adequate analysis	Studies with no clear methodological description or no results attributable to RP
Language	English and Spanish	Other languages
Review	Peer/double-blind review	Reports or documents not reviewed

violence" OR bullying) AND ("emotional wellbeing" OR anxiety OR stress OR depression). For Web of Science, the equation included additional terms: ("restorative practices" OR "restorative justice" OR "restorative approaches" OR "conflict resolution") AND ("school violence" OR bullying OR "aggressive behavior" OR "peer aggression" OR "school misconduct") AND ("emotional wellbeing" OR "mental health" OR anxiety OR stress OR depression OR "psychological wellbeing" OR "emotional health" OR "social–emotional learning"). This initial search identified 860 publications, of which 806 were from Scopus and 54 from Web of Science. After removing duplicates, the pool was reduced to 436 unique studies. This was followed by a review of titles and abstracts to identify relevant studies on the impact of RP on school violence and students' emotional wellbeing. In this phase, the previously defined inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, and studies that did not contain key terms in the title or abstract, such as restorative justice, RP, emotional wellbeing, anxiety, and depression, were discarded. This screening phase reduced the selection to 51 potentially relevant articles. In the eligibility phase, the full texts of these 51 studies were assessed to ensure they met the minimum methodological criteria. Studies that did not specify the methodology lacked outcomes directly attributable to RP or showed quality limitations were excluded. At the end of this process, 13 studies met all criteria and were selected for inclusion in the systematic review. This selection process is presented visually using the PRISMA diagram, which summarizes each phase and ensures the traceability of the applied methodology (Figure 1).

Bias risk analysis

This study has several limitations related to bias in the selected studies, which is important to consider when interpreting the results. Although the review intentionally focused on quantitative studies to objectively assess the impact of RP on school violence and emotional wellbeing, this methodological decision implies some restrictions in interpreting the findings. The absence of qualitative approaches limits the understanding of subjective experiences and the context in which these practices are implemented, aspects that could enrich the interpretation of quantitative data and provide a more holistic view of their impact. In addition, the geographical concentration of studies in Anglo-Saxon countries, especially the United States and the United Kingdom, represents a possible publication bias, given that these countries have extensively developed RP programs. This distribution may limit the applicability of the findings to different educational and cultural contexts, where implementation dynamics and outcomes may vary. Including studies only in English and Spanish may also have restricted access to relevant research in other languages, limiting the representation of diverse cultural perspectives on RP. Moreover, most of the studies reviewed are cross-sectional, making it difficult to assess the sustainability of the observed effects on reducing school violence and improving emotional wellbeing over the long term. Without longitudinal studies, it is difficult to determine whether the benefits of RP are sustained over time or require periodic

FIGURE 1
Flowchart.
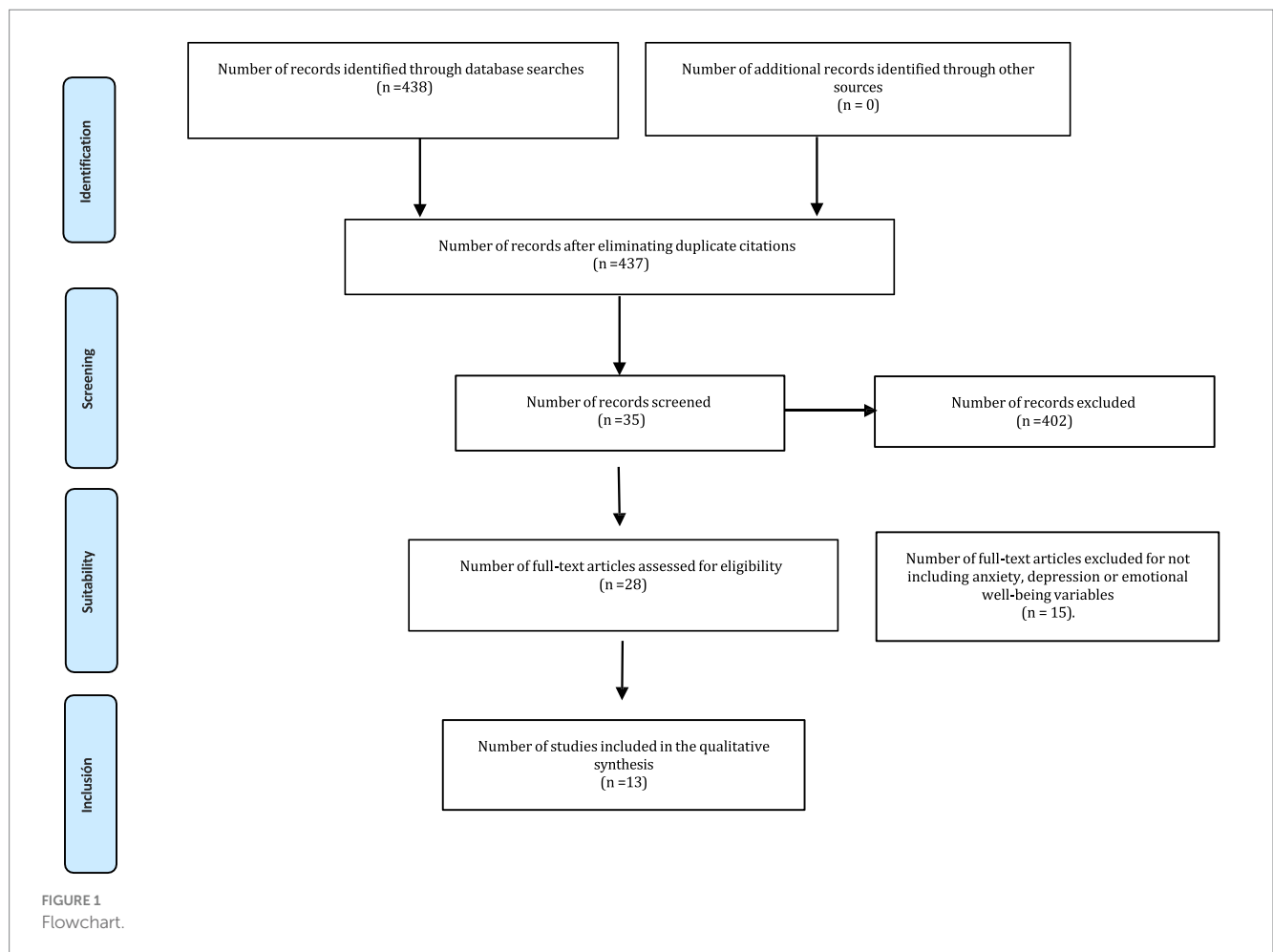
interventions to be consolidated. Finally, there is considerable variability in the sample sizes and characteristics of the studies reviewed, ranging from small samples to large school clusters. This heterogeneity limits direct comparability across studies and may affect the robustness of the conclusions, as the specific characteristics of each educational context may condition findings. Overall, although the quantitative review confirms the benefits of RP in school settings, the results should be interpreted with caution. Future research could address these limitations through longitudinal studies and greater cultural diversity in their samples, as well as incorporating mixed methodological approaches to enrich the understanding of the impact of RP in the educational context.

Results

This thorough and systematized study selection process ensures the review's results are based on relevant, high-quality empirical evidence. The focus is on studies that meet the methodological standards necessary to evaluate the impact of RP in the school context (presented in Table 2).

Results

A consistent pattern has been observed about school climate, which acts as a crucial mediator in the effects of restorative practices. A positive school atmosphere reinforces the effectiveness of these practices and contributes significantly to their long-term sustainability and improvement.

Of the 13 articles selected for this review, 38.46% were published programs implemented in the United States ($N = 5$), followed by the United Kingdom, which accounted for 23.08% of the publications ($N = 3$). Other countries such as Germany, Mexico, Spain, and Belgium contributed 7.69% each, with only one publication related to implementing a program per country. This concentration in Anglo-Saxon countries can be attributed to the trajectory of restorative justice programs in these contexts, where RP have been incorporated as alternatives to traditional disciplinary policies, especially to address the problem of school violence and to foster a safe and constructive classroom environment (Bonell et al., 2015; Acosta et al., 2019). In terms of study samples, research focused on three main groups: students, teachers, and whole school communities, including both educational staff and students and their families. Five studies (38.46%) focused exclusively on school-aged students, four focused on adolescents, and one covered students aged 3–12 (Reimer, 2020). A further five studies (38.46%) looked at the school community. On the other hand, one study (7.69%) looked exclusively at teaching staff (Clark et al., 2023), while another included both teachers and students and families (Pérez-Jorge et al., 2021). Additionally, Weber et al. (2021) evaluated the effectiveness of RP in both adolescents and the whole school, using control and experimental groups to analyze the impact on cohesion and school climate.

Regarding the number of participants, the studies with student-only samples had an average of 1613.6 participants (Max = 7,121, Min = 15, Sd = 3087.39). In the only study focusing on teachers, the sample was 140 participants. In the studies that included whole schools, the sample size was expressed in the number of schools,

with an average of 16.4 institutions (Max = 40, Min = 1, Sd = 14.90). The methodological variety of the studies encompasses qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches, which provides a broad picture of the effects of RP from different perspectives. The qualitative studies mainly focused on students, explored subjective perceptions, and experiences through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Hadar et al. (2024) and Chatlani et al. (2023) used qualitative methods to reduce negative emotions and strengthen empathy and social skills among participants, highlighting how learning circles promote an atmosphere of openness and collaboration. Quantitative studies focused on measuring the effects of RP on reducing violence and improving emotional wellbeing. For example, Avivar-Cáceres et al. (2022) employed a quasi-experimental design with the FHaCE up program to evaluate the impact of these practices on decreasing incidents of violence, finding significant improvements in school climate and students' social–emotional competencies, including empathy and active listening skills. Similarly, Melendez-Torres et al. (2021) conducted a cluster-controlled trial, observing improved students' emotional wellbeing and reduced psychological problems such as stress and anxiety.

Studies involving whole school communities, cluster randomized trials, and other quantitative approaches were used to analyze the impact of RP on cohesion and respect within the school environment. Studies such as those by Eisman et al. (2020) and Bonell et al. (2014, 2015) demonstrated that implementing these practices reduces school violence and fosters respect and collaboration, contributing to students' emotional wellbeing. In these studies, teachers reported that RP offered effective tools to manage disruptive behaviors, improve safety and classroom climate, and reduce students' anxiety and stress. However, Acosta et al. (2019) found no significant differences between restorative and control schools, suggesting that the context of implementation and the particularities of the program may influence its effectiveness. Studies using a mixed or observational approach, such as Prutzman et al. (2022), integrated qualitative methods such as dialogue circles and observations in school groups to assess how these practices contribute to conflict resolution and group cohesion. This methodological combination provided a richer understanding of the processes by which RP fosters an inclusive and emotionally supportive school climate. The findings also reveal that developing social–emotional competencies and group cohesion are dimensions that benefit from RP. In studies focusing on students, RP reduced negative emotions such as shame and significantly improved empathy, social skills, and conflict resolution abilities (Hadar et al., 2024; Avivar-Cáceres et al., 2022). Studies that integrated technology into interventions, such as that of Melendez-Torres et al. (2021), showed that using RP improved students' wellbeing and reduced psychological problems. Reimer (2020) also highlighted that restorative circles strengthen self-confidence and help students manage conflict proactively, thus promoting positive social–emotional development. In studies of whole school communities, RP reduced the incidence of violence and created a more participatory and respectful school environment, increasing cohesion and a sense of belonging. Prutzman et al. (2022) found that these practices fostered a culture of collaboration and respect, while Bonell et al. (2015) documented decreased student anxiety and stress levels. Where teachers and families were involved, RP were perceived as a practical resource for conflict resolution and for improving classroom relationships. These

TABLE 2 Summary of selected studies.

Author	Country	Objective	Sample	Methodology	Results
Hadar et al. (2024)	Belgium	Explore the possibilities of RP through open, direct and safe dialogue between young victims of cyberbullying and perpetrators.	N = 15 young victims of sexual harassment Age = adolescents	Qualitative methodology Exploratory study. Semi-structured interviews Content analysis.	There is emotional intensity in encounters with perpetrators, who find it difficult to take what happened seriously. The feasibility of restorative encounters is challenging (difficulties talking about it, shame). With technology, the restorative process is more complex because of the capacity to expand information. Normalizing the event reduces negative emotions, allows for a reinterpretation of the event, and allows for a return to routine.
Clark et al. (2023)	EEUU	Study the associations between teachers' educational styles (punitive, positive and social and emotional learning techniques) and school climate.	N = 140 teachers	Quantitative Method Delaware- Teacher/Staff Techniques Scale and Delaware-Teacher/Staff School Climate Survey Latent Profile Analysis	Years of teaching experience are related to conflict management techniques. The use of positive techniques decreases as the level of education increases. Such techniques significantly improve the school climate. Social and emotional learning techniques are significantly related to the teacher's perception of a better school climate and are used equally at all levels of education.
Chatlani et al. (2023)	EEUU	Design a JR-based online safety program where users (adolescents) are their authority, without the mediation of families.	N = 21 students	Qualitative method. Focus groups (3 adolescents and 2 researchers) via videoconference. Structure: discussion, participation, and questions and answers. Thematic analysis.	71% of respondents said that families and 52% that teachers should be involved in the design. 79% were motivated to participate in design to help others and as an activity that can be included in their curriculum in the future. They also shared experiences and provided practical and proactive solutions that took them into account as adults.
Avivar-Cáceres et al. (2022)	Spain	Evaluate the FHaCE up! program for the improvement of communication and socio- emotional skills for conflict resolution and, thus for, the improvement of school violence.	N = 561 students Age = 11–17. Two groups GC = 297 and GE = 264.	Quasi-experimental design. FHaCE up! 2 phases: social–emotional skills training and conflict resolution. Questionnaires. School Violence Questionnaire, School Climate, Conflictalk, Empathy (BES), Social Skills (CHASO), Active Listening Styles Inventory ACOVA and T Student.	There has been a reduction in school violence, a moderate improvement in school climate, collaborative style, and active listening, and a reduction in the adversarial model. There have also been small effect sizes in empathy and social skills.
Prutzman et al. (2022)	EEUU	To contribute to bridging the gap in research on implementing restorative practices in a case study.	Schools 1 Creative Response to Conflict (cooperation, communication, affirmation, conflict resolution, mediation...)	Case study: Observational	Implementing RP resulted in a decrease in expulsion rates, indicating a shift from a punitive to a restorative approach. Using restorative circles and the 100% Respect programme contributed to a more respectful, inclusive, and participatory school environment, which improved students' emotional and social wellbeing. Collaboration between students, teachers, staff, and parents was crucial to the success of the program. It improved conflict resolution skills and empathy.

(Continued)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Author	Country	Objective	Sample	Methodology	Results
Pérez-Jorge et al. (2021)	Mexico	To assess the perception of educational agents regarding restorative practices in school conflict prevention.	N = 453 Teachers = 18 Families = 203 Students = 242	Exploratory empirical research pre- and post-test Likert questionnaire. In addition, students Self-Determination Scale, Prosocial Self-Regulation Scale, Matson T Student's Social Skills Assessment	Families: Significant differences in perceptions of conflict through RP (post- test). Students: Improvements in legitimacy and compliance with the law and perception of self-efficacy and self-determination (post-test). Perception of Conflict Resolution by RP improved results in the post-test.
Weber et al. (2021)	Germany	To study the effects of restorative practices on school climate, taking into account the moderating role of students' experiences of victimization and emotional and social inclusion.	Study 1: One group N = 130 Stage = Secondary Study 2 N = 320 GC = 4 Schools and GE = 4 Schools	Study 1: Quantitative method (pre- and post-test) Linzer School and Class Climate Questionnaire Revised Peer Experience Questionnaire (R-PEQ) Perceptions of Inclusion, Special Educational Needs Status and Disabilities Questionnaire (SEND) 2. Study 2 quasi-experimental design with one experimental and one control group. Cuestionarios de auto-reporte. Análisis correlacional Spearman, Mann-Whitney-U, Wilcoxon y Regresión Lineal	Study 1: The RP intervention improved the classroom climate, increasing the sense of community and reducing rivalry among students. Student-teacher relationships improved, with greater pedagogical engagement and reduced perceptions of restrictiveness and unfairness. In addition, victimization behaviors were reduced, and students experienced greater emotional wellbeing and a sense of social inclusion. Study 2: The experimental group showed significant improvements in classroom climate, with greater cohesion and less rivalry compared to controls. Improvements in student-teacher relationships. Teachers: greater pedagogical commitment.
Melendez-Torres et al. (2021)	United Kingdom	This study aims to study the impact of the Learning Together intervention, which includes RP, on bullying victimization and emotional wellbeing in students.	N = 7,121 students GC = 3,605 GE = 3,516 Beyond Blue School Climate Questionnaire (Sawyer et al., 2010).	Cluster randomised controlled trial Gatehouse Bullying Scale. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Warwick- Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale Gatehouse Bullying Scale. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale.	When there is an increased sense of belonging and an intervention, violent behavior among peers is reduced. In addition, the sense of belonging decreases the feeling of victimization. A sense of belonging helps to reduce psychological problems and increase emotional wellbeing. It is a mediator in reducing victimization and improving mental health, especially in schools with exceptional grades and an inclusive environment.
Reimer (2020)	Canada	Exploring the role of the JR in a primary school as an enabler of student wellbeing	N = 350 Age = 3–12 years	Document analysis, participatory observation, interviews, educator and learning circle questionnaires	Students perceive the school as a safer context (family context) perceptions of teachers as close and friendly. Rules are perceived as necessary. Students perceived that despite difficulties situations were solved, they trust in themselves and the teacher's support. 79% of the respondents perceived that the school would help them solve conflicts. Regarding restorative circles, some respondents reported a lack of honesty and listening from their peers. Rewarding, happy, and joyful time at school where they can respectfully express their opinions. 66% indicated wanting to be more involved in school decisions.

(Continued)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Author	Country	Objective	Sample	Methodology	Results
Eisman et al. (2020)	EEUU	Develop and research a positive school climate intervention that includes restorative justice, mental health first aid, and crime prevention.	N = 20 schools. 2 cohorts: Cohort 1: 5 intervention schools and 5 control schools. Cohort 2: 10 schools (5 intervention and 5 control).	Cluster randomized trial	Reduced violence in schools that participated in the intervention, as well as an improvement in school climate that was associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression.
Acosta et al. (2019)	EEUU	To study the decrease in school violence following implementing RP and the impact on student wellbeing.	13 schools 2 years Adolescents N = 2,824 Mean Age = 11 years	Randomized controlled trial. Restorative versus control schools School environment and teacher behavior surveys School climate School connectedness Peer connectedness Social skills Bullying victimization	There were no differences between schools where RP were implemented versus those where they were not on school connectedness, positive development, and victimization. Student reports were predictive of significant positive relationships with school climate and connectedness, peer attachment, and social skills. They were associated with lower levels of bullying.
Bonell et al. (2015)	United Kingdom	To deepen the implementation of the INCLUSIVE intervention, based on RP, in secondary schools.	8 schools	Cluster randomized controlled pilot study Schools with RP versus control schools Surveys, semi-structured interviews, documentary evidence, and group observations	INCLUSIVE accepted and perceived as viable in 4 secondary schools (80% of students). Implementation of new rules that students perceived as fairer. More time with teachers for conflict resolution. Students participated in school decisions, increasing the feeling of fairness and respect. Teachers felt that such practices provided them with strategies for dealing with aggressive behavior.
Bonell et al. (2014)	United Kingdom	To establish the effectiveness of the INCLUSIVE intervention for reducing aggression and bullying in schools with the support of educational facilitators.	40 secondary schools N = 6,000 Young people 11–16 years old, teaching staff and educational assistants	Cluster randomized trial. 3 years Single sex versus mixed school Level of deprivation (free meals) Academic progress Annual surveys Schools with RP versus control schools Dialogue circles, lectures, personalized actions, work on social and emotional skills in curriculum	Results showed marked improvements in bullying and aggression among students who participated in INCLUSIVE compared to controls. INCLUSIVE also improved students' psychological wellbeing, reducing levels of anxiety, stress, and depression. The improvements extended to the whole educational community.

studies showed that the participation of the entire educational community strengthens the sense of belonging and emotional wellbeing in the school context, allowing students, teachers, and families to feel an active part of a collaborative educational community (Pérez-Jorge et al., 2021; Weber et al., 2021).

In summary, the findings underline the importance of promoting a positive school climate as an integral part of implementing restorative practices. These results suggest that interventions should be designed considering the specific characteristics of the school environment to maximize their effectiveness and sustainability.

Discussion

The findings of this systematic review confirm that RP is an effective tool for addressing school violence, improving students' emotional wellbeing, and fostering the development of social–emotional competencies and group cohesion. However, the methodological and geographical variability of the studies and limitations in qualitative approaches present challenges and opportunities for future research and more effective implementation.

Reducing school violence

Most of the studies reviewed indicate that RP has a positive effect on reducing school violence, which is particularly relevant in contexts with high rates of aggressive behavior in the educational environment. Studies such as those by Eisman et al. (2020) and Bonell et al. (2014, 2015) have shown that using RP, especially talking circles and group interventions, decreases the frequency of violent incidents by providing a safe space for conflict resolution. In these settings, RP allows students to express their emotions and experiences, facilitating the peaceful resolution of differences and reducing the escalation of aggressive behavior. However, some studies, such as Acosta et al. (2019), found no significant differences between schools that implemented RP and those that followed traditional disciplinary methods. This discrepancy suggests that the success of RP may depend on contextual and implementation factors, such as teacher commitment, program structure, and underlying school culture. In addition, the lack of longitudinal studies limits the ability to assess the impact of RP on reducing school violence over the long term. Future research should address these limitations by integrating ongoing evaluations examining RP's sustainability and evolution in different settings and its long-term effect on school violence.

Improving emotional wellbeing

The results indicate that RP not only reduces violence but also contributes significantly to the improvement of students' emotional wellbeing. Studies such as Bonell et al. (2015) and Melendez-Torres et al. (2021) show that students who participate in RP experience decreased levels of anxiety, stress, and depressive symptoms. These practices allow students to develop a sense of belonging and support in the school environment, which is crucial for their mental and emotional wellbeing. This aspect of RP is particularly relevant in

school contexts where students' mental health is threatened by factors such as bullying and academic pressure. The reviewed studies show that RP can serve as a psycho-emotional support system for students, providing them with emotional regulation and conflict management tools. Including talking circles and facilitating a safe space to express emotions are key components that contribute to these positive effects. However, there remains a need to develop studies that explore the impact of RP on the emotional wellbeing of teachers and administrative staff, who are also key actors in the emotional climate of the school and can benefit from the adoption of RP.

Development of socioemotional competences and group cohesion

The development of social–emotional competences is one of the implicit goals of many restorative interventions, and the findings of this review suggest that RP is effective in this regard. Studies such as those by Reimer (2020) and Avivar-Cáceres et al. (2022) indicate that students who participate in RP improve empathy, active listening, and conflict resolution skills. These skills are essential to fostering healthy school coexistence and promoting student cohesion while strengthening respect and collaboration within the educational community (Rodríguez-Muñiz et al., 2022). Furthermore, studies that included multiple school stakeholders, such as Pérez-Jorge et al. (2021) and Weber et al. (2021), demonstrate that the joint participation of students, teachers, and families in RP amplifies its impact on the development of social–emotional skills and group cohesion. This holistic approach allows for a deeper transformation of school culture, in which all community members feel engaged in building a positive and safe environment. However, most selected studies focused on students, leaving a significant gap in developing these competencies in other actors, such as teachers and support staff. Future research should address this gap by exploring how RP can be integrated into teacher training and interactions between school community members.

Practical recommendations for implementation

The findings of this review highlight the importance of implementing RP comprehensively in schools to maximize its benefits in reducing violence, improving emotional wellbeing, and strengthening group cohesion. However, some practical challenges are identified that need to be considered. One of the main challenges is the initial resistance of students and teachers, who may be used to traditional disciplinary approaches. To overcome this barrier, it is recommended that sensitization and training be implemented before introducing RP to ensure that all community members understand and accept the benefits of this approach. Another challenge is the implementation of RP as an ongoing practice and not just as a one-off intervention. Studies that have looked at the adoption of RP in whole schools, such as those by Bonell et al. (2015), suggest that RP is most effective when it is part of the school culture. Schools must include RP in their coexistence policies to achieve this integration and provide ongoing training for teachers and support staff. This will facilitate the adoption of RP and contribute to creating a cohesive and

collaborative school environment. Including families is another crucial aspect of maximizing the impact of RP. As the studies by Pérez-Jorge et al. (2021) and Weber et al. (2021) demonstrate, the involvement of families in the restorative process strengthens the sense of community. It promotes the development of socio-emotional competences in a mutually supportive environment. Educational institutions are recommended to foster spaces for meeting and dialogue with families, integrating them into the conflict resolution process and group cohesion activities. Logistical challenges, such as the availability of resources and time to apply RP, may hinder its implementation in some school contexts. To address this limitation, it is suggested that RP programs be developed that are adapted to the needs and possibilities of each school, promoting flexibility that allows their application even in environments with time and personnel restrictions.

Adopting these practices represents a fundamental opportunity to transform the reality of coexistence in schools, promoting not only the reduction of school violence but also the development of a positive climate of coexistence for all educational agents.

Future lines of research

The present review provides evidence that RP is a promising tool for improving school climate but also highlights areas for further research. The impact of RP on developing social–emotional competencies in teachers and other school community members needs to be further explored. In addition, most of the selected studies focused on short-term interventions; therefore, longitudinal studies examining the sustained effect of RP on reducing violence and improving emotional wellbeing would be valuable. Another important line of research is the adaptation of RP to different cultural contexts and educational stages. Although the studies reviewed suggest that RPs are effective in school settings in Anglo-Saxon countries, it is essential to evaluate their applicability and effectiveness in different contexts, especially those where RP are not a common strategy.

It is also suggested that the effectiveness of RP be investigated with a focus on different age groups, taking into account variables such as gender, cultural diversity, and special educational needs. In particular, focus on primary school students, as this population has been studied little but could greatly benefit from developing social–emotional skills from an early age.

Limitations

This study has some limitations when interpreting the results and projecting future research. The first limitation is the geographical concentration of the selected studies in Anglo-Saxon countries, mainly the United States and the United Kingdom, which reduces the applicability of the findings to different cultural contexts. The limited representation of countries from other regions underscores the need to explore how RP can be adapted and effective in diverse educational systems. Another significant limitation is the predominance of quantitative methodologies in the studies reviewed. While these methods allow for measuring the impact of RP on variables such as school violence and emotional wellbeing, the lack of qualitative approaches and mixed

methodologies restricts an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences and perceptions of students, teachers, and families. This limits the ability to understand how RP are implemented and perceived in the school context. Also, the absence of longitudinal studies makes it difficult to assess the sustainability of the effects of RP in the long term. Without longitudinal data, it is difficult to determine whether observed benefits, such as reduced school violence and improved emotional wellbeing, endure over time or whether they require ongoing interventions to be sustained. Finally, variability in sample sizes and methodological designs of studies makes direct comparison of results difficult and may influence the robustness of conclusions. The lack of standardization in sample characteristics and analysis approaches reduces the generalizability of findings. It highlights the importance of conducting studies with homogeneous samples and unified methodological criteria in future research.

RP are suggested as a strategy for conflict management in schools and for promoting respectful and cooperative classroom environments. To achieve this challenge, it is essential to promote policies focused on continuous and updated teacher training. In this way, it will be possible to integrate these practices in schools, ensuring their implementation and evaluating their effectiveness in the short and long term.

Conclusion

This systematic review highlights that RP in school settings effectively reduces violence, improves students' emotional wellbeing, and fosters essential social–emotional skills and group cohesion. Unlike traditional punitive methods, the reviewed studies confirm that RP offers a constructive approach that promotes conflict resolution focused on empathy, responsibility, and restoring interpersonal relationships. While RP is effective in multiple educational contexts, methodological and geographical limitations of the reviewed studies point to the need for further research. Longitudinal studies are recommended to assess the sustainability of the observed effects over time. Furthermore, given the concentration of studies in Anglo-Saxon countries, it is crucial to expand research to diverse educational and cultural contexts to adapt RP to the specific needs of each educational community. From a practical perspective, implementing RP requires a holistic approach involving the entire educational community, including students, teachers, and families. The transition from a punitive disciplinary culture to a restorative approach may face initial resistance; however, it is recommended that schools integrate awareness-raising and training programs to facilitate this cultural change. In addition, RPs should be part of school coexistence policies and be maintained as an ongoing practice rather than being applied sporadically to consolidate their positive impact on school climate. The incorporation of families in RP amplifies its effectiveness by strengthening the sense of community and promoting the development of socio-emotional competencies in a mutually supportive environment. Evidence suggests that educational institutions that involve families in the restorative process significantly impact students' emotional wellbeing and group cohesion. RP represents a transformative approach that contributes to building a culture of peace and respect in schools, promoting peaceful coexistence and the holistic development of students.

To maximize the impact of RP, it is crucial to integrate these approaches into teacher training programs. This approach not only improves school climate, but also strengthens the social–emotional skills of students and educators. Furthermore, it is recommended that policy makers support the implementation of restorative practices through specific policies that allocate the necessary resources and promote ongoing research on their effectiveness and sustainability in various educational contexts.

Fostering these values through education is essential to preparing future generations to face conflicts constructively and cooperatively, contributing to the formation of inclusive and resilient school communities. Thus, the adoption of PR in schools is presented not only as a behavior management strategy but also as an opportunity to strengthen the links between educational community members and build a fairer and more equitable society.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

Author contributions

IA-R: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Resources. DP-J: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. IP-P: Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. EO-R: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Generative AI statement

The authors declare that no Generative AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

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