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Successful Models and Experiences of School Mediation Around the World

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ABSTRACT:

This article addresses the topic of school mediation as an alternative mechanism for resolving conflicts within educational institutions, focusing on successful international models and experiences implemented in various educational systems around the world. It presents the social and cultural contexts in which these initiatives emerged, highlighting their objectives, implementation mechanisms, and the groups that benefit from them. School mediation has become widespread in many countries, including Canada, the United States, Spain, and France. The article emphasizes the positive impact of school mediation in reducing school violence, improving the institutional climate, and promoting a culture of dialogue. It also underscores the importance of adapting these experiences to local contexts and recommends the training of educational mediators and the inclusion of mediation programs in educational policies as part of a comprehensive societal project that contributes to fostering values of peace and tolerance in schools.

Keywords: School mediation, conflict resolution, school violence, school climate, education for peace.

Introduction:

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School violence has been increasingly prevalent across educational institutions, particularly at the secondary level, due to the developmental phase adolescents are undergoing. This violence may stem from bullying, extortion, or provocative behaviors that provoke anger and insecurity among students. Often, students feel unsafe in such environments, and some may resort to violent behavior, which can be either physical or verbal—insults and mockery being the most widespread. Harassment often targets students' clothing, appearance, or mannerisms, and the consequences of such violence can be severe. Some students are exposed to persistent peer conflict, necessitating timely intervention to prevent escalation into retaliation or more serious incidents.

Many school conflicts arise from issues related to personal belongings (such as school supplies), disputes over shared institutional property, academic competition, or socioeconomic differences among students. These conflicts often originate from poor communication, misunderstandings, or intense emotional reactions. In many cases, the disputing parties are unable to resolve their issues independently. Therefore, they require the support of a neutral third party—a mature and impartial mediator—who is capable of identifying the root causes of the conflict and intervening early before the situation escalates. This is where the importance of school mediation becomes evident: it facilitates conflict resolution, restores dialogue, and helps rebuild students' self-confidence.

Numerous studies conducted in developed countries have highlighted alarming rates of school violence. In the United States, over 250,000 students are reported to experience violence on a monthly basis, and approximately 60% of high school students have been found to possess weapons. In France, data from the Ministry of Education for the 1998–1999 academic year revealed that approximately 240,000 incidents occurred in secondary schools, with 26% classified as serious. Additionally, 40% of students admitted to having experienced some form of school violence.

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In Algeria, school violence has also become a significant concern across educational institutions. Statistics indicate that 80% of violent incidents occur between students, while 13% involve students committing violence against teachers. Additionally, 5% of incidents are perpetrated by teachers against students, and 2% involve conflict among teachers themselves. In response, the Ministry of National Education has taken measures to confront and reduce violence in schools, including the adoption of school mediation as an alternative strategy. This approach engages various stakeholders in the education sector to address the growing challenges and difficulties facing schools.

As part of its efforts to promote inclusive education and reduce dropout rates, the Ministry of National Education in Algeria has introduced several initiatives to counter school violence. Among these are the creation of listening and psycho-pedagogical support units aimed at addressing psychological tension and providing early intervention in student-related issues. According to the Ministry's official bulletin (2014), these units were established in response to field studies and daily follow-ups of emotional distress in schools. Their primary goals include behavioral correction, conflict resolution, and violence prevention through listening, dialogue, and mediation. In secondary education, these units serve as essential mechanisms for supporting students socially and emotionally, and for cultivating a safe and peaceful school environment.

1. Study Objectives:

This research paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify the factors contributing to the spread of violence within school environments.
- To highlight the role and effectiveness of school mediation in resolving conflicts and transforming negative student behaviors.
- To assess the level of attention given by global educational systems to school-related issues, and to determine the nature of these issues as addressed through school mediation programs.

2. Significance of the Study:

The importance of this topic lies in the following aspects:

- Shedding light on school mediation as one of the most effective mechanisms employed by educational institutions to eliminate negative behaviors such as bullying, mockery, and violence. It targets a broad segment of learners in schools and universities, offering an alternative means of conflict resolution through dialogue instead of aggression.

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- Providing educators, parents, researchers, and stakeholders with a foundational understanding of school mediation within its natural and social context.
- Drawing the attention of educational policymakers and administrators to the vital role of school mediation in mitigating behaviors that negatively impact the educational process and classroom climate.

3. Key Concepts of the Study:

3.1 Mediation:

Linguistically, "mediation" refers to the act of interceding or intervening. It derives from the Arabic root "wasata," implying fairness, balance, or acting as an intermediary. In classical usage, a "wasit" (mediator) is someone held in high regard among their people. The Qur'anic expression "And thus We have made you a just (wasat) nation" refers to a balanced and fair community.

Mediation is thus defined as a process in which disputing parties attempt to resolve their conflict with the help of a neutral third party known as the "mediator." This mediator does not impose a decision but instead facilitates dialogue and helps both sides reach a mutually acceptable agreement.

As Khalaifia and Madouri (2020) state, mediation is a voluntary negotiation process led by a neutral third party to assist disputants in reaching mutually agreeable solutions.

3.2 School:

Linguistically, the word "school" is derived from the Arabic root related to learning and teaching. It signifies a place where individuals gather to acquire knowledge and skills. Adli Suleiman defines it as an institution through which the educational process is implemented, whether as a kindergarten, school, institute, college, or educational center. Each has its own objectives, curricula, services, and tools.

Sociologically, the school is a social institution established to assist families in shaping the personality of individuals by transmitting cultural heritage to new generations, instilling values of citizenship, and preparing students for active participation in society.

Jamaluddin (2006) further describes the school as a space where two generations meet—adults who educate and guide, and youth who are in the process of growth and learning—within socially regulated structures.

3.3 School Mediation:

School mediation is a conflict resolution method that employs dialogue and negotiation between students to achieve peaceful outcomes.

It is considered a proactive and educational approach employed by schools to manage disputes between students, between students and teachers, or between

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students and administrators. In some cases, even parents may be involved as part of the conflict resolution team.

As Nadia and Wassila (2023) explain, it is an administrative and educational strategy that schools adopt to address interpersonal differences, mitigate violence, and foster positive social interaction.

Zlikha (2022) adds that school mediation is a preventive educational practice designed to reduce conflict, prevent violence, and develop communication and life skills among students. It aims to enable students to resolve disputes peacefully through a win-win approach.

All definitions agree on the involvement of a trained third party—known as the mediator—who possesses the necessary interpersonal skills to manage the conflict, facilitate dialogue, and guide disputants toward a satisfying resolution. Within school settings, mediation is a strategic tool used by school administrators to ease tension and promote a peaceful learning environment

4. The Evolution of Mediation Around the World:

Mediation has deep historical roots and has been practiced in various forms across civilizations. From Islamic, Christian, and Jewish traditions to Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Indigenous cultures, mediation has been embraced as a legitimate and effective method of resolving conflicts.

In modern times, the practice of mediation has rapidly expanded, particularly over the past five decades. This growth is partly due to the global rise in awareness of human rights, the demand for democratic participation at all social and political levels, and the belief in individuals' right to have a say in decisions that affect their lives. The spread of ethical principles that value individual freedom and embrace pluralism and diversity has also contributed to the prominence of mediation.

A key factor in this expansion is the increasing dissatisfaction with authoritarian decision-making structures that impose top-down resolutions which often fail to address the true needs of the parties involved. Traditional adversarial methods of conflict resolution—often resulting in a winner and a loser—have also been criticized for their high costs, time consumption, psychological toll, and for undermining social cohesion.

Although mediation has gained global traction, it has developed most significantly in countries such as the United States and Canada. In the U.S., formal mediation structures first emerged in labor relations. In 1913, the U.S. Department of Labor established a panel of “conciliation commissioners” to address disputes between workers and employers. This initiative eventually evolved into the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS), formally established in 1947.

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According to Al-Samadi (2010), North American mediation was initially considered universally applicable across cultures and contexts. However, with the rise of culturally diverse perspectives within the field of peace and conflict studies, scholars began to challenge this universality. They highlighted the influence of cultural norms and social assumptions on mediation practices and introduced models tailored to their own communities. Consequently, North American scholars revised their approach, acknowledging that while their model offers valuable insights, its applicability is not universal and must be adapted to specific cultural contexts.

5. School Mediation in Algerian Educational Legislation:

Algeria's educational legislation encourages the incorporation of mediation practices within school communities. For example, Article 32 of Chapter Three—concerning specific provisions related to students—of Ministerial Decree No. 65, dated July 12, 2018, outlines the principles for organizing and managing the educational community. It emphasizes that educational institutions should promote dialogue and consultation among students, as well as between students and all members of the school community, on educational, pedagogical, and organizational matters, in accordance with procedures defined by each school's internal regulations.

Similarly, Article 83 of the same decree underscores the importance of dialogue and mediation. It states that employees and their union representatives should, in collaboration with school administration, prioritize mediation approaches to prevent workplace conflicts.

The Ministry of National Education has also strongly recommended adopting school mediation in various decisions and legal texts. The Official Educational Bulletin (Issue No. 572, October 2014) refers to Ministerial Circular No. 219, dated August 20, 2014, which concerns listening and psycho-educational support units in secondary schools. These units, while not replacing disciplinary councils, are intended to complement them by addressing school violence and anticipated conflicts through mediation and dialogue. Their goals include creating safe spaces for students to express concerns, promoting behavioral change through listening and persuasion, and offering psychological, social, and educational support using updated techniques to improve school life. These units are established in each secondary school and conduct individual or group sessions based on free and open dialogue.

Previous Studies

Several studies have addressed school mediation from different perspectives. For instance, a study by Ayas et al. (2010) aimed to explore conflict resolution

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strategies among adolescents in the school environment. The sample included 430 students from grades 7 to 11 in schools in Sakarya, Turkey. The students were asked to describe their strategies in situations involving physical violence, classroom discipline, theft, or mockery. The researchers used a specially developed questionnaire to collect data and analyzed the responses. The results indicated that conflict resolution strategies varied based on the nature of the conflict and the students' gender. Female students tended to adopt cooperative and avoidant strategies, while male students were more inclined toward aggressive and uncooperative approaches. The study emphasized the importance of equipping adolescents with mediation skills to foster healthier social interactions during this critical developmental phase (Hamam, 2013, p. 74.)

Another study by Garcia-Raga et al. (2019), titled "School Mediation Under the Spotlight: What Spanish Secondary Students Think of Mediation," aimed to evaluate mediation programs based on students' perceptions. Data were collected from 1,198 secondary students through a dedicated questionnaire. The descriptive-analytical results showed a high level of agreement among students who had participated in mediation processes, particularly those who had directly used mediation to resolve conflicts. The study highlighted the need to raise awareness about available mediation services, train the entire educational community, and expand the role of school mediation to fully realize its potential.

A further study by Artyukhina et al. (2020), titled "The State and Prospects of School Mediation Services in the Modern Russian Educational System," explored how conflict resolution is approached within Russian schools. The study used both quantitative methods (surveys and content analysis) and qualitative methods (expert interviews and document analysis). It revealed the growing role of mediation services in addressing school conflict, the specific characteristics of disputes in Russian schools, and the major challenges faced in implementing school mediation programs, particularly in Barnaul. The study concluded with a set of recommendations for strengthening the practice.

6. Models of School Mediation Around the World:

School mediation has become widespread in many countries, demonstrating significant benefits for learners, educational institutions, and society as a whole. These experiences vary from one country to another, reflecting diverse educational policies and cultural contexts. Among the most prominent models are the following:

United States:

The U.S. is considered a pioneer in school mediation, which began in the 1970s

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in several schools in California. Since then, school mediation has expanded significantly and is now implemented in most schools across the country.

Canada:

School mediation in Canada also began in the 1970s, initially in the province of Quebec. Over the years, it has spread widely and is now applied in many Canadian educational institutions.

Australia:

School mediation emerged in Australia in the 1970s, with early implementations in schools in Victoria. The program has since expanded and is now broadly adopted across Australian schools.

Japan:

In Japan, school mediation was introduced in the 1980s, beginning in schools in Tokyo. The model has gained considerable momentum and is now practiced in many educational institutions throughout the country.

Impact of International Experiences:

- In the United States, school mediation programs have contributed to a 20% reduction in school violence and enhanced trust among students, teachers, and parents.
- In the United Kingdom, mediation programs helped reduce school absenteeism by 10% and improved academic performance.
- In Canada, studies indicate a 25% decrease in bullying and increased student well-being.
- In Australia, school mediation led to a 15% drop in disruptive behavior and fostered a stronger sense of fairness among students.
- In Japan, mediation efforts resulted in a 10% reduction in behavioral issues and heightened students' sense of responsibility.

These results highlight the potential of school mediation not only to resolve conflicts but also to transform school environments and improve overall educational outcome.

Notable School Mediation Models:

A. The BOCES Program (New York, USA):

One of the earliest and most classic programs is the BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) initiative, launched in the early 1980s in New York State's central school district. This model focused on training both teachers and students to mediate conflicts involving students or between students and their parents.

It is considered a "hybrid model" because it involves both teachers and students as mediators, although its scope is limited to conflicts between students and between students and parents. There was some initial resistance from teachers

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regarding allowing students to mediate disputes involving themselves and their instructors. Thus, mediation programs primarily addressed student-to-student and student-to-parent conflicts, especially in New York City.

B. Peer Mediation Model:

Peer mediation is a model where students are trained to mediate conflicts among their fellow students. One of the most renowned projects under this model is the "Conflict Managers Project," initiated by the Community Board Program in San Francisco in 1982.

In this program, young mediators, easily identifiable by their bright orange shirts labeled "Conflict Managers," conducted mediations without adult intervention, addressing minor issues during recess or between classes. This peer-driven process promoted conflict resolution through community pressure, mutual recognition, and cooperation. The program's broader objectives were to foster responsibility, enhance the school climate, and reduce tension and violence among students (Bonafé-Schmitt, 1992).

C. The Brussels School Mediation Service (Belgium):

Since 1994, the Brussels-Capital Region has implemented a unique school mediation service under the Directorate General for Compulsory Education. Unlike other models, this service employs full-time mediators who work exclusively within secondary schools but remain institutionally independent from school administration.

These mediators are granted a private office within schools, ensuring neutrality, confidentiality, and accessibility. Although they integrate daily into the school environment, they maintain professional distance and neutrality to preserve the trust necessary for effective mediation.

Following decrees in 1998, 2004, and 2013, the mediation service expanded beyond schools with "positive discrimination" status to all secondary schools. As of 2014, there were 56 mediators employed within Brussels schools.

Mediators do not participate in school governance or disciplinary councils unless invited solely to promote or facilitate mediation, thus ensuring their neutrality and independence.

D. Peer Mediation Model (Expanded Explanation):

Peer mediation is now the most common form of school mediation worldwide. It involves training voluntary students to act as mediators among their peers.

Peer mediation specifically addresses conflicts between students, unlike broader school mediation programs that also involve teachers, administrators, and parents. According to Vankova (2018), peer mediators are neutral third parties who assist students in resolving disputes fairly and constructively without taking sides.

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This model fosters social cohesion, improves communication, and builds protective factors that create a positive school climate. Schools that implement peer mediation programs report reductions in bullying, improved student attendance, stronger leadership skills, and better conflict resolution abilities among students (Gerber, 1999; Noaks, 2009)

7. Conclusion and Recommendations :

School mediation is a highly effective method for resolving conflicts among students, providing numerous benefits for learners, schools, and society as a whole. Promoting school mediation worldwide requires raising awareness about its importance, developing comprehensive mediation programs, and providing institutional and financial support to ensure its success.

It is equally important to foster a culture of mediation within schools by organizing awareness campaigns, workshops, and academic forums that highlight the value and benefits of mediation practices.

Despite these advantages, several challenges still hinder the widespread implementation of school mediation in Algeria, including limited resources, insufficient specialized training, and a lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities among educators and administrators. Currently, school mediation remains a relatively new practice and has not yet been formally adopted across all Algerian educational institutions. However, in recent years, initiatives and programs promoting school mediation have been launched, signaling a positive trend toward broader adoption.

In light of the above, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance school mediation globally:

- Raise awareness about the importance of school mediation among students, teachers, and administrators through educational campaigns and training workshops.
- Develop tailored mediation programs that address the specific needs of different educational institutions and student populations.
- Provide financial and administrative support to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of mediation initiatives within schools.
- Encourage educational associations to fully adopt and collaborate with schools in implementing school mediation projects, emphasizing their significance in fostering a peaceful educational environment.
- Integrate mediation programs into educational curricula by incorporating parallel activities such as role-playing, creative writing workshops, and dialogue-based exercises that teach students active listening, cooperation, and conflict resolution skills.

It is time for school mediation to be formally integrated into our educational

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systems to cultivate psychologically healthy individuals capable of embracing dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding.

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