

EDUCATION THROUGH HUMAN RIGHTS LENS: Adolescent Psychosocial Development and Student Engagement in School

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ABSTRACT

The right to education entails a specific quality of education that summons full personality development and educational processes. However, the pressing need for a theoretical framework to address these aspects at the student level, particularly during adolescence, a crucial period for promoting lifelong well-being, thriving, and active participation, cannot be overstated. The study aims to present a theoretical perspective to address full personality development and educational processes at the student level. Following initial considerations, we suggest two sound theoretical and empirical approaches highly relevant to education research: Erikson's psychosocial development to address full personality development; student engagement in school to address educational processes. For each approach, prospects and challenges are presented. The discussion section focuses on the feasibility of a framework using these approaches to address the right to education at the level of students' experience. The study presents a practical and constructive framework to actualize the right to quality education and advocates for its significance in both research and intervention. While the perspectives hold promise, this work serves as a starting point for debate and issue presentation. Further empirical endeavors are imperative, given the urgent need to consider education's role in adolescent's thriving. However, the potential of the presented perspectives gives us hope for the future of education.

Keywords: psychosocial development; student engagement; adolescent development; human rights.

EDUCAÇÃO NA PERSPECTIVA DOS DIREITOS HUMANOS: DESENVOLVIMENTO PSICOSSOCIAL E ENVOLVIMENTO DOS ALUNOS NA ESCOLA

RESUMO

O direito à educação implica a qualidade da educação associada ao pleno desenvolvimento da personalidade e aos processos educativos. Destaca-se neste contexto a necessidade premente de um quadro teórico para abordar estas questões ao nível do aluno, especialmente durante a adolescência, período-chave da vida para a promoção da saúde, o desenvolvimento ótimo e a participação ao longo da vida. O objetivo do estudo é apresentar uma perspectiva teórica para abordar o desenvolvimento integral da personalidade e os processos educativos ao nível do aluno. Na sequência de algumas considerações iniciais, são sugeridas duas abordagens teóricas e empíricas, com grande relevância na investigação em educação: o desenvolvimento psicossocial de Erikson para estudar o pleno desenvolvimento da personalidade; envolvimento dos alunos na escola para estudar os processos educativos. Para cada abordagem são apresentadas perspectivas e desafios. A discussão centra-se na adequação da proposta para questionar a qualidade da educação nos contextos escolares. O estudo sugere um modelo prático e construtivo para concretizar o direito à educação de qualidade e defende a sua relevância para a investigação e a intervenção. Apesar do potencial das perspectivas, este trabalho é apenas um ponto de partida para o debate. É imperativo, reconhecendo o papel da educação no desenvolvimento ótimo dos adolescentes, investir no aprofundamento empírico. O potencial das perspectivas apresentadas, no entanto, reforça a nossa esperança para o futuro da educação.

Palavras-chave: desenvolvimento psicossocial; envolvimento dos alunos na escola; desenvolvimento adolescente; direitos humanos.

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INTRODUCTION

The Right to Education Handbook opening statement says that education is not a privilege but a human right (Unesco, 2019). It is a moral and political obligation toward all human beings to be fulfilled now (McCowan, 2015) and, in the report *Reimagine our future together*, it is the cornerstone of a new social contract for education (Unesco, 2021). There has been a remarkable global expansion of access to educational opportunities in recent decades. However, alongside persistent gaps in access, there are increasing concerns about the equality of educational quality (Unesco, 2021). Many children and adolescents attend school but struggle to acquire the essential skills needed to cope with the demanding tasks of their context (Unesco, 2021; Unicef; Unesco, 2007).

Although education is not just schooling, considering the increasing role of school in children and adolescents learning, development, and thriving (Eccles; Roeser, 2009; Osher *et al.*, 2020), we should discuss what happens in school (Tomasevick, 2001b, a), focusing on the specific *quality* of education (Monteiro, 2010; Monteiro, 2004; Unesco, 2019), also portrayed in the fourth SDG – Sustainable Developmental Goal (Unesco, 2016). The problem is the concept's elusive, changeable, or even empty meaning (Alexander, 2008; Biesta, 2022). Using a human rights lens, we expect the quality of education to address two issues: the *aims of education*, stressing the “full personality development” (UN, 1948, Art. 26, N. 2), which traverses all international human rights legislation, regional conventions, and many national laws (Lundy; O’Lynn, 2019; Monteiro, 2010); the *educational processes* that, according to the General Comment 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), should be child-centered, child-friendly and empowering (UN, 2001, parag. 2).

Unfortunately, clear theoretical and empirical perspectives addressing the aim of full personality development and educational processes are missing, which hinders research and intervention (McCowan, 2010). Existing references are broad, vague, abstract, and hardly sensitive to students’ everyday experiences. For this reason, the right to education and the strive for equity is relegated to school attendance, bureaucratic proceedings, and scattered initiatives. It is critical to address education aims and processes at the student level, with particular attention to adolescents (Alfvén *et al.*, 2019; Patton *et al.*, 2016). Adolescence is a pivotal time in human development, characterized by fast changes, increasing abilities, growing autonomy, and distinct vulnerabilities, thus requiring specific support, references, and opportunities (Patton *et al.*, 2016; Robaert; Schonardie, 2017; Unesco, 2021; Unicef, 2018). This concern guided CRC’s General Comment 4 - Adolescent Health and Development (UN, 2003), reinforcing the key role of school in adolescents’ present and future health, thriving, and well-being (Coulombe; Hardy; Goldfarb, 2020; Eccles; Roeser, 2009; Osher *et al.*, 2020; Patton *et al.*, 2016; Unicef, 2018).

Therefore, a research agenda focused on the right to education, able to interrogate “all barriers to quality, equitable education for all,” is required (Unesco, 2021, p. 123). Answering this challenge, this theoretical paper aims to discuss a framework that may address quality education at the student level, thus enhancing investigation and intervention. The research problem is: How to consider and approach

the aim of full personality development (topic 1) and school educational processes (topic 2) at adolescent students' level? Three study questions were identified for each topic: How to consider the topic (Considerations)? Which approach may provide conceptual and empirical support to its study at the student level (Approach)? What are the main prospects and challenges for research and intervention regarding quality education (Prospects and challenges)? Beyond the boundaries of legal perspectives (McCowan, 2010), our inquiry found guidance in educational psychology, traditionally bridging psychology and education with workable and significant contributions to deepen education aims and educational processes (Caldeira; Veiga, 2013; Kohlberg; Mayer, 1972). A positive and robust framework is needed to inspire and bring together authorities, researchers, directors, teachers, parents, and students in a joint action to enhance the right to quality education in a practical sense, with an impact on educational opportunities and, consequently, on adolescents students' development and relation with the school.

The following sections address the two topics following the three questions - considerations, approach, main prospects, and challenges. Regarding the first topic of full personality development, the approach suggested is Erikson's psychosocial development; for the second topic of the educational processes, the approach suggested is student engagement. The discussion section argues the framework's feasibility in addressing the quality of education.

EDUCATION'S AIM OF PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

Considerations

Education's purpose is probably the most important and controversial issue in education (Kohlberg; Mayer, 1972). Reflection on education aims points out a tension between two poles: (i) regulation or socialization, stressing the integration in a sociocultural milieu valuing conservation and unity; (ii) emancipation, stressing liberation, the opportunity to become oneself, the enhancement of each person's dispositions, and subjectification, that is, becoming an autonomous and independent person, free to make decisions (Biesta, 2009, 2020; Reboul, 2000; Santos, 1991; Savater, 2007). If both regulation and emancipation are crucial in the mission of education, the problem is the imbalance favoring regulation, of which the international measurement is an example (Biesta, 2009; Patton *et al.*, 2016), over emancipation focused on autonomy, personal growth, fulfillment, critical thinking, creativity, and democratic participation in the community (Monteiro; Lima-Berton; Asinelli-Luz, 2021; Santos, 1991). This imbalance may explain the general sense of delusion and frustration toward education's promises (Bourdieu, 1966; Ibáñez Ayuso; Limón Mendizabal; Ruíz-AlberdÍ, 2022; Monteiro, 2004; Santos, 1991).

Human rights legislation pushes forward the emancipatory tenet of education, pointing out the aim of *full personality development* (UN, 1948, Art. 26, N. 2), thus stressing the education's mission of human development (Reboul, 2000; Savater, 2007), which some authors trace back to Dewey's and Piaget's pioneer works (Kohlberg; Mayer, 1972). In this context, CRC's Article 29 (UN, 1989) made an invaluable contribution

(McCowan, 2010), strengthening the orientation toward the development of each child's unique personality, talents, and abilities to their fullest potential (Tomasevisk, 2001b; UN, 2001), under the best interest of the child (Monteiro, 2004). This emancipatory tenet was reinforced by Delors's report (1996) "learning to be" pillar and the focus on the development of the whole person (body, intelligence, sensibility, aesthetic sense, personal responsibility, and spirituality); the WHO's (1978) definition of health, oriented to overall well-being (Robaert; Schonardie, 2017); the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (Unesco, 2016); and the shift in education's International Organizations from achievement, curricula, and competencies to personality and psychosocial capacities (Zapp, 2018).

At the same time, Article 29, by valuing personality development within a clear set of aims, stressed the balance between individual freedom, autonomy, and fulfillment, with respect for human rights, responsible participation, and contribution to the community and social justice (Ibáñez Ayuso; Limón Mendizabal; Ruíz-Alberdi, 2022; Unesco, 2019, 2021). Beyond individualism or self-sufficiency, *Learning to be* is intrinsically related to *Learning to live together*, which includes discovering others and committing to community growth and well-being (Delors, 1996).

The question remains: How to approach the emancipatory tenet of full personality development as the aim of education? Based on these considerations, we put forward three criteria for a suitable approach. The first is a comprehensive understanding of human development, valuing the interaction between different dimensions or influences toward healthy and fulfilling lives. The second is to balance emancipation and regulation, valuing the bidirectional relation between the person and the context (e.g., Kohlberg; Mayer, 1972) and plasticity (Lerner *et al.*, 2021). The third, because development, like learning, happens naturally and should not be an end in itself (Biesta, 2009), an approach should provide a specific direction or quality regarding age-appropriate needs, challenges, health, well-being, flourishing or thriving (Alfvén *et al.*, 2019; Coulombe; Hardy; Goldfarb, 2020). Accordingly, opening the debate, we suggest Erikson's psychosocial development as a possible approach.

Approach

Erik Erikson's (1902-1994) understanding of life as a continuum of opportunities for growth, reconstruction, and positive change, reshaped views of human development (The New York Times, 1994), anticipated positive psychology (Newman; Newman, 2015) and positive education (Coulombe; Hardy; Goldfarb, 2020), and keeps inspiring research and education (Carvalho; Veiga, 2022; Dunkel; Harbke, 2017; Schachter, 2005). Can Erikson's psychosocial development address the aim of full personality development?

The first criterion was comprehensiveness. Erikson first purpose of extending Freud's psychosexual theory to adult life soon led him to the aim of understanding how the healthy and vital personality develops throughout the lifespan (Erikson, 1994). In addition, enriching the understanding of human development, the author defined psychosocial development as the interplay between the biological, psychological, and communal systems or dimensions (Erikson, 1994; Erikson; Erikson, 1998; Newman; Newman, 2015; Schachter, 2005).

The second criterion was the emancipation-regulation balance. Psychosocial development is an interactionist approach (Caldeira; Veiga, 2013), stressing the complementary complicity between the growing person and the environment's readiness to guide, acknowledge, and enhance growth (Erikson, 1994; Erikson; Erikson, 1998). In this relationship, where the tension between emancipation and regulation is present, mutual adjustment is necessary. As an illustration, Erikson described how a baby affects all the household members' inner and outer lives: a "family can bring up a baby only by being brought up by him" (Erikson, 1994, p. 96). It is consistent with the value of the alignment between students' developmental needs and school reality and opportunities (Coulombe; Hardy; Goldfarb, 2020; Eccles; Roeser, 2009). Going further, Erikson advocates for the active role of the person in one's development as part of the ego's mission: to integrate, unify, and master experience, thus allowing the person to coordinate processes, be in tune with reality, govern action, guide, plan, build consistency and meaning, and interact with others (Caldeira; Veiga, 2013; Erikson, 1994; Erikson; Erikson, 1998; Newman; Newman, 2015).

The third criterion is a direction for healthy development. Psychosocial development suggests a lifespan *roadmap* of eight stages (Caldeira; Veiga, 2013; Erikson, 1994; Erikson; Erikson, 1998). Unlike a rigid timetable (e.g., Lerner, 2002), Erikson's stages are renewed opportunities to review former and later stages in a process open to personal, social, and cultural influences (Caldeira; Veiga, 2013; Newman; Newman, 2015). Each stage includes specific tasks and challenges driven by biological, psychological, and social adjustment. Erikson uses the image of a *crisis* or *turning point* to describe how in each stage the person strives for the resources and abilities to cope with new changes, challenges, or social demands (Erikson, 1994). In this process, contexts, including schools and teachers, play a decisive role. The positive outcome of each stage is a change in the person's self-concept, which defines development and growth: a "new view of the self in society and a new way of relating to others" (Newman; Newman, 2015, p. 65). Figure 1 presents the first five stages of infancy and adolescence, with the two opposite poles representing the crisis of each stage, followed by the human strengths or ego qualities that result from the successful resolution of each stage (Erikson; Erikson, 1998).

Figure 1 – Stages of childhood and adolescence and their meaning to identity

Age	Stage	Strength	Gains to identity
Infancy	Basic trust vs. mistrust	Hope	I am what hope I have and give
Early childhood	Autonomy vs. shame, doubt	Will	I am what I can will freely
Play age	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	I am what I imagine I will be
School age	Industry vs. inferiority	Competence	I am what I can learn to make work
Adolescence	Identity vs. identity confusion	Fidelity	What do I want to make of myself, and what do I have to work with?

Note. Sources (Erikson, 1994; Erikson; Erikson, 1998).

Between infancy and adulthood, adolescence's main psychosocial task is the sound formation of the psychosocial identity, expressing the person's search for the integration of "constitutional givens, idiosyncratic libidinal needs, favored capacities, significant identifications, effective defenses, successful sublimations, and consistent roles" (Erikson; Erikson, 1998, p. 74). Therefore, adolescents' identity includes a realignment of past identifications and, at the same time, a meaningful future direction, recognized by the person and by significant others, that is, finding acceptance and support in one's context (Erikson, 1994; Newman; Newman, 2015). Consistently, extant research presented evidence of identity's relevance for adolescents' well-being (Carvalho; Veiga, 2022; Verhoeven; Poorthuis; Volman, 2019). As Figure 1 shows, identity is not an isolated stage. Conversely, it tributes earlier stages, allowing their reorganization, and underpins adulthood stages and well-being (Erikson, 1994; Ibáñez Ayuso; Limón Mendizabal; Ruíz-AlberdÍ, 2022; Newman; Newman, 2015).

Prospects and challenges

Research allows different prospects and challenges regarding addressing full personality development using Erikson's Psychosocial development.

A first prospect is a comprehensive, humanistic, and ethical approach to human development, valuing children's best interest and full development (UN, 1989). Psychosocial development is an insightful approach that inspires psychology and education (Schachter, 2005). Although reality changed, many Eriksonian assumptions on childhood and adolescence have found empirical reinforcement (Carvalho; Veiga, 2022; Dunkel; Harbke, 2017; Newman; Newman, 2015). However, other assumptions are less consensual. For instance, on identity, and avoiding the discussion on the neo-Ericksonian identity processes research (Waterman, 2015), which strayed from Erikson's work (Côté; Levine, 1987), the concept should evolve from an oversimplified perspective of a lifelong, rational, integrated structure, to a more configurational, adaptable and inclusive understanding, conveying the search for meaning and life goals, probably closer to Erikson's intention (Schachter, 2005). Other discussions on Erikson's present-day theoretical and empirical fit are taking place with suggestions focusing on the number and organization of lifespan stages (Newman; Newman, 2015) and the role of stages like generativity in teachers (Liu; Ball, 2019) and adolescents (e.g., Lawford; Doyle; Markiewicz, 2018).

The second prospect-challenge is the cross-cultural relevance of psychosocial development. It was a cherished subject of Erikson, which drove his research among the Sioux and Yurok Indian tribes. However, critics say his theory is western centered (Newman; Newman, 2015; Schachter, 2005). Although studies presented promising results regarding the critical value of psychosocial concepts across cultures, especially regarding identity, further research is needed (Carvalho; Veiga, 2022; Schwartz *et al.*, 2012; Verhoeven; Poorthuis; Volman, 2019).

The third prospect is the plethora of qualitative and quantitative assessment suggestions (Carvalho; Veiga, 2022; Newman; Newman, 2015). Nevertheless, challenges arise. One is the widespread focus on isolated stages, like identity formation. It reifies Erikson's meaning of identity and the lifelong dynamic process, where each stage plays

a critical role in the *whole* psychosocial development (Carvalho; Veiga, 2022; Erikson, 1994). Consistent with this idea, a recent meta-analysis confirmed the relationship between stages and the possibility of a *general factor* of psychosocial development (Dunkel; Harbke, 2017).

The fourth prospect is a comprehensive benchmark for school action. Studies showed that psychosocial development is empirically related to adolescents' personal and social strengths, such as life goals, purpose in life, trust, resilience, optimism, self-esteem, and empathy (Carvalho; Veiga, 2022). Consequently, psychosocial development may help schools action regarding learning (Caldeira; Veiga, 2013), students' well-being and health, especially when facing adversity (Carvalho; Veiga, 2022), including adolescent students with special needs, gifted (e.g., Cross; Cross, 2017), from immigrants or minority families (e.g., Rivas-Drake *et al.*, 2014), or at-risk (e.g., Gandhi *et al.*, 2016). Likewise, the life span perspective, valuing the "wherefrom" and "whereto" of development as permanent growth (Erikson, 1994), can provide depth to contextual support to students' developmental needs, as suggested in Self-Determination Theory (Ryan; Deci, 2000), or the Stage-Environment Fit model (Eccles; Roeser, 2009).

Two other challenges are noteworthy. The first is the need to foster an understanding on the relation between psychosocial development and empathy (Newman; Newman, 2015) and prosocial behaviors, including contribution to the community (Carvalho; Veiga, 2022). The second is the need for up-to-date research on the relation between psychosocial development and school settings and formal education (Carvalho; Veiga, 2022; Verhoeven; Poorthuis; Volman, 2019).

Following our research problem, the next section addresses the educational processes.

EDUCATIONAL PROCESSES

Considerations

Quality education should address education's aims, but also its content, "what" students learn, and processes, "how" they learn (Tomasevsk, 2001b; UN, 2001). Regarding educational content, CRC's General Comment 1 (UN, 2001) stresses the need to surpass academic restrictions and value the relevance of content for life, life skills, ability to define and pursue options, cope with life challenges, promote human rights and CRC's values of peace, tolerance, and respect for the environment. Regarding the educational processes, General Comment 1 defends the consistency between children's rights and the educational options regarding the school environment, pedagogical strategies, teacher-student relations, and peer relations. The question is: What methodological and pedagogical implications for school has this child-centered approach, oriented towards competencies, human rights, and children's full participation and contribution?

Literature on the right to education underlines the model of the 4 As (Tomasevsk, 2001a). In this model, *Availability* and *Accessibility* relate to provision and access, while *Acceptability* and *Adaptability* relate to the quality of education. *Acceptability* integrates educational content (curriculum) and processes (school organization, relations,

pedagogical options), while *Adaptability* expresses their flexibility to adapt to student needs, as well as to context and time challenges (Veriava; Paterson, 2020). Although important, the model will only fit our research problem if we determine what acceptable and adaptable means and how to assess it at the student level.

Advocating the need for a model that addressed the quality of education, McCowan (2010) analyzed two factors that could be used as evidence. The first was learning outcomes. Although popular among International Organizations (Biesta, 2009), the assessment of learning outcomes presents obstacles such as (McCowan, 2010): (a) the pitfall of the outcomes levels; (b) the influence of many variables; (c) outcomes may not reflect the quality of the opportunities within some contexts; (d) the constrictive effect of outcomes over education; (e) the difficulty of considering *Adaptability*. The second factor is student engagement in meaningful educational processes, which are often ignored or subordinated to outcomes (McCowan, 2010, 2015). The author puts forward student engagement, stating that the right to education should complement equality in access with “the right to engage in educational processes that are both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable” (McCowan, 2010, p. 521). It is an exciting suggestion. After all, one may impose attendance but not engagement in learning and school (Fredricks; Blumenfeld; Paris, 2004).

Approach

Student engagement is a present-day prominent subject in educational psychology, with a growing body of research (Carvalho; Veiga, 2023; Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2018; Wang; Degol, 2014; Wong; Liem, 2022), especially after the First International Congress on Student Engagement in School in 2013 (Veiga *et al.*, 2021).

Motivation is a critical “energy” in students’ relation with learning and school. However, it is insufficient for students to persist, overcome difficulties, finish their tasks, learn, and keep oriented toward school. Therefore, student engagement is defined as “energy in action” (Veiga *et al.*, 2014a; Wang; Degol, 2014), stressing students’ *implication*, *investment*, and *commitment* toward learning and school (Fredricks; Blumenfeld; Paris, 2004), or, in another definition, the “centripetal experience of bonding to school” (Veiga, 2016, p. 188).

Today, authors agree that student engagement is a construct that entails distinct dimensions, each one with a specific and complementary contribution that enriches the overall understanding, assessment, and promotion (Carvalho; Veiga, 2023; Fredricks; Reschly; Christenson, 2019; Wang; Degol, 2014; Wong; Liem, 2022). Within the discussion regarding the number and definition of the dimensions, the research highlighted Fredricks *et al.*’s (2004) threefold model of engagement, including behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Carvalho; Veiga, 2023; Lam *et al.*, 2012). Studies suggested that a fourth dimension could enrich the model, such as an *academic* dimension, deemed redundant with other dimensions (Lam *et al.*, 2012), or a *social* dimension, addressing students’ social interactions within and outside the classroom (Wong; Liem, 2022), which was included in the emotional dimension in some models (Veiga *et al.*, 2014a) or considered as contextual factors in others (Lam *et al.*, 2012). Another suggestion is the inclusion of an *agentic* dimension (Carvalho; Veiga,

2023), opening the triadic model to students' proactivity and initiative (Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2018; Reeve; Tseng, 2011; Veiga, 2016).

Following the review of Veiga *et al.*, (2014a), the behavioral dimension refers to students' actions and practices regarding learning and school, including homework, school tasks, conduct, and participation in school-related activities; the emotional dimension includes the identification and feelings toward school, peers, and teachers; the cognitive dimension addresses students' approaches to learning and self-regulation strategies; finally, the agentic dimension includes students' intentional and proactive contribution to learning.

The question remains: can student engagement address quality concerning content and processes at the student level? We believe it might. Empirical findings consistently highlight engagement's key role in students' learning, academic achievement, lower school dropout, decreased risk behaviors like delinquency, substance use, and anti-social behaviors, and higher mental health and well-being (Archambault *et al.*, 2019; Carvalho; Veiga, 2023; Fredricks; Reschly; Christenson, 2019; Lam *et al.*, 2012; Veiga *et al.*, 2014a; Wang; Degol, 2014; Wong; Liem, 2022).

Prospects and challenges

The first prospect of addressing educational processes using student engagement, is the possibility of a richer insight into students' subjective experience of school (Veiga *et al.*, 2014a) than just behavior or achievement (Fredricks; Reschly; Christenson, 2019). After all, students not engaged in school, or behaviorally engaged but not emotionally or cognitively so, forfeit many of the educational benefits that could enrich their development and broaden their present and future options in all domains of life (Fredricks; Blumenfeld; Paris, 2004; Fredricks; Reschly; Christenson 2019). However, as a challenge, research stresses the conceptual haziness regarding terminology, definition, dimensions, and methodological approaches (Lam *et al.*, 2012; Lei; Cui; Zhou, 2018; Reschly; Christenson, 2012; Wong; Liem, 2022). Not overriding the potential of the concept, haziness demands redoubled conceptual and methodological efforts, which seem to be improving (Carvalho; Veiga, 2023).

The second prospect is the cross-cultural value of student engagement in school, visible in studies with students from culturally different countries (Lam *et al.*, 2016). In addition, studies widened geographically, presenting a fair representation of studies from North America, Europe, and Asia, but a small presence of studies from South America and Africa (Carvalho; Veiga, 2023; Reschly; Christenson, 2012).

The third prospect is the affinity between a human-rights school orientation and student engagement. A school environment where human rights are respected and promoted is expected to be more engaging. Studies with Portuguese adolescents confirmed it by presenting a positive relation between students' perception of existing rights and all school engagement dimensions (Malveiro; Veiga, 2014; Veiga *et al.*, 2014b). A theoretical study posit the need to emphasize the relation between human rights in school and peace education in school settings (Monteiro; Lima-Berton; Asinelli-Luz, 2021). In addition, the agentic dimension of engagement provides a unique contribution to human rights school orientation by valuing students' participation in

school, deemed key in child-centered education (UN, 2001, parag. 10), and related to future “ability and opportunity to participate fully and responsibly in a free society” (UN, 2001, parag. 12).

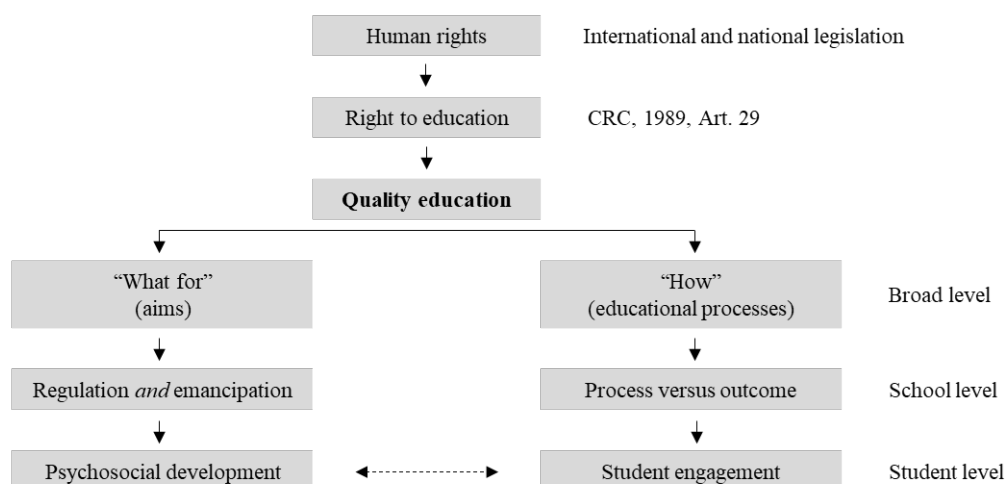
The fourth prospect is student engagement’s malleability or sensitivity to contexts, such as the school’s environment and relations, which motivates and legitimates intervention (Fredricks; Reschly; Christenson, 2019; Lam *et al.*, 2012; Quin, 2017; Wang; Degol, 2014; Wong; Liem, 2022). Instead of blaming hard-to-change factors like genetics, family, or socioeconomic background for educational hardships, student engagement’s amenability to intervention, invites educators and schools to act (Veiga *et al.*, 2014a). In addition, educators easily understand and value student engagement, integrating findings in their practices, classrooms, and schools (Fredricks; Reschly; Christenson, 2019). Regarding intervention, research stressed the impact of student-teacher relations, one of the most critical variables of student engagement (Quin, 2017), followed by the relation with parents and peers (Carvalho; Veiga, 2023; Lam *et al.*, 2012; Lam *et al.*, 2016). It also reinforced the impact of the school’s climate and values (Carvalho; Veiga, 2023; Wong; Liem, 2022), thus reaffirming the value of school settings in students’ well-being (Coulombe; Hardy; Goldfarb, 2020; Monteiro; Lima-Berton; Asinelli-Luz, 2021). However, further research on intervention using stronger evidence-based assessment and addressing the degree of implementation is needed (Carvalho; Veiga, 2023; Fredricks; Reschly; Christenson, 2019; Wang; Degol, 2014).

The fifth prospect is the negative relation between student engagement and students’ issues like special needs, low engagement, disengagement, academic difficulties, adverse life situations or contexts (Lei; Cui; Zhou, 2018), including minority or immigrant students (Fredricks; Reschly; Christenson, 2019; Rivas-Drake *et al.*, 2014; Veiga *et al.*, 2021). Overall findings stressed the need for renewed action to enhance all students’ engagement in learning. Suggestions for action appear in Human Rights literature: (a) more child-centered; (b) more supportive of each child’s unique strengths and needs; (c) counteracting obstacles and overcoming discriminatory practices (UN, 2001); and (c) respecting the child’s parents, cultural identity, language, and values (UN, 1989, art. 29).

DISCUSSION: ISSUES FOR A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the context of the right to quality education, our research problem was how to consider and approach the aim of full personality development and educational processes at the adolescent students’ level. Figure 2 synthesizes the suggestion in a positive and concrete framework.

Figure 2 – Framework to Address Quality Education’s Aims and Processes at the Student Level



Source: Figure created by authors.

The literature reviewed provided valuable insights into the relevance of each approach for promoting students’ thriving and well-being. The question at hand is whether psychosocial development and student engagement approaches can consistently serve as an “underpinning model” (McCowan, 2010) to uphold the right to education from the perspective of students’ experiences. Therefore, within the context of the proposed framework’s significance for research and intervention in the field of education, five issues are examined.

The first issue is methodological (Carvalho; Veiga, 2022, 2023). For psychosocial development, the key challenge is integrating identity into lifespan development, allowing a more comprehensive understanding of students’ full personality development (Dunkel; Harbke, 2017). At the same time, stages demand updating, conveying the richness of extant research on the interplay between biological, psychological, and social systems (Newman; Newman, 2015). The main challenge for student engagement is consistency (Reschly; Christenson, 2012), demanding researchers to use clear options and sound measures (Wang; Degol, 2014).

The second issue is the study of the relation between Erikson’s psychosocial development and its stages with student engagement and its dimensions. Although the theoretical suggestions of a relation (e.g., Wong; Liem, 2022) and the relation between a broad definition of identity and school adjustment (Verhoeven; Poorthuis; Volman, 2019), more studies are needed (Carvalho; Veiga, 2022, 2023). However, there are promising hints. One is the positive relation between self-concept, a key concept in psychosocial development (Newman; Newman, 2015), and student engagement (Veiga *et al.*, 2014a; Veiga *et al.*, 2015). Another hint is the relationship between the satisfaction of psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan; Deci, 2000), key nutrients of psychosocial development (Soenens; Vansteenkiste, 2023) – and adolescents’ student engagement (e.g., Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2018).

The third issue considers how the two concepts and their relationship develop across adolescence and differ according to adolescents' personal and contextual variables like gender and age. Although more recent studies regarding psychosocial development are needed, student engagement research across countries emphasizes girls' highest engagement in school (Carvalho; Veiga, 2023; Lam *et al.*, 2016) and a decrease in student engagement throughout school years (Carvalho; Veiga, 2023).

The fourth issue is how the framework addresses the other CRC's educational aims. On the subject of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (UN, 1989, Art. 29, N. 1 b, c), an international study showed that students' perception of existing rights in school fell short of their expectations (Hart; Pavlovicb; Zeidnerc, 2001; Veiga, 2001). More worrying was that in some countries, students with a lower perception of existing rights in school were those who faced higher personal and social constraints (Veiga, 2001). Can the suggested framework help to raise school reality to students' expectations? Research offers promising evidence of the positive relation between students' perception of existing rights in school and their engagement (Malveiro; Veiga, 2014; Veiga *et al.*, 2014b). Another question is how the framework enhances students' positive and responsible participation in society, including valuing peace (Monteiro; Lima-Berton; Asinelli-Luz, 2021) and the respect for the natural environment (UN, 1989, art. 29, N. 1 d, e). At this level, although studies in PYD research stressed the positive relationship between developmental outcomes, student engagement, prosocial behaviors, and contribution to the community, more research is needed (Carvalho; Veiga, 2022, 2023).

The fifth issue addresses the contribution of the framework to education and school action. Teachers can easily understand and value the contributions of psychosocial development (Cross; Cross, 2017) and student engagement (Fredricks; Reschly; Christenson, 2019). Erikson's clear theoretical stance on lifespan development, valuing the *wherefrom* and *whereto* of development, offers: the reinforcement of education's emancipatory aim; sound foundation for research on development, health, and well-being; a lifespan continuum of relevant tasks, challenges, and strengths easily built into classrooms and school action; the reminder that educators' psychosocial development also demands support. On its part, student engagement offers: a valuable, multidimensional understanding of students' relationship with school; practical ideas regarding student engagement's improvement, and an alert for disengaging students (Fredricks; Reschly; Christenson, 2019). We believe that the framework may complement ecological models addressing school, like the stage-environment fit (Eccles; Roeser, 2009), and the comprehensive and promising perspectives of SoLD – Science of Learning and Development (Cantor *et al.*, 2019).

Implications and limitations

This study has several theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. Theoretically, the study proposes a comprehensive framework that integrates Erikson's psychosocial development theory and the concept of student engagement to address the quality of education at the student level. This dual approach ensures full personality development and effective educational processes, emphasizing the importance of

fostering life-long health, thriving, and participation during adolescence. The theoretical framework underscores the need for education systems to go beyond academic achievement and focus on holistic development, aligning with human rights principles.

Empirically, the study highlights the potential of combining psychosocial development and student engagement as crucial constructs in educational psychology research. By presenting prospects and challenges for each approach, the study sets the stage for future empirical investigations that can validate and refine this integrated framework. The emphasis on systematic and empirical efforts underscores the urgency of addressing the role of education in adolescents' present and future well-being, providing a solid foundation for subsequent research.

Practically, the study offers valuable insights for educational practice and policy. It advocates for implementing educational strategies that promote full personality development and active student engagement, aligning with the right to quality education. The framework suggests that schools should create environments that support both psychosocial development and engagement, thereby enhancing students' overall well-being and academic success. The study also calls for more systematic and empirical efforts to investigate and implement these strategies, highlighting the critical role of education in fostering adolescents' long-term health and thriving.

Overall, the study provides a theoretical foundation, empirical direction, and practical recommendations for enhancing the quality of education through a human rights lens, emphasizing the holistic development of adolescents in school settings.

Nevertheless, several limitations must be considered. Firstly, the study only introduced the issues and began the discussion. The theoretical framework proposed is in its initial stages and lacks systematic and empirical validation. Future studies should empirically test the proposed framework in diverse educational settings to validate its effectiveness in promoting quality education and fostering adolescents' full personality development and well-being. Secondly, the meaning of quality of education demands further theoretical development. Future studies should thoroughly review the different meanings of this quality and their implications for schools. Thirdly, there is the need to compare the two approaches suggested in this article with other theoretical possibilities. Future theoretical inquiries should focus on understanding how different theoretical perspectives may enhance education's promises for all students. Fourthly, the focus of this reflection was exclusively on school settings. Future studies should extend the reflection to other non-school daily life settings, relations, and activities (Unesco, 2021), with particular attention to families, playing a critical role in both psychosocial development (Erikson, 1994) and student engagement in school (Abreu; Veiga, 2014; Veiga *et al.*, 2014b).

CONCLUSIVE IDEAS

The text emphasizes the crucial role of childhood and adolescence in shaping present and future well-being. It highlights the urgent need for quality education that transcends traditional and bureaucratic constraints. Schools should balance regulation with emancipation, creating a supportive and relational environment that nurtures students' full development. Students should be actively involved in their

learning, contributing to the community, and shaping the future. The article proposes a framework combining psychosocial development and student engagement to understand, plan, and assess educational efforts. It underscores the importance of focusing on adolescents' subjective experiences, which may be more significant than broad legal provisions. This holistic approach prioritizes the overall development and active participation of students. In summary, our highlights are: the importance of childhood and adolescence, the need for quality education, a balanced educational approach, active student participation, a framework for quality education, and the focus on subjective experience. These conclusions highlight a holistic approach to education that prioritizes students' overall development and active engagement.

Statements and Declarations

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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