Teaching morality as an inclusive competence in higher education: Effects of dilemma discussion and contribution of empathy

Enseñando moralidad como competencia inclusiva en educación superior: efectos de la discusión de dilemas y contribución de la empatía

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Abstract:

Inclusive pedagogies belong to the diversity agenda in higher education and so their teaching methodologies should be tested to ensure the effective training of students in democratic and inclusive citizenship competencies, such as moral competence. Moral-dilemma based methods have proven to be effective in learning about morals in specific programmes, but there is still no evidence for their cross-cutting application in regular courses. These methods could also be enriched by strategies aimed at learning competences that have been identified as predictive factors in theories of moral judgement and development, such as empathy. The current study examines the effects of a 10-hour teaching intervention on learning moral competence using a version of the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD), either applied in isolation or using a mixed strategy of dilemma discussion and narrative persuasion activities, this last method with the aim of verifying the contribution of empathy to moral learning. The hypotheses regarding the two methodological approaches were tested using a quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test design with a control

group in the ecological context of the first semester of teacher training. Data were collected using the Moral Competence Test and were analysed with linear mixed models. The results did not support the expected empathy-induced moral learning. However, significant progression in moral competence when using KMDD is shown. The discussion considers the disassociation between empathy/altruism and moral competence in order to interpret the ineffectiveness of the mixed strategy. The need to apply pedagogies with a more experiential focus is suggested in order to foster moral learning by means of activities in community diversity environments.

Keywords: higher education, inclusive pedagogies, moral competence, empathy, teacher education.

Resumen:

Las pedagogías inclusivas se han incorporado a la agenda de la diversidad de la educación superior y, por consiguiente, sus metodologías docentes deben ser evaluadas para garantizar la formación efectiva de los estudiantes en competencias de ciudadanía inclusiva, como es el caso de la competencia moral. Los métodos basados en discusión de dilemas han demostrado su efectividad sobre los aprendizajes morales en programas específicos, pero se carece de evidencia relacionada con su aplicación transversal. Por otro lado, estos métodos podrían enriquecerse mediante estrategias orientadas al aprendizaje de competencias que han sido identificadas como factores predictores en teorías de juicio y desarrollo moral, tales como la empatía. El presente estudio analiza los efectos de una intervención docente de 10 horas sobre el aprendizaje de la competencia moral a través de una variante del método Konstanz de discusión de dilemas (KMDD), bien aplicando únicamente esta metodología, bien usando una estrategia mixta de discusión de dilemas y actividades de persuasión narrativa —estas últimas con objeto de verificar la contribución de la empatía al aprendizaje moral—. Las hipótesis sobre ambas aproximaciones metodológicas se comprobaron mediante un diseño cuasiexperimental pretest-postest con grupo de control en el contexto ecológico del primer curso de formación de maestros. Los datos se recogieron con el test de competencia moral y se analizaron con modelos lineales mixtos. Los resultados no apoyaron la expectativa de aprendizaje moral inducido empáticamente. Sin embargo, se evidenció una progresión significativa de la competencia moral mediante el uso del KMDD. En la discusión se plantea la disociación entre empatía/altruismo y competencia moral para interpretar la inefectividad de la estrategia mixta, y se sugiere la necesidad de aplicar pedagogías con un foco más experiencial con objeto de potenciar la competencia moral mediante actividades en entornos comunitarios de diversidad.

Descriptores: educación superior, pedagogías inclusivas, competencia moral, empatía, formación de profesorado.

1. Introduction

Universities play a vital role in relation to diversity (Smith, 2020) in the context of higher education's social mission.

Evidence shows that, while there is a range of discourses of educational diversity and inclusion discourses (Brooks, 2020; García-Cano et al., 2021), advances are

being made in practices (Álvarez-Castillo et al., 2021), with inclusive pedagogies being among the areas of this progression (i.e., how to teach competences relating to diversity from a focus of inclusion) (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021).

Attention to inclusive pedagogies is important because university practice frequently disregards the teaching of personal and social competences, focussing instead on professionalising competences that are specific to the modules (Sanderse & Cooke, 2021). Ethical or moral competence is an inclusive citizenship capacity that is potentially neglected in university education (Gasser & Althof, 2017), even though higher education institutions recognise its importance (Mayhew et al., 2012) and many of the most prestigious universities explicitly mention the development of values as an educational objective in their mission statements (Brooks & Villacís, 2023). Similarly, in regions such as Europe, moral learning has been linked to the key competences for lifelong learning, including those that should be taught in higher education (Council of the European Union, 2018). Most of these capacities consist of a knowledge, skill or attitude associated with awareness of and respect for diversity and the consideration and application of ethical principles, as well as conflict resolution through democratic means and respect for the common interest and human rights. In other words, education in morality is at the heart of lifelong learning.

Given the relevance of moral competence in a diverse world, the present study aims to verify the efficacy of a brief teaching methodology to develop, in a way that is integrated with the specific capacities of a university module, moral competence in students who have recently started university (the first term of the first year) with the aim of studying a teacher-training plan, also testing the effects of including empathy training in this methodology. University centres for training primary schoolteachers also do not pay great attention to moral training (Orchard, 2021; Sanderse & Cooke, 2021), despite the low level of moral competence of future teachers (Bronikowska & Korcz, 2019; Meza-Pardo & Guerrero-Chinga, 2016). The present study is committed to this need, supporting the transversal teaching of the moral competence in university modules.

2. Moral competence and empathy

Although numerous theories have been developed to explain the different dimensions of morality (see the review in Garrigan et al., 2018), we could start from a concept of morality as the capacity to resolve conflicts and take decisions in accordance with one's own principles, which, in all cases, transcend self-interest or submission to conventional rules, being aligned with universal ethical ideals such as equity, justice or fundamental human rights. Kohlberg (1964) was the first to define morality in terms of the capacity to take decisions and make moral judgements based on inner principles, and Caro-Samada et al. (2018) found a precursor to competence-based education in his theories.

The present article also considers relational and emotional dimensions as determinants of moral life, without this preventing a defence of the need for and relevance of rational argumentation, and without assuming that motivations and behaviour of a similar sense automatically derive from moral judgements. This understanding is associated with the neo-Kohlbergian postulates that have, in various ways, modified Kohlberg's general position and in so doing have revealed important components of morality (sensitivity, motivation, and action) that differ from moral judgement (Rest, 1986); supported an approach to a common and not merely individualist morality when resolving ethical problems (Narváez, 2005; Rest et al., 1999); qualified the universalist position (Rest et al., 1999) and invoked the capacity of intermediate concepts, which are not independent from contextual factors, to generate moral decisions (Bebeau & Thoma, 1999; Thoma, 2014; see also Walker, 2022; Walker et al., 2021); made the stages of moral development flexible in terms of schema through which students progress continuously (Rest et al., 1999, 2000); defined new methods for evaluating moral judgement, which include its tacit dimension when not admitting that participants have the capacity to explain explicitly how they reach a moral judgement (Narváez, 2005; Rest et al., 1999, 2000; Thoma, 2014); and recognised the role of affect in moral functioning (Walker & Thoma, 2017). The neo-Kohlbergian focus has developed into educational applications that are consistent with different mod-els, and character education stands out among these (Narváez, 2005; Thoma *et al.*, 2013; see an up-to-date review of this moral education model in the monograph by Ibáñez-Martín & Ahedo, 2023).

As a new development of the Kohlbergian concept, the German psychologist Georg Lind (2019) argued that moral competence is acquired by means of conflict resolution strategies through processes of moral reasoning that happen in discussions with people who think differently, thus facilitating democratic coexistence. This cognitive capacity would be one of the dimensions of the theory of the dual aspect of moral behaviour (Lind, 2008, 2019), in parallel with the affective dimension that links the person to particular principles or ideals. Consequently, morality would comprise both adhesion to ideals and the competence to resolve conflicts and take moral decisions.

For its part, empathy is a social disposition which, despite lacking a unanimously agreed definition (Hall & Schwartz, 2019), at least has components of perspective taking, affective sharing, and empathic concern (Decety & Cowell, 2015), and it is associated with moral competence (Decety & Cowell, 2015; Eisenberg, 2000; Harari & Weinstock, 2021; Hoffman, 2000; Mestre et al., 2019; Ortega-Ruiz & Mínguez-Vallejos, 1999). One of the most coherent theorisations of this relationship is given by the empathy–altruism hypothesis, developed over several decades by Daniel Batson (1987, 2011, 2017). This model

predicts that empathic concern results in a motivation to improve the well-being of another person who is in need as an end goal. That is to say, the motivational component of empathy would be a factor that induces altruism. However, not all of the effects are positive or moral, and not all of the effects of moral motivation are altruistic. Indeed, Batson (2011) differentiates between egoism, altruism, and morality as three different motivational types. The fact that individuals are motivated to achieve their own well-being or that of another person as an end goal (egoism and altruism, respectively) does not mean that the behaviours generated by one or other motivation have effects that are necessarily immoral or moral. So, for example, the egotistical motivation to benefit more than other citizens from access to social resources would be judged to be just if the person pursuing his or her own benefit were in a vulnerable position compared to the majority of the population. On the other hand, the altruistic motivation to satisfy the needs of a specific person can be in detriment to the satisfaction of the needs of other people, something that would not be considered just for them. If this independence of motivations is linked to the empathy–altruism hypothesis, it would be deduced that immoral effects could also derive from empathic concern through altruism (e.g., when someone in a position of power gives favourable treatment to a person in need with whom he or she empathises). Accordingly, the link between empathy and altruism is not identified with the link between empathy and morality, although in a structured

teaching context their convergence could be fostered.

3. Teaching moral competence and empathy

Moral competence has been the subject of teaching and learning using a number of methodologies, among which stand out ones based on the concept of moral dilemmas, initially proposed by Kohlberg (1958). The methodology for developing moral judgement from moral dilemmas was originally proposed by Moshe Blatt in his doctoral thesis, which he presented in 1969 and which Kohlberg supervised at Harvard (see the procedure of the method in Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975). This was essentially a matter of posing moral dilemmas that created disagreements between students in a morally heterogeneous group with the expectation of stimulating the moral development of someone who is at a lower stage. One strategy derived from the methodology Blatt proposed is the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD), developed by Lind (2002, 2006, 2019). The KMDD displays a series of characteristics that distance it from Blatt's initial method. It uses counter-arguments, not higher-order arguments, although Kohlberg (1984) also proposed dilemmas and counter suggestions in his interview method to mediate moral judgement; it allocates the role of facilitator to the teacher — not the role model figure as in the original method — and increases the students' active role; it extends the duration of individual sessions beyond the 45 minutes of the initial

strategy, as well as the total duration of the programme, increasing the time interval between the sessions; and it uses semi-real moral dilemmas that can cause conflicts for and between people, eliciting moral emotions that encourage learning but are not intense enough to block it. As for the measurement of moral competence, Kohlberg uses external standards in accordance with his six-stage model of moral development (only participants whose judgements match stage 6 receive the highest score). Lind (2019), however, argues that not all solutions to conflicts require a type-6 argument, instead many of them can be resolved with arguments typical of lower stages. Ultimately, KMDD reformulates Blatt's methodological proposal, achieving large effect sizes (Lind, 2006).

In turn, a variety of methodologies have been used to develop empathy, but narration stands out among them. This method can be particularly useful to help students be attuned with other people's internal states, and its persuasive impact in changing beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviour has been recognised in the fields of psychology and communication (Braddock & Dillard, 2016). A written, oral or audiovisual narrative can transport us to different times and places, activating emotions and motivations that can change something in our cognitive, emotional or motivational universe. This narrative transportation is similar to real experience (Green & Brock, 2000), and so would be classed as a type of experiential learning when used in a formative setting. Green and Brock

(2000) drew on the theories of Daniel Gilbert (1991), which predicted that people tend to believe what they read or hear by default, while any process of rejection involves effort. The thesis for which Green and Brock (2000) found evidence is that once people are involved in a process of narrative transportation, they are less motivated to reject or critically analyse the ideas in the narrative, and a process of change in beliefs can begin with the evaluations of the characters being more positive (see also Ratcliff & Sun, 2020). A second mechanism that has been proposed to explain the effects of narrative persuasion is emotional identification with characters (Hoeken et al., 2016), which can cause real feelings of empathic concern for them, as well as the adoption of their goals and perspectives in the context of the narration (Cohen, 2006) and, consequently, altruistic reactions (Batson, 2017). This could become an effective mechanism for education of moral emotions, which is so necessary from pre-university stages (Bisquerra Alzina & López-Cassà, 2021), and it would also be very useful for emulating the qualities of the *good character* that are present in the protagonists of great works of literature (e.g., from a model of character education, see the seven groups of qualities that Ibáñez-Martín [2023] identifies in don Quijote).

4. Aims and hypotheses of the study

This study starts from the assumption that moral competence can be taught transversally, incorporating this capacity

into the ordinary teaching of university courses. Furthermore, it is a competence that is not just developed through specific teaching procedures, but these procedures can be combined with empathic induction strategies. Considering these initial ideas, the following objectives are proposed: 1) to evaluate the effectiveness of a short moral dilemma based methodology inspired by KMDD for learning moral competence in the ecological context of the teaching of a teacher training module; and 2) to evaluate the effectiveness of a mixed method combining narrative persuasion with moral dilemmas in the same setting. Methodological effects in both cases are hypothesised: 1) using a variant of KMDD in the framework of the teaching of the ordinary competences of a teacher training module for a brief period (one hour per week for 10 weeks) will be of use in the learning of moral competence; and 2) the mixed use of narrative persuasion techniques and moral dilemmas in the ecological training context and with the stated duration, will also increase students' moral competence.

5. Method

5.1. Design

A quasi-experimental design with three natural groups of students (two experimental and one control) with pre-test and post-test was used. A second post-test (follow-up measure) was initially planned, but had to be cancelled because of the emergency measures in Spain in March 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The experimental sequence started by measuring the moral competence and various sociodemographic variables in the pre-test (week 1); it continued with the intervention, carried out during weeks 2-11 in accordance with the initial plan; and it ended with the post-test in week 12.

5.2. Sample groups

Three academic groups were purposively selected from future school teachers at the Universidad de Córdoba, to whom the authors of this study delivered a module on the theoretical-historical foundations of education, the content and teaching methodology of which were equivalent in the first year of the degrees in primary education and early-childhood education. The experimental conditions (KMDD variant [KMDDv] and Mixed Methodology [MM]) and control were randomly assigned to the groups with KMDDv and control corresponding to the two primary-education groups and MM to the early-childhood education group. Although the initial sample size in the pre-test was 194 participants, this was reduced owing to two factors: 1) students who did not participate in both moments of measurement and in at least 80% of the methodological sessions were excluded; and 2) it was not possible to match some students owing to self-identification errors in the two moments of measurement. The final sample comprised 161 participants (n_{KMDDv} = 72; n_{MM} = 39; n_C = 50), 78.26% of whom were female. The mean age was 19.0 years (SD = 2.98) and the mode was 18 years.

5.3. Instrument

The measurement used was the Moral Competence Test (MCT), initially called

the *Moral Judgment Test* (Lind, 1978). This has been suitably validated and translated into many languages (Lind, 2008, 2019). Lind (2020) gives the results of the validations corresponding to 28 of these translations, including the one by Luis Trechera in 1996 on a sample from Spain. The test involves presenting two moral dilemmas: in the first, workers from a factory illegally enter the management offices to find evidence about their suspicions that the workers are being spied on, which is also against the law; in the second, a doctor gives a morphine overdose to a patient who is terminally ill with cancer and asks for help dying. In each dilemma the participants are asked to take a position in favour of or against the behaviour of the protagonists on a Likert-type bipolar scale (-3 = strongly disagree; +3 = strongly agree). They are then asked to accept or reject, again on a bipolar scale (-4 = strongly reject; +4 = strongly accept), twelve arguments (six for and six against) representing six different types of moral orientation corresponding to the stages of Kohlberg (Kohlberg, 1958, 1976). The calculation of the C-score reflects the extent to which participants accept or reject arguments related to the dilemmas on the basis of the moral quality of the arguments, and not from their subjective opinion of the behaviour of the protagonists or other non-moral criteria (Lind, 2019).

The MCT was administered in face-to-face sessions using Google Forms for both the pre-test and the post-test. The participants accessed them through the link provided on the screens in the computer room and they gave their informed consent and stated which academic group they were in, as well as their gender, age, the levels of studies of their father and mother, and the occupations of their father and mother. The gender and level of studies items used a multiple choice answer format, while the age and profession were free response. They then completed the MCT.

5.4. Intervention

The intervention in each of the experimental groups, as well as the methodology implemented in the control group, comprised 10 one-hour sessions (one per week). Each group in the design was divided into three subgroups for the practical classes of the module in which the study was carried out.

The intervention aimed at developing moral competence involved adapting the KMDD, as the practical work in the module was aimed at the acquisition of specific competences relating to the comprehension and analysis of theoretical-pedagogical problems. So, except for the first session, in which KMDD was used with a certain degree of strictness, a variant was used in sessions 2-9. Specifically, a methodology was implemented that can be summarised in the following five phases: 1) the teacher, while remaining neutral, articulated the dilemma conceptually with two opposing positions; 2) the students voted on which position to adopt and the teacher provided the groups with news stories from the press that included real stories in favour of one or another contradictory option;

3) each group of students presented their argument, and the debate began; 4) each group acknowledged the best opposing arguments, congratulated the other group for it and a new vote was held; and 5) the session ended with an individual written reflection in which the students set out the arguments presented. Session 10 deviated from this methodology to propose an activity based on cooperative learning, in which small groups planned an inclusion project for an educational centre. The proposals were then shared to develop a single integrated project and individually analyse how coherent it is with the results of the debates on the moral dilemmas of the nine previous sessions (introspective element). This analysis of coherence was particularly relevant in relation to the sessions of debate on conceptual dilemmas in which the principle of inclusion was directly involved (e.g., special education centres *vs* general education centres, lay schools *vs* religious schools, schools with an open environment *vs* schools with a closed environment) or methodologies close to this principle (e.g., cooperation *vs* competition in the school). Ultimately, this session integrated and applied moral competence that had been the object of training in previous sessions. This methodology was used with the KMDDv group and in five of the sessions with the MM group.

In the MM group's remaining five sessions, an active methodology based on narrative persuasion was used. The teacher acted as a guide in the session, introducing the key concepts, directing its phases and facilitating essential resources, while the students participated with some autonomy, both through their involvement in the story and in the interactive in small and large group debate. The methodological sequence for each session comprised five stages: 1) the teacher introduced the key theoretical concept; 2) the students accessed the narrative resource selected by the teacher, taking the perspective of the vulnerable protagonists; 3) in small groups, the students carried out an activity based on perspective taking, affective sharing, or empathic concern, which was directed at cognitively, emotionally, or motivationally elaborating the individual effort made in the previous phase to put themselves in the place of the vulnerable protagonists of the narration (e.g., the participants had to imagine what a normal day in the life of one of the protagonists would be like — children or their family members — from their cultural perspective; similarly, they were asked to anticipate, from the empathic concern of a primary school teacher, different professional behaviours to support the children's learning in collaboration with the families); 4) in the whole group, the students discussed the perspectives, emotions, and motivations experienced in the previous two phases and, where applicable, on courses of action aimed at prevention or educational improvement of the situations of vulnerability; and 5) each participant elaborated the experience cognitively and emotionally.

The activities implemented in the control group solely used the module's normal methodology and moral dilemmas were not used nor was empathy induced through narrative persuasion in any case.

Their general phases were as follows: 1) the teacher introduced the key theoretical concept; 2) the students accessed the audiovisual or text-based resource chosen by the teacher in which the arguments associated with the theoretical concept were developed; 3) the students worked in small groups on a task set by the teacher based on the resource presented in the previous phase (e.g., searching for and selecting information on educational practices that would exemplify the theoretical concept); 4) in the whole group, the students discussed the results of the task carried out in the previous phase and its suitability; and 5) the session ended with an individual written reflection in which the students set out and evaluated the conclusions reached. One fundamental methodological difference between the experimental groups and the control group is that the control group did not start from life stories in real contexts, as was done in phase 2 with the moral dilemma and narrative persuasion activities. Instead, the resource from this phase was used to present arguments that justified the theoretical concept with the aim of then proceeding to the identification of applications (deductive procedure).

6. Results

The hypotheses were compared using linear mixed-model analysis (LMM, implemented using the SPSS v.25 program), a technique that adapts very well to data with repeated measures in unequal groups (Muth et al., 2016). Before the critical results, some preliminary tests are presented, as are the basic descriptive statistics.

6.1. Preliminary and descriptive results

The data from two participants were eliminated in one of the measurement moments as a result of systematic answer bias. Subsequently, the calculation of the individual scores (Lind, 2008) was carried out, which emulated that of a MANOVA with a $2 \times 2 \times 6$ factorial design (two decision contexts [work and medical], two groups of opinions on each context [for and against], and six types of moral orientation for each opinion group). The distributions of C-scores resulting from the pre-test and the post-test, which displayed positive asymmetry, were transformed logarithmically with the aim of smoothing the curves and conforming them more closely to the normal distribution.

In addition, as these were unequal groups, the relationship between the sociodemographic variables and the dependent variable was tested taking the pre-test data as a reference (the information about professions was previously coded on the basis of the European Classification of Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations [https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1326&langId=en], creating ordinal variables with a small group of categories with different levels of qualification). None of the variables correlated significantly with moral competence ($p >$ .05 in all cases), and so the unequal size of the groups was less relevant in the levels of these variables.

Table 1 shows the basic descriptive statistics for moral competence in the three groups and two measurement moments of the design.

TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics corresponding to moral competence by groups and measurement moments.

Time	KMDDv			Mixed Methodology			Control			TOTAL		
	M	*DT*	*N*	*M*	*DT*	*N*	*M*	*DT*	*N*	*M*	*DT*	*N*
Pre-test	13.47	7.34	69	12.88	7.30	37	14.89	11.20	50	13.79	8.73	156
Post-test	29.26	17.23	72	19.51	12.77	38	21.85	16.58	49	24.64	16.54	159

Note: The statistics correspond to the distribution of C-scores (without logarithmic transformation).

6.2. Results of the LMM analysis

After establishing the absence of differences between the groups in moral competence in the pre-test, F (2, 153) = 0.036, p = .965, two hypothetical models were initially formulated for the LMM analyses:

1. The first only included fixed effects. In terms of the representation of the function, the total moral competence score of the participant i was modelled in the measurement moment j and the group k ($y_{ij(k)}$) by the parameter δ_i of each participant i, the effect β_j of time j, the effect γ_k of the group k, the interaction $\beta\gamma_{jk}$ between the moment of measurement j and the group k, and the error $\varepsilon_{ij(k)}$.

$$y_{ij(k)} = \delta_i + \beta_j + \gamma_k + \beta\gamma_{jk} + \varepsilon_{ij(k)}$$

$\varepsilon_{ij(k)} \sim N (0, \alpha^2)$: residuals

2. The second model added random intercepts linked to the participants. So, as well as the effects of the first model, an estimate could be obtained of the variance of the random intercepts across the subjects, representing the intercept as a function of the total mean and of the conditional deviations with regards to it. On the other hand, random slopes for the repeated measures variable were not included because this fact was not relevant to the hypotheses formulated and, furthermore, a number of just two levels in the time variable presented limitations (Gelman & Hill, 2007).

$$y_{ij(k)} = \delta_i + \beta_j + \gamma_k + \beta\gamma_{jk} + b_a + \varepsilon_{ij(k)}$$

$b_i \sim N (0, \omega^2{}_B)$: random effects of the subjects

$\varepsilon_{ij(k)} \sim N (0, \alpha^2{}_w)$: residuals

rep

Table 2 shows the values corresponding to three information criteria in the two proposed models (fixed and mixed effects): the Akaike information criterion (AIC); the Hurvich and Tsai corrected version of the AIC (AICc), which is appropriate for the study data because of the low ratio of the number of observations (N = 161) to the number of parameters (n = 7, n = 8); and the Schwarz Bayesian criterion (BIC). The mixed effects model fits the data better.

TABLE 2. AIC, AICc, and BIC information criteria in the fixed effects model and in the mixed effects moral competence model.

	Fixed effects model			Mixed effects model		
	AIC	AICc	BIC	AIC	AICc	BIC
Moral competence	253.74	253.75	257.47	236.80	236.84	244.27

The restricted maximum likelihood estimation method was used for the analysis. Furthermore, a scaled identity error covariance structure was selected for the repeated measures as a result of the prominence given to fixed effects compared with random ones to confirm the hypotheses, also establishing globally higher values for the information criteria in other covariance structures.

As for fixed effects, analysis of the interaction of the group with the moment of measurement gave a value of F (2, 156.71) = 5.49, p = .005, meaning that the null hypothesis that the means of the groups had changed in an equivalent way between the two measurement moments could be rejected. When observing the estimates of the fixed effects corresponding to the different parameters (Table 3), the improvement of the KMDDv group in the post-test in relation to the base line is apparent: β = 0.222; p = .003; 95% CI = 0.075, 0.370. As it is difficult to offer a value on the effect size in models with multiple error terms, a small size would be inferred from the proximity to 0 of the lower limit of the confidence interval of the estimate. Hypothesis 1 would be verified with this assessment of the magnitude. However, the same progression is not observed in the MM group, which is not significantly distant from the base line, and so hypothesis 2 is not confirmed. Figure 1 shows the interaction found between the group and time. Figure 2 shows the differences in the variability of the scores between the two measurement moments, also highlighting the development of the KMDDv group.

TABLE 3. Estimates of fixed effects in the LMM analysis on the moral competence data (logarithmic transformation).

Parameter	Estimate	Dev. Error.	df	t	Sig.	95 % Confidence interval	
						Lower limit	Upper limit
Intercept	1.046	0.049	278.30	21.142	.000	0.948	1.143
KMDDv	-0.001	0.065	280.04	-0.021	.983	-0.129	0.126
Mixed Methodology	-0.019	0.076	282.21	-0.256	.798	-0.168	0.130
Post-test	0.112	0.057	154.69	1,958	.052	-0.001	0.225
Post-test × KMDDv	0.222	0.075	155.32	2.978	.003	0.075	0.370
Post-test × Mixed Methodology	0.021	0.087	157.08	0.237	.813	-0.152	0.193

Note. Redundant parameters have been omitted.

FIGURE 1. Evolution of the means (C-scores) of the three groups in moral competence between the pre-test and post-test, and standard error of the means.
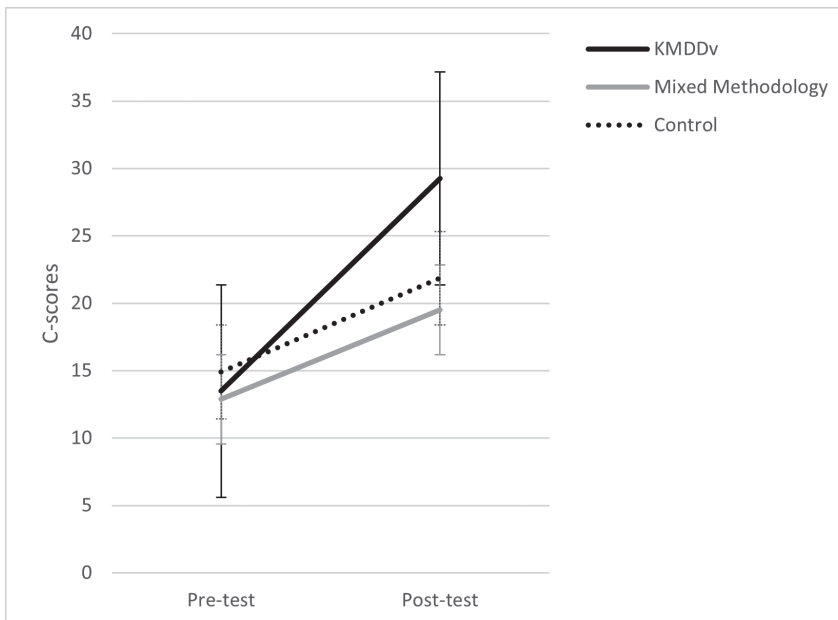
FIGURE 2. Interquartile range in moral competence (C-scores) of the three groups in the pre-test and post-test.
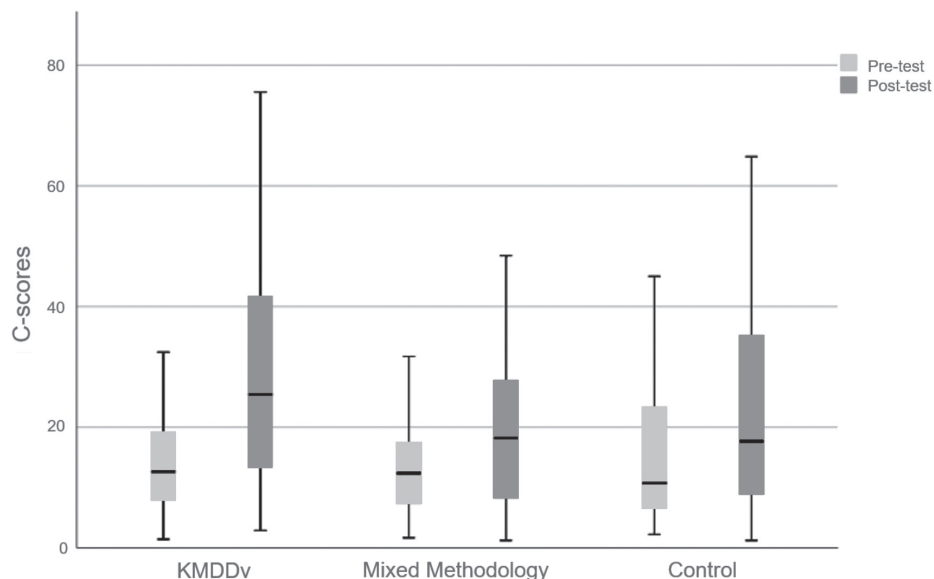
For their part, in the analysis of the estimates associated with the random effects of the model, a significant variance was identified by the Wald test, both through repeated measures ($Z = 8.76$, $p < .001$), and in reference to the random intercepts across the subjects ($Z = 4.01$, $p < .001$).

7. Discussion and conclusions

The results of this study confirm the teaching potential of a variant of Lind's Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (2002, 2006, 2019) which, when used in the teaching of specific competences on a university module, was able to increase in just 10 sessions the moral competences of first semester students who were starting their training as school teachers (hy-pothesis 1). However, when dilemmas and narrative persuasion activities were integrated into these sessions in a balanced way, the increase in moral competence compared to the base line was not statistically significant (hypothesis 2), despite the important role assigned to empathy in theories of morality (Decety & Cowell, 2015; Eisenberg, 2000; Harari & Weinstock, 2021).

The most significant conclusion of the study would, therefore, refer to the possibility of shaping moral competence through discussion of dilemmas (specifically, the variant of the KMDD evaluated) in the context of teaching regular modules, starting from the limited level of training of the students on primary and early childhood teaching degrees when

they start university. Transversal teaching of ethical or moral abilities would be particularly indicated for this type of population, both in relation to their own education in citizenship in contexts of diversity, which forms part of the definition of the key competences for lifelong learning (Council of the European Union, 2018), and in their future role as educators of citizens. If a moral education that is deliberate, well planned, and implemented through active methodologies is not provided during the university years, there is a risk that future teachers will reach the end of their university studies with a low or medium-low moral profile (Meza-Pardo & Guerrero-Chinga, 2016), which would limit their capacity both to teach morally (that is to say, to be just and honest in their teaching actions) and to teach morality (Gasser & Althof, 2017).

Nonetheless, the moral dilemma-based intervention was probably not the only explanatory factor for the progress in moral competence of the KMDDv group. If the comparison between groups is dispensed with and the change in this competence between the two measurement moments is evaluated, both in the MM group and in the control group, a tendency to significant progress is apparent (the value of t is associated with $p < .10$). Based on this result, it is possible to assume that time also has an effect on the increase in scores from the KMDDv group. This factor could be realised in the development of the students' moral identity in a phase of transition from adolescence to post-adolescence (Helwig, 2018), in combination with the "college effect" (Rest & Narváez, 1991/2014). That is to say, both the maturation and cognitive stimulation that the university setting provides, especially on socioeducational courses, could partly explain the intragroup variance in moral competence.

Interpreting the results from the second hypothesis in the study is more difficult: the methodology loses its effectiveness when half of the activities with moral dilemmas are replaced by narrative persuasion sessions. It could be that the empathic training elicited emotional and automatic reactions more than cognitive ones, even though the stimulation of perspective taking of the vulnerable protagonists of the narrations was also an aim, this capacity being necessary for the development of moral judgement (Garrigan et al., 2018; Kohlberg, 1976). On the other hand, it was hoped that identifying with vulnerable people in particular would inspire true feelings of empathic concern (Cohen, 2006; Hoeken et al., 2016) which in turn would generate altruistic motivations of cooperation and care (Batson, 2017). Either this sequence of effects did not occur (Sassenrath et al., 2022) or they did occur but the participants disassociated altruistic motivations from moral ones (Batson, 2011), despite the predictive capacity that empathic concern has for prosocial moral reasoning (Gülseven et al., 2020) and, in general, for ethical or moral competence (Pohling et al., 2016). Consequently, the second conclusion of the study suggests that a methodology aimed directly at facilitating moral

reasoning could be more effective than one that combines it with more indirect strategies (e.g., persuasive narration, the direct objective of which would be to promote empathy). These, in a reduced number of sessions, would not achieve the ultimate aim of significantly increasing moral competence.

The potential disassociation between empathy/altruism and morality would also have occurred despite the teachers' efforts to relate the narratives presented in the activities with principles such as inclusion, democracy, equity and social justice, and to adapt the interventions to the profile of quality learning settings in higher education. For example, with the methodological activities, efforts were made to facilitate well-structured representations of the practical content to be covered in each session; set the students cognitive and emotional challenges; provide opportunities to apply the knowledge in real or semi-real settings; consider the interests and goals of the participants; create opportunities for group work; and foster the development of metacognitive learning processes through continuous self-evaluation of emotional reactions and cognitive argumentation (Smith & Baik, 2021). Several of these traits of quality also appear in the results of research into inclusive teaching methodologies (Hockings, 2010), in which great importance is given to the use of conflicts linked to real contexts of diversity in which the students move, as well as to the teachers' expertise to facilitate participation, suggest key ideas, and promote metacognition.

Given these results, it may be necessary in future to increase the amount and quality of experiential learning when educating inclusive competences and, particularly, morality. Problem-based learning with inclusion aims (e.g., Grier, 2020) or service learning (Leung & Yung, 2022; Santos-Rego et al., 2020) could stimulate students' autonomy and their experiential learning in real scenarios of diversity even more, facilitating perspective taking and empathic concern for people who are in situations of social exclusion or at risk of it. In service-learning in particular, university students acquire a responsibility or commitment through direct contact with the people they serve which, combined with the reflexive intrapersonal activity associated with the moral principles of professional activities, would not only strengthen the altruistic motivation of empathic concern, but also moral competence. In other words, it would be a learning scenario that links moral ideals to moral reasoning and behaviour (i.e., the two dimensions of Lind's dual model [2008, 2019]) or, to put it another way, theory with practice, a nexus that is always essential when training teachers in inclusion (Sharma & Mullick, 2020).

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