

Assessing experiences with violence and peace in primary schools in Sierra Leone

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to discuss the construction of two composite indices to assess children's experiences with violence and peace in primary schools in Sierra Leone.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors provide a conceptual framework based on the three dimensions of the violence index (direct, structural and cultural violence) and the three dimensions of the positive peace index (inclusion, citizenship and well-being). After that, this work proposes an operationalisation of these concepts based on a survey administered with 2,000 pupils and examine the correlates of the indices.

Findings – Results indicate not only a substantial level of violence among the sampled schools but also a considerable level of positive peace. These indices are negatively correlated, suggesting that lower levels of violence are related to higher levels of positive peace. Further analysis also shows that socioeconomic variables and school characteristics such as headteacher experience and teacher qualification are associated with levels of violence and peace. Finally, based on longitudinal evidence, this study also indicates that the prevalence of violence is a significant predictor of reading development among children.

Originality/value – The indicator presented is the first to combine children's experiences with violence and experiences with positive peace in schools. It is a unique contribution to the measurement of school outcomes that are usually overlooked in the literature.

Keywords Violence, Sierra Leone, Education, Children, Peace, Social indicators

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) estimates that 246 million children and adolescents in schools suffer some form of violence every year (UNESCO, 2017). This is a global phenomenon that has several health, social and educational consequences for children and adolescents (Debarbieux, 2006; Pinheiro, 2006; Ferrara *et al.*, 2019; WHO, 2019; Wodon *et al.*, 2021).

In this context, there is an ample effort in academia and civil society to understand and assess to what extent violence is part of children's experience of schooling. Most of the projects aiming to measure this dimension of schooling (GEMR, 2017; UNESCO, 2017) have focussed on a particular type of violence, mainly restricted to direct forms of violence. The global school-based student health survey (GSHS), conceived by the World Health Organisation (WHO), contains a module on violence and unintentional injury in which students aged 13–17 are asked about the frequency of physical attacks and fights in their school over the previous 12 months. The Young Lives longitudinal study conducted in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam focussed on corporal punishment (Pells and Morrow, 2017).

Some international large-scale learning assessments, such as the Programme for the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality, also measure

levels of violence in schools based on questionnaires administered to principals. The Programme for International Student Assessment also gathers information on the incidence of violence not only from principals but also from pupils. These international comparative projects focus mainly on direct violence at the secondary level of education, which is also the target population of other national projects in developing countries such as the National Survey of School Health in Brazil (Silva *et al.*, 2018), the National Polivictimization Survey Survey in Chile (Pinto-Cortez *et al.*, 2020) and the Study on Child Abuse in India (Loveleen *et al.*, 2007). Apart from measurements of direct physical or psychological violence, some of these international and national studies also measure other forms of violence. Both the GSHS and Young Lives, for instance, address structural violence by examining child hunger.

Comparatively, this paper adopts a broader perspective on the measurement of violence in schools. Based on Galtung's conceptual framework for peace (Galtung, 1985, 2015a), we take into consideration three types of violence that are interdependent but conceptually distinct. The type commonly adopted by the studies mentioned previously is direct violence, which comprehends the visible physical and psychological violence perpetrated directly by other humans. In addition to that, as postulated by Galtung, children may be exposed to structural violence, i.e. the invisible forces that prevent them to satisfy their basic needs such as shelter and food. Finally, the third type relates to cultural violence in which symbolic and cultural phenomena such as classism, sexism and racism, legitimise the other two forms of violence.

Furthermore, using the same framework, we also argue that measuring violence in schools is an incomplete endeavour. If the objective is to assess to what extent the school is capable of providing a sustainable non-violent environment that promotes learning, it is also necessary to integrate dimensions related to positive peace (Cremin and Guilherme, 2018). As a result, this paper proposes two composite indices to assess both peace and non-violence in schools.

To do that, we first discuss the concepts of the components of those indices: direct violence, structural violence, cultural violence and positive peace. In the second part, we propose an operationalisation of these concepts based on a survey administered with school children in Sierra Leone. The final part of this paper analyses the distribution of the proposed measurements of school violence and peace in our sample and factors associated with them.

What is violence in schools?

The multidimensional nature of violence in schools poses a complex challenge to the efforts of defining it. Depending on which aspect of the phenomenon is highlighted, the definition may vary substantially (Furlong and Morrison, 2000; Silva and Assis, 2017). The challenge usually resides in the scope of what should be considered violence. If narrow, definitions may ignore or underestimate the experiences of victims (Henry, 2000). At the same time, too broad definitions can entail two risks: the epistemological one in which the problem is amplified to the point of not being solvable or the political risk of criminalising behaviours and attitudes of social resistance and confrontation (Debarbieux and Blaya, 2002). The social and cultural context also plays a crucial role in both narrowing and broadening the definition (Underwood *et al.*, 2001; Benbenishty and Astor, 2019).

The definition used by this work seeks to balance the number of aspects related to violence in schools with an operational definition that can be used empirically (Galtung, 2015a). The point of departure is broad as it stems from the general idea of violence as "avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to life" (Galtung, 1985, p. 293), which are experienced or carried out by the school community. More concretely, we can describe three types of violence in schools: direct, structural and cultural.

Direct violence refers to the intentional physical and psychological harming of others in the school. This is closely related to the WHO definition of violence. However, it excludes other insults to basic human needs that children experience in the school context. To go beyond the main perspective of violence as physical or psychological aggression (direct violence), it is important to incorporate a comprehensive conception of violence that considers violence as a violation of rights (Bufacchi, 2005; Gopal and Collins, 2017).

This conception entails the inclusion of two additional dimensions of violence: structural violence and cultural violence. Structural violence refers to those forms of violence in which no clear individual actor is perpetrating the physical or psychological aggression, as in acts of direct violence. Instead, the violence is established through social and institutional mechanisms that alienate people from their basic rights (Galtung, 1969). Structural violence relates, for instance, to people living in starvation in places where this is an avoidable problem.

Finally, an additional dimension is 'cultural violence'. Galtung (1990, p. 291) defines it as "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence [...] that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence." In this sense, an investigation of violence in schools cannot ignore also the symbolic mechanisms that legitimise direct and structural violence, such as religion, ideology or gender norms.

These three dimensions of violence (direct, structural and cultural) have been widely discussed and studied in fields such as political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology and history (Webel and Galtung, 2007). However, this framework has been used to a lesser degree to investigate violence in primary and secondary schools (Cabezudo and Haavelsrud, 2013; Cremin and Bevington, 2017; Cremin and Guilherme, 2018; Khoja-Moolji, 2012). In this sense, there is a lack of empirical quantitative studies employing this framework, particularly in developing countries, which the present study aims to attenuate.

What is peace in schools?

The absence of direct, structural and cultural violence is only one component of a peaceful society. The emphasis on peace as the absence of violence ignores the positive and tends to direct the efforts of dealing with violence in schools to suppress the occurrence of direct violence. Similarly, this focus underestimates the importance of harmonious and equitable social relationships within schools. Baszarkiewicz and Fry (2008, p. 1557) describe peaceful societies as those that also present "shared beliefs that devalue aggression and/or positively value harmonious interpersonal relationships."

Cremin and Bevington (2017) discuss positive peace in schools as the outcome of constant processes of peacemaking and peacebuilding. Although peacekeeping is a concept that primarily addresses direct violence, the other two (peacemaking and peacebuilding) address issues related to structural and cultural violence providing tools for the emergence of positive peace.

Cultural context

There are also two important aspects of violence in schools that were considered in our conceptual operationalisation. First is the fact that incidences of violence cannot be taken as individual acts. As argued by Pinheiro (2006, p. 131), "Violence in schools tends to be less about isolated incidents and more about patterns of violence." This has an important methodological implication for the proposed indicator. Considering that violence and peace are collective phenomena, the indicator that assesses them should also refer to a group of individuals. In the case of the proposed indicator, it refers to the pupils and teachers within a school or a community.

In addition, the national and regional socio-cultural context of Sierra Leone is also relevant for the elaboration of the proposed composite index, from the design of the instruments, which included the participation of children and parents in the community, to the data analysis.

Some aspects of direct violence as well as of positive peace may indeed be more or less pronounced depending on practices, policies and pedagogies implemented in schools. However, there cannot be an interpretation of violence and peace in a given school detached from the social and cultural context in which this school is situated. Post-conflict societies face particular challenges to reconstruct peaceful education, as demonstrated in different studies in sub-Saharan Africa (Harber, 2018).

From the 1990s until the early 2000s, Sierra Leone experienced a widespread civil war. In the space of a decade, it is estimated that it caused about 70,000 casualties and 2.6 million displaced people (Kaldor and Vincent, 2006), with hundreds of schools being destroyed. The subsequent effort to reconstruct the public education system is expressed by the educational recommendations from Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, emphasising universal and free primary education, the combat to gender disparities and the end of practices of corporal punishment (Paulson, 2006).

This general movement towards the expansion of primary education led the international community to establish multiple aid programmes in Sierra Leone, including peacebuilding and peace education programmes. However, as discussed by Novelli and Higgins (2017), many of these interventions were based on a narrow view of peacebuilding focussed on stabilisation which hampered necessary transformations for the emergence of a socially just peace.

In this new scenario after the conflict, school communities move between challenging negative peace through the use of schooling as violence (Harber, 2002) and following different paths into fostering positive peace (Cremin and Bevington, 2017). These are not mutually exclusive paths, as both approaches to schooling can coexist. As pointed out by Gill and Niens (2014), schooling in this scenario has the potential to be a dialogic process that enables education as humanisation. This is particularly important in post-conflict societies where the experience and memory of violence "wounds minds as much as bodies," as put by Lahai and Ware (2013, p. 86).

Methods

To produce the composite indices to assess violence and peace in schools, this research has undertaken two main tasks. The first one was related to the selection and analysis of the components that were combined in the final composite indicators (violence and positive peace). The second major task comprised an examination of external factors associated with the indicators to investigate how coherent they are within their social context.

The data used was produced by a survey conducted among primary school children in the province of Tonkolili in Sierra Leone. This is particularly relevant due to the lack of studies regarding school violence based on children's views and voices (Leach, 2006; Pells and Morrow, 2017; Shiva Kumar *et al.*, 2017). Surveys with pupils have already been used as a tool to assess violence in schools at all levels of education (GEMR, 2017). Some studies have questioned the reliability of children's self-report of exposure to violence, particularly due to frequent levels of discrepancy in parent-child reports of victimisation (Lombardi *et al.*, 2021). However, there is sufficient evidence supporting the accuracy and relevance of school children's self-reports of experience and exposure to violence (Raviv *et al.*, 2001; UNICEF, 2010; Devries *et al.*, 2013; Rieffe *et al.*, 2016).

The study sample involved 100 schools out of 137 primary schools in operation in the district of Tonkolili. Schools were eligible to participate in the study if they were the only

primary school in the community. This criterion was adopted to facilitate the implementation of the longitudinal project and led to the exclusion of 27 schools located in communities with more than one primary school. In addition, the 10 schools that participated in the pilot were excluded from the study sample resulting in the final number of 100 schools.

Several qualitative interviews and focus groups were conducted with children in different communities to design and test the final structured instrument that was piloted in 2017 with 10 schools. The main survey was administered during the first and last term of the school year (October 2018 and May 2019) with a full sample of 100 schools. In all, 2,361 children from 100 schools were interviewed (face-to-face) in their mother tongue (Krio, Temne, Limba or Kuranko), following a common questionnaire translated from English. The sample was composed of 51% boys and 49% girls, with an average age of 7.1 years (SD = 1.4). The translation to the four survey languages was carried out by a team of bilingual native speakers and validated during the pilot, which included ethnographic immersion in the field.

This instrument contained questions related to children's socio-cultural background, their physical and psychological well-being, their exposure to violence, among other topics. After the interviews, children also participated in a reading assessment at the first term of the school year (Baseline), which was repeated seven/eight months later at the end of the first year (Post-test 1) and at the beginning of the third year (Post-test 2, November 2020). The survey and the data used in this article draw on a wider, mixed-methods evaluation of a multi-component school- and community-based intervention, which had as one of its objectives assessing school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) in Sierra Leone. This project has received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the institution where this research was hosted.

Construction of indicators

Following the sequence of steps recommended on the construction of composite indicators (Nardo *et al.*, 2005), we have initially analysed the main questionnaire and its conceptual framework to identify variables that were most closely related to the theoretical framework proposed here. These selection criteria were based on two principles: conceptual alignment and parsimony. This means that the variables selected should cover minimally the concept assessed but the selection itself should make use of a few questions as possible to facilitate the understanding of the indicator.

Violence indicators

The main objective of the work in this initial stage was to select one indicator for each component of violence (direct, structural and cultural) as well as indicators of positive peace. The section of the questionnaire designed to measure exposure to violence among children (Devine *et al.*, 2018) was based on adapted items from the Conflict Tactics Scale Parent-Child that have been tested and used for cross-cultural comparisons (UNICEF, 2010).

The indicator related to direct violence is based on questions measuring exposure to physical and psychological violence. Participant children were asked whether a teacher, another child or youth had ever beaten them, physically hurt them or threatened them verbally or called them bad names. In addition, the indicator also includes a question on whether teachers (exclusive) made children kneel or squat or stand in the sun as a punishment. For both questions, response options were "yes" or "no."

Regarding structural violence, we selected a question in which children are asked how often they have enough to eat or drink and how often they miss school to work. Despite the socio-economic nature of food insecurity, primary schools play a central role in this regard in Sierra Leone. Particularly in rural communities, the school is often the focal point for food

security policies both from the government and non-governmental organisations (Government of Sierra Leone, 2019).

Finally, a crucial dimension of violence in schools in West African countries is gender-based violence (Tuwor and Sossou, 2008), which is directly related to cultural violence (Confortini, 2006). To assess this dimension and how it is expressed in the classroom, we have selected items in which pupils are asked whether boys or girls were helped more in class and who their teacher thinks should come to school every day. The value of the indicator denotes the proportion of children who state that their teachers do not help “both boys and girls the same” or that “both boys and girls should come to school every day.” In this sense, the indicator addresses the everyday experiences of pupils with the absence of gender equality attitudes in their school, which translates into cultural insults to their basic needs as learners (attending school, being helped in class).

The variables that were collected at the individual level were aggregated at the school level to provide information by school. To do that, we considered the proportion of answers to the relevant categories in each variable of interest. For instance, for the component on direct violence, the indicator represents the percentage of Class 1 pupils in each school who have responded affirmatively to any of the two questions.

Positive peace indicators

Finally, looking at aspects related to positive peace in schools, we examined questions associated with two main concepts of positive peace: equity and harmony (Galtung, 2015b). Cremin and Bevington (2017) translate these two concepts into three pillars of peacebuilding in schools: inclusion, citizenship and well-being.

The survey contains multiple questions designed to assess children's personal and social well-being with peers and teachers (Symonds *et al.*, 2021). To operationalise the well-being pillar, we have selected an indicator of eudaimonia that translates more adequately the Cremin and Bevington's (2017) conception of well-being as harmony and inner peace. In addition, a eudaimonic perspective of well-being, living a life of virtue aiming for excellence, is closely related to the idea of the “good” child and collectivist habitus valued by communities in Tonkolili (Devine *et al.*, 2020). The well-being indicator selected for this well-being pillar is based on an arithmetic mean of the responses to the personal well-being scale and scale of well-being with teachers (Symonds *et al.*, 2021).

As argued by Cremin and Bevington (2017), inclusion is related to becoming part of the school community and having positive emotions about it. An item that is associated with this idea in the questionnaire asks whether children receive love and care from adults in their household, school or community. Another item relevant to this pillar is the extent to which children do not feel excluded or ignored by their teachers or peers. The indicator denotes the average value for the five-point scale of receiving love (1-Never to 5-Always) and the number of actors who did not exclude or ignore them (a teacher, another boy or another girl).

The last pillar of positive peace is citizenship. An important aspect of children's participation and social learning is the practice of free play (Horwitz, 2015; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). As argued by Hart (2014, p. 132), “free play” is important for children's individual and social development as “When adults are not always present in a supervising role, children have some special opportunities to learn to self-organize.”

Given the importance of this dimension in children's social lives and learning of citizenship, we have selected an item from the survey that assesses to what extent they play with their friends outside school. Furthermore, we included a question on the extent to which children consider that they are allowed to make decisions in their school. Although those questions do not address directly the issue of social citizenship in positioning relative to adults (Devine and Cockburn, 2018), it does provide a good measurement of the spaces created

for collective problem-solving and self-organisation, as well as autonomy and relative freedom from adults within an extended school *locus* (Furlong and Morrison, 2000).

Table 1 summarises the proportion of children who experienced violence and the extent to which they experienced positive peace across the sample, as well as the lowest and highest percentages and average values for each component found among schools in the sample.

The index measuring the violence dimension results from the arithmetic mean of the components on direct, structural and cultural violence. The arithmetic average as an aggregation method was preferred to allow for compensation between components and simplify interpretation (Mazziotta and Pareto, 2013). Similarly, the index measuring the positive dimension results from the standardised arithmetic mean of the normalised components on inclusion, citizenship and well-being. In this sense, higher values of the violence index denote a higher prevalence of direct, structural and cultural violence in the school, whereas higher values in the positive peace index indicate that there is a higher presence of processes associated with positive peace.

Results

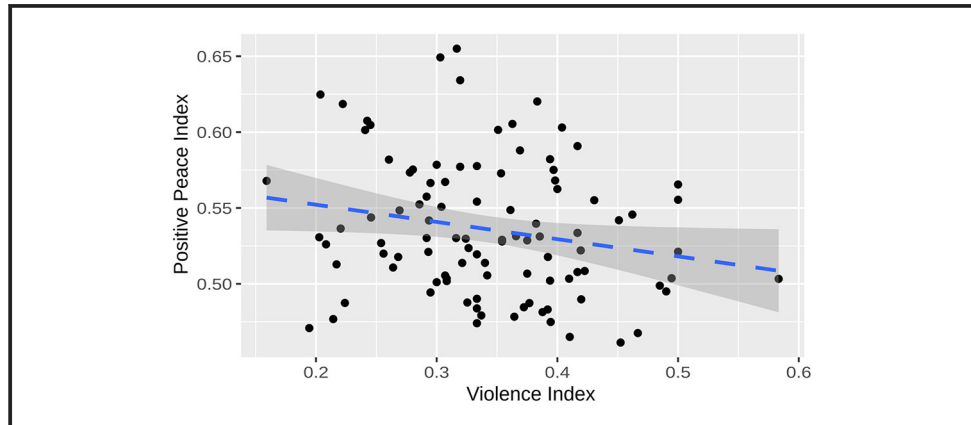
The highest correlation of components within a dimension is a negative association between structural violence and citizenship [$r(100) = -0.43, p < 0.001$], which is not strong enough to change or discard one of the two components on the grounds of redundancy. The direction of the association between pairs of components is aligned with what was expected theoretically. For instance, the highest positive correlations are between cultural violence and structural violence [$r(100) = 0.35, p < 0.001$], followed by the pair well-being and inclusion [$r(100) = 0.24, p < 0.001$]. In summary, this analysis reinforces the internal consistency of the indices with all indicators directly correlated within each index and all indicators for positive peace inversely correlated with the violence indicators.

Figure 1 shows a scatter plot between the positive peace and violence indices that summarise this relationship. The Pearson correlation coefficient is equal to -0.21 ($n = 100, p = 0.039$), suggesting a negative association between positive peace and violence among schools. In other words, in schools with a high prevalence of direct, structural and cultural violence, we tend to find lower levels of inclusion, citizenship and well-being. The relatively weak association also suggests, as argued before, that violence and peace are not

Table 1 Components of the composite index and participant proportions

Index	Indicator	Variables	Individual % or mean (sd)	School	
				Lowest	Highest
Violence (proportion)	Direct	<i>A teacher, another child or youth has either: i) beaten me up or physically hurt me; and/or ii) called me bad names, teased me, threatened me verbally; or A teacher has made me kneel or squat or stand in the sun as a punishment</i>	42%	0%	91%
	Structural	<i>I do not <u>always</u> have enough to eat or to drink or I miss school to work more than "<u>once a week</u>"</i>	69%	32%	100%
	Cultural	<i>Mainly boys are helped by the teacher in my class; or Teachers think that <u>mainly boys</u> should come to school every day</i>	54%	9%	97%
Positive peace (extent)	Inclusion	<i>To what extent receive love and care from adults in my household, school, or community and to what extent is not excluded or ignored by teachers or colleagues</i>	47 (11)	37	56
	Citizenship	<i>How often play outside school and how much children are allowed to make a decision in the school</i>	40 (17)	43	91
	Wellbeing	<i>Eudaimonic personal wellbeing and wellbeing with teachers</i>	59 (17)	46	65

Figure 1 Relationship between positive peace and violence



mutually exclusive that these peaceful and violent processes can coexist in the same school environment.

Both the coherent associations between pairs of indicators and the negative correlation between the positive peace and violence indices shown in [Figure 1](#) indicate a good level of consistency of the indices constructed.

Finally, we also investigated the factors that are associated with the composite indices at the school level. Linking the indices with other variables is an important step in the development of a composite indicator as it indicates the relationship between concepts that are theoretically associated ([Nardo et al., 2005](#); [Saltelli, 2007](#)).

For that, we have performed an ecological correlational analysis to investigate factors that were associated with levels of violence and peace in schools. This analysis does not aim to suggest causality between any of these variables but rather to indicate that the composite indices are varying in expected directions according to changes in theoretically related variables. [Table 2](#) presents the Pearson correlation coefficients of the different associations between the violence and positive peace indices and some socio-economic and school-related variables.

Some variables that were expected to have an association with the indices do not show a statistically significant correlation, such as teachers' experience and level of education. However, all statistically significant coefficients follow the direction expected for the relationship between the variables. For instance, the proportion of parents who work in unskilled jobs (mostly mining and agriculture, as opposed to services and commerce) is

Table 2 Correlation coefficients between indices and related variables

Variables	Violence	Positive peace
Parents who work in unskilled jobs (%)	0.038	-0.206**
Parents who know how to read and write (%)	0.017	0.233**
Children who live with their biological fathers (%)	-0.091	0.158
The year that the school was established (year)	0.003	0.045
School size (number of pupils)	0.029	-0.276***
Proportion of girls	0.119	-0.021
Headteacher experience (years)	-0.182*	-0.058
Teacher experience (years)	0.070	0.034
Teacher is qualified	-0.206**	0.098
Teacher level of education	0.128	-0.128

Notes: * $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

negatively correlated with the positive peace index. Similarly, the higher the proportion of literate parents, the higher the positive peace. At the same time, both the headteacher's experience and the teacher qualification seem to be associated with a lower prevalence of violence.

Finally, we have tested whether those indices were also related to learning outcomes measured by an Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) administered at the end of the first year with a follow-up at the beginning of Class 3. For that, mixed-effect linear regression was fitted, having the violence and positive peace indices as predictors and pupils' performance at the Baseline as a covariate. In addition, the intervention group that the school participate in was used to control the relationship analysed.

As shown in Table 3, the measurement of variance explained suggests that the selected variables explain slightly better the EGRA scores in the first year compared to the subsequent assessment. This may indicate that the prevalence of violence and positive peace have a higher immediate effect than a longer-term effect on children's learning. This seems to be particularly true for the prevalence of violence that has a statistically significant effect for the first year, but it is not significant to explain the performance in year 2. However, the estimates for the positive peace index are significant for both periods, suggesting a lasting positive effect on reading development.

Discussion

Our results indicate that children in primary schools in Sierra Leone are exposed to significant levels of direct violence (physical and psychological) perpetrated by their teachers and colleagues. This confirms several previous studies that showed high levels of violence against children in Sierra Leone (UNICEF, 2008; Concern Worldwide *et al.*, 2010; UNICEF, 2010; Devine *et al.*, 2019; Zuilkowski *et al.*, 2019). Apart from direct violence, the composite index proposed also assesses the level of structural and cultural violence that children experience in schools and their lives in general. In doing so, the violence index provides a summarised but more comprehensive measure of violence against children, i.e. avoidable insults to children's basic needs (Galtung, 1990) throughout their educational development.

This study also argued for the insufficiency of assessing the absence of violence without paying attention to processes leading to peacebuilding (Cremin and Bevington, 2017). In this sense, we have shown that positive peace aspects such as inclusion, citizenship and well-being are clearly expressed by children in these schools. Furthermore, we found that there is an inverse correlation between the level of positive peace and violence at the school level. This is a policy relevant finding that emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach

Table 3 Multilevel regression estimates for early grade reading assessment scores

Predictors	Estimates	EGRA (year 1)		p	Estimates	EGRA (year 2)	
		CI				CI	p
(Intercept)	13.40	7.66 – 19.15		<0.001	28.46	19.55–37.37	<0.001
Violence (Standardised)	–2.76	–5.49–0.03		0.048	–3.36	–7.67–0.95	0.127
Positive Peace (Stds.)	6.58	3.81–9.34		<0.001	10.84	6.59–15.08	<0.001
EGRA (Baseline)	1.19	1.11–1.27		<0.001	1.31	1.19–1.43	<0.001
<i>Random effects</i>							
σ^2		680.27				1,317.43	
τ_{00}		161.31 _{school_id_0}				400.26 _{school_id_0}	
ICC		0.19				0.23	
N		99 _{school_id_0}				100 _{school_id_0}	
Observations		2301				1,780	
Marginal R^2 /Conditional R^2		0.340/0.467				0.292/0.457	

Note: Controlled by intervention group

for any intervention aiming at reducing levels of school violence. Our results suggest that creating conditions for sustainable positive peace is as important as combating violence in schools.

Many factors may be influencing and moderating this relationship between peace and violence in schools, but there are already pieces of evidence, even if scattered, that levels of positive peace in schools diminish children's exposure to community and war violence in sub-Saharan Africa (Foster and Brooks-Gunn, 2015; Harber, 2018). The correlational evidence offered by our study points in the same direction and reinforces the need for further research addressing the determinants of peacebuilding in schools.

Our analysis also indicates that levels of positive peace and violence are associated with sociocultural characteristics of the group of children attending those schools as well as with school characteristics such as teacher qualification and headteacher experience. As discussed earlier in this work, these school level dynamics cannot be interpreted separately from the broader cultural and structural social processes that determine both violence and peacebuilding in schools (Higgins and Novelli, 2020).

Concerning the operationalisation of this framework, our study presents some limitations. Firstly, Class 1 children may be too young to express well their experiences with violence in surveys like this (as discussed before). In addition, they may still begin to experience direct violence in schools as these were likely their first months in school. At the same time, they may still be starting to internalise and socially reproduce aggressive behavior, especially with regards to SRGBV. On the other hand, this study is an attempt to recognise the agency and consider their voices in the construction of a violent or peaceful school. This is not the most common approach as many studies prioritise teachers and principals as the main informants of the degree of school violence. Finally, in the interest of parsimony, some relevant aspects of school life are not covered by the proposed indices, which are not able to reflect "the messiness and unpredictability of conflict on the ground" (Cremin and Bevington, 2017).

However, the main contribution of this work lies in:

- better understanding dynamics of school violence, particularly about positive peace;
- assessing initial experiences with violence and peace in school, which are not well addressed in the literature, despite the evidence on long-lasting impact in later school outcomes (Ogando Portela and Pells, 2015); and
- producing measurements of school outcomes that are usually overlooked in the literature.

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