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## Representations of social justice amongst Spanish teachers and students<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

*In this empirical study we designed a questionnaire that seeks to analyse the representations that Spanish students and teachers have about Social Justice. The questionnaire includes a set of different dilemmas about social justice issues. The questions represent three fundamental dimensions in social justice: representation, redistribution, and recognition. The questionnaire has been applied to a sample of teachers and students of elementary education and secondary education. The results show differences in social justice conceptions regarding student's level of education and gender. We also found differences depending on participant's age and educational level in the three dimensions of social justice: representation, recognition and redistribution.*

**Keywords:** social justice, redistribution, recognition, representation, education, students, teacher

### **Introduction**

Building a just society is an essential challenge if we want to promote a quality education for all. Quality education necessarily includes Social Justice Education, as a key point in our society. Today's students need to be well prepared to live in this diverse world. They need to become well informed, knowing and analysing the different unjust realities that exist, and approaching from a critical perspective, in order to develop as real active citizens oriented toward social justice. This becomes even more necessary in the present era, in which the crisis, globalization and migration, have caused an increase in the complexity of our society and the production of inequalities, exclusion and discrimination for reasons of gender, social class, culture, capacity or sexual orientation.

In this heterogeneous context, there is an obvious need to constitute Social Justice as one of the fundamental aims of our society. From our point of view, social justice reflects our wishes for a better world. Probably, for this reason, we should consider social justice like a dynamic project, never finished or reached. Therefore, social justice should always be subject to reflection and improvement.

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In this study, we have assumed the concept of Social Justice based on the proposals of Sen (2010) about the importance of redistribution of capabilities, followed by Young (1999, 2010) and Fraser's ideas (2003, 2008) about recognition and participation as complementary elements, as reflected in Murillo and Hernández-Castilla (2011). Therefore, these three concepts are the base of our Social Justice approach in our study:

- *Redistribution* (Rawls, 1971; Sen, 2010) of material and cultural resources or primary goods.
- *Recognition* (Collins, 1991; Cole, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Fraser, 2005) and cultural respect of all people in a just relationship.
- *Representation* (Miller, 1999; Bell, 1997; Fraser, 2008; Hartnett, 2001; Lee and Hipólito-Delgado, 2007; Young, 1990, 2010) or participation of people in important decisions that concern their own lives.

From our point of view, these three processes are highly related, being the first and main axis of our Social Justice approach.

Furthermore, within this triple view other relevant factors are integrated, such as prejudice, discrimination, racism, sexism, citizenship, protection of environment, access to ICT (information and communication technologies), fiscal politics, democracy, educational politics, relationships between the States and NGO's, globalization, and migration. All these factors can be quoted as a second axis, which is related with specific social dimensions of social justice.

With this double axis perspective, we expect to have a global image about some important Social Justice issues of our heterogeneous and diverse world.

With respect to education, it is worth to mention that schools have real possibilities to compensate differences of learning between students and to contribute to social mobility and to the reduction of inequalities. Therefore, schools must have an important role in the formation of students as citizens oriented toward social justice that will be able to analyse, denounce and intervene to reduce unjust situations that happen not only inside the schools but also outside them in the whole society.

Besides this, teachers and students' representations about social justice are elements that have an effect in their actions (or inactions) of their own schools. For example, Miller et al (2008) found a clear relationship between students' ideas about social justice and their implication and commitment with schools. In the case of the teachers, studies like MacDonald (2005) or Baldwin, Buchanan and Rudisill (2007) with training teachers, or Applebaum (2004) or Cochran-Smith (2005), with in-service teachers, have shown a high relationship between both issues. Nevertheless, there are not so many quantitative studies on students' and teachers' representations about Social Justice and their implications in classrooms.

For all these reasons, more research is needed in order to explore the representations that specific actors of schools have about Social Justice, and also which is the role of schools for promoting it. We consider that it is very important to know the representations that

students and teachers have about social justice issues in order to promote a real transformation in schools.

For this reason, we have elaborated different specific instruments. We have designed a quantitative study that has allowed us to make a comparison between the representations about social justice of students of different educational levels and between social justice ideas of students and teachers.

### **Objectives**

In this research, we have assumed the following general objectives:

1. To design a specific instrument to obtain information of representations about Social Justice, basically regarding educational decisions.
2. To know and to analyse the ideas and representations that teachers and students of primary and secondary education have about social justice, analysing specifically three dimensions of social justice: Redistribution, Recognition, and Representation.
3. To compare the representations of students and teachers.
4. To explore the representations that students and teachers have on the educational practices that promote social Justice inside the schools.

### **Methodology**

#### ***1. Questionnaire design***

To obtain information of the representations of students and teachers about social justice, we have designed a Social Justice Questionnaire. This instrument has been developed for different experts in the fields of education, psychology, history, linguistics, pedagogy and anthropology.

In order to know the ideas of teachers and students of different educational levels, we have designed three questionnaires:

1. *A Social justice questionnaire for students of primary education.* This questionnaire has twenty one dilemmas about social justice and is intended for students of sixth grade (11-12 years old).
2. *A Social justice questionnaire for students of secondary education.* This questionnaire has thirty dilemmas. It includes the twenty one dilemmas of the questionnaire for primary education and nine more dilemmas. It is intended for students of second course (13-14 years old), and fourth course (15-16 years old) of secondary education and also in second course of Baccalaureate (17-18 years old).
3. *A Social justice questionnaire for teachers.* This questionnaire has thirty nine dilemmas related to social justice. It includes the thirty dilemmas of the

questionnaire for secondary education and nine more questions about educational social justice issues.

It is important to realise that there is a set of common dilemmas in the three questionnaires that allows making a comparison with the answers of teachers and students of different educational levels.

With respect to the structure of the questionnaire, this includes a set of different dilemmas about hypothetical situations or problems relating to social justice dimensions. These dilemmas are about different current issues, especially in educational context.

Each dilemma has three alternatives or possible responses. One alternative is highly promoting of social justice, other alternative is against social justice and a third alternative that is more neutral or less promoting of social justice.

In all the Social Justice Questionnaires there are an equal number of dilemmas related to the three dimensions of Social Justice: Redistribution, Recognition and Representation. In order to describe the characteristics of our instruments, we want to show an example of the dilemmas for each dimension of Social Justice in the questionnaire. Figure 1 contains an example of the Redistribution dilemmas:

**Figure 1. Redistribution dilemma**

<p>Three persons are hired to do a job. One of these has a slight disability, and is therefore slower than the others. How do you think the wages should be distributed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> A) All three persons should earn the same wage as they hold the same post.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> B) Each person should earn a wage proportionate to his or her performance.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> C) All three persons should earn the same wage y the state must give economic compensation to the company.</li></ul>
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The following is an example of the recognition dimension, as can be seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Recognition dilemma**

<p>In our society, men y women who do the same job do not usually earn the same amount. Why do you think this happens?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> A) Women earn less because they are discriminated against.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> B) Women earn less because they usually have other family obligations.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> C) Men earn more because they are usually more committed to their job.</li></ul>
--

Finally, Figure 5 shows an example of the Representation dilemmas:

**Figure 3. Representation dilemma**

<p>Anna wants to be the class representative, but her tutor thinks that another student with much better grades should represent the class. Who do you think should be the representative?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> A) The students most highly valued by the tutor</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> B) Only students with good grades should be class representatives.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> C) Any student who wishes to be class representative should be allowed to, even if their grades are not good.</p>
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## 2. *Validation of the questionnaire.*

It is important to mention that the Social Justice Questionnaire has been subject to a double validation:

On the one hand, a validation of experts, in which each expert has validated each one of the three alternatives of the dilemmas in a Likert scale of social justice ranging from 1 to 9. In this validation, we obtained a very good intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC=0.97). This result shows a high coherence between experts in all questions. Other indices of validation of the questionnaire are the following ones: CVRt=0.67, W of Kendall=0.62, Kappa of Cohen coefficient=0.48. All these values show good levels of agreement, consistency and reliability of the questionnaire of social justice.

On the other hand, a pilot study was applied to a sample of training teachers and students of primary and secondary education. The pilot questionnaire was applied to 130 training teachers and 187 students of primary education and 243 students of secondary education, obtaining a good reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha=0.74).

## 3. *Social Justice Scales*

Finally, using these questionnaires, we will obtain four different scales of social justice. By one side a global index of social justice. By other side, three specific indexes for the three main dimensions of social justice: redistribution, recognition and representation indexes. These indexes have been adapted to a rank from 1 to 100, so we have a scale that indicates the general representations of Social Justice, and three independent scales about issues of Redistribution, Recognition and Representation/Participation.

## **Participants**

The participants were 1302 teachers and students (606 men and 696 women). The sample was divided in five groups: 152 students of primary education, 681 students of

secondary education, 247 students of baccalaureate, 130 training teachers and 92 in-service teachers.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained in the social justice questionnaire has a good reliability (0,72), showing an adequate internal consistence.

Table 1 shows the distribution of participants with respect their gender, educational level and teacher experience.

**Table 1. Distribution of participants**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total</b>
6 <sup>th</sup> of primary	75	77	152
2 <sup>nd</sup> of secondary	169	159	328
4 <sup>th</sup> of secondary	155	198	353
2 <sup>nd</sup> of baccalaureate	119	128	247
Training teachers	49	81	130
In-service Teachers	39	53	92
<b>Total</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>696</b>	<b>1302</b>

## Hypotheses

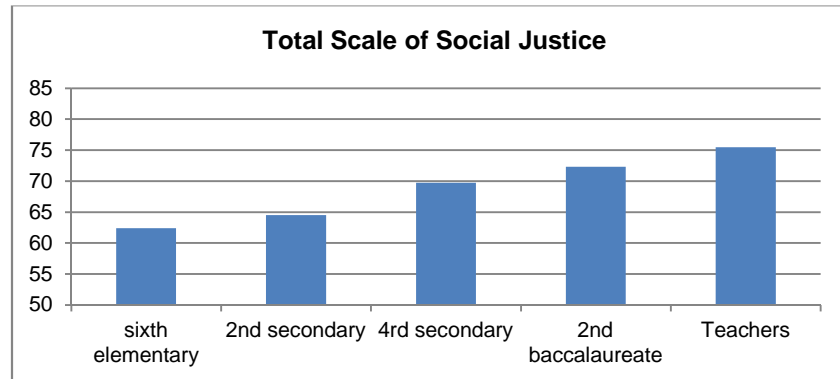
The main hypotheses of our study are the following ones:

1. Teachers will have a more elaborated conception of social justice than students.
2. With regard to the comparison between students, those of higher educational levels will have a more prosocial representation of justice than students of lower grades.
3. As in other similar studies, we expect to find that women will have a more prosocial view of justice than men in all dimensions.
4. We expect to obtain differences in the teachers' social justice representations with respect to their teaching experience and their curricular area of specialization.

## Results

First at all, with respect to the Total Scale of Social Justice (Figure 4), we have found that the mean value tend to increase when the educational level is higher. In this case, it can be observed that the mean value of teachers is significant higher than those obtained by students. Besides, students with a higher level of education have a more prosocial conception of social justice.

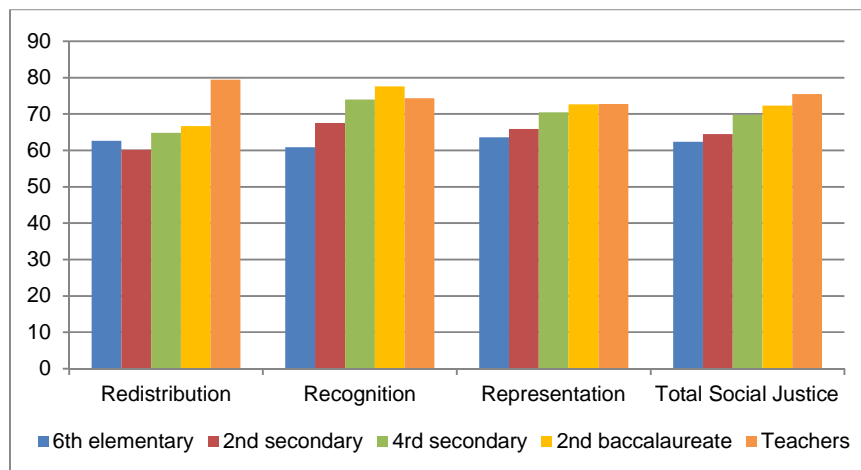
**Figure 4. Histogram of mean values obtained in the Total Scale of Social Justice by groups**



This pattern of results show a clear tendency to obtain higher values in the Scales of Social Justice in relation with age groups, as occurs in the other areas of prosocial development.

In all dimensions of social justice the same trend is appreciated when the educational level is higher. In the Figure 5 and Table 2 it can be observed this trend.

**Figure 5. Histogram of mean values obtained by the groups in the different Scales of Social Justice**



With respect to the first hypothesis, we have found significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between teachers and students in all dimensions of social justice. As it can be seen in Figure 7, in general, teachers have a more elaborated conception of social justice in all factors.



**Table 2. Mean values obtained by groups in the Scales of Social Justice.**

	6 <sup>th</sup> primary (11-12 years old)	2 <sup>nd</sup> secondary (13-14 years old)	4 <sup>th</sup> secondary (15-16 years old)	2 <sup>nd</sup> baccalaurate (17-18 years old)	Teachers
<b>Redistribution</b>	62,61	60,2	64,8	66,72	79,39
<b>Recognition</b>	60,9	67,52	73,94	77,61	74,29
<b>Representation</b>	63,57	65,85	70,45	72,69	72,78
<b>Total Social Justice</b>	62,41	64,52	69,73	72,34	75,49

Regarding the second hypothesis, we can say that students of higher grades have a more prosocial conception of justice than students of lower grades in all dimensions of social justice.

Regarding the redistribution dimension, there are significant differences between teachers and students of all grades ( $p < .05$ ). Teachers have a mean value higher than students. Besides, there is a trend to have a more elaborated conception of redistribution in the highest grades, except in the case of sixth grade of Primary students when compared to second grade of Secondary students.

With respect to the recognition dimension, it can be seen in Figure 5 that teachers have a more elaborated conception than all students except in the case of second baccalaureate students. In addition, there are significant differences between the four groups of students in this dimension. In this case we can see that in the recognition dimension students obtained higher values when their educational level is higher.

With regard to the dimension of representation, there are also significant differences between students and teachers. The mean value obtained by teachers in the representation/participation dimension is higher than those obtained by students. Besides, when education level increases the conception of participation tend to improve.

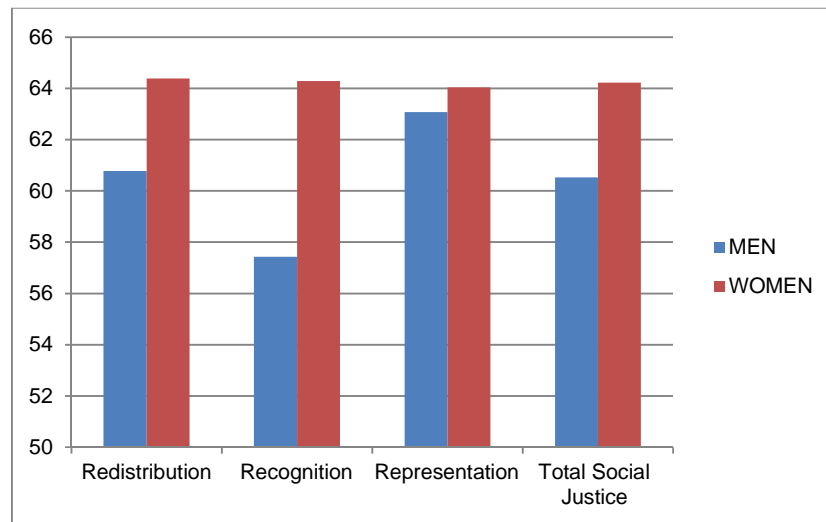
With regard to the fourth hypothesis, results show that in general women have a more elaborated conception of social justice than men. These results appear in the results obtained by teachers and in the four groups of students.

In sixth course of primary education, girls have a higher mean value than boys in all factors of social justice (Table 3 and Figure 6). There are significant differences in the recognition dimension and in the total social justice factor ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table 3. Mean values obtained by students of primary education in the Scales of Social Justice (by gender)**

	<b>MEN</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>
<b>Redistribution Scale</b>	60,78	64,39
<b>Recognition Scale</b>	57,43	64,29
<b>Representation Scale</b>	63,08	64,04
<b>Total Scale of Social Justice</b>	60,53	64,22

**Figure 6. Histogram of mean values obtained by students of primary education in the Scales of Social Justice (by gender)**

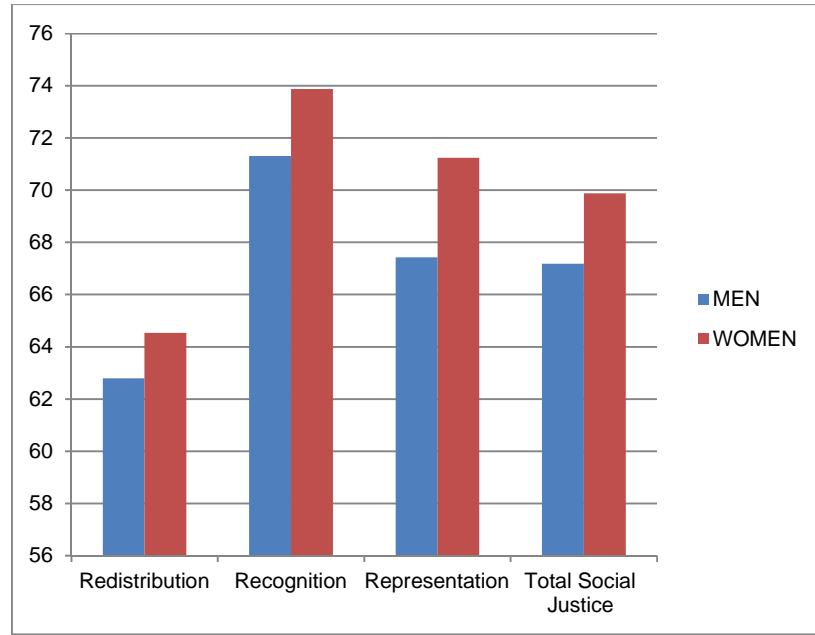


With respect to secondary and baccalaureate students, when analysing these groups together as a unique group, results show that women have a more prosocial conception of social justice than men in all dimensions. In this case, there are significant differences in the dimensions of recognition and representation, as well as in the Total Scale of Social Justice, as can be seen in Table 4 and Figure 7.

**Table 4. Mean values obtained by students of secondary education in the Scales of Social Justice (by gender)**

	<b>MEN</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>
<b>Redistribution Scale</b>	62,79	64,53
<b>Recognition Scale</b>	71,31	73,87
<b>Representation Scale</b>	67,43	71,24
<b>Total Scale of Social Justice</b>	67,18	69,88

**Figure 7. Histogram of mean values obtained by students of secondary education in the Scales of Social Justice (by gender)**



**Table 5. Mean values obtained by students of secondary education and bacallaureate in the Scales of Social Justice (by gender)**

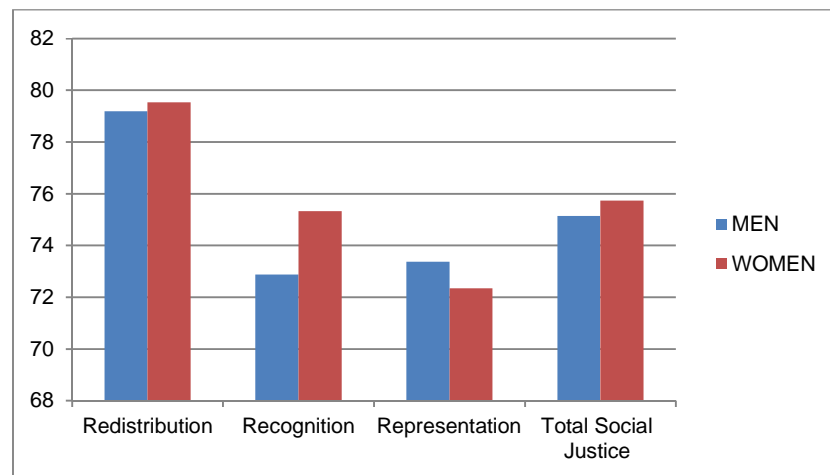
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Secondary Ed.		4 <sup>th</sup> Secondary Ed.		2 <sup>nd</sup> Bacallaureate	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>Redistribution Scale</b>	58,43	62,08	64,52	65,03	66,64	66,80
<b>Recognition Scale</b>	66,24	68,87	71,84	75,58	77,77	77,46
<b>Representation Scale</b>	63,46	68,40	68,90	71,67	71,18	74,10
<b>Total Scale of Social Justice</b>	62,71	66,45	68,42	70,76	71,86	72,79

As can be seen in Table 5, the differences between the mean values obtained by gender in secondary students tend to decrease in the higher groups, showing that when age increases the representations of social justice tend to be closer between women and men.

In relation with the results of teachers, women also obtain a higher mean value in redistribution, recognition and in the Total Scale of Social Justice, as shown in Table 6 and Figure 8.

**Table 6. Mean values obtained by teachers in the Scales of Social Justice (by gender)**

	MEN	WOMEN
<b>Redistribution Scale</b>	79,19	79,54
<b>Recognition Scale</b>	72,88	75,33
<b>Representation Scale</b>	73,37	72,35
<b>Total Scale of Social Justice</b>	75,14	75,74

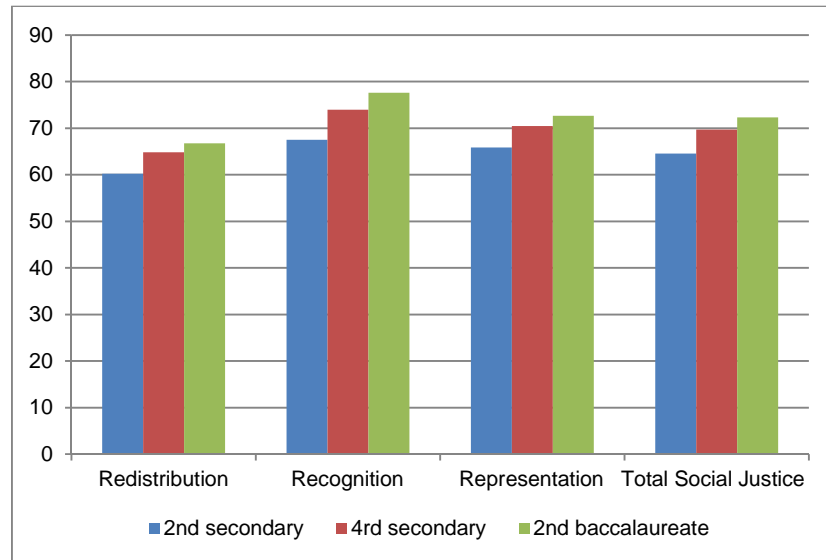
**Figure 8. Histogram of mean values obtained by teachers in the Scales of Social Justice (by gender)**

When we analyse the prevalence of the different Scales of Social Justice with respect to the different groups, as can be seen in the Figure 7 and Table 2, the following results are obtained.

With respect students of primary education, the more salient dimension of social justice is Representation and the less salient is Recognition. These results show that for primary students is easier to think about people participation (students, parents, teachers, citizens, etc.) in decisions that concern their lives than about redistribution of resources and primary goods because participation issues are probably closer of their daily life (at least in the school context).

Regarding secondary students, the more salient dimension of social justice is recognition. These results show that is easier for them to think about issues related to the recognition of diversity (social, cultural, etc.) than to reflect on representation and participation issues. These results suggest that thinking over redistribution of resources seem to be a more difficult task for these age groups, as it can be seen in Figure 9.

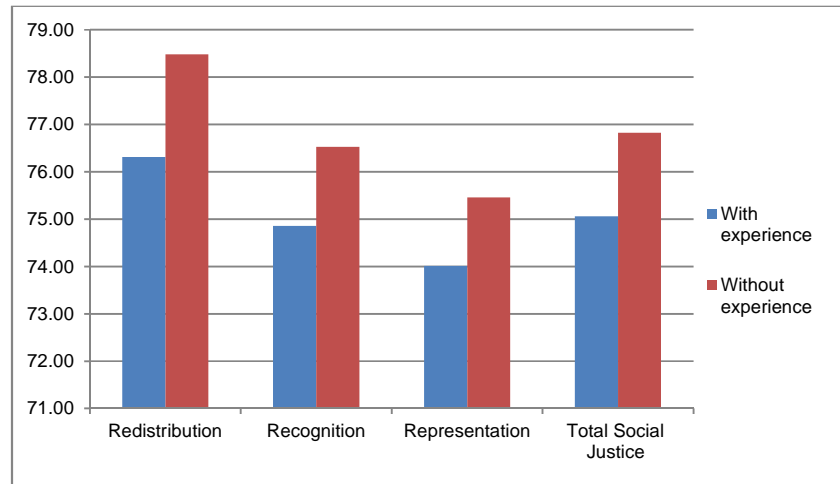
**Figure 9. Histogram of mean values obtained by secondary and baccalaureate students in the Scales of Social Justice**



By contrast, teachers tend to have a more elaborated conception of redistribution than recognition and representation. This result shows a similar trend that appears in the literature of social justice with respect its historical development as a complex concept, because initially the social justice concept was used within a redistributive justice framework. Results suggest that for teachers, economic issues and redistribution of resources become more salient and relevant than other dimensions of social justice when thinking about social justice issues.

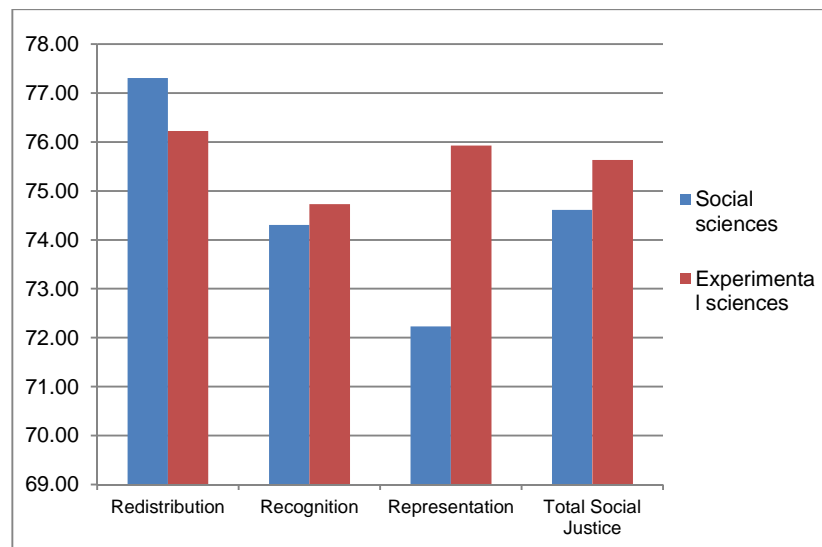
In relation with our last hypothesis, there are not significant differences between training teachers who have had a short previous teaching experience and training teachers without previous teaching experience (Figure 10). This is an unexpected result that needs a more detail analysis.

**Figure 10. Differences between training teachers with and without previous teaching experience**



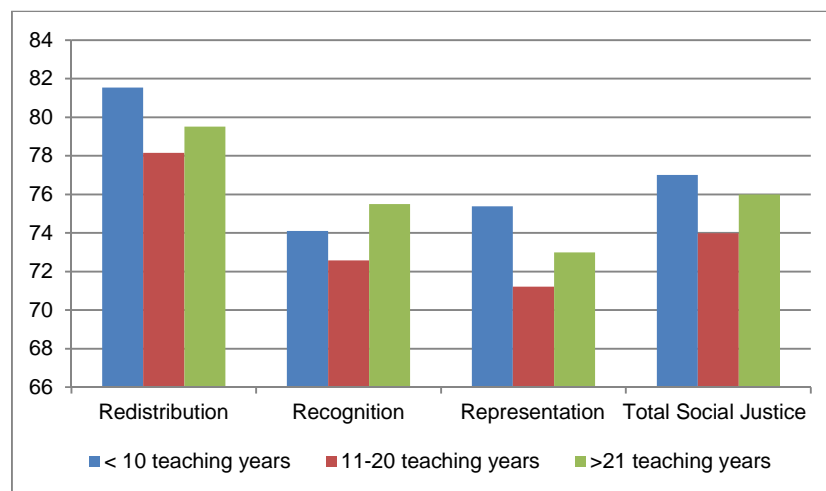
Moreover, there are not significant differences on the concept of social justice in relation to the teachers' fields of expertise. However, teachers of social sciences have a more elaborated representation on the Redistribution dimension and teachers of experimental sciences have more elaborated representation on the dimensions of Recognition and Representation (Figure 11).

**Figure 11. Differences between teachers of social sciences and experimental sciences**



Finally, we have found a relevant, and in some sense, an unexpected result. As we expected, the youngest teachers (or the teachers with less experience) showed the highest mean values in all Scales of Social Justice (Figure 12).

**Figure 12. Histogram of mean values obtained by teachers in the Scales of Social Justice (by teachers' experience)**



But the group of teachers who has an intermediate teaching experience (from 11 to 20 years old) obtained the lowest value in the different scales of social justice. This result shows a cohort effect in the case of teachers with 11-20 years of teaching experience. We think that these results are in consonant with some life-span development of teachers as adults, in relation with their disappointment about teaching experience. By contrast, the group of teachers with the highest experience (and also highest age, near to the retirement) appear to be more optimistic about their view toward social justice in education, but less than the youngest teachers.

## Conclusions

First at all, we can say that our questionnaire has a good reliability for evaluating social justice conceptions of teachers and students. Applying this questionnaire reveals relevant differences in the three dimensions of social justice between teachers and students of different educational levels. There is a developmental tendency in students with respect the values obtained in the scales of social justice. In this case, students tend to obtain higher values in the scales when attending higher educational levels, within the interval from 12 to 18 years old. Furthermore, as other studies about social development have showed, at these ages, women have a more prosocial conception of justice. But these gender differences disappear in teachers.

For primary education students, the Representation dimension is the most salient. By contrast, secondary education students tend to see as more relevant the Recognition dimension. Finally, teachers show a higher value for Redistribution than for the two other dimensions. The teacher group results show a similar pattern to the historical trend in the development of the concept of Social Justice (Fraser, 2008).

There are no differences in the scales of social justice between teachers with respect their teaching specialization, that is, between social sciences teachers and experimental sciences teachers. Also there are no differences in the social justice representations of training teachers and in-service teachers in relation with their teaching experience. We have found a cohort effect in relation with the less elaborated representations of social justice in education in teachers with a medium level of experience (11-20 years).

Finally, we will continue exploring the representation about social justice of students and teachers using personal and semi-structured interviews and also by focus groups. Also, it is worth to mention that we are in process of applying this questionnaire in different countries in order to compare the representation about social justice of students and teachers in different countries.

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