Assertive style: The balancing point in the educational process

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Abstract

This study explores how interpersonal communication styles relate to individual balance across mental, emotional, and physical dimensions. The purpose is to examine the connection between communicative capacity and personal equilibrium, emphasizing how children evolve by transforming imbalance into balance through interpersonal interaction. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining systematic observation, questionnaires, and interviews conducted in both individual and group settings. The sample comprised 315 participants. The analysis focused on how communication styles (assertive, aggressive, passive, and impulsive) correlate with ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Findings reveal that assertive communication is significantly associated with emotional balance, while mental and physical imbalances are more frequently linked to aggressive, impulsive, or passive styles. The study concludes that fostering assertive communication can support holistic development and personal well-being. From an educational standpoint, the integration of methodologies that promote expression and reflection is recommended to enhance meaningful learning. These practices not only strengthen individual growth but also contribute to group cohesion and a balanced social and educational environment.

Keywords: Balance, Belonging, Interpersonal Communication, Need, Social Adaptation.

1. Introduction

Human beings adapt to society both through their innate neurological social endowment and through the development

of this capacity, facilitated by interpersonal stimulation and the social context that welcomes it Smetana, et al. [1]. This process is favoured when the community looks after its members and when people live in an environment of social values [2] stories such as belonging to a group or family unit [3], love, solidarity, cooperation and compassion towards the youngest members.

Within this framework, the empathic factor emerges, both emotional [4] and social [5], connecting individuals with a sense of personal belonging to a group or community, transcending their society and the world in general [6]. This attachment variable manifests itself through interpersonal communication, a process theorised by Watzlawick, et al. [7], which highlights the importance of interaction in the construction of meaningful relationships. Numerous studies emphasise the relevance of interpersonal communication [8-10] as a fundamental axis for improving coexistence and increasing well-being [11-15]. These studies particularly emphasise the importance of expressing personal needs in order to achieve them, also considering personal satisfaction [16]. Communicating emotions [17], thoughts and behaviours allows people to gain greater self-awareness.

As for the definition of balance, the concept of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), coined by Redford [18], is taken into account. These authors investigate how representations of the world are transmitted through language. According to NLP, each person possesses unique internal strategies, and, once identified, it is possible to programme thoughts that favour the achievement of desired results. Effective communication, through language and other non-verbal systems, facilitates the recognition and change of positive behaviours, allowing the modification of mental and emotional models acquired since childhood [18].

From this perspective, conscious attention is considered the first step towards balance [19]. In this sense, the voice is understood as a direct access to the inner world that can be projected towards the outer world. Interpersonal communication is, therefore, a form of externalisation of the human being in society. In the field of education, the development of communication skills is promoted through various techniques [20] and the identification of communication styles [21]. Through expression, people communicate their needs, whether conscious or unconscious [22].

With regard to human needs, recent authors such as Ryan and Deci [23] propose that intrinsic motivation is closely linked to the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence and relatedness. These needs, when adequately satisfied, allow for the achievement of personal balance. In this context, the need to be respected, recognised and valued occupies a fundamental place in the development of a sense of belonging, which, according to Barraca [24] is essential for the individual. This process of satisfying mental, emotional and physical needs and desires is projected outwards, where a balance or imbalance can manifest itself [22].

From an early age, individuals must learn to recognise their bodily movements and develop social skills [25] and social intelligence [26] which will enable them to advance and progress in their social interaction. The needs that arise throughout this process must be met to prevent the drive towards well-being and happiness from becoming a selfish act. For this not to happen, the sense of well-being needs to be transcended, directing it from within towards society. Balance is achieved when the individual connects with their community and their group of belonging, motivated by the desire to share and grow together through interpersonal communication [9]. In the field of education, this feeling of belonging generates a shared sense of emotional connection [8] where cooperation plays an essential role in the management of learning [27].

In this context, the intrinsic motivation to remain in the group generates cognitive, emotional and behavioural processes, constituting a key driving force for the equilibrium of the human being [28]. This feeling of belonging is strengthened through meaningful relationships, in which the person, aware of their needs, seeks to be accepted and recognised within the group, generating stability and positive emotions [29]. The way in which a person communicates reflects the balance between their inner needs and those of the group to which they belong. Achieving a balance between oneself and others, between what unites us and what differentiates us, is a process that requires social interaction [30]. Contact with our needs through voice and communication with others facilitates self-recognition. A balanced society is made up of individuals who not only seek to grow as people, but also to transcend towards a better world.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Personal Movements, Communication and Balance

Interpersonal communication is characterised by a dynamic process of interaction in which the person projects themselves from the inside out, in a constant give and take [22]. This communicative exchange not only allows us to connect with others, but also serves as a key tool for self-awareness and for bringing both conscious and unconscious needs to the surface. Through communication, people have the opportunity to reflect on their thoughts, emotions and actions, promoting a deeper and more genuine knowledge of their own identity.

This communicative exchange implies a conscious balance between needs, satisfactions and the way in which each individual thinks, feels and acts, which is associated with the concept of personal movement. Personal movement refers to the integral manifestation of the human being in three fundamental dimensions: mental, emotional and physical [22]. These dimensions determine the particular way in which each person interacts and communicates with others.

This section examines how personal movements (mental, emotional and physical) interrelate with interpersonal communication and personal balance. Each movement represents a specific way of experiencing and expressing reality, influenced by the way we process information, manage emotions and execute actions.

When we talk about mental movement, it corresponds to the mental processes that facilitate complex cognitive functions such as reasoning, deduction, reflection and information processing. From a neurological perspective, it is mainly associated with the neocortex, specifically in the frontal lobe [31]. In communicative terms, people with a predominance of

this movement tend to respond in a slow and reflective manner, preferring to observe before acting and showing caution in their interventions [32].

The Emotional Movement is linked to the ability to experience and manage emotions both on an intrapersonal level and in interaction with the environment. On a cerebral level, it involves the activation of the limbic system and prefrontal areas of the cerebral cortex [32]. People whose communication is emotionally charged focus their attention on the affective sphere, integrating what they think and do with the emotional charge experienced [33].

Finally, Physical Movement is related to action and execution, this movement translates into a tendency to act impulsively and to prioritise action over reflection. From a cerebral perspective, it involves both the language area in its phonological aspect and the areas responsible for voluntary movements, with activity in the thalamus and Broca's area in the frontal lobe standing out [34, 35]. People with a physical dominance are impulsive and tend to act rather than think, guided by both reason and emotion [32].

Imbalance in these three movements can lead to a disharmony between personal needs and the way one behaves, generating ways of thinking, feeling and acting that are out of step with the process of personal evolution. These aspects coincide with the learning styles proposed by Kolb. The lack or deficit in the satisfaction of these needs is considered an 'imbalance by default', while their excess is defined as 'imbalance by excess' [22].

2.2. Communication Styles

In the process of interpersonal communication, various factors intervene that influence the way in which people relate to and express themselves, such as the evolutionary development of the brain, self-knowledge of mental processes and personality, understood as a construction resulting from both the environment and the genetic structure of the individual [36]. These factors not only condition the way we communicate, but also how we perceive and understand our own inner world and that of others.

Within the framework of the study, three fundamental communication styles are considered: assertiveness, passivity and aggressiveness [21]. These styles are indicators of personal balance or imbalance and are expressed through verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal components of communication [37]. Each of them is detailed below:

- Assertiveness: This is defined as the ability to express thoughts, emotions and perceptions in a clear and direct manner, respecting one's own rights and those of others [38]. This communicative style promotes self-esteem and emotional stability, as well as fostering an internal locus of control, which allows the person to assume responsibility for their actions and decisions [39]. Assertive people tend to maintain an appropriate tone of voice, fluent and coherent verbal expression, and congruent non-verbal communication. Assertiveness represents the optimal balance within the communicative continuum, allowing for the genuine and respectful expression of personal needs.

- Passivity: This style is characterised by the difficulty in expressing one's own opinions, emotions and rights, which generates feelings of dissatisfaction and low self-esteem [40]. People with a passive style tend to avoid conflict and speak in a low, evasive and insecure tone of voice. Their tendency to repress their needs and thoughts is often a response to negative beliefs about themselves or fears related to rejection or disapproval. This communicative inhibition can generate a feeling of loss of control and the perception that others do not respect their limits.

- Aggressiveness: Contrary to passivity, aggressiveness involves an impulsive and hostile expression of thoughts and emotions, transgressing the rights and well-being of others [41]. This style manifests itself through a raised tone of voice, challenging looks and threatening body language. Although aggressiveness may seem like a way of asserting oneself or exerting control, in reality it generates frustration, interpersonal conflicts and negative consequences for both the aggressor and those around them.

Assertiveness, passivity and aggressiveness are situated on a communicative continuum, with assertiveness representing the point of balance. While passivity is associated with inhibition and a lack of contact with the environment, aggressiveness leads to overexposure and a tendency to dominate others. Assertiveness, on the other hand, is related to a healthy internal locus of control and a balanced expression of one's own needs [42]. This style allows for adaptive movement between the inner and outer worlds, favouring conscious and authentic communication [19].

From an existentialist perspective, communication is not only oriented towards the satisfaction of one's own needs, but also towards genuine interaction with others. Living together and social interaction are scenarios where people face their own imbalances and have the opportunity to adjust the way they communicate to achieve greater personal balance [30]. This process involves recognising and attending to one's own needs without neglecting those of others, thus promoting simultaneous personal and relational growth [43].

Finally, achieving communicative equilibrium requires developing the capacity for emotional self-regulation and self-control. This adjustment allows people to manage their impulses and act in a manner consistent with their personal values and objectives, favouring a process of evolution towards greater self-knowledge and more effective and respectful communication [40].

3. Design and Method

The purpose of this quasi-experimental research is to analyse the relationship between personal imbalance and patterns of behaviour in interpersonal communication, with the aim of establishing a basis for designing intervention strategies that favour a more effective and appropriate communication style for each individual. From this purpose, other specific objectives can be derived:

- Establish a relationship between personal imbalance and the type of behaviour in communication.

- • Determine how the type of imbalance and the communicative abilities of individuals.
- • Analyse the relationship between personal imbalance and people's sense of belonging.

The methodology used has been eminently quantitative, investigating observable and measurable objects of study [44]. The information has been obtained from a questionnaire and supplemented with interviews (individual and group) in combination with systematic observation of the participants, as well as the collection of data through record sheets based on their perceptions.

In order to carry out the research, variables derived from Esther Ponce's Movement and Colour method (balance and communication) have been taken into account, together with others that refer to the person's behaviour, such as aggressiveness, impulsiveness, passivity, assertiveness and sense of belonging. These variables have been taken into account to establish the working hypotheses:

H_1: *There is a relationship between each person's imbalance and assertive communication skills.*

H_2: *There is a relationship between each person's imbalance and non-assertive communication skills, aggressiveness and impulsiveness.*

H_3: *There is a relationship between each person's imbalance and non-assertive communication skill, passivity.*

H_4: *There is a relationship between personal balance and assertiveness.*

H_5: *There is a relationship between each person's imbalance and the feeling of belonging.*

The quantitative data has been processed using the SSPS programme, version 29. The statistical tests applied have consisted of Chi-square and Spearman's correlation to verify the certainty of the hypotheses. The Chi-square test investigates the probability distribution. Spearman's correlation coefficient is a non-parametric test of the rank correlation between variables [45].

The data was collected at the Educarte psychology centre in Tomelloso (Ciudad Real). It is a stratified random sample. The participants were aged between 3 and 55, with a mean age of 23.26 and a standard deviation of 15.21. Of these, 158 are children and adolescents aged 3 to 17 and 195 are young people and adults aged 18 to 55.
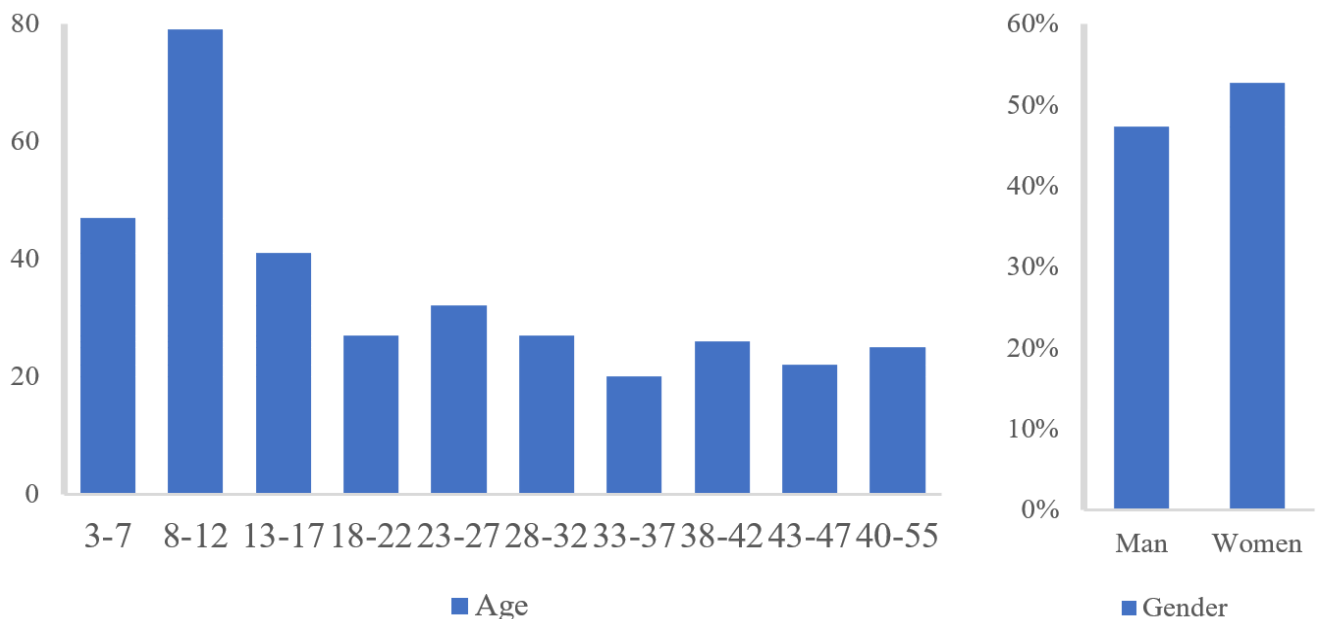

Figure 1.
Age and gender of participants.

4. Field Work and Data Analysis

The following instruments were used over a period of six months, from January to June. The first tool consists of a questionnaire following the ABP method (of systematic observation of body movement, need and personality type) applied to the whole sample. This questionnaire is carried out in an online session and in another group session to observe the interaction. The second tool is a qualitative interview. In addition, it has been combined with a third tool: a validated questionnaire aimed at the children's parents. This questionnaire is also applied to adults.

The data has been systematically analysed using the technique of content analysis. These communication techniques use systematic methods to describe the contents of messages [46]. Participants' comments and drawings are organised into topics and then into categories. To do this, the drawings and comments are classified according to the method proposed by Haney, et al. [47].

To generate the categories of analysis, the postulates of the Esther Ponce Blázquez (EPB) method were taken as a reference, which establishes a series of movements and needs in relation to their imbalances. In this categorisation, the colour chosen by the people is taken into account. Both aspects are recorded in a category of qualities in a series of statements that generate a categorisation of personal movement, needs and personality type [22].

This recording was carried out in an online session and a group session. In the case of children, an interview is also conducted with the parents to confirm the observed data and they are asked to fill in a questionnaire. In the case of adults,

they are also given a questionnaire. In this way, a second analysis was carried out to complement the previous one. This made it possible to compare the results with the postulates of the method and the rest of the variables in this article: aggressiveness, impulsiveness, assertiveness, passivity, communication, balance and sense of belonging.

5. Results

The present study allows us to clearly observe the relationship between imbalance and type of behaviour, which determine the type of communicative style that will predominate in the person in terms of interpersonal communication. In the same way, the interpretation offered by each of the imbalances allows us to delve into the possibilities of interaction and sociability that human beings have. It is from there that communication has a key function in transcending from imbalance to equilibrium, from the outside in, to return from within to society as a whole [19]. In this sense, people show a greater sense of belonging when they are assertive, the opposite being the case when passive or aggressive behaviour is displayed.

Table 1.
Correlation (Spearman) between different variables involving the attitude and behaviour of participants. Source: authors' own creation.

		Aggressiveness	**Impulsivity**	**Passivity**	**Assertiveness**	**Belongingness**
Aggressiveness	Corr	1.000	**0.400**[**]	**-0.289**[**]	**-0.344**[**]	-0.079
	Sig.	.	**<0.001**	**<0.001**	**<0.001**	0.138
Impulsivity	Corr		1.000	**-0.507**[**]	-0.085	0.016
	Sig.		.	**<0.001**	0.111	0.767
Passivity	Corr			1.000	-0.071	**-0.129**[*]
	Sig.			.	0.185	**0.016**
Assertiveness	Corr				1.000	**0.125**[*]
	Sig.				.	**0.018**
Belongingness	Corr					1.000
	Sig.					.

Note: **. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).
*. The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

Table 1 shows the correlation that exists between different variables involving the attitude of the participants. In the first place, there is a clear positive correlation between aggressiveness and impulsiveness. On the other hand, the correlation of aggressiveness with two other variables, passivity and assertiveness, is inversely proportional. Therefore, the higher the values of aggressiveness, the greater the impulsiveness, but the lower the levels of assertive behaviour and passivity or inaction. There is also a negative correlation between impulsiveness and passivity, as in the previous cases with a significance level of 0.01.

On the other hand, a clear relationship can be seen between the feeling of belonging and passivity or assertiveness. With regard to the former, the correlation is negative, so as the attitude of passivity increases, there is a lesser feeling of belonging. On the contrary, when the assertiveness of the individual is more evident, their feeling of belonging increases.

In the majority of cases a correlation has been observed (whether inverse or direct) with a high level of significance ($p<0.001$). In the correlations involving the Sense of Belonging a lower level of significance is observed ($p<0.05$).

Figure 2.
Relationship between the imbalance shown by participants and aggressiveness.

In Figure 2 we can see the relationship between the imbalance shown by the participants and their aggressive behaviour. We can see that in the majority of cases aggression appears. The vast majority of students who present a mental defect or physical excess show aggressive behaviour, over 80%. They also show very high values in the case of girls and

boys with emotional defect or mental excess. On the other hand, when the participants presented a physical defect or emotional excess, the majority did not display aggressive behaviour. It can be confirmed that these differences are highly significant, obtaining a Chi-square value of 81.138 (p<0.001).
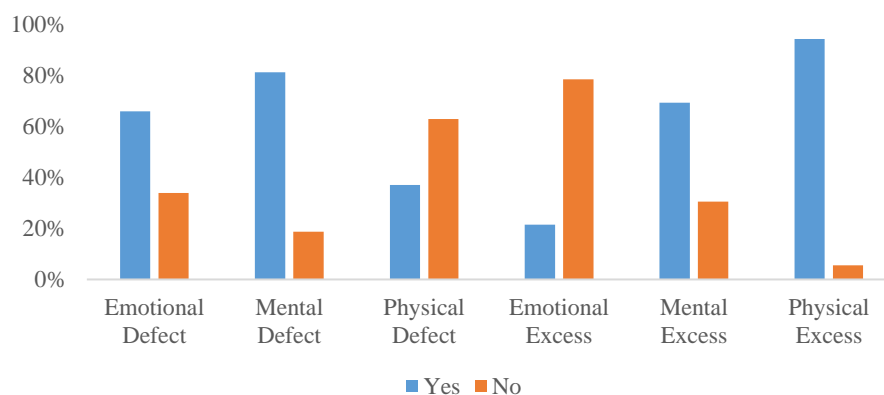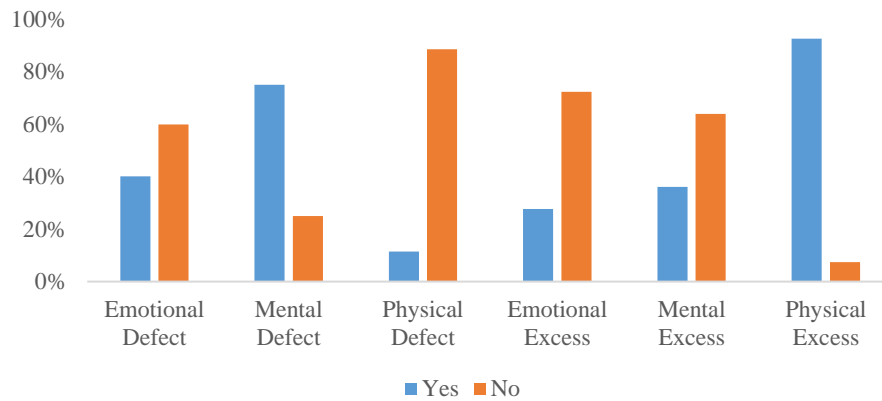

Figure 3.
Relationship between the imbalance shown by the participants and impulsiveness.

Figure 3 shows the relationship between the imbalance of the participants and the presence of impulsive behaviour. When the students are physically overweight, almost all of the participants show impulsivity. Very high values are also found in people with a mental defect, three quarters. On the other hand, in the rest of the cases, the majority of people do not show impulsivity, or show it to a very low degree. When they have an emotional defect or mental excess, only slightly less than half show impulsivity. Finally, the majority of participants who show emotional excess or physical defect show hardly any impulsivity. As in the previous case, there are very significant differences with a Chi-Square value of 81.792 (p<0.001).
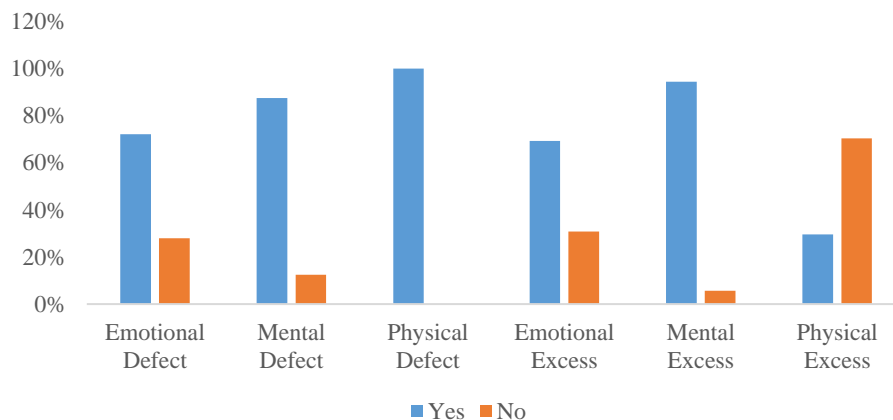

Figure 4.
Relationship between the imbalance shown by the participants and passivity.

In this Figure 4 we can see the relationship between the imbalance of the participants and passivity. In almost all cases, the girls and boys show great passivity when there is an imbalance. When a physical defect appears, everyone has a passive attitude. When there is a mental defect or excess, more than four-fifths also have the same attitude. When the defect or excess is emotional, this corresponds to values close to 70% of the participants. On the contrary, when the excess is physical, only a third of the people have a passive attitude. It can be confirmed that these differences are highly significant, obtaining a Chi-square value of 70.832 (p<0.001).
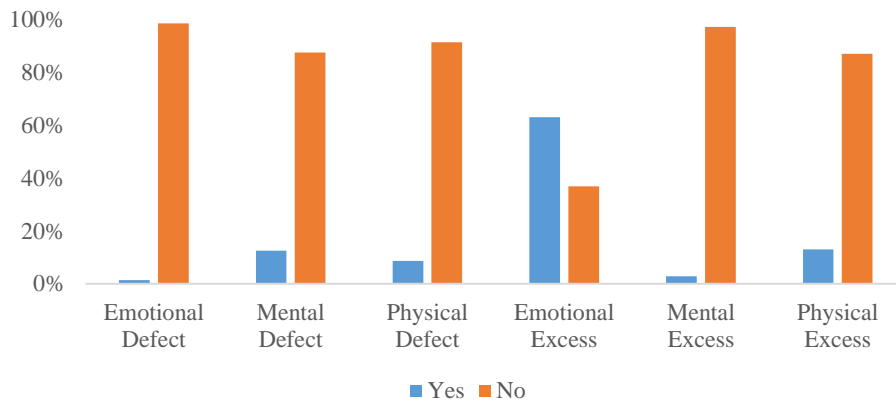
Figure 5.
Relationship between the imbalance shown by the participants and assertiveness.

In Figure 5 it can be clearly seen that in almost all cases where there is an imbalance between the participants, this prevents assertive behaviour from occurring. It is the practice of all the boys and girls when there is an emotional defect and mental or physical imbalance, either by excess or by defect. Only when emotional excess appears are the participants capable of maintaining assertive behaviour. In this case it can also be confirmed that these differences are significant, obtaining a Chi-square value of 138.209 (p<0.001).
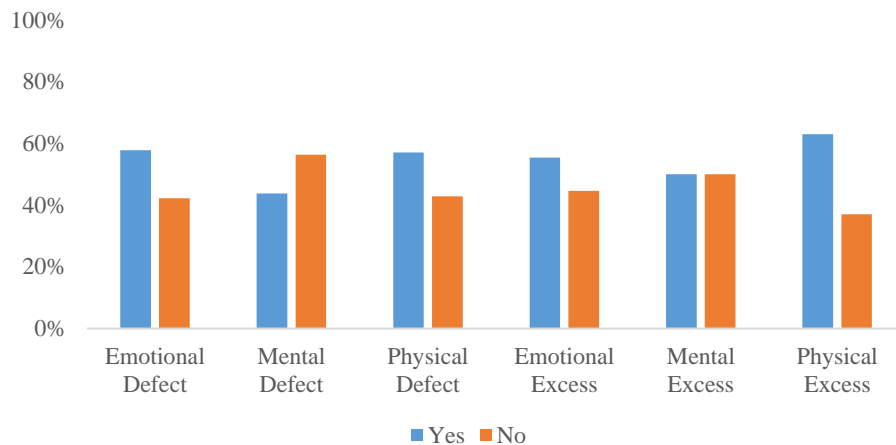

Figure 6.
Relationship between the imbalance shown by the participants and the feeling of belonging.

Finally, Figure 6 shows the relationship between the imbalance presented by the participants and the people's sense of belonging. In this case, the results are very similar in all cases. When an imbalance appears, there are no major differences in the people who express a feeling of belonging to the group. These values are confirmed when applying the Chi-Square statistic, which maintains its values above the required level of significance.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The conclusions derived from this study suggest that, in today's society, it is essential for people to develop a deep and reflective awareness [43]. Fear and lack of empathy contribute to growing individualisation, promoting an environment where interpersonal connection is weakened. This phenomenon is associated with a society characterised by immediacy and constant demands, where objectives often lack a deeper purpose. To counteract this phenomenon, it is essential to encourage conscious attention directed inward, not with the aim of satisfying selfish needs, but with the aim of finding true meaning when shared with others. In this process, interpersonal communication plays a key role, although it will only be effective if it is carried out with full and conscious attention. This form of communication allows us to externalise what is present inside each person, especially their conscious needs [48]. The challenge lies in the fact that this process leads to both personal and collective balance. Only if we overcome the domination of the fear that paralyses and reduces impulsivity, allied to aggressiveness [19] will it be possible to achieve interpersonal communication that is centred on mutual respect and love, contributing to the achievement of a balanced society [49].

In this sense, education has a fundamental role, as each act of communication should be orientated towards a greater objective: the balance of society [50]. This approach implies focusing not only on the content, but also on the learning processes, which are enriched when the learner carries out a self-evaluation. In this context, each learning experience becomes an act of interactive communication, in which the teacher, the student and the group mobilise their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, the teacher must be prepared, trained and, above all, have had the experience of being an assertive

person, because what is not experienced cannot be taught. It is necessary to move towards an evaluation system that is not limited to grades, but rather favours expression and active listening throughout the learning process, allowing the student to express themselves both verbally and non-verbally in the group [51]. This helps to generate a climate of trust and security, strengthening the cohesion of the class group. If communication is essential for balance, special attention must be paid to creating emotional bonds, starting with teacher training, which is the key to promoting effective communication in the classroom. It is the teacher who facilitates the expression of the members of the educational community through the curriculum [52].

With regard to the results obtained in this study, it is observed that in order to move towards a balanced society, each individual must be able to recognise in themselves the behaviours that bring them closer to or further away from personal balance, through their way of communicating interpersonally. This process implies constant self-regulation, the result of the evolution of language in its oral, linguistic and communicative dimensions [53]. Language, as an interpersonal practice [10] , increases personal awareness, thus favouring development and evolution towards a balance [22].

In relation to the first hypothesis (H1), which establishes a possible relationship between the type of imbalance and the ability to communicate assertively, the results suggest that people with emotional imbalance due to excess tend to be more assertive. This predominance of emotions seems to facilitate greater attention to the affective dimension, which favours more serene and caring relationships [49]. One possible explanatory factor is that this attitude promotes positive emotions towards both oneself and others [17] which in turn contributes to self-motivation and the regulation of behaviour. These positive emotions allow for the integration of thoughts, emotions and actions, creating an emotional state conducive to effective communication and balanced actions [54].

Both people with emotional imbalance due to excess and those with imbalance due to deficiency must learn to recognise and express their emotions, both in their internal language and in their external communication [30]. This learning involves a process of emotional self-regulation [17] that favours a healthy emotional balance [55]. In this context, communication becomes an essential ally, since language facilitates personal evolution and development [56] allowing for a genuine and conscious expression of emotions.

With regard to the second hypothesis (H2), which suggests a relationship between personal imbalance and non-assertive communication skills, such as aggressiveness and impulsiveness, the findings confirm that people with a tendency towards aggressiveness and impulsiveness predominantly present an excess of physical imbalance. This type of imbalance is characterised by a lack of cognitive and emotional self-regulation, which hinders the ability to adjust communicative behaviour to the context [55]. The impulsive and aggressive responses typical of these people often lack prior reflection, which limits the effectiveness of the verbal and non-verbal expression of their needs. To restore balance, it is considered essential to promote communicative processes that favour changes at the cognitive, affective and procedural levels, in order to improve self-control and favour a more effective and positive expression of needs [57].

In relation to the third hypothesis (H3), which establishes a relationship between imbalance and non-assertive communication skills, especially passivity, the results suggest that people with mental excess imbalance tend to develop a passive communication style. These people, by reflecting excessively before acting, experience difficulties in making decisions, which leads them to adopt a passive stance in their interactions [38]. This imbalance is associated with a tendency towards emotional immobility and a lack of active expression of emotions, which implies the need to act with greater determination [58]. Interaction situations, therefore, offer an opportunity for these people to explore new, more active and open ways of communicating [18].

Regarding the fourth hypothesis (H4), which postulates a relationship between imbalance and assertiveness, it is observed that assertive people tend to pay attention to both their own emotional aspects and those of others [40]. Their ability to harmonise verbal and non-verbal expression facilitates the balanced fulfilment of their needs and those of others. However, this process can only take place when the individual is close to mental, emotional and physical equilibrium [59].

Finally, in relation to the fifth hypothesis (H5), which establishes a relationship between imbalance and the feeling of belonging, the results, although they do not reveal a significant connection, suggest a trend in the link between emotional imbalance and the feeling of belonging. People with emotional imbalance tend to be more assertive, as affectivity favours the expression of their needs in a positive way [57]. However, people with physical imbalance, especially those with physical excess, maintain a sense of belonging, although their communication, characterised by impulsiveness and aggressiveness, can hinder their interpersonal relationships [3, 60]. For their part, people with mental illness tend to prioritise individual interests, which can generate a more individualistic focus in their relationships [22].

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