

## Evaluating a whole-school guidance programme: a mixed-methods study on student voice, relational climate, and institutional practice

### Valutare un programma di orientamento scolastico: Uno studio mixed-methods su student voice, clima relazionale e pratica istituzionale

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#### Abstract

This study reports a mixed-methods evaluation of a whole-school guidance programme implemented during the early phase of a structurally embedded national reform in Italy. Adopting a single-case design, the research integrates student (N = 565) and teacher (N = 17) perspectives to examine how the programme was experienced across three dimensions: personal growth, orientational development, and relational climate. Data were collected through anonymous post-intervention questionnaires combining Likert-scale items and open-ended responses. Quantitative findings indicate that relational climate received the highest evaluations in both stakeholder groups, whereas personal growth showed more moderate and variable student ratings. Teachers consistently reported stronger perceived impact in agency-related domains than students. Thematic analysis confirmed the salience of dialogical interaction and reflective space. The findings highlight the value of cross-perspective evaluation in understanding guidance reform implementation.

**Keywords:** student voice, agency development, relational pedagogy, mixed-methods.

#### Riassunto

Questo studio presenta una valutazione mixed-methods di un programma di orientamento scolastico implementato durante la fase iniziale della riforma nazionale italiana dell'orientamento. Adottando un disegno a caso singolo, la ricerca integra le prospettive di studenti (N = 565) e docenti (N = 17) per analizzare come il programma sia stato vissuto rispetto a tre dimensioni: crescita personale, sviluppo orientativo e clima relazionale. I dati sono stati raccolti tramite questionari anonimi post-intervento contenenti item Likert e domande aperte. I risultati mostrano che il clima relazionale ha ricevuto le valutazioni più elevate in entrambi i gruppi, mentre la crescita personale ha evidenziato valutazioni più moderate. I docenti hanno riportato un impatto percepito più elevato nelle dimensioni legate all'agency e alla riflessività. I risultati sottolineano il valore della valutazione multiprospettica per comprendere l'implementazione delle riforme dell'orientamento.

**Parole chiave:** student voice, sviluppo dell'agency, pedagogia relazionale, valutazione mixed-methods.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, school guidance has gained renewed prominence in international educational debates, particularly in relation to youth transitions, social equity, and the development of individual agency in increasingly complex socio-economic contexts (Hooley, Sultana, & Thomsen, 2019; Watts, 2013). Contemporary scholarship has moved beyond a narrow understanding of guidance as information provision, conceptualising it instead as a curriculum-embedded educational process aimed at fostering reflexivity, identity formation, and informed decision-making. Within this perspective, guidance becomes an integral component of educational practice oriented toward enabling students to navigate uncertain futures.

This reconceptualisation aligns with broader theoretical developments. From a capability perspective (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011), education expands individuals' substantive freedoms and real opportunities to pursue valued life paths. Theories of agency further emphasise that the capacity to act emerges from the interplay between personal resources and contextual conditions (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). School guidance can thus be understood as a structured educational space in which reflective capacities and future-oriented deliberation are cultivated.

Across Europe, reforms have sought to institutionalise this expanded vision of guidance within formal schooling. In Italy, Ministerial Decree 328/2022 introduced a structural reform embedding guidance within the regular curriculum of upper-secondary schools through annual modules, the introduction of the teacher-tutor, and systematic monitoring of orientational development. These measures resonate with international calls to strengthen lifelong guidance systems as instruments of educational quality and social inclusion (OECD, 2021; Sultana, 2014). However, empirical research examining how such structurally embedded reforms are experienced at school level remains limited.

At the same time, evaluation research increasingly highlights the importance of incorporating multiple stakeholder perspectives. The student voice literature shows that students' perceptions are crucial for understanding how educational practices are interpreted and internalised (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2011; Mitra, 2018). Moreover, relational climate plays a central role in shaping educational processes: positive teacher–student relationships are associated with engagement and achievement (Roorda et al., 2011; Quin, 2017), and relational pedagogy emphasises recognition, dialogue, and care as foundational dimensions of education (Noddings, 2005). Yet the specific role of relational climate within whole-school guidance initiatives remains underexplored, particularly in post-reform contexts.

Methodologically, evaluating complex school-based initiatives requires integrating distributional patterns with interpretive depth. Mixed-methods approaches allow the combination of quantitative indicators and qualitative meanings, enhancing interpretive robustness and institutional learning (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Greene, 2007; Patton, 2015). Examining convergences and divergences between stakeholder groups can further illuminate how reforms are differentially experienced within the same institutional setting.

Against this background, the present study examines the evaluation of a guidance programme institutionally designed within a whole-school framework and implemented in a public upper secondary school in Southern Italy during the early phase of the national reform. While the reform mandates 30 annual curricular hours pursuant to Ministerial Decree No. 328/2022, the analysis focuses on an additional 30-hour module funded through the Complementary Operational Programme (POC) «Per la Scuola» 2014–2020 and delivered in extracurricular afternoon sessions. Although conceived as a cross-track institutional initiative, its implementation involved exclusively students in the final three years of upper secondary education (N = 565).

Drawing on questionnaire data from 565 students and 17 teachers, and integrating descriptive quantitative analysis with thematic analysis of open-ended responses, the study provides an empirically grounded account of how a structurally embedded guidance initiative is experienced in the post-reform school context. Rather than assessing causal effectiveness, the research investigates how the programme is evaluated across three analytically differentiated domains—personal growth, orientational development, and relational climate—and how these dimensions are comparatively weighted and interpreted by students and teachers.

Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

1. How do students and teachers differentially evaluate the impact of a whole-school guidance programme across personal, orientational, and relational dimensions?
2. Which dimensions emerge as most salient in stakeholder evaluations, and how are they qualitatively interpreted?
3. What patterns of convergence and divergence between student and teacher perspectives can inform institutional models of guidance evaluation?

By foregrounding cross-perspective comparison and dimensional differentiation, the study contributes empirical evidence on the early implementation of national guidance reform and advances a multi-perspective approach to institutional evaluation.

Although situated within the Italian reform context, the case analysed offers analytically transferable insights into how structurally mandated guidance reforms are enacted, interpreted, and experienced within school settings.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Transformative guidance and agency development

Within the transformative perspective outlined in contemporary scholarship, guidance can be understood as an educational space in which agency is progressively constructed and rendered exercisable, rather than as a mere informational mediation between students and external opportunities (Watts, 2013; Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2019). In this framework, guidance seeks to foster reflective capacity, critical interpretation of context, and autonomous deliberation regarding future trajectories.

This orientation is grounded in broader theories of educational agency. Biesta and Tedder (2007) conceptualise agency not as a stable individual trait, but as an emergent achievement arising from the interaction between personal resources and contextual conditions. From this perspective, guidance interventions contribute to agency development insofar as they strengthen students' reflective competences while simultaneously configuring relational and institutional environments that enable action.

The capability approach further clarifies the normative dimension of this perspective. For Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011), education expands individuals' substantive freedoms—that is, their real opportunities to choose and pursue life projects they have reason to value. In this sense, agency does not coincide with formal autonomy, but with the expansion of possibilities that students can meaningfully exercise. Transformative guidance therefore aims not to steer students toward predetermined outcomes, but to widen the conditions for meaningful choice and informed future planning.

Although agency is theoretically conceptualised as a multidimensional and contextually situated construct (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Sen, 1999), its empirical operationalisation in school-based research necessarily entails a partial translation into observable indicators. In the present study, agency-related development is operationalised through students' and teachers' perceptions of reflective awareness, clarity in future planning, decision-making autonomy, and perceived capacity for self-understanding. These indicators do not exhaust the theoretical construct of agency, but function as contextually grounded proxies aligned with the educational aims of the national reform. The explicit distinction between theoretical construct and empirical indicators is intended to preserve conceptual coherence while acknowledging the methodological constraints inherent in an institutional case study.

### 2.2 Narrative orientation and identity construction

Within the Italian context, the transformative model of guidance has been elaborated through the approach of narrative orientation developed by Batini (2024). Narrative orientation conceptualises guidance as a structured process of meaning-making, in which autobiographical reflection and guided dialogue enable students to articulate implicit competencies, aspirations, and representations of the future.

This perspective resonates with research on narrative identity, which posits that the construction of

selfhood involves the temporal integration of life experiences into coherent personal stories (McAdams, 2001). Guidance, in this sense, becomes a space where students reorganise their past experiences and future expectations into a projective framework.

More broadly, narrative approaches to career construction emphasise that individuals actively author their trajectories through interpretive processes situated within social contexts. Thus, guidance practices grounded in reflective narration may support the development of agency by enabling students to reinterpret their biographies in project-oriented terms.

Within the Italian national reform (D.M. 328/2022), the introduction of the teacher-tutor and structured reflective tools appears conceptually aligned with this narrative orientation, although empirical research on how these principles are enacted and experienced remains limited.

### 2.3 Relational climate as an enabling condition

Relational pedagogy conceptualises education as fundamentally situated within processes of recognition, dialogue, and care (Noddings, 2005; Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). Meta-analytical evidence demonstrates that positive teacher–student relationships are significantly associated with engagement, motivation, and academic outcomes (Roorda et al., 2011). Quin (2017) further highlights that relational quality predicts active participation and school commitment.

In the context of guidance, relational climate may operate as an enabling condition for reflective and deliberative processes. If agency is understood as emerging from the interaction between individual capacities and contextual affordances (Biesta & Tedder, 2007), then the quality of relational environments becomes a relevant dimension in shaping how guidance initiatives are experienced and evaluated.

Despite robust evidence on the importance of teacher–student relationships in general educational processes, the specific role of relational climate within whole-school guidance reforms has received comparatively limited empirical attention. Investigating how relational dimensions are perceived alongside agency-related outcomes can therefore contribute to clarifying the experiential dynamics of reform implementation.

### 2.4 Student voice and cross-perspective evaluation

The inclusion of students' perspectives in educational evaluation is grounded in the paradigm of student voice, which recognises students as epistemically competent subjects and active contributors to institutional reflection (Cook-Sather, 2006; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). Lundy (2007) clarifies that «voice» entails not merely the opportunity to express opinions, but the presence of authentic listening and the possibility of influence in decision-making processes. In this sense, considering students' perceptions in the evaluation of guidance initiatives is not simply a methodological choice, but is consistent with a dialogical pedagogical stance (Mitra, 2018).

Within the Italian context, Grion (2013) argues that student participation in evaluation processes can function as a device of organisational learning, fostering institutional reflexivity. From this perspective, divergences between student and teacher evaluations should not be interpreted merely as inconsistencies, but as analytically meaningful expressions of distinct positionalities within the same educational field.

From the standpoint of evaluation theory, comparative analysis across stakeholder groups enables a problematisation of the very notion of educational «impact,» revealing how it is constructed and negotiated through situated perspectives (Greene, 2007; Patton, 2015). Integrating multiple viewpoints therefore responds not only to methodological triangulation, but also to the need to render visible the relational and interpretive dimensions that structure the experience of guidance.

Within this framework, the integration of student and teacher perspectives provides the conceptual foundation for examining how relational, orientational, and personal growth dimensions are comparatively perceived during the early implementation of a structurally embedded guidance reform.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Institutional context and reform framework

International perspectives on evaluation and assessment underscore the role of systematic monitoring in improving educational quality (OECD, 2013). Within the Italian context, evaluation has been increasingly framed as a tool for institutional improvement (Ciani, Ferrari, & Vannini, 2020).

The study was conducted in a public upper secondary school in Southern Italy during the 2024/2025 academic year, within the early implementation phase of the national guidance reform introduced by Ministerial Decree No. 328 of 22 December 2022. The reform, linked to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, mandates the introduction of structured annual guidance modules and the appointment of a teacher-tutor responsible for reflective accompaniment (Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito, 2022).

The programme analysed was funded through the Complementary Operational Programme «Per la Scuola» 2014–2020 (Call 64310/2025) and involved students in Years 3–5 of upper secondary education. Teacher-tutors were selected through an internal call in accordance with ministerial procedures.

The institution comprises three curricular tracks—Classical Studies, Linguistic Studies, and Human Sciences—with approximately 1,700 enrolled students. The coexistence of distinct disciplinary cultures within the same organisational context provides a potentially relevant contextual variable for future comparative research.

The study adopts a single-case design (Yin, 2018). Its aim is analytical rather than statistical generalisation: the case is examined as an empirically informative instance of early reform implementation within a structurally embedded guidance framework.

#### 3.2 Research design

A mixed-methods convergent parallel design was employed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same time frame, analysed separately, and integrated during interpretation.

This design was selected to address the study's focus on cross-perspective evaluation. Quantitative data allow identification of distributional patterns across stakeholder groups and dimensions (personal growth, orientational development, relational climate), while qualitative data provide insight into the meanings attributed to these dimensions.

The integration of both strands supports triangulation and strengthens interpretive validity (Greene, 2007; Patton, 2015).

#### 3.3 Participants

The sample includes 565 students enrolled in Years 3–5 and 17 teachers directly involved in the design and implementation of the guidance programme.

Student participation was voluntary and anonymous. Teachers included the full group of tutors and facilitators involved in the intervention. The size of the student sample permits stable descriptive pattern analysis within the institutional context. However, given the single-case design and the relatively small teacher sample, findings should be interpreted within the boundaries of contextualised institutional analysis rather than population-level inference.

Although the teacher sample ( $N = 17$ ) is numerically limited, it includes the full population of tutors and facilitators involved in the programme. Descriptive comparisons are therefore interpreted as population-level indicators within the institutional context rather than as estimates based on sampling. Nevertheless, the limited size warrants cautious interpretation of variability and inferential statistics involving the teacher group.

### 3.4 Instruments

Data were collected through anonymous post-intervention questionnaires administered at the end of the programme.

The construction of the instruments followed a theoretically informed and practice-oriented process. Item generation was guided by the three conceptual domains identified in the theoretical framework—personal growth, orientational development, and relational climate—as well as by the specific educational objectives of the guidance programme. Initial items were developed to reflect key constructs emerging from the literature on agency development, student voice, and relational pedagogy (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Noddings, 2005; Cook-Sather, 2006), together with the operational aims of the intervention, such as reflective awareness, future planning, and quality of interaction. The preliminary item pool was subsequently reviewed by members of the school coordination team responsible for programme design and implementation. This review process aimed to ensure clarity, contextual relevance, and alignment with institutional evaluation purposes, and minor revisions were introduced to improve item wording and reduce ambiguity.

Both student and teacher instruments included Likert-scale items (1–5) measuring three analytically defined macro-dimensions: (a) personal growth and reflective development; (b) orientational development and future planning; (c) relational climate and quality of interaction. In addition, open-ended questions invited participants to reflect on strengths, perceived impact, and areas for improvement.

The aggregation of items into macro-dimensions was guided by conceptual coherence aligned with the theoretical framework, rather than by purely statistical criteria. Items referring to self-awareness, critical thinking, and coping with difficulties were grouped under personal growth, as they capture intra-personal and reflective processes. Items addressing clarity of future pathways, knowledge of opportunities, and perceived usefulness were included in orientational development, given their relevance to future-oriented decision-making. Relational climate included items related to perceived listening, participation, and group atmosphere, in line with relational pedagogy frameworks. This theoretically grounded classification was subsequently supported by internal consistency analyses, which confirmed the coherence of aggregated item groupings.

Given the exploratory and case-based nature of the study, the scales are treated as descriptive indicators of perceived experience rather than as standardised psychometric measures.

Internal consistency of item groupings was examined prior to aggregation. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for multi-item scales, while two-item scales were assessed using Pearson correlations and Spearman–Brown coefficients. Reliability analyses were conducted on complete cases within each stakeholder group.

Within the student questionnaire, two items assessing perceived overall utility were analytically grouped within the orientational development macro-dimension, as they refer to students' appraisal of the programme's relevance for future planning. Reliability was examined at two levels: first, for the two-item utility subscale considered independently; and second, for the broader orientational development macro-dimension including both planning-related and utility-related items. This dual assessment was conducted to verify internal coherence both at subscale level and within the aggregated macro-dimension.

Within the student sample, internal consistency was good for personal growth ( $\alpha = .89$ ). For two-item subscales, satisfactory coherence was observed for perceived utility ( $r = .69$ ; Spearman–Brown = .81) and relational climate ( $r = .66$ ; Spearman–Brown = .79). The aggregated orientational development macro-dimension, including both planning-related and utility-related items, demonstrated good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

Within the teacher sample, internal consistency was excellent for relational climate and participation ( $\alpha = .95$ ) and orientational objectives ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Although alpha values above .90 may suggest potential redundancy, item inspection indicated conceptual complementarity rather than duplication.

Overall, these indices support the internal coherence of the macro-dimensions and the use of aggregated composite indicators for descriptive analysis.

Likert scales are widely used in educational research to measure attitudes and perceptions (Likert, 1932; Boone & Boone, 2012), while open-ended questions allow access to interpretive depth (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### 3.5 Data analysis

Quantitative analysis consisted exclusively of descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, minimum, maximum) calculated for each item and aggregated macro-dimension. The aim was to identify distributional patterns within and across stakeholder groups, in line with the study's analytically oriented case-study design (Yin, 2018). No inferential comparisons were conducted, as the purpose of the analysis was interpretive rather than generalisable.

Open-ended responses were analysed using inductive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). A total of 565 student responses and 17 teacher responses were examined. The analysis proceeded through iterative cycles of coding, theme development, and refinement. Initial codes were generated independently and subsequently reviewed to ensure internal coherence and conceptual distinctiveness. Themes were constructed through aggregation of semantically related codes and subsequently mapped onto the three analytically defined macro-dimensions, while allowing for the emergence of additional patterns. To enhance analytical credibility, coding decisions were revisited after initial quantitative analysis in order to ensure independence between strands prior to integration.

Integration occurred at the interpretive stage through systematic comparison between quantitative distributions and qualitative thematic patterns. Convergences and divergences across stakeholder perspectives were examined as analytically meaningful findings rather than inconsistencies. This triangulated approach enhances interpretive robustness and aligns with dialogical models of evaluation research (Greene, 2007).

### 3.6 Ethical considerations

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. No identifiable personal data were collected. Data were analysed in aggregated form and used exclusively for research and institutional improvement purposes, in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU Regulation 2016/679).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Comparative evaluation across dimensions and stakeholder groups

This section addresses the first research question by examining how students and teachers evaluate the impact of the whole-school guidance programme across three analytically differentiated domains: personal growth, orientational development, and relational climate.

#### 4.1.1 Student evaluations across dimensions

Tab. 1 presents descriptive statistics for the eleven Likert-scale items completed by students (N = 565). Mean scores range from 2.90 to 4.33, with standard deviations between 0.84 and 1.19.

Dimension	Item (abridged)	M	SD	Min	Max
Personal Growth	Greater self-awareness	3.08	1.08	1	5
Personal Growth	Improved time management	3.00	1.17	1	5
Personal Growth	Ability to cope with difficulties	2.90	1.12	1	5
Personal Growth	Greater empathy/collaboration	3.28	1.17	1	5
Personal Growth	Development of critical thinking	3.19	1.14	1	5
Oriental Development	Clarity about future pathway	3.45	1.13	1	5
Oriental Development	Knowledge of opportunities	3.39	1.17	1	5
Oriental Development	Overall usefulness of the programme	3.45	1.11	1	5

Oriental Development	Relevance for personal development	3.47	1.19	1	5
Relational Climate	Feeling listened to	3.92	1.00	1	5
Relational Climate	Positive group climate	4.33	0.84	1	5

Tab. 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Items – Students (N = 565)

When aggregated into macro-dimensions, a differentiated pattern emerges. The relational dimension (including items such as «feeling listened to» and «positive group climate») records the highest overall mean ( $M \approx 4.12$ ), followed by orientational development ( $M \approx 3.42$ ), while personal growth indicators show comparatively lower averages ( $M \approx 3.09$ ).

Within the personal growth domain, the lowest mean score concerns perceived capacity to deal with difficulties ( $M = 2.90$ ), whereas items related to empathy and collaboration reach moderately higher levels ( $M = 3.28$ ). In the orientational domain, clarity regarding future pathways ( $M = 3.45$ ) and knowledge of opportunities ( $M = 3.39$ ) show similar distributions. Notably, relational items display both higher means and lower dispersion compared to other dimensions, indicating a more concentrated distribution of positive evaluations.

Overall, relational aspects receive higher mean scores than personal and orientational dimensions in the student dataset.

#### 4.1.2 Teacher evaluations across dimensions

Descriptive statistics for teacher responses ( $N = 17$ ) are reported in Tab. 2. Mean scores range from 3.88 to 4.41, with standard deviations between 0.50 and 0.83.

Items related to climate and participation show consistently high values, with «positive group climate» recording the highest mean ( $M = 4.41$ ). Indicators associated with orientational objectives also display elevated scores, including overall orientational impact ( $M = 4.35$ ) and development of awareness ( $M = 4.06$ ). The lowest mean concerns autonomy in decision-making ( $M = 3.88$ ).

Dimension	Item (abridged)	M	SD	Min	Max
Relational Climate	Active student participation	4.18	0.64	3	5
Relational Climate	Student interest	4.06	0.75	2	5
Relational Climate	Engagement in proposed activities	4.06	0.83	2	5
Relational Climate	Positive group climate	4.41	0.62	3	5
Oriental Development	Development of awareness	4.06	0.75	2	5
Oriental Development	Personal reflective capacity	4.00	0.50	3	5
Oriental Development	Clarity in future planning	4.06	0.66	3	5
Oriental Development	Decision-making autonomy	3.88	0.60	2	5
Oriental Development	Ability to analyse opportunities	4.06	0.83	2	5
Oriental Development	Overall orientational impact	4.35	0.70	3	5

Tab. 2: Descriptive Statistics of Teacher Items (N = 17)

Standard deviations are relatively contained across items, indicating a concentration of responses in the upper range of the scale.

### 4.1.3 Cross-stakeholder comparison

A cross-stakeholder comparison reveals both parallels and differences in evaluative patterns. These comparisons should be interpreted descriptively and contextually, given the asymmetry in group sizes and the case-based design of the study.

First, relational climate emerges as the highest-rated domain in both groups, indicating a shared recognition of the quality of interaction and listening within the programme. Second, teachers consistently report higher average scores across personal and orientational domains than students. While students' evaluations of personal growth cluster around moderate values, teachers tend to assess orientational and awareness-related outcomes more positively.

The magnitude of descriptive differences across dimensions is presented in Tab. 3. Patterns of convergence and divergence are examined in Section 4.3.

Dimension	Students (N = 565)	Teachers (N = 17)	Difference (T – S)
Personal Growth	3.09	4.01	+0.92
Oriental Development	3.42	4.13	+0.71
Relational Climate	4.12	4.18	+0.06

Tab. 3: Comparative mean scores across macro-dimensions

*Note.* Macro-dimensions were computed by averaging conceptually related items within each stakeholder group. Values are presented for descriptive comparison only.

As shown in Tab. 3, relational climate receives the highest mean scores in both stakeholder groups, while the largest descriptive difference between students and teachers concerns the personal growth dimension. Oriental development displays an intermediate pattern of difference. These patterns are further examined in subsequent sections.

## 4.2 Dimensional salience in stakeholder evaluations

### 4.2.1 Quantitative salience patterns

To address the second research question, macro-dimension means were examined in order to identify which domains received comparatively stronger evaluations within each stakeholder group.

Macro-dimensional comparison indicates a consistent salience of relational climate across stakeholder groups ( $M \approx 4.12$  for students;  $M \approx 4.18$  for teachers), followed by orientational development ( $M \approx 3.42$  and  $M \approx 4.13$  respectively), while personal growth indicators show comparatively lower averages ( $M \approx 3.09$  and  $M \approx 4.01$ ). The dispersion of responses is also lower for relational items, suggesting a more consistent pattern of evaluation across participants in both groups.

### 4.2.2 Qualitative interpretations of salient dimensions

Open-ended responses were analysed through inductive thematic analysis. Recurring semantic patterns were identified and grouped into thematic clusters corresponding to the three macro-dimensions.

Within the relational domain, student responses frequently referenced experiences of being listened to, opportunities for dialogue, and a positive group atmosphere. Expressions such as «avere spazio per parlare», «sentirsi ascoltati», and «condividere idee apertamente» appeared recurrently. Teachers similarly described the programme as characterised by active participation and constructive interaction.

In the orientational domain, students referred to increased awareness of future possibilities and clearer understanding of available pathways. These references often concerned informational clarification and reflection on personal aspirations. Teacher responses emphasised students' reflective engagement and progressive clarification of future planning.

With regard to personal growth, student responses were more heterogeneous. Some participants mentioned improved self-understanding and confidence, while others indicated limited perceived change. Teacher comments highlighted observed increases in students' reflective capacity and participation.

The qualitative material reflects distributional patterns comparable to those observed in the quantitative analysis, thereby supporting the interpretive coherence of the mixed-methods approach.

### 4.3 Patterns of convergence and divergence between stakeholder perspectives

#### 4.3.1 Areas of convergence

Descriptive comparison indicates a strong alignment between stakeholder groups in the relational climate dimension. As shown in Tab. 3, mean scores for relational climate are closely aligned (Students: 4.12; Teachers: 4.18), with a minimal descriptive difference (+0.06). Both quantitative and qualitative data reflect consistently high evaluations of listening, participation, and positive group atmosphere.

In addition, both groups report overall positive assessments of the programme across all dimensions, with mean values consistently above the midpoint of the scale. No domain receives a predominantly negative evaluation in either group. This convergence suggests a shared experiential interpretation of the programme's relational dimension.

#### 4.3.2 Areas of divergence

Descriptive differences between stakeholder groups are more pronounced in the personal growth and orientational development dimensions.

The largest mean difference concerns personal growth (+0.92), with teachers reporting higher levels of perceived impact compared to students. A substantial, though smaller, difference is also observable in the orientational development domain (+0.71). In both cases, teacher evaluations systematically attribute greater transformative impact to the programme than students' self-assessments suggest.

Item-level inspection reveals that teachers rate indicators related to awareness, reflective capacity, and clarity of future planning at higher levels than students' corresponding self-assessments. Within the student dataset, personal growth indicators display greater variability compared to relational items.

Qualitative responses reflect a similar pattern. While teachers frequently refer to observed increases in student awareness and reflective engagement, student comments on personal growth are more heterogeneous, including both positive references and indications of limited perceived change.

Summary of cross-perspective patterns.

Across the three macro-dimensions, relational climate exhibits the highest level of descriptive convergence between stakeholders. Personal growth presents the greatest divergence, while orientational development occupies an intermediate position. These cross-perspective patterns provide a structured overview of how different domains of programme impact are evaluated within the same institutional context and are further examined in the Discussion section.

## 5. Discussion

The findings highlight a structured pattern of convergence and divergence between stakeholder perspectives, offering interpretive insights into how the guidance programme is experienced within the institutional context.

A first key result concerns the strong convergence observed in the relational dimension. Rather than merely reflecting high descriptive scores, this alignment suggests that relational aspects—such as listening, dialogue, and participation—constitute a shared interpretive framework through which the programme is understood by both students and teachers. This finding is consistent with relational pedagogy, which positions educational relationships as foundational to engagement and meaning-making processes (Noddings, 2005; Roorda et al., 2011). The findings suggest that relational climate may constitute not only an

outcome of the programme, but also a central experiential dimension through which the educational experience is interpreted.

In contrast, more differentiated patterns emerge in agency-related domains, including personal growth and orientational development. Teachers consistently report higher levels of perceived impact, whereas students' evaluations appear more moderate and internally variable. This divergence can be interpreted in light of student voice literature, which highlights that subjective recognition of learning processes—particularly those involving reflection and identity development—may not be immediately accessible to learners themselves (Cook-Sather, 2006; Mitra, 2018).

From a capability perspective (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011), the development of agency-related capacities does not necessarily coincide with their immediate awareness. Reflective and orientational processes may unfold gradually and become recognisable only over time. Within this interpretive framework, the divergence observed between teachers and students does not indicate inconsistency but rather reflects different experiential positions in relation to the same educational process.

The prominence of relational climate alongside more moderate self-reported agency-related outcomes also invites further theoretical reflection. Rather than implying a direct causal relationship, the findings are consistent with perspectives that conceptualise agency as emerging within dialogical and recognition-based environments (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Relational conditions may therefore function as enabling contexts within which reflective and deliberative capacities can develop, even if such development is not immediately articulated by participants. This remains an exploratory interpretation: the cross-sectional design does not allow for temporal sequencing or mediation analysis, but the descriptive prominence of relational evaluations provides a basis for future longitudinal research examining whether and how relational climate interacts with the development of agency-related outcomes.

Finally, the integration of student and teacher perspectives illustrates the analytical value of cross-perspective evaluation. Convergences and divergences should not be interpreted as measurement discrepancies, but as meaningful expressions of how educational processes are differentially experienced within institutional contexts. In line with evaluation theory (Greene, 2007; Patton, 2015), this multi-perspective approach contributes to a more nuanced understanding of programme impact and supports forms of institutional learning oriented toward continuous improvement. The evaluative process itself—grounded in mixed-methods integration and cross-perspective comparison—can function as a form of organisational learning, providing actionable insights for programme refinement.

More broadly, the findings suggest that evaluating guidance reforms requires attention not only to measurable outcomes, but also to the relational and interpretive conditions through which educational change becomes meaningful to participants.

## 6. Implications for practice and research

### 6.1 Implications for practice

The findings indicate that relational climate constitutes a shared and salient dimension of the guidance experience. For schools implementing structurally embedded guidance reforms, this suggests the importance of institutionalising dialogical spaces in which listening, participation, and recognition are not episodic features but stable components of practice. Conceiving guidance as a structured space of reflective accompaniment rather than merely as informational provision appears consistent with how participants experience its value.

The observed divergence between teacher and student evaluations in agency-related domains further highlights the need to make reflective and orientational processes more explicit and developmentally scaffolded. Schools may benefit from strengthening the continuity of guidance activities across the curriculum, ensuring that opportunities for reflection are sustained over time rather than confined to isolated modules. Research on educational reform implementation underscores that policy effectiveness depends on contextual integration within institutional cultures rather than formal compliance alone (Sultana, 2014; OECD, 2021).

Finally, the integration of student and teacher perspectives within evaluation processes may itself func-

tion as a lever for organisational learning. Systematically incorporating student voice into monitoring frameworks can support more nuanced and responsive implementation of national guidelines.

## 6.2 Implications for research

This study underscores the value of multi-perspective and mixed-methods approaches in evaluating guidance reforms. Integrating quantitative patterns with qualitative meanings enables a more comprehensive understanding of how institutional initiatives are experienced, in line with contemporary evaluation research (Greene, 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Several directions for future research emerge. First, longitudinal designs are needed to examine whether divergences in perceived personal growth persist, diminish, or intensify over time. Given that orientational and agency-related processes may unfold gradually (Watts, 2013), temporal analysis is essential for understanding developmental trajectories. Second, comparative studies across schools could explore how organisational cultures and curricular traditions mediate the reception of structurally embedded guidance reforms. Such analyses would contribute to clarifying contextual conditions that facilitate or constrain effective implementation. Finally, further investigation of the relationship between relational climate and agency development—potentially through mediation analysis or qualitative longitudinal designs—could deepen understanding of how dialogical environments interact with students' evolving self-perceptions and decision-making capacities.

## 7. Limitations

The present study presents several limitations that should be explicitly acknowledged. First, the research is configured as a single-case study conducted within one educational institution. While this design allows for an in-depth contextual analysis, it limits the generalisability of the findings to other educational settings (Yin, 2018). The aim of the study, however, is not statistical generalisation but contextualised analysis of an experience related to the implementation of the national guidance guidelines.

Second, the data collected are primarily based on self-report measures. Methodological literature indicates that perception-based scales may be influenced by subjective and contextual variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The absence of longitudinal indicators or objective outcome measures limits the possibility of assessing medium- and long-term impact.

A further limitation concerns the timing of data collection, which took place at the end of the programme. As highlighted in research on guidance and reflective competence development, some effects may emerge over time rather than immediately (Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen, 2019). A longitudinal design would have allowed exploration of the evolution of students' perceptions.

Furthermore, although internal consistency indices support the aggregation of items into macro-dimensions, the instruments were developed for institutional evaluation purposes and were not subjected to full psychometric validation procedures (e.g., confirmatory factor analysis). Future research could further refine and validate measurement tools to enhance construct precision and comparability across contexts.

Finally, although a mixed-methods design was adopted, the qualitative analysis was based on relatively brief open-ended responses. Future studies could integrate in-depth interviews or focus groups in order to further explore the narrative and reflective processes activated by guidance activities (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## 8. Conclusions

The present study examined the evaluation of a school-based guidance programme implemented during the early implementation phase of the Italian national guidance reform (D.M. 328/2022), integrating student and teacher perspectives through a mixed-methods design.

This study contributes to international research on guidance reform by offering early empirical evidence

from a structurally embedded national policy context and by advancing a cross-perspective evaluative framework that integrates relational and agency-related dimensions within institutional analysis.

Descriptive findings indicate strong convergence between stakeholders regarding the centrality of relational climate, alongside moderate divergence in agency-related dimensions. Within the analysed case, relational aspects consistently receive the highest evaluations across quantitative and qualitative data strands. The integration of quantitative and qualitative perspectives further demonstrates the value of mixed-methods evaluation for capturing the relational and interpretive complexity of guidance reforms.

These patterns are consistent with theoretical perspectives that emphasise the relevance of relational pedagogy (Noddings, 2005) and narrative guidance approaches (Batini, 2024) in supporting reflective educational processes. However, given the case-based and cross-sectional nature of the study, such interpretations should be understood as contextually grounded rather than generalisable claims.

Within the framework of the reform introduced by D.M. 328/2022, the findings offer empirical insight into how structurally embedded guidance initiatives are experienced at school level. The cross-perspective patterns identified in the study highlight the importance of multi-perspective evaluation in understanding reform implementation.

To sum up, the study suggests that the effectiveness of school guidance may depend not only on orientational content, but also on the relational environments within which reflective processes are experienced and interpreted. Future research should continue to investigate longitudinal developments, cross-institutional comparisons, and the interaction between relational conditions and perceived agency growth. School guidance, conceived as a continuous and relational educational process, represents an increasingly relevant field for understanding how educational institutions support agency, reflection, and future-oriented meaning-making in post-reform contexts.

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