

## Generating Changes Against Sexism in Adolescents Through a Citizenship Training Program

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### Abstract

*The issue of gender discrimination is a global challenge, and Ecuador is no exception. Within the Ecuadorian population, the importance of addressing gender as a means to achieve equal rights in historically discriminatory areas has been recognized. In this present study, the general objective was to develop a civic education program to improve high school students' attitudes towards sexist behaviors. To achieve this, research was conducted, which included a survey administered to 320 students aged between 15 and 18 years old. The results revealed a significant negative relationship between civic education and sexist attitudes among high school students. It was concluded that the majority of respondents exhibit a high level of active and engaged participation in civic activities. However, it was also identified that entrenched beliefs in certain gender stereotypes still persist.*

**Keywords:** Sexism, role, gender, citizenship, high school.

### INTRODUCTION

The problem of gender discrimination represents a global challenge, and Ecuador is no exception to this reality. In Ecuadorian society, the importance of addressing gender as a vehicle to achieve equal rights in areas historically affected by discrimination has been recognized, this problem not only involves labeling people according to their physical appearance or culture, but also evidences the existence of inequalities and the perpetuation of stereotypes. As reported by Human Rights Watch, nearly 30% of the more than 14,000 complaints of sexual violence registered by Ecuador's Ministry of Education between January 2014 and April 2022 took place in school settings. (UNFPA, 2022)

Gender-based violence takes multiple manifestations, including acts that cause suffering, physical or psychological harm, threats, coercion and restriction of freedoms, among others, certain behaviors such as machismo, sexism and violence in relationships, stand out for their dangerousness by putting at risk the physical integrity of those who are affected by these behaviors. In addition, in the environment of social networks, another type of violence known as cyberbullying emerges, which mainly impacts the social image of the people affected. It is essential to prevent all these different types of gender-based violence as they are part of a culture rooted in inequality, this culture, in the long term, perpetuates violence by not bringing about a change in entrenched patterns. These patterns are internalized from an early age in childhood and youth, and continue to be replicated throughout society.

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An analysis of sexism and conflict management among high school students in Mexico revealed that students who exhibited more sexist beliefs and attitudes tended to exhibit more aggressive behaviors when confronted with individuals of the opposite gender. (Luna-Bernal, 2018)

A significant challenge lies in the lack of comprehensive, evidence-based sexuality education for students, which can expose them to myths and prejudices related to sexual relationships and sexuality, this lack can contribute to the persistence of sexist stereotypes and attitudes, in addition to the fact that the media and popular culture often present stereotypical portrayals of men and women, Which may reinforce these sexist attitudes, high school students could be particularly susceptible to these influences due to their high media consumption and constant exposure to popular culture. (Beltrán, 2022)

(Parreño, 2019) In recent years, there have been significant advances in theories of learning and knowledge, with a particular focus on the constructivist notion. According to this perspective, it is argued that individuals construct new knowledge from their previous knowledge and integrate it into their lives through meaningful learning. In line with this idea, Coloma argues that pedagogical constructivism provides us with a route towards educational change, transforming it into an active process in which students elaborate and construct their own knowledge based on their experiences and interactions with teachers and the environment. This implies a change in our educational practices, and in order to adopt this possibility, it is essential to understand its foundations.

Erikson (1950) and his Theory of Developmental Psychology examined the different periods of development, including adolescence, which he referred to as the "Identity Crisis" stage. This stage is influenced by culture, society, and personal history. During adolescence, individuals go through a moratorium period, in which they leave childhood behind and strive to integrate their future expectations of adulthood. This stage is significant because it allows individuals to establish their personal identity, avoiding the risk of role dysfunction and personal identity crisis. (Preciado, 2020)

Sexism can be conceptually defined as a discriminatory attitude directed toward individuals on the basis of their biological sex. This conception implies the belief that there are inherent differences between men and women, which leads to the establishment of gender-specific social norms and behaviors. These beliefs also entail the notion of superiority of one gender over another, which contributes to maintaining a system in which inequalities and discriminatory behaviors persist (Luna, 2018)

It is essential to understand these different forms of sexism in order to be able to identify and address them effectively in our society, education and awareness are key tools to combat sexism in all its manifestations and promote gender equality (Díaz-Loving et. al., 2019).

To argue the research question, the general objective was established: To identify the influence that citizenship education has on the sexist attitude of high school students towards sexist behaviors.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The notion of population or universe is conceived as the whole set of individuals that make up the investigated environment, sharing common characteristics or attributes among themselves. In the specific framework of this study, it is estimated that the population comprises 320 students, representing the total number of subjects that make up the focus group of the research, and whose data or samples will be collected in order to analyze and evaluate aspects related to citizenship education and sexist attitudes within the school context.

Inclusion criteria were applied for the selection of participants, including adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18, as well as students officially enrolled in the corresponding educational institution. In contrast, exclusion criteria were established for those students who suffered from psychological or mental illnesses, those who did not attend high school, as well as students belonging to institutions other than those selected for this study.

Regarding the sample, a deliberate strategy was used, characterized by the selection of subjects without the application of specific statistical or mathematical criteria. In this particular context, the sample included the entire student population estimated at 320 individuals, these being the focus of interest for the analysis and evaluation proposed in the research.

A non-probabilistic sampling approach was chosen, which is characterized by the subjective selection of samples, based on convenience and considering specific attributes relevant to the investigated context.

The unit of analysis refers to the individuals responsible for providing the data or information relevant to the research. In this study, this unit was limited to students enrolled in the 2nd and 3rd years of baccalaureate.

The instrument designed for data collection consisted of a form containing a total of 20 items evenly distributed in seven different dimensions. Each item required a response provided using a five-level Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1).

In this study, the instrument was judged by three experts in the field, who assessed the suitability and relevance of the instrument for application in this specific context, given their experience and expertise.

Reliability is related to the consistency of the results obtained in a given sample. A value of 0.768 was obtained for the variable that evaluated sexist attitudes in high school students, indicating a high level of reliability. In addition, the five dimensions of the instrument obtained values in a range between 0.700 and 0.950, confirming the consistency of these dimensions.

## **RESULTS**

Analyzing the data obtained after the application of the survey in each question, the following results were obtained

How important do you feel it is to participate in civic and community activities?

The findings indicate a widespread perception about the relevance of contributing to civic and community initiatives. However, there is a minority segment that attaches less importance to this aspect. The majority of participants, corresponding to 35.6%, say that participating in civic and community activities is of "Moderate" importance. However, a considerable percentage of them, 25.0% and 22.2%, respectively, indicate that these activities are "Quite Important" and "Very Important". On the other hand, 9.4% of students state that this type of participation is of "not important importance", while 7.8% indicate that they do not assign any relevance to it.

To what extent do you think education should promote respect for human rights and diversity?

The highest percentage of students surveyed, 49.7%, consider that education should promote these values "to a large extent". It is followed by a significant group of students, 16.6%, who believe that education should do so "to some extent". In addition, 13.1% of students believe that it should be promoted "to some extent". However, a smaller

percentage of students are identified as believing that education should promote respect for human rights and diversity: "To a very small extent" (9.7%) or even "Not at all" (10.9%). These results reflect the need to reinforce the importance of inclusion in education and compliance with human rights and diversity

To what extent do you feel committed to building a more just and equitable society?

The highest percentage of students (27.2%) feel "Quite committed" in the construction of a more just and equitable society, 26.3% correspond to students who feel "Moderately committed", 25.9% feel "Very committed" in the construction of a society with greater justice and equity, 10.6% of students feel "Not very committed" and 10.0% feel "Not at all committed" in the construction of a society with greater justice and equity. These results highlight the importance of fostering and promoting student awareness and active participation in crafting a more just and equitable society, as well as the need to address the causes of disengagement in some students.

To what extent do you think young people should be involved in political and social issues?

The highest percentage of students (32.5%) consider it "Quite important" for young people to get involved in political and social issues, 27.2% correspond to students who consider it "Very important" for young people to get involved in these issues, 21.9% consider it "Moderately important" for young people to be involved in political and social issues, 9.1% of students consider it "Not very important" for young people to get involved and 9.4% think it is not important "Not at all". These results highlight the need to promote and stimulate the active participation of young people in political and social issues, as well as to address possible barriers or negative perceptions that may exist in some students.

To what extent do you consider it important to know and understand the laws and regulations that govern your country?

According to the results obtained, the highest percentage is represented by the "Very important" category, with 38.4%, closely followed by the "Fairly important" category with 27.2%, on the other hand, 15.9% of students consider importance in a moderate way, representing, there is a minority that considers little or not at all important to know and understand these laws, with 8.8% and 9.7% respectively. These results suggest the need to promote greater awareness and education around laws and regulations in the country, highlighting their relevance in society and fostering an informed citizenry committed to complying with them.

To what extent do you feel empowered to exercise your rights and duties as a citizen?

When analyzing the results, it can be seen that the highest percentage corresponds to the category "Moderately trained", with 35.6%, followed by the category "Fairly qualified" with 21.3% and the category "Very trained" with 20.0%, a considerable part is also identified that is considered little or not at all qualified, with 14.1% and 9.1% respectively. The results obtained demonstrate the importance of strengthening civic education and promoting greater knowledge of citizens' rights and duties.

To what extent do you think education should encourage active participation in decision-making?

The majority of respondents believe that education should encourage active involvement in decision-making to a large extent, with 39.7% of the sample, 25.0% of the sample believing that education should stimulate active involvement to some extent, 12.5% of the sample considering that education should stimulate active involvement to some extent, 9.4% of students believe that education should encourage active involvement to a very limited extent, 13.4% of students surveyed believe that education should not encourage active involvement to any extent.

To what extent do you consider yourself a person committed to caring for the environment?

It is observed that the majority consider themselves to be quite committed, 29.7% of the sample, a percentage of 27.5% consider themselves moderately committed, 20.0% of the sample, consider themselves very committed, a percentage of 14.1% identify a considerable group of students who consider themselves not very committed, 8.8% of students surveyed consider themselves not at all committed.

To what extent do you consider it important to know and respect different cultures and traditions?

A total of 44.4% of the sample said that knowing and respecting different cultures and traditions, 21.9% considered this aspect to be quite important, 14.7% considered it moderately important to know and respect different cultures and traditions, 9.1% considered this aspect to be unimportant, 10.0% of students surveyed said that knowing and respecting different cultures and traditions was not important at all.

To what extent do you think education should promote gender equality and eliminate sexist stereotypes?

The majority, 50.9% of the sample, believe that this should be done to a large extent, 15.3% believe that this should be done to some extent, 13.4% believe that education should promote gender equity and eliminate gender-based stereotypes that promote sexist attitudes to some extent, 9.7% believe that this should be done to a very small extent, and 10.6% of students surveyed believe that education should not promote gender equality or eliminate sexist stereotypes at all

To what extent do you think the skills and abilities of men and women are equal?

In relation to the students' perception of the abilities of men and women, it is highlighted that 25.9% of the students consider that these are totally equal, in the same way, it is observed that both 21.3% of the participants maintain that the skills and abilities are very similar, and another 21.3% consider that they are moderately similar. 17.5% believe that there are some differences between the two genders, and finally, 14.1% of students consider that the abilities of men and women are totally different.

To what extent do you think women are inherently less capable in fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics?

A large majority, representing 50.6% of the students surveyed, state that women are not inherently less capable in academic and technological fields, both 12.8% consider women to be inherently less capable to a very small extent, and 12.8% indicate that to some extent, respectively, it is identified that 10.3% of students believe that women are inherently less capable to some extent, while 13.4% say they are much less capable in such fields.

To what extent do you think men and women should have the same opportunities in the workplace?

49.7% of the students surveyed are in favor of equal opportunities between men and women. On the other hand, 14.1% believe that men and women should have similar opportunities to some extent, while 13.8% think the same to some extent. It is observed that 12.5% of students believe that men and women should have similar opportunities to a lesser extent. Finally, 10.0% of students believe that men and women should have different roles in the workplace.

To what extent do you see harassment and gender-based violence as serious issues that need to be addressed?

58.1% of the students surveyed consider that these problems are very serious and need to be addressed as a priority, 12.2% of students believe that these problems are serious to

some extent, and of 10.9% to some extent, with a percentage, it is identified that 10.3% of students consider that bullying and aggression directed towards a person because of their gender, They are serious problems to a very small extent, while 8.4% say they are not serious problems at all.

To what extent do you think it is important to promote gender equality and eliminate sexist stereotypes in society?

46.9% of the students surveyed consider this to be very important, 18.4% of students think it is quite important, 14.7% of students consider it moderately important, while 11.3% consider it unimportant, 8.8% of students say that promoting gender equity and eliminating gender-based stereotypes that promote sexist attitudes is not important at all.

To what extent do you agree with traditional gender roles in society?

23.4% of students say they strongly disagree, while 17.2% disagree mostly, it is observed that 27.8% of students declare themselves neutral regarding these roles, 15.3% mostly agree with traditional gender-based roles, and 16.3% strongly agree.

To what extent do you think women should take the primary responsibility for housework and childcare?

26.6% of the students believe that women should not assume the primary responsibility for housework and child-rearing, 21.6% of the students believe that women should assume the primary commitment to a very limited extent, and 24.4% to some extent, 17.8% of the students consider that women should assume the primary commitment to some extent, while 9.7% say they should assume it completely.

To what extent do you think men are naturally superior to women in terms of intelligence?

47.8% consider that men are not superior to women in terms of knowledge, 14.1% of students think that men are superior to a very small extent, 15.9% think that to some extent, 10.3% of students consider that men are superior to some extent, while 11.9% maintain that they are totally superior.

To what extent do you think women are more emotional and irrational than men?

27.5% consider that women are not more emotional compared to men, 23.4% of students that women are more emotional to a very small extent, 20.9% think that to some extent, 17.8% of students believe that women are more emotional to some extent, while 10.3% maintain that they are much more emotional.

To what extent do you agree with the idea that women should be submissive and obedient to men?

54.7% strongly disagree with this statement, 13.8% of students who disagree mostly, 10.6%, have a neutral position, 11.9% of students mostly agree with this idea, while 9.1% strongly agree.

## Dimensions

### Board 1 Indicators for variable 1: Citizenship education

	Civic & Community Engagement	Knowledge of citizens' rights and duties	Valuing Diversity and Equity
Low	5	18	15
Middle	86	86	90
High	229	216	215
Total	320	320	320

Regarding the Civic and Community Participation indicator, the High level stands out, with a total of 229 respondents, indicating active and committed participation in civic and community activities. It is followed by the Medium level, with 86 respondents, evidencing a moderate degree of participation. On the other hand, the Low level has only 5 respondents, denoting a limited participation in this area.

In relation to the indicator Knowledge of citizens' rights and duties, the High level has a total of 216 respondents, which suggests a good knowledge in this area. The Medium level, with 86 respondents, indicates an average degree of knowledge. In contrast, the Low level has 18 respondents, who have limited knowledge regarding citizens' rights and duties.

In the Diversity and Equity Valuation indicator, the High level has 215 respondents, indicating a high valuation of diversity and equity. The Medium level has 90 respondents, evidencing a moderate assessment. On the other hand, the Low level registers 15 respondents, who present a limited assessment in relation to diversity and equity.

These results indicate that the majority of respondents show a medium to high level in the indicators of Civic and Community Participation, Knowledge of Citizen Rights and Duties, and Valuation of Diversity and Equity.

**Board 2 Indicators of variable 2: Sexist attitudes in high school students**

	Perception of differences in skills and abilities	of Equal opportunities in the workplace and	Acceptance of traditional gender roles	of Belief in gender stereotypes
Low	93	9	65	123
Middle	153	89	150	129
High	74	222	105	68
Total	320	320	320	320

In relation to the indicator Perception of differences in skills and abilities, the Middle stands out, with a total of 153 respondents, which suggests that there is some perception of differences between men and women in terms of skills and abilities. It is followed by the Low level, with 93 respondents, indicating a less pronounced perception of these differences. On the other hand, the High level has 74 respondents, who present a more marked perception of the differences in skills and abilities between both genders.

Regarding the Equal Opportunities in the Workplace indicator, the most frequent level is High, with a total of 222 respondents, which denotes a strong belief in the importance of providing equal opportunities to men and women in the workplace. The Medium level, with 89 respondents, suggests a moderate perception in relation to this equality of opportunities. On the other hand, the Low level has 9 respondents, who have a lower assessment of equal employment opportunities.

In the indicator of Acceptance of traditional gender roles, the Medium level stands out, with 150 respondents, indicating a moderate acceptance of traditional gender roles. The Low level has 65 respondents, suggesting a lower acceptance of these roles. On the other hand, the High level registers 105 respondents, who present a greater acceptance of traditional gender roles.

In the indicator Belief in gender stereotypes, the most frequent level is Medium, with 129 respondents, which indicates a moderate perception of gender stereotypes. The Low level has 123 respondents, evidencing a lower belief in these stereotypes. On the other hand,

the High level registers 68 respondents, who present a greater belief in gender stereotypes.

The findings indicate that among the young high school students surveyed there is a moderate perception of the differences in skills and abilities between men and women, as well as a high valuation of equal opportunities in the workplace. There is also a moderate acceptance of traditional gender roles and a moderate belief in gender stereotypes. These results suggest the presence of sexist attitudes in the sample analyzed.

Board 3 Correlation between variables Citizenship Education and Sexist Attitudes in Baccalaureate Youth

Correlations

	Civic education
Pearson's correlation	-.372A
Sexist attitudes in high school students Sign.	,000
N	320

to. Significance at level 0.05

In the study of the relationship between citizenship education and sexist attitudes in high school students using Pearson's correlation analysis, a correlation coefficient of -0.372 was found. This value indicates a moderate negative correlation between both variables, suggesting that as citizenship education increases, the presence of sexist attitudes in high school students decreases. In other words, there is an inverse relationship between both variables, indicating that young people with greater civic education tend to have less pronounced sexist attitudes.

The significance value obtained was 0.000, which is lower than the standard significance level of 0.05. This indicates that the correlation between the variables is statistically significant and it is unlikely that the observed relationship is the product of chance.

There is evidence of a negative and significant relationship between citizenship education and sexist attitudes in high school students.

**DISCUSSION**

Fernández-García et al. (2022), in their research, observed significant discrepancies in sexist attitudes according to the educational level of the participants. It was found that those with primary education obtained considerably higher scores compared to those who completed secondary education, which is consistent with the results obtained in the present study since students with high levels of citizenship education obtained lower indices of sexist attitudes.

It's your studio Mastache (2019) highlights the importance of integrating the study of human rights and current problems of society into civic education, which contributes to a good knowledge in this area. On the other hand, our study shows that a significant number of respondents have limited knowledge regarding citizens' rights and duties, which suggests the need to strengthen this dimension.

On the other hand, Contreras (2020) It emphasizes the relevance of social relations between students and teachers in the training process, promoting a good climate and the recognition of common goals. This could positively influence civic and community participation. In line with this, the results of the present study indicate that a large number

of respondents present an active and committed participation in civic and community activities, which is encouraging and shows a high level in this indicator.

In turn, the study by Molina et. al., highlights the importance of addressing deficits in civic knowledge, valuing democracy, and community participation among young Chileans. These aspects are related to the level of knowledge and appreciation of diversity and equity. In our study, a sizable group of respondents rated diversity and equity moderately, but there is also a significant number who have a limited rating in this dimension.(2020)

Núñez-Páliz (2021), in her study, indicated that violence against women is rooted in society and manifests itself in deep-rooted social inequalities that are internalized from childhood and expressed during adolescence through feelings of insecurity in the interactions, attitudes and behaviors of first-year high school students, While in our study it was found that there is a moderate acceptance of traditional gender roles and a moderate belief in gender stereotypes in the young people surveyed from high school, the presence of sexist attitudes can be seen in the sample analyzed.

In relation to the perception of differences in skills and abilities, in our study it was found that there is a moderate perception of these differences between men and women, with an outstanding average level, which is consistent with the results of López (2020), who found that young people present similar levels of benevolent sexism and hostile sexism.

The findings of Ortiz (2019), who mentions that new forms of sexism have a greater acceptance among the young population, which suggests a greater sensitivity towards equal opportunities, this is aligned with equal opportunities in the workplace, where the results of our study indicate a high valuation of this equality, This reflects a strong belief in providing equal opportunities for men and women in the workplace.

Esteban & Fernández (2018), in their study, shows a moderate acceptance of traditional gender roles, which indicates a certain ambiguity in the acceptance of these roles by young people. This implies that young people do not have an extremely favorable or unfavorable position towards traditional gender roles, reflecting a more balanced attitude, while our study shows a moderate acceptance of these roles, with an outstanding average level. This suggests that there is an ambiguity in the acceptance of traditional gender roles among the young people surveyed.

These results suggest that moderate acceptance of traditional gender roles may be related to a moderate perception of gender stereotypes. That is, young people do not have a full acceptance of traditional gender roles, but they still maintain some belief in the gender stereotypes existing in society.

In general, the present study suggests the presence of sexist attitudes in the sample analyzed, evidencing a moderate perception of differences in skills and abilities, a high valuation of equal employment opportunities, a moderate acceptance of traditional gender roles and a moderate belief in gender stereotypes, which highlights the importance of continuing to work on the promotion of gender equality and the elimination of sexist attitudes among women. young people.

In conclusion, in terms of civic and community participation, it is observed that the majority of respondents are at the High level, indicating a level of active and engaged participation in civic and community activities. However, a small number of respondents were identified at the Low level, reflecting limited participation in this area. Regarding the knowledge of citizens' rights and duties, it was found that most of the respondents are located at the High level, which suggests a good knowledge in this area. In relation to the valuation of diversity and equity, it is observed that the majority of respondents are at the High level, which reflects a high valuation of diversity and equity.

When measuring the degree of sexist attitudes present in young high school students, it was found that in terms of the perception of differences in skills and abilities, there is a moderate perception in most of the respondents, with a predominant medium level, which indicates that there is some awareness of the differences between men and women in terms of skills and abilities. A strong belief in the importance of providing equal opportunities is highlighted, with a high standard predominating, which is encouraging. In terms of acceptance of traditional gender roles, there is moderate acceptance, with a predominant medium level, indicating that certain gender stereotypes still persist in society. Finally, a moderate perception was identified, with a predominant medium level, suggesting that there are still beliefs rooted in certain gender stereotypes.

When correlating the variables citizenship education and sexist attitudes in high school students, a moderate negative correlation has been found between both variables, which means that as the level of citizenship education increases, the presence of sexist attitudes in young people decreases. This indicates that young people with more civic education tend to have less pronounced sexist attitudes. In addition, the significance value obtained shows that this relationship is statistically significant, which rules out the possibility that the results are the product of chance.

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