



This paper is taken from

Reflecting on Identities: Research, Practice and Innovation
Proceedings of the tenth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Academic Network

London: CiCe 2008

edited by Alistair Ross and Peter Cunningham, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 978-0-9560454-7-8

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Navarro Sada, A. et al (2008) Spanish secondary students' attitudes towards Citizenship Education: indicators based on the IEA Civic Education Study, in Ross, A. & Cunningham, P. (eds.) Reflecting on Identities: Research, Practice and Innovation. London: CiCe, pp. 473 - 482

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Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The CiCe administrative team at London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The Socrates Programme and the personnel of the Department of Education and Culture of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

Spanish Secondary Students' Attitudes towards Citizenship Education: Indicators Based on the IEA Civic Education Study¹

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Abstract

This empirical study is partially based on the IEA Civic Education Study. Our general purpose is to know Spanish secondary compulsive education students' attitudes towards citizenship education before the implementation of a statutory specific subject in Spanish schools. The IEA questionnaire was partially adapted and validated to Spanish population, and it was applied to a sample of 342 secondary students from 3rd grade (i.e., the modal grade for 14/15-year-olds) from public schools in Madrid, Spain.

Introduction

Studying young people's attitudes and values has been a continual motive for worrying to the people involved in social sciences concerns. During the last decades, the analysis of aspects related to citizenship has been one of the most important mainstays of the international debate. Examples of this interest are the numerous reports and studies carried out in different parts of the world. (Bahmueller, 1994; Civics Expert Group, 1994; NAEP, 1996; Kemp, 1997; Crick, 1998; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Husfeldt, & Nikolova, 2002; Lee, & Fouts, 2005). Among the conclusions of these studies, the one that mentions the low index of political participation of the young people in democratic societies has generated much discussion, specially the declining levels of youth voting in general or national elections² despite that over the past two decades a subject called "Citizenship Education" has been introduced in the majority of the established democracies, to engage citizens in their own democracy (Print, 2007).

According to Print (2007), the problem might have a different colouring if the civic participation, shared with an education for democratic citizenship, takes into account other indicators as, for example, the active membership of groups associations, volunteering, community participation, contact print and broadcast media, protests, written petitions, internet engagement, etc. (pp.327-328). One thing is clear, as Crick (1998) pointed out, all modern societies need that their schools train students in citizenship competences so they may become active citizens in a representative democracy.

¹ This research was supported with funds from the Dirección General de Investigación Científica y Técnica, Spain (SEJ2007-64719/EDUC).

² The declining in democratic participation is more widespread than voting in elections (Putnam, 2000; Norris, 2002; O'Toole, 2003; O'Toole, Lister, Marsh, Jones, and McDonagh, 2003).

One of the most representative studies on civic attitudes with adolescents is the *Civic Education Study* by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) coordinated by Judith Torney-Purta (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Husfeldt, & Nikolova, 2002; Schulz and Sibberns, 2004). Nearly 90.000 14-year-old adolescents from 28 countries participated in the study. Questionnaires about content domains covering democracy and citizenship, national identity, and social cohesion and diversity were administered. The instrument consisted of five types of items measuring the students' knowledge of fundamental principles of democracy; their skills in interpreting political communication; their concepts of democracy and citizenship; their attitudes related to trust in institutions; their nation; opportunities for immigrants; the political rights of women; and their expectations for future participation in civic-related activities. Questionnaires were also administered to teachers and school principals of the standard population of students. The most relevant results can be sum up as follows: a) 14-year-olds in most countries have an understanding of essential democratic values and institutions; gender differences are minimal relating to civic knowledge but substantial in some attitudes (i.e. girls are more supportive than boys of the political rights of women and immigrants), b) apart from voting, students are sceptical about traditional forms of political engagement. However, many are open to other types of involvement in civic life (i.e. collecting money for social causes, participating in a non-violent protest march, etc.). Students with the most civic knowledge are those most likely to be receptive to participating in civic activities, c) young people are drawn to television as their source of news (i.e. watching news programs on television is positively associated with higher civic knowledge and intention to vote), d) home environment and educational resources have a considerable impact on civic knowledge. Schools that impel democratic practice are those schools most effective in promoting civic knowledge and engagement (IEA, 2008).

As far as we know, there is only one study in Spain exploring secondary students' concepts related to citizenship (Cabrera, Martín, Rodríguez y Espín, 2005), and as in Spain the compulsory status of the subject Citizenship Education, both in primary and secondary levels, was developed recently (Ley Orgánica de Educación, LOE, 2/2006, May 3) in the National Curriculum (RD 1631/2006, December 29th), we study secondary students' attitudes towards civic education based partially on some indicators of the *Civic Education Study* by the IEA (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Husfeldt, & Nikolova, 2002; Schulz and Sibberns, 2004).

Our general objective was to explore students' previous concepts and attitudes prior to the implementation of the subject in schools. Although by law the status of the subject is official, the context in its execution in the different Autonomous Communities within

Spain is quite special because each Community can determine when to start with the implementation.³ In the case of Madrid, the regional authorities have been in opposition of this subject (delaying as much as they can include it in the Regional Curriculum), and

³ At the moment, only seven Autonomous Communities of seventeen, have put into practice Citizenship Education in their schools

they have promoted the conscientious objection of parents who consider this subject might interfere with their constitutional right of teaching freedom. For that reason, we consider it especially interesting to know what the students of Madrid, who have not received education in Citizenship⁴ yet, think about some key aspects of Citizenship Education. It is important to point out that Spain has not participated in the *Civic Education Study*⁵.

Method

Participants

The participants were 342 secondary students (181 females, and 161 males) from 3rd grade (i.e., the modal grade for 14/15-year-olds) from 6 public schools in the area of Madrid, Spain. The average ages, in months, were 176 (SD = 9.3 months). A group of 42 participants (12.1%) of the total sample were non Spanish students. The schools sent a letter to the parents and/or guardians of the prospective participants in order to inform them about the study and to ask for their permission for the students' participation. All the participants were informed about the voluntary and confidential character of their participation. The data were collected in February 2007.

Measures

The IEA Civic Education Study Questionnaire (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Husfeldt, & Nikolova, 2002; Schulz and Sibberns, 2004) was partially adapted and validated to Spanish population referred to the next sections including 28 items expressed in a four point Likert Scale:

- F. Opportunities 1. Evaluates social perceptions about chances that members of groups like immigrants, girls or women, poor families, and rural people "really do have" regarding education and jobs.
- G. Opportunities 2. Includes statements referring to beliefs about the chances that members of groups like women, immigrants and antidemocratic groups "should have" in Spain. Six of the fourteen questions are included in the Scale for Positive Attitudes toward Women's Political and Economic Rights.
- H. Immigrants. This section covers eight statements about immigrants in Spain, and five statements related to Trust in Government-related Institutions.

⁴ Our intention is to compare, in a few years, these attitudes and opportunities perceptions with students that have already studied this subject.

⁵ Now Spain is participating in the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study from the IEA (ICCS 2009)

For describing the results we will use the same acronyms used in the IEA CIVED Technical Report (Schulz & Sibberns, 2004). Data were analyzed using SPSSPC v. 15 + statistical software. Reliability, factor analysis and *t* student analysis were conducted.

Specific Objectives

- 1) Assess the relation among different attitudes (towards gender equality, antidemocratic groups and immigration) voiced as wishes, and their real perception of opportunities (in relation to gender differences, economic level, ethnic group and urban/rural context).
- 2) Identify the differences between this perception of reality and the mentioned attitudes in relation to general personal variables (gender, economic level), as well as to other personal variables related to citizenship education (civic knowledge, number of books read at home, associations, etc.)

Results

To reach our first objective a factorial analysis was done with the purpose of a structure simplification of the 28 components to a lesser group of variables independent from one to another to be able to eliminate the initial information redundancy. The Bartlett's Sphere Test as well as the contrast ratio KMO (0.87) indicated the convenience of such analysis. Four factors were found:

1. Attitude towards immigrants (INMIG, $\alpha = .879$)
2. Perception of reality (PERCEP, $\alpha = .835$)
3. Attitude towards women equality (WOMR, $\alpha = .785$)
4. Attitude towards antidemocratic groups (ADGR, $\alpha = .797$)

Table 1 shows the reliability index (internal consistency) estimated from the selection of items with higher loading coefficients (>0.500) in each factor.

Table 1. Internal Consistency of the Four Dimensions (Cronbach- α)

Factor	INMIG	PERCEP	WOMR	ADGR
A	.879	.835	.785	.797
# items	11	6	6	4

The first attitudinal factor is concern with Immigration, assembled clearly the answers related to this group in sections G and H of IEA CIVED, with the labels of MINOR (Section G) an INMIG (Section H), as they are described in the CIVED Technical Report (Schulz & Sibberns, 2004). In this case we assumed both factors as INMIG. A high value in this factor is linked with a high commitment with desires of full integration of immigrants.

On the other hand, we found two additional factors. One related with attitude towards antidemocratic groups and another factor concerned with equal women's rights. Both factors corresponded directly with the WOMRT and ADGR factors described in the CIVED Technical Report. A high level in the WORMT factor is associated with desires of full accomplishment of Political and Labour Rights. In contrast, as it shows the IEA

CIVED Technical Report, a high mark in ADGR factor reflects a high rejection towards activities of antidemocratic groups.

Finally, the four factors in our study are related with perception of real opportunities of traditionally disadvantage groups (PERCEP). This factor grouped all section F items of CIVED study. A high level in this factor is associated to a high social perception of “real” equality of opportunities.

The internal structure of this PERCEP factor must be comment. The weights of the different items included in Section F of CIVED Study, oscillated between 0.763-0.685, and its intercorrelations between 0.34-0.57, showing a strong and unique factor with short variability between the weights of the different items concerned with different groups and different contexts. Among Spanish adolescents the perception of the existence of fewer opportunities for traditionally underprivileged people was relatively small, oscillating between means 1.88 and 2.2 in a Likert scale of four levels of agreement, as it shows Figure 1. It is necessary to specify that items 1 to 4 allude to educational opportunities and items 5 and 6 to work opportunities.

In short, it has been found that social perceptions of lesser real availability of opportunities can be explained in relation to only one underlying factor that we called it PERCEP.

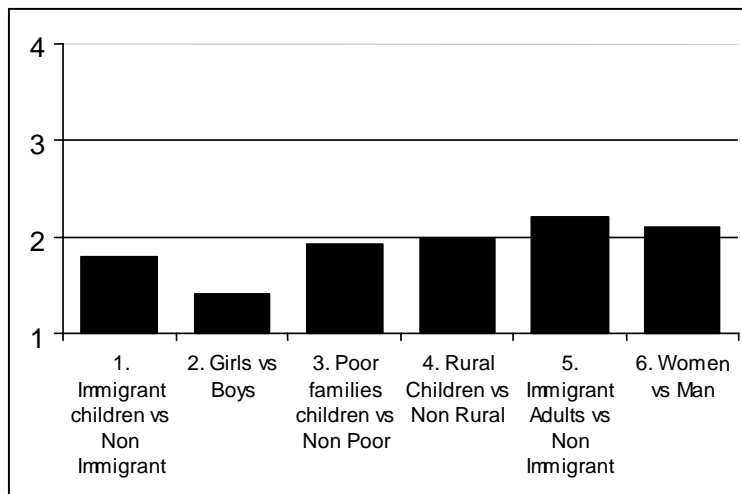


Figure 1: Perception of fewer opportunities. Mean of each item (Scale Values from 1 “Strongly disagree” to 4 “Strongly agree”)

In Table 2 appears the correlation matrix of these four factors, as it is showed in FA Oblimin Rotation Procedure. We also include a correlation data between the same factors found in CIVED Study to show the coincidence in the sign of correlation and the similarity of coefficients. The factorial structure of PERCEP is not quoted in CIVED.

The non significant correlation between INMIG and PERCEP factor, shows that the social perception of real opportunities of different groups is independent of the attitude towards immigration.

In contrast, this INMIG factor shows significant correlations with ADGR and WOMR, but in different directions. The highest values in attitudes towards a full integration of immigrants are associated, in some extent, with highest values in attitude towards the rights of women and with low rejection towards antidemocratic groups. On the other hand, it can be said that low commitments of woman political and labour rights are related with high rejection of antidemocratic groups and also related to a naïve perception about the total equality of opportunities in traditionally disadvantage groups. A low rejection of antidemocratic groups tends to be associated with a notion of equality in real opportunities for all groups and persons in educational and labour contexts.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix between Factors found in this study (In brackets correlation data in CIVED)

Factor	INMIG	WOMR	ADGR	PERCEP
INMIG		.337** (.63)	-.205** (-.14)	.108 (not quote)
WOMR			-.194** (-.29)	.159* (not quote)
ADGR				-.135* (not quote)
PERCEP				
** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).				
* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).				

To examine our second objective comparisons about the probable existence of significant differences of these 4 factors according to the group variables that appear in table 2 were done codified from the identification data of the CIVED questionnaire. All the variables that were not dichotomous were dichotomized, according to the Median value of each group, except for variables 2 and 9, for which the inferior third of the sample were compared (with a percentile equal or less than 33) to the upper third (with a percentile equal or higher than 66%).

Table 3. Mean differences between dichotomous (or dichotomized) groups in Attitudes Factors

	Immigration INMIG	Antidemocratic Group Rejection ADGRA	Woman Political and Labour Rights WOMRT	Perception of Opportunities PERCEP
Gender	Girls>Boys (p=.001)	Boys>Girls (p=.0001)	Girls>Boys (p=.001)	Girls>Boys (p=.06)
Civic Knowledge *	ns	Low>High (p=.092)	High>Low (p=.005)	High>Low (p=.015)
Ethnic Origin	Non Spanish> Spanish (p=.006)	ns	Spanish> Non Spanish (p=.011)	ns
Academic Achievement	ns	ns	Average>Low (p=.019)	Average>Low (p=.048)
Social Interaction (After Schools)	ns	ns	Lower Interaction > High (p=.007)	ns
Social Interaction (Weekend)	ns	ns	Lower Interaction > High (p=.005)	Lower Interaction > High (p=.009)
Associationism	ns	No>Yes (p=.048)	ns	ns
# Books in Home	More Books>Less (p=.073)	Less Books>More (p=.009)	More Books>Less (p=.002)	
Socio-cultural family level (studies)	ns	Lower>Higher (p=.038)	ns	ns
Economic family level (jobs) *	ns	ns	Higher>Lower (p=.082)	Higher>Lower (p=.080)
News Reading (in family)	ns	No>Yes (p=.073)	ns	ns
News Reading (by themselves)	ns	ns	ns	ns
TV time	ns	ns	ns	ns
TV News	ns	ns	ns	ns

* 33 Percentil vs. 66 Percentil

Table 3 shows the results of the contrast between the lower and the higher mean of the dichotomous (or dichotomized) groups in each variable (Student *t*-test). The table shows the levels of significance of the media differences in each factor, for each of the 14 variables of assembled, as well as the group that obtains the significantly higher punctuation.

In relation to the perception of real equality of opportunities factor (PERCEP), interesting results have been found. On one hand, and as we expected, groups formed by girls and adolescents with higher civic knowledge or higher academic performance levels, tend to perceive the real existence of inequalities among groups that were traditionally underprivileged. The same happens with adolescents that belong to a family with higher income level. On the contrary, it is really surprising that adolescents that say they have less social interaction in their free time (weekend) seem to perceive better these inequalities than those who share more free time with other mates.

Fewer differences among groups were found in the INMIG factor, provided that only the girls group and the group that report about the existence of more books at home, both show more desire of plenty immigrant integration. On this attitude they show the same

tendency than the immigrants themselves. It is relevant this greater favourable attitude towards immigration on the girls' side.

With regard to the factor of rejection to antidemocratic groups (ADGRA), we found more differences among groups. Thus, the fewer books at home, the less civic knowledge, not being a member of any kind of association, are associated to a great extent to that rejection. In the opposite, we found less rejection on the girls' side than on the boys'.

The most complicated scene is found with regard to the factor related to wishes of plenty acknowledgement and practice of women's political and labour rights (WORMT). We found significant differences between many grouping variables: in 8 of 14 comparisons. As it is predictable, the girls groups, the highest civic knowledge group, the highest academic level group and the "more books at home" group, all of them show significantly higher values in this factor. It is interesting that between Spaniards and Immigrants significant differences are also found, and even more in the case of variables related to social interaction.

Belonging to a family of low income level (estimated from the average of the income level of both parents) seems to be associated with a slightly higher perception ($p=0.080$) of the real opportunities of underprivileged groups and their plenty practice of women's rights.

It is interesting to point up that also the girls obtained a higher punctuation in the factor WOMRT, provided that it affects them directly and it is logic to assume a more sensitivity about it but, however, in the immigrant adolescents group it is not found a more favourable attitude towards women's rights as in the group of the natives. ANOVA analysis of both factors (gender X ethnic origin) it didn't find any effect of interaction.

Conclusions

Related to our first objective, it is necessary to point out that it has not been found a direct relation between social perception of real opportunities of groups in social disadvantage and the attitude factors studied. This real perception of opportunities seems to be explained by only one common and general factor that would allow to explain the different perceptions about the disadvantages of the underprivileged groups (both in school and labour contexts)

With respect to the second objective, we can affirm that from the 14 grouping variables studied, "gender" is the variable in which we found a major number of significant differences in this study of 4 attitudes factors. The girls obtained higher punctuations in the 4 factors, what it is useful as a direct indicator of a higher prosocial behaviour than boys.

Both the civic knowledge level and the ethnic origin, or the academic performance or the books at home, seem to be associated with higher punctuations in some of the attitude factors studied; moreover in everything related to plenty practice of women's labour and social rights, and, to a great extent, in everything related to opportunities perception, but these grouping variables don't produce so many differences as gender.

On the other hand, with variables related to Media we scarcely find differences in the grouping categories, except for the rejecting to antidemocratic groups factor that is higher for those who belong to families that often read newspapers. This will show that being in much contact with news resources does not seem to be associated to different attitudes in relation to the real perception of opportunities, the desire of more immigrant integration, the plenty practice of women's political and social rights, and the rejection of antidemocratic groups.

It has to be pointed up that the different analysis done on each attitude factor put aside the existence of interactions between the explained effects of being part of each grouping variables.

Our data show that, at least regarding to the four attitudes studied, there are important differences among the groups we studied. The most sensitivity of the girls seems to be more probable to apply to other groups as the immigrants'. But, in the case of the immigrants, this better perception of their own fewer opportunities does not seem to generalize to a more sensitivity towards women's rights. That is to say, immigrants as a group seem to perceive their situation of disadvantage, but not the women's disadvantage. This more sensitivity showed by the girls towards immigrants' rights, and in general in the pro-social attitude factors, has been emphasized in these studies (Torney-Purta, 1984, Torney-Purta et al. 2001).

As we can see, the general perspective is far of being simple, both in everything related to the attitudes we studied and the obtained results for each of the grouping variables.

Undoubtedly, wider studies about Spanish adolescents' civic knowledge are needed that may support some of the results obtained here; but other previous studies are in the same direction. Thus, the national surveys about Spanish young people's opinions and its situation (INJUVE, 2005), show a higher level of participation in social and political actions by women in all age intervals and in all kind of activities (signing a request as long as collecting funds for a social action). Other survey (INJUVE, 2006) also points out that the girls are more inclined to participate in volunteer actions than the boys. They are also more inclined to volunteer actions of much social contact with other people (support to young people, health or helping old people), while the boys are more interested in volunteer activities related to the environment protection. As Fülöp, Davis and Navarro (2008), we think that it is necessary to go deeply into this increasing debate about the role of gender in citizenship.

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