Teaching controversial issues in secondary education

Edited by
Delfín Ortega-Sánchez, Esther Sanz De La Cal,
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Teaching controversial issues in secondary education

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Editorial: Teaching controversial issues in secondary education

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Editorial on the Research Topic
Teaching controversial issues in secondary education

The teaching of controversial topics—understood as opposing viewpoints that generate rational disagreements—plays a crucial role in the development of critical awareness skills and the civic competencies necessary to address them effectively (Ibagón-Martín and Miralles, 2021). Their inclusion in the secondary education curriculum aims to foster the contrast of reasoned perspectives, enabling students to critically analyze sources and narratives while engaging with opposing beliefs, values, and interests. This pedagogical approach enhances elective rationality—that is, the ability to make informed and justified decisions in complex contexts—and promotes social engagement as an integral part of the democratic process (Ortega-Sánchez and Pagès, 2022). Therefore, it not only seeks to facilitate an understanding of social complexity but also to prepare students to anticipate, intervene in, and resolve the challenges that affect it. Addressing these topics offers numerous benefits, as supported by recent research (Meral et al., 2022). Among these, the development of critical-reflective thinking stands out, equipping students with the ability to contemplate real-world issues, assess diverse perspectives, and propose adaptable solutions. Furthermore, it fosters active citizenship by promoting participatory and responsible attitudes toward social issues and encourages students' willingness to engage in collective wellbeing. In this way, the teaching of controversial topics serves as a fundamental tool for understanding the complexity of social issues and for critically and responsibly contributing to their resolution.

For this teaching to be effective, it is essential to integrate it into the educational curriculum through curricular problematization or the didactic treatment of socially relevant problems, controversial issues, or socially significant questions. This requires that selected content be of particular social relevance, be connected to contemporary societal challenges and interests, and adopt a transdisciplinary approach. From this perspective, teacher education programs should, according to Ortega-Sánchez (2024), provide both the pedagogical and substantive knowledge necessary to navigate diverse interpretations and multiple perspectives. This would help to overcome tensions between traditional curricula and the inherent complexity of controversy, particularly in disciplines such as social studies (Jerome and Elwick, 2019). In this context, the present Research Topic focuses on the teaching of controversial topics as a means to educate critically engaged citizens who are reflective and committed to social justice. Its incorporation into education thus seeks to connect students with real-world problems and prepare them to participate actively in a democratic, inclusive, and equitable society.

The monograph *Teaching Controversial Issues in Secondary Education* brings together eight studies on the teaching of controversial topics and their curricular inclusion within the framework of education for critical and democratic citizenship. The research conducted by Ibagón and Miralles-Martínez, *The Conceptions of Spanish and Colombian Students Regarding Processes of Historical Reconciliation*, seeks to analyze the historical judgments of Spanish and Colombian students regarding historical reconciliation processes and their influence on the construction of their identity as well as their ethical and political stances. Their findings indicate that students tend to express ethically and politically correct judgments when the topics do not affect their national identity; however, they adopt more neutral or less critical positions when the issue is directly related to their own identity.

The evaluation of history teaching through the promotion of critical thinking skills is the central focus of the study by Miralles-Sánchez et al., *Design and Validation of Two Tools to Observe and Analyze History Lessons in Secondary Education*. This valuable contribution significantly addresses the longstanding lack of robust measurement instruments in the field of Social Sciences education. The study aims to describe the design and validation process of two observation and analysis instruments (*History Class Observation Tool* and focus groups) to enhance the teaching of historical thinking in secondary education. Both instruments were validated with high reliability and proved to be suitable and relevant for assessing history teaching and fostering critical thinking in secondary education.

In the field of gender inequalities in literary education, the research conducted by López-Valero et al., *Exploring Family Models and SDG Number Five in Picture Books: Dialogical Alternatives for Secondary Education*, examines how picture books can serve as key educational resources for understanding new family models and gender equality in secondary education. The findings highlight the existence of suitable picture books for addressing family diversity and gender equity in the classroom, as well as their potential for implementing dialogical teaching strategies that promote critical thinking and respect for diversity.

In this line of research, the contribution of Ortega-Sánchez et al., *Affective-Sexual and Gender Diversity in Spanish Education: A Systematic Literature Review*, presents the first systematic review of the scientific literature on affective-sexual and gender diversity education in Spain (2013–2023). Aimed at identifying advances, challenges, areas for improvement, and research gaps in this field, their findings highlight the factors influencing attitudes toward diversity in educational settings. The study reveals the persistence of hegemonic gender representations, the curricular invisibility of affective-sexual and gender diversity, and deficiencies in teacher training, among other dimensions. Although diversity education is associated with the promotion of democratic citizenship and social inclusion, it faces structural barriers such as LGBTIQ+phobia and the lack of specific educational protocols.

Within this field, the study by Marolla-Gajardo and Castellví-Mata, *Transform Hate Speech in Education from Gender Perspectives: Conceptions of Chilean Teachers Through a Case Study*, explores opportunities to teach students how to construct counter-narratives against hate speech and gender-based violence through the teaching of History and Social Studies. Their findings indicate that teachers perceive a growing presence of gender-based violence and hate speech in classrooms, express concern over the normalization of these attitudes, and acknowledge a lack of training and tools to address them effectively.

The influence of conceptual change pedagogy on students' attitudes and behaviors toward pluralism and associated rights in culturally sensitive contexts is the focus of the study by Rea-Ramirez et al., *Evaluating the Impact of Conceptual Change Pedagogy on Student Attitudes and Behaviors Toward Controversial Topics in Iraq*. Their results demonstrate the effectiveness of this pedagogical approach in fostering respect for diversity, the inclusion of religious and ethnic communities, gender equality, and the non-violent resolution of conflicts.

The study by Singh and Mukeredzi, *Teachers' Experiences of Continuous Professional Development for Citizenship and Social Cohesion in South Africa and Zimbabwe: Enhancing Capacity for Deliberative Democracies*, analyzes teachers' experiences in professional development programs focused on citizenship and social cohesion. Their contribution highlights a pervasive concern regarding professional training in these areas, revealing it to be fragmented and inconsistent, as well as the avoidance of political topics, whose content and competencies are often neglected.

Finally, the study by Fernández Tilve et al., *Emotional Competence Profile in Secondary School Counselors: Controversy or Need?*, evaluates the perceptions of school counselors in Galicia regarding the importance of emotional competencies in their professional practice. Despite confirming their interest in such competencies and acknowledging their impact on interpersonal relationship management and personal wellbeing, the study identifies the need to explicitly integrate these competencies into both initial and ongoing training for counselors to enhance the quality of secondary education.

Collectively, these eight studies define, through the lenses of historical thinking, gender equity, citizenship, and professional development, the objective of establishing a holistic educational model capable of integrating cognitive, ethical, political, social, affective, and emotional dimensions to address and engage with contemporary controversial issues and social problems. From this perspective, the monograph offers rigorous and multidimensional analyses of the teaching of controversial topics in secondary education, providing evidence of both the challenges and opportunities for their curricular and instructional inclusion. Through diverse methodological approaches and educational contexts, the selected studies emphasize the importance of ensuring a curriculum that is comprehensively oriented toward the development of critical, creative, and social thinking skills, as well as civic and emotional competencies, in both students and professional practice.

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Design and validation of two tools to observe and analyze history lessons in secondary education

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This article focuses on the validation of two data collection instruments, one is the *History Class Observation Tool* (HCOT) and the other is focus groups with students, trainee teachers and tutors from secondary school classrooms. The main objective of the study is to obtain evidence of validity of the two instruments to be used in research on the design, validation, implementation, and evaluation of training units. All this in order to improve the teaching-learning process of historical thinking skills in high school students with the aim of forming critical citizens. The initial set of 32 observable behaviours was reviewed by 9 judges, who rated each on a scale of 0 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree) in terms of appropriateness, importance, clarity of wording, and observability. As can be seen from the results, both instruments according to the agreement indices suggest that the items, overall, can be considered suitable and important, and observable in the case of the observation instrument, as well as having clarity of wording appropriate to the objectives of both, with high confidence on the part of the experts. If we compare it with similar studies that we have discussed previously, we can see how this validation process has been quite rigorous and novel following some guidelines set previously in certain studies.

Introduction

This article is part of the research "The teaching and learning of historical competences in baccalaureate: a challenge to achieve a critical and democratic citizenship" based on the design, validation, implementation, and evaluation of training units to improve the teaching-learning process of historical thinking skills in baccalaureate students aimed at the formation of critical citizens. The aim of this article is therefore to obtain evidence of the content validity of two data collection instruments, namely, the *History Class Observation Tool* (HCOT) and the focus groups with students, trainee teachers, and tutors in secondary school classrooms.

The development and implementation of observation instruments can be very useful to effectively design training programmes and evaluate classroom interventions. However, most of these instruments focus on teachers' generic competences rather than subject-specific competences. Therefore, some researchers have highlighted the importance of designing specific observation instruments in research on teacher education and competences (Desimone, 2009; Schoenfeld, 2013). However, to date, there are no validated and reliable observation instruments for analyzing teaching-learning processes in history. This is unfortunate, especially because, as Sáiz Serrano and Gómez Carrasco (2016) and Van Boxtel et al. (2020) warn, current teacher education programmes may not meet the needs of history teachers to achieve the objectives set out in the curricula. Observational instruments that assess the teaching strategies of history teachers could allow the identification of specific

needs and thus facilitate the design of teacher education plans and/or programmes, which is an important and novel contribution to the field of history teacher education.

As Huijgen et al. (2017) point out, the use of standardized observation instruments in history education research is an under-addressed topic, and, in particular, instruments for observing strategies for developing historical thinking in the classroom are not available. Since the 1970s, increasing attention to the assessment of teachers' generic competencies has led to the development of a variety of observation instruments that are widely used to assess primary and secondary education, such as the *Stallings Observe System* (Stallings and Kaskowitz, 1974), the *Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, 1996), the *International System for Teacher Observation and Feedback* (Teddlie et al., 2006), the *International Comparative Analysis of Learning and Teaching* (Van de Grift, 2007), and the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (Pianta et al., 2008, 2011), among others. Although some recently developed observation instruments focus on more specific teaching competences, such as classroom conversation (Mercer, 2010), project-based learning (Stearns et al., 2012), and learning and instructional reform (Sawada et al., 2002), only a few observation instruments focus on teachers' strategies in specific subjects, such as reading in English (Gertsen et al., 2005), content and language integrated learning (De Graaff et al., 2007), English language arts (Grossman et al., 2010), and mathematics teaching (Matsumura et al., 2008; Hill et al., 2012; Schoenfeld, 2013).

In terms of observation instruments used in history, we can first highlight the pioneering work of Nokes (2010), which focused on history teachers' literacy-related decisions about the types of texts they used and how students were taught to learn with these texts. In this study, two observation instruments were created: one to record the type of texts teachers used and one to record the activities and instruction they provided. To create the text log sheet, a group of experienced secondary school history teachers generated a list of common types of resources they might use in class, listing each as a row. To create the activity record sheet, the same group followed the same procedure with a list of common activities in history classrooms. Both forms provided space for adding texts or unplanned teaching activities. On both recording sheets, the 90-min class session was divided into six columns representing 15-min time units. Detailed instructions for the use of the recording sheets were drawn up, along with a description of what could and could not be ticked in a certain box. Moreover, it was analyzed in four phases. First, the frequency of use of various texts and didactic activities was calculated. In the second phase of the analysis, differences between teachers were investigated. Third, an analysis was carried out to see how each teacher used each type of text. Fourth, based on the frequency counts, teachers were placed on a spectrum showing the proportion of instruction on historical narrative and the amount of instructional time on historical processes (Nokes, 2010).

But a key observational instrument more closely related to historical thinking was created by Van Hover et al. (2012) and called the *Protocol for Assessing the Teaching of History* (PATH). This instrument provides a lens through which to observe secondary history teaching with the aim of providing a means for structured and focused observation with the goal of improving instruction, although it was not intended to provide guidelines on how to teach and learn history. PATH initiates the conversation about how to capture and explore specific teaching behaviors. In terms of validation, history educators (in the United States and the United Kingdom) and measurement experts reviewed the dimensions and provided critical comments and suggestions. At the same time, the authors watched hundreds of hours of videos of history teaching in secondary schools (Van Hover et al., 2012).

It is based on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System-Secondary (CLASS-S) (Pianta et al., 2008, 2011), an instrument developed to assess classroom quality. CLASS-S focuses on student-teacher interactions as the primary mechanism for student learning, and PATH uses the same structure and scoring/coding approach. Prior to using the tool, PATH coders are trained on each dimension of a rubric through a detailed manual that describes the specific teaching behaviors that make up each dimension. The high inference instrument is scored on a 7-point rating scale based on alignment with the anchor descriptions at Low (1, 2), Medium (3, 4, 5), and High (6, 7). In addition, to develop the discipline-specific dimensions, they first conducted an extensive review of the literature on history teaching, looking for work that could help identify observable teacher and student behaviors that contribute to student learning (Van Hover et al., 2012).

Six separate dimensions emerged from this literature review. Lesson components: Assesses the structure and flow of the history lesson, paying attention to objectives, assessment, and appropriate instructional approaches. In addition, it assesses attention to an overarching concept or framing a historical question. Comprehension: Assesses whether students understand the framework, key concepts, and content of the story and whether they are able to express this knowledge in different ways. Narrative: Assesses the structure and flow of a narrative and whether students understand chronology, context, cause and effect, and how narratives are constructed. Narrative is defined as any contemporary verbal or written account (could include texts, lectures, websites, or films). Interpretation: Assesses the level of attention paid to the fluid and controversial nature of the story, as well as consideration of (if appropriate to the lesson objectives) agency, meaning, diverse points of view, and recognition of perspective. Sources: Assesses the selection, accessibility, purpose, and level of analysis of historical sources used in the classroom and whether there is an opportunity for meaningful historical research. Historical practices: Assesses whether general instructional practices (writing, discussion, and simulations) are implemented in ways that are authentic and appropriate to the discipline (Van Hover et al., 2012).

Gestsdóttir et al. (2018) underline the fact that the PATH is still under development and, despite the importance of the definition of the six dimensions, none of them is adequate for providing an overview of teacher behavior that reinforces students' historical thinking and reasoning. Therefore, there is a clear need for a more comprehensive instrument that continues to focus on the specific components of history teaching. They developed and evaluated the Teach-HTR (Historical Thinking and Reasoning) observation instrument in four phases: (1) literature review,

(2) expert consultation, (3) first pilot of the instrument, and (4) second pilot of the instrument. This instrument examines lessons with high and low scores to explore the potential of the instrument to give teachers feedback on what they are already doing and where there is room for development (Gestsdóttir et al., 2018).

They define seven categories: *Communicating goals related to historical thinking and reasoning*; *Demonstrating historical thinking and reasoning*; *Using sources to support historical thinking and reasoning*; *Presenting multiple perspectives and interpretations*; *Explicit instructions on historical thinking and reasoning strategies*; *Engaging students in individual or group tasks that require historical thinking and reasoning*; and *Engaging students in a whole-class discussion that asks for historical thinking and reasoning* (Gestsdóttir et al., 2018).

Another key instrument is that of Huijgen et al. (2017), from which we have taken some categories for the observation instrument we have taken. They developed and tested a domain-specific observation instrument focusing on historical contextualization called the *Framework for Analyzing the Teaching of Historical Contextualization* (FAT-HC). Their instrument was based on four teaching strategies for historical contextualization. The first strategy is the reconstruction of the historical context. Students must have knowledge of the historical context, including knowledge of chronology and space, and of socio-economic, socio-cultural, and socio-political developments before they can successfully carry out historical contextualization. The second strategy is to enhance historical empathy, e.g., by selecting a historical agent relevant to the topic under study, focusing on the role and position of the historical agent in society, and promoting students' affective connections with the historical agent. The third strategy is to enhance the use of knowledge of the historical context. Students not only have to reconstruct a historical context but should also use it, for example, to determine causes and consequences, compare historical phenomena, and understand different perspectives on phenomena. The last strategy is to enhance the awareness of present-oriented perspectives among pupils when they examine the past. Without awareness of the differences between the past and the present, students are not able to compare, explain, or evaluate the past (Huijgen et al., 2019).

They modeled their instrument on Van de Grift (2007, 2009) *International Comparative Analysis of Learning and Teaching* (ICALT) observation instrument, resulting in a total list of 45 items in the first version of the FAT-HC. The aim of the study was to develop a reliable observation instrument and a scoring design to assess how history teachers promote historical contextualization in classrooms. Using expert panels, they found positive indicators of the content validity of the instrument, and by analyzing generality theory, they found indicators that the instrument is unidimensional, as it showed that a large proportion of the variance of the instrument was explained by differences between observed teachers and a small proportion of the variance was explained by differences in lessons and observers. They also organized two expert roundtables to ensure the face and content validity of the instrument. Finally, they trained 10 history students in the use of the observation instrument and observed a videotaped history lesson using the instrument, calculating Cronbach's alpha for their observation scores to explore the internal consistency of the instrument (Huijgen et al., 2017).

Finally, it is worth noting the more recent work of Oattes et al. (2022), who used three instruments to collect data. First, a quantitative *Pedagogical Content Knowledge* (PCK) checklist was used to record the frequency and quality with which particular PCK items were used, supplemented by qualitative data software to analyze fourteen key items from twelve paired lessons to distinguish differences and similarities in the language of instruction. They highlight that, for a quantitative analysis of history teachers' application of PCK, existing models of observation of teaching behavior are general education-oriented and appeared to be either too pedagogical-didactic in general (Van de Grift, 2007), too language-oriented (De Graaff et al., 2007), or too intellectually demanding for the younger learners involved. They concretised them to analyze the classroom teaching of history teachers using PCK using Monte-Sano and Budano's (2013) *Framing History*. Finally, they used the Protocol for the Assessment of Teaching History (PATH), designed by Van Hover et al. (2012), with the six categories it includes with the aim of improving instruction. In addition, for the quantitative part, the assessment scores of the 24 observed classes were analyzed using the SPSS software to calculate descriptive statistics, quantifying the differences between the applications of the PCK categories (Oattes et al., 2022).

In contrast to the instruments outlined earlier, the observation instrument we present here focuses on a unique but very important competence for history teachers, namely the fostering of historical thinking skills, which are embedded in history curricula worldwide (Van Drie and van Boxtel, 2008; Seixas and Morton, 2013). In previous studies, we have analyzed the impact of a training programme in the Geography and History specialization of the Master's Degree in Teacher Education on the motivation, satisfaction, and perception of learning of history students (Gómez Carrasco et al., 2020, 2021), and we have analyzed the teaching approaches of history teachers in Spain and their relationship with their views on the use of digital resources in a classroom (Gómez Carrasco et al., 2022). The data obtained through the observation instrument that we will design will allow us to complement these previous works, based on self-reported measures, with a micro-analytical perspective that provides greater richness and detail of what really happens in the classroom. Moreover, the combination of both techniques (systematic observation/self-report) will allow us to analyze the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their practices for the development of historical thinking skills, opening up a promising line of research as suggested by Huijgen et al. (2019).

Objective

The aim of this article is to obtain evidence of the content validity of two data collection instruments, namely, the *History Class Observation Tool* (HCOT) and the focus groups with students, trainee teachers, and tutors in secondary school classrooms. These instruments will be used in the research "The teaching and learning of historical competences in baccalaureate: a challenge to achieve a critical and democratic citizenship" based on the design, validation, implementation, and evaluation of training units to improve the teaching-learning process of historical thinking competences in baccalaureate students aimed at the formation of critical citizens. It is evaluative research with a mixed explanatory approach, a

quasi-experimental design with an experimental group and a control group, and the use of quantitative and qualitative methods and observation.

Methods

Research design

The initial set of 32 observable behaviors was reviewed by nine judges, who rated each on a scale of 0 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree) in terms of appropriateness, importance, clarity of wording, and observability. Similarly, the 41 questions posed for the focus groups were rated in terms of appropriateness, importance, and clarity of wording on a scale of agreement between 0 (do not agree at all) and 3 (strongly agree) by 8 expert judges. To analyze the agreement among the judges, Bangdiwala's weighted coefficients of agreement (B_N^W) (Bangdiwala, 1987) were calculated. Bangdiwala's B_N^W agreement index allows a graphical representation of the degree of agreement and provides a measure of the strength of agreement. In this representation, the black squares show observed agreement, while the gray areas represent partial agreement. The white area of each rectangle is the graphical representation of disagreement. Data were analyzed using the R software v. 4.0.4 (R Core Team, 2021).

Instruments

First, the *History Class Observation Tool* (HCOT) is composed of three dimensions, namely, Teaching Discourse (Verbal), Teaching Materials, and Student Activity. The first dimension, Teaching Discourse, is subdivided into five categories, namely, Exploration and Activation of Prior Knowledge; Contextualization; Interpretation; Historical Thinking; and Teaching Methods, Strategies, and Techniques. This gives a total of 38 items (see Annexes).

The focus groups consisted of interviews with students, trainee teachers, and secondary school tutors, with a total of 16, 9, and 16 questions, respectively (see Annexes).

These instruments will be used in the four phases of the project: pre-observation of the classroom (I), design of training units (II), implementation of training units (III), and evaluation of results (IV). Validation of these instruments would be essential to ensure that the data collected are accurate and reliable. One way to validate the instruments would be through review by experts in the field and pilot testing on a small group of participants to assess the effectiveness and relevance of the questions and observation procedures.

Results

Inter-judge agreement systematic history classroom observation instrument and focus groups

Table 1 shows Bangdiwala's strict (B_N) and weighted or partial agreement (B_N^W) coefficients (Bangdiwala, 1987; Friendly and Meyer, 2016) obtained for both the observation instrument and the focus groups. The BN coefficients (on the values of the matching matrix that is subjected to the concordance analysis) are calculated using the formula:

$$B_N = \frac{\sum n_{ii}^2}{\sum n_{i+} n_{+i}} = B_N$$
$$= \frac{\text{área de los cuadrados negros}}{\text{área total de los cuadrados de cada categoría}}$$

To account for partial agreement (B_N^W), since this is an ordinal rating scale, a weighted contribution of the off-diagonal cells is included as a function of the steps (separation) from the main diagonal. These partial agreements are included in the graph as squares of a lighter shade (gray squares) than the strict agreement (black squares). So a pattern of weights (weights w1, w2, ..., wb), according to the formula proposed by Fleiss and Cohen (1973), is applied to the shaded areas separated by b steps from the diagonal. Thus, the following formula is used to calculate the partial agreement coefficient (B_N^W):

$$B_N = 1 - \frac{\sum [n_{i+} n_{+i} - n_{ii}^2 - \sum w_b A_{bi}]}{\sum n_{i+} n_{+i}}$$

Where w_b represents the weighting as a function of distance from the diagonal and A_{bi} represents the area of the shaded areas with a separation b from the diagonal. As shown in Figure 1, the weighted Bangdiwala concordance coefficients (Bangdiwala, 1987) obtained were $B_N^W = 0.94$ (appropriateness); $B_N^W = 0.94$ (importance); $B_N^W = 0.92$ (clarity of wording); and $B_N^W = 0.88$ (observability). To interpret the agreement coefficients, Muñoz and Bangdiwala (1997) propose the following criteria: values below 0.09 indicate a poor level of agreement; between 0.09 and 0.25, poor agreement; between 0.25 and 0.49, moderate agreement; between 0.49 and 0.801, good agreement; and above 0.801, excellent agreement. The results obtained, according to this interpretation, suggest an excellent level of agreement, so that the items, overall, can be considered adequate, important, and observable. Moreover, the clarity of the wording, in the opinion of the experts, is adequate for observing the effectiveness of a formative programme for teaching history at the baccalaureate level based on epistemological and methodological changes.

To complete the analysis, we also calculated the coefficients of agreement AC2 (Table 1) proposed by Gwet (2008) to overcome the limitations and paradoxes of Cohen's Kappa coefficient (Cicchetti and Feinstein, 1990; Feinstien and Cicchetti, 1990), especially in situations where the degree of agreement is high. In this case, AC2 was used, as it allows for partial agreement in the case of ordinal data. The AC2 agreement indices obtained can be considered excellent for all the variables examined according to the criteria proposed by Muñoz and Bangdiwala (1997), or taking into consideration the proposal by Gwet (2021) to interpret the values obtained by calculating the probability of belonging to each of the intervals (Interval Membership Probability), the results of which are shown in Tables 2, 3, the cumulative probabilities for the AC2 agreement coefficient using the reference scale proposed by Muñoz and Bangdiwala (1997). Based on these results, the level of

TABLE 1 Bangdiwala's stringent (B_N) and weighted (B_N^W) agreement coefficients.

	Coefficient	Suitability	Importance	Clarity	Observability
Observation instrument	B_N	0.835	0.801	0.856	0.736
	B^W_N	0.942	0.944	0.918	0.880
	AC_2	0.950	0.946	0.943	0.843
Focus groups	B_N	0.798	0.777	0.646	–
	B^W_N	0.907	0.924	0.838	–
	AC_2	0.881	0.897	0.849	–

FIGURE 1
Results of the Bangdiwala judges agreement analysis—observation instrument.
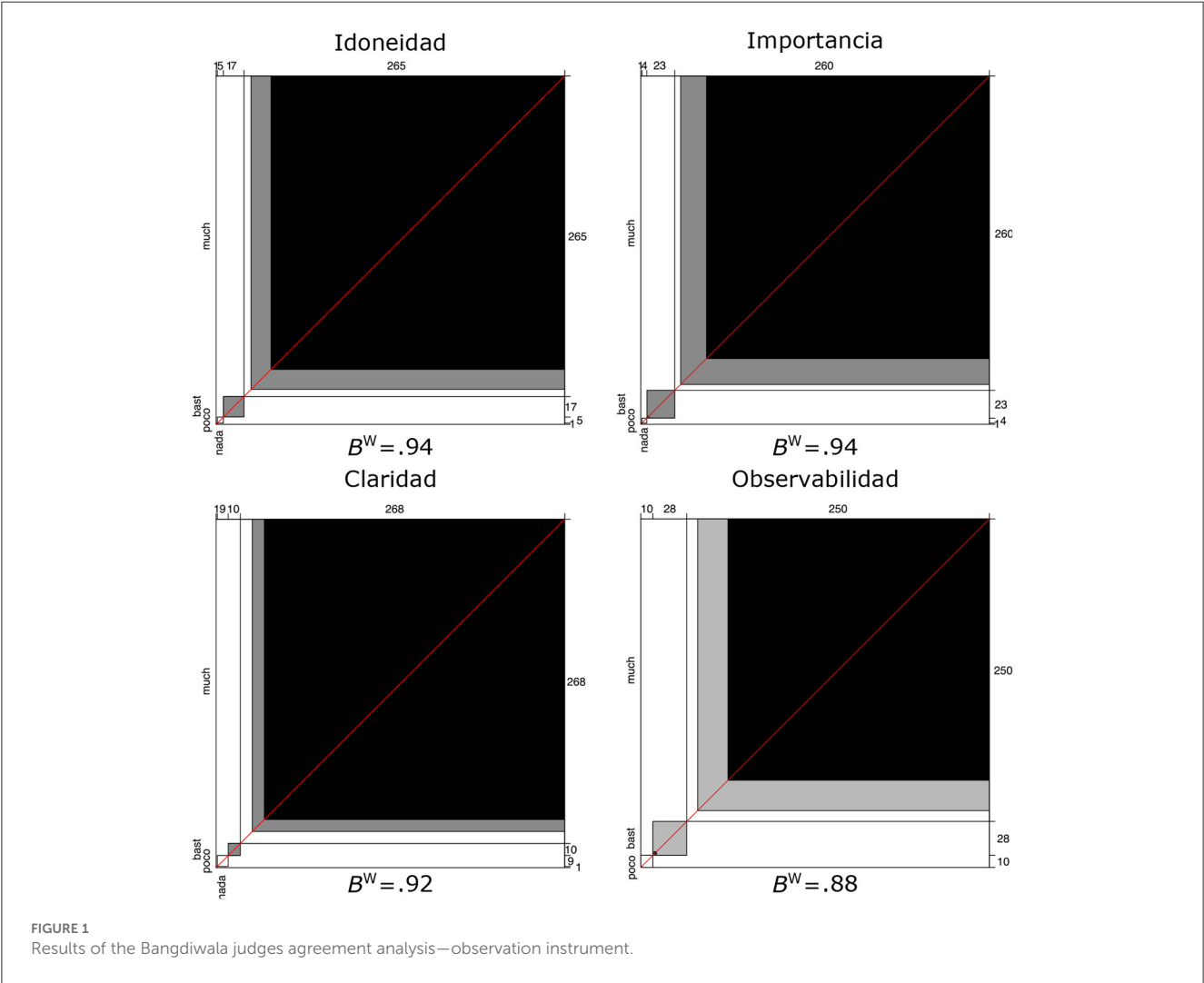
agreement obtained for the behaviors covered by the observation instrument can be considered excellent with a confidence of over 95% for all the variables analyzed. As far as the focus groups are concerned, agreement can be considered excellent for the appropriateness and relevance of the items asked, with more than 95% confidence, and good or better with 100% confidence for the clarity of the wording of the items.

Next, the responses of the same set of judges on their assessment of the questions posed to the focus groups were analyzed. In this case, as can be seen in Figure 2, the weighted

Bangdiwala agreement coefficients (Bangdiwala, 1987) obtained were: $B_N^W = 0.91$ (appropriateness); $B_N^W = 0.92$ (importance); $B_N^W = 0.84$ (clarity of wording). These indices of agreement suggest that the items, overall, can be considered suitable and important, and also that the clarity of the wording, in the opinion of the experts, is adequate to pose the questions proposed in the focus groups with the aim of identifying changes and permanence in teaching practices, in the role of the students, and in the learning of historical competences within the group, and to identify the role of the school

TABLE 2 Cumulative probabilities of membership in benchmark ranges—observation instrument.

Agreement values	Interpretation	Suitability 0.950 (SE = 0.011) 95% CI (0.927−0.974)	Importance 0.946 (SE = 0.012) 95% CI (0.922−0.970)	Clarity 0.943 (SE = 0.012) 95% CI (0.919−0.969)	Observability 0.842 (SE = 0.022) 95% CI (0.786−0.900)
(0.81−1)	Excellent	0.999	0.999	0.999	0.970
(0.49−0.81)	Good	1	1	1	1
(0.25−0.49)	Moderate	1	1	1	1
(0.09−0.25)	Scarce	1	1	1	1
(0.01−0.09)	Poor	1	1	1	1

TABLE 3 Cumulative probabilities of membership in benchmark ranges—focus groups.

Agreement values	Interpretation	Suitability 0.881 (SE = 0.024) 95% CI (0.832−0.930)	Importance 0.897 (SE = 0.018) 95% CI (0.860−0.934)	Clarity 0.849 (SE = 0.026) 95% CI (0.797−0.903)
(0.81−1)	Excellent	0.998	0.999	0.933
(0.49−0.81)	Good	0.999	1	1
(0.25−0.49)	Moderate	1	1	1
(0.09−0.25)	Scarce	1	1	1
(0.01−0.09)	Poor	1	1	1

context, the students, and the teaching staff in the results of the experimentation.

Subsequently, the *Content Validity Ratio* (CVR) (Lawshe, 1975) was calculated for each of the behaviors included in the observation instrument and for each of the focus group questions, for each of the variables analyzed (appropriateness, importance, clarity of wording, and observability), and the *Content Validity Index* (CVI) (Lawshe, 1975) for the set of items.

This is an indicator of inter-judge agreement that can take values between −1 (total disagreement) and +1 (total agreement), so that the CVR value is negative if agreement occurs with less than half of the judges; CVR is zero if there is exactly half agreement among the expert judges; and CVR is positive if more than half of the judges agree on the item rating. For the interpretation of the results with nine judges, Ayre and Scally (2014) propose the critical value of CVR = 0.778 ($p = 0.020$), which assumes that at least eight of the nine judges agree on the item rating and exceeds the probability of agreement by chance effect at a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$), while for eight judges, the critical value of CVR proposed by these authors is 0.750 ($p = 0.035$).

For the calculation of the CVR values, the ratings of the judges who selected options 2 (quite a lot) and 3 (a lot) were grouped together, and the ratios were calculated using the formula proposed by Lawshe (1975):

$$RVC = \frac{n_e - \left(\frac{N}{2}\right)}{\left(\frac{N}{2}\right)}$$

where n_e is equal to the number of judges who consider the item to be quite or very adequate, important, clear, or observable, and N is the total number of judges. Finally, the Content Validity Index (CVI) was obtained by calculating the average content validity (CVR) of each of the items in each of the variables considered globally.

With regard to the behaviors present in the observation instrument, the RVC values ranged from 0.78 to 1 for the four variables considered (appropriateness, importance, clarity of wording, and observability), so that all exceeded the critical RVC value proposed by Ayre and Scally (2014) of 0.778 for nine judges. The overall CVI for the set of behaviors was 0.96 (appropriateness), 0.97 (importance), 0.93 (clarity), and 0.93 (observability).

Regarding the questions posed for the focus groups, the RVC values for all items exceeded the critical value of 0.750 ($p = 0.035$), except for item 14 of the focus group of active teachers in suitability (RVC = 0.5) and clarity (RVC = 0.5) (14. Why do you think that these practices are not reproduced on a daily basis in the classroom? They are not useful/lack of training/school culture/lack of time associated with excessive content, class hours, ratios, bureaucracy, time to prepare classes…?); item 16 of the focus group for students in suitability (RVC = 0.5) (16.5) (16. Do you think that this way of working with history helps us to be better citizens?); item 6 of the focus group of in-service teachers on clarity (RVC 0.5) (6. Do you consider that this methodology brings about changes in the richness of student learning? What kind of changes?); and item 8 of the focus group of in-service teachers on clarity (RVC 0.25) (8. In what way could you have acted to achieve better results in order to achieve better results in the development of historical competences by the
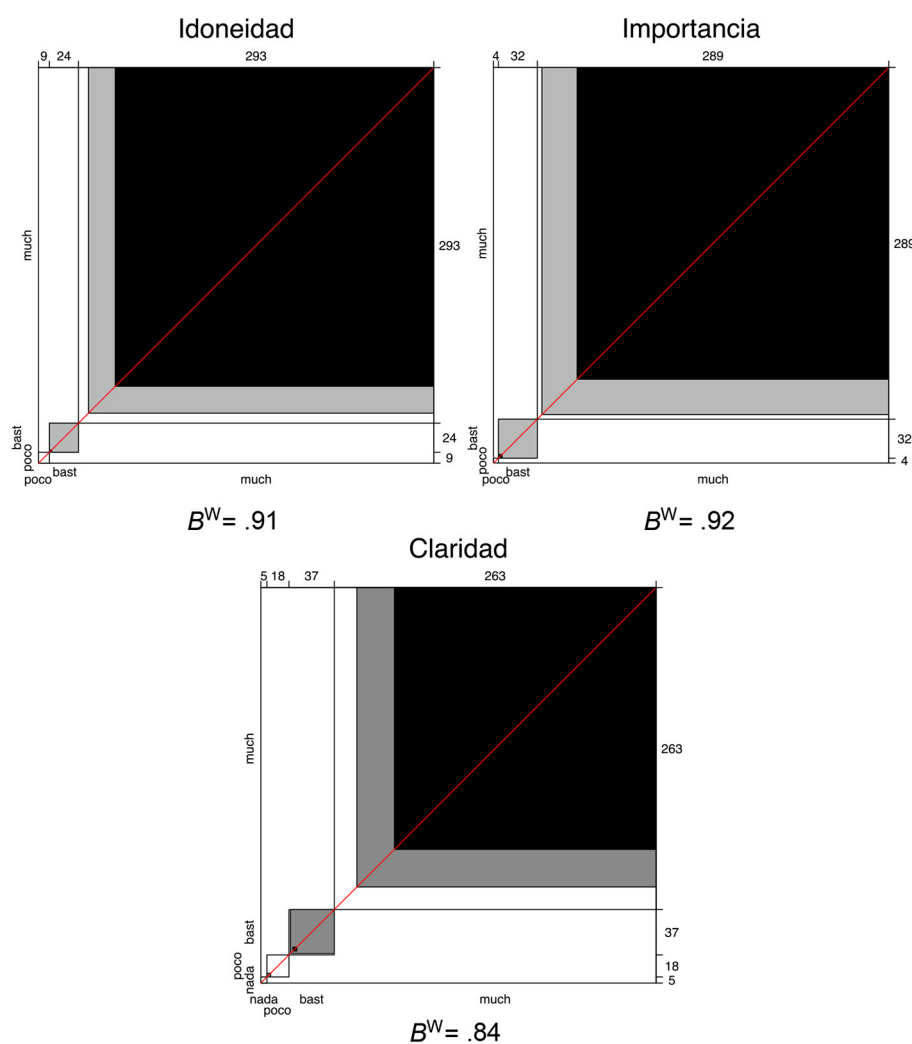
FIGURE 2
Results of the Bangdiwala judges agreement analysis—focus groups.

students?). The CVI values for the set of items proposed for the focus groups were 0.93 (appropriateness), 0.96 (importance) and 0.84 (clarity).

In light of these results, the judges' qualitative assessments of the items noted that did not pass the content validity ratio threshold were reviewed. With regard to the clarity of the wording of item 8 of the in-service teacher focus group, an error in the wording was identified and corrected ("to achieve better results to achieve better results"). Four of the eight judges identified this error and pointed it out in their comments.

In relation to item 6 of the focus group of active teachers in clarity (6. Do you think that this methodology brings changes in the richness of student learning? What kind of changes?), the experts pointed out that it would be convenient to explain what is considered "richness" (e.g., j4—"I find the expression 'richness of learning' abstract and somewhat confusing"; j1—"What is considered as richness?"). Regarding item 16 of the student focus group (16. Do you think that this way of working with history helps you to be a better citizen?), the judges

expressed the possibility that students may have difficulties in understanding the meaning of the question (e.g., j1—"In what sense?"; j8—it would be convenient to "Ask about what they consider to be 'good' or 'better' citizens". j2—"Formulation somewhat misleading because of the comparison between better and worse"; j5—"I would speak of 'citizens' and include at the end the question 'Why?' I consider it essential that they explain the causes in order to check what they understand by citizenship and what aspects they focus on, as there may be wide divergences").

Why do you think that these practices are not reproduced on a day-to-day basis in the classroom? They are not useful/lack of training/school culture/lack of time associated with excessive content, class hours, ratios, bureaucracy, time to prepare classes ...? The experts considered that it would be appropriate to ask two different questions (e.g., j1—"Question too broad. It would be convenient to divide it in order to cover everything in the answers; otherwise, it is possible that some aspects are left out"; j3—"I would ask two different questions") or that it is a "biased" question (e.g.,

j7—"It is a biased question: it conditions that they see that they do not apply, there will be some who apply some strategies in this respect, or at least that they identify themselves and have had experiences in this respect"). Therefore, it seems appropriate to revise the wording.

Discussion and conclusion

As can be seen from the results, both instruments, according to the agreement indices, suggest that the items, overall, can be considered suitable, important, and observable in the case of the observation instrument, as well as having clarity of wording appropriate to the objectives of both, with high confidence on the part of the experts. Regarding the behaviors present in the observation instrument, the RVC values ranged between 0.78 and 1 for the four variables considered (appropriateness, importance, clarity of wording, and observability). About the questions posed for the focus groups, the RVC values for all the items exceeded the critical value of 0.750 ($p = 0.035$), except for those indicated above, which would be the lines of improvement of the research.

If we compare it with similar studies that we have discussed previously, we can see how this validation process has been quite rigorous and novel, following some guidelines set previously in certain studies. It should be noted that, due to the specificity of history education, the use of observation instruments has been infrequent and underestimated (Van Hover et al., 2012). However, this trend is beginning to change, as we can see an evolution from a purely qualitative observational approach to a mixed approach such as ours, although the evolution is not chronological.

Similarities can be found in work such as that of van Hover, Hicks, and Cotton (PATH), which used history educators and measurement experts to review the dimensions, providing critical comments and suggestions, while also using the resource of viewing hundreds of hours of videos of history teaching in secondary schools (Van Hover et al., 2012). Also noteworthy is the Teach-HTR observation instrument by Gestsdóttir et al. (2018), who reviewed literature, consulted experts, and conducted two pilots of the instrument for validation. Huijgen et al.'s instrument in the FAT-HC, a major reference for the development of our observation instrument, took this a step further by using expert panels to find positive indicators of the content validity of the instrument, as well as analyzing the theory of generality to have indicators that the instrument is unidimensional. They also organized two expert roundtables to ensure the face and content validity of the instrument, and, finally, they trained 10 History students in the use of the observation instrument and observed a videotaped History class using it, calculating Cronbach's alpha for their observation scores in order to explore the internal consistency of the instrument (Huijgen et al., 2017).

The final objective is to design, validate, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of training units to improve the teaching-learning process of historical thinking skills in Baccalaureate students in order to train critical citizens. It should be remembered that historical thinking is a didactic approach that aims to teach students to *think historically* by deploying different strategies and

skills to analyze and respond to different historical questions and to understand the past in a more complex way. To learn about history, we must resort to the use of skills focused on reflection, analysis, argumentation, and interpretation of the past. Such skills are not innate; therefore, they must be acquired and developed in the classroom (Chapman, 2011; Gómez Carrasco et al., 2014). Seixas and Morton (2013) state that historical thinking is a creative process developed by historians to generate new historical narratives through the analysis of sources from the past. These competences and strategies are related to the search for, selection, and treatment of historical sources, empathy, multi-causal explanation, and historical perspective (Peck and Seixas, 2008; Seixas and Morton, 2013).

The importance of teaching historical thinking in the classroom lies in the fact that historical thinking does not develop naturally but needs explicit teaching (Wineburg, 2001). The central core of this theoretical approach is occupied by a small group of methodological concepts that identify the historian's own ways of working. These concepts are variable and do not form a closed and invariable list, but each author attaches greater importance to certain aspects. Some of the historian's most characteristic ways of working include the use of sources and evidence, changes and continuities, empathy and historical contextualization, causes and consequences, and narratives and interpretations. These concepts of historical thinking play a transcendental role in the assessment framework of historical competences (Santiesteban Fernández, 2010; Gómez Carrasco et al., 2017).

Understanding history involves understanding these categories and processes of historical thought. The assessment model for Geography and History should encourage students to reflect on historical content. It is necessary to establish a cognitive model for learning history in order to correctly assess historical knowledge (Carretero and López, 2009; Carretero and Van Alphen, 2014). This cognitive model that we are going to develop must have appropriate techniques and instruments for assessing first- and second-order historical content and skills (Domínguez Castillo, 2015). This requires the collaboration of various social and human disciplines, such as history, art, geography, and literature.

In terms of identifying teaching models, it is worth highlighting the line of research developed by Trigwell and Prosser (2004) based on interviews with teachers and a questionnaire called the Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI) (Trigwell et al., 2005). They identified four different conceptions of teaching and three methodologies, establishing five approaches that can be grouped into three broad models or ways of teaching. In the first model, the role of the teacher is greater, since the importance lies in the transmission of content, students assume a passive role, limiting themselves to receiving and memorizing the knowledge transmitted by teachers, thus establishing a unidirectional relationship without considering their experience, previous knowledge, characteristics, or context. The most commonly used methodological strategy is the master class, and the main resources used are the textbook and class notes. In addition, a final examination of the learning contents is usually established (Galvis, 2007; Castejón et al., 2009; Hernández et al., 2012; Guerrero-Romera et al., 2022).

On the other hand, there is learner-centered teaching, which differs from the previous one in that the teacher's intention is to provoke conceptual change and intellectual growth in the learner. Thus, the teacher acts as a guide, guiding students in the process of constructing their own knowledge, encouraging their conceptions, and providing them with opportunities to interact, debate, investigate, and reflect. The aim of this model is for students to learn content by questioning and reflecting on it. The strategies employed are active and inquiry-based. In contrast to the previous model, which encouraged competitiveness and individualism, this approach favors interaction and cooperation between the individuals involved in the teaching and learning process and prioritizes continuous assessment (Vermunt and Verloop, 1999; Kember and Kwan, 2000; Trigwell et al., 2005; Henze and van Driel, 2011). Finally, there is a third, intermediate model based on teacher-student interaction, although it should be noted that there is a hierarchical relationship between the different approaches, with each including elements of the previous one (Guerrero-Romera et al., 2022).

To conclude, this proposal represents a significant improvement compared to the traditional methods used in social science teaching, as it seeks to develop essential skills for critical thinking and citizenship training, and its effectiveness is also evaluated through rigorous methods and a scientific approach. To develop the competences associated with historical thinking, the introduction of the historian's method and techniques and historical awareness are key elements (Domínguez Castillo, 2015). This requires a methodological change in the approach to social sciences classes with the use of a greater variety of techniques beyond the mere expository master class. All of this is to encourage a critical spirit and autonomous learning, and therefore the formation of critical and independent citizens who know how to judge for themselves the vicissitudes that civic life in a democracy demands of them.

There is still an overuse of textbooks and the expository strategy by teachers who teach history (Sobejano and Torres, 2009; Valls and López, 2011; López and Valls, 2012; Carretero and Van Alphen, 2014; Colomer et al., 2018). However, more and more teachers in Spain are in favor of a teaching model in which the student acquires a greater role through the implementation of innovative resources (heritage, written and oral sources, new technologies) and educational strategies that encourage the active participation of students in the teaching and learning process (project-based learning, gamification, and flipped classroom) (Olmos, 2017; Gómez et al., 2018; Gómez Carrasco et al., 2020; Sánchez et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to be aware of developments in the incorporation of competency-based social sciences teaching and a learner-centered model at all levels of education. For this reason, it is necessary to analyze the teaching profiles of history, geography, and art history teachers by means of observation instruments that make it possible to describe and analyze their classroom practices (Guerrero-Romera et al., 2022).

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding authors.

Ethics statement

Ethical issues were carefully contemplated in this study. Participants were informed about the objectives and procedures of the study and how their rights were going to be protected. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous.

Author contributions

CG-C and JR-M conceived and designed the project and doctoral thesis of which this study is part, have made methodology, validation, data collection, and formal analysis. PM-S and JR-M have co-written the manuscript and contributed to revisions, having read and approved the submitted manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2023.1213358/full#supplementary-material

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Corrigendum: Design and validation of two tools to observe and analyze history lessons in secondary education

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A corrigendum on

Design and validation of two tools to observe and analyze history lessons in secondary education

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In the published article, there was an error in the author list order. The corrected author list appears below.

Pedro Miralles-Sánchez, Cosme J. Gómez-Carrasco and Jairo Rodríguez-Medina.

In the published article there was an error in the Correspondence section. The following authors are incorrectly listed in the section; Gómez-Carrasco and Jairo Rodríguez-Medina. The corrected Correspondence section is as follows "Pedro Miralles-Sánchez, pedrmir98@gmail.com".

The authors apologize for these errors and state that this does not change the scientific conclusions of the article in any way. The original article has been updated.

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Transform hate speech in education from gender perspectives. Conceptions of Chilean teachers through a case study

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The research presented is positioned under the issue of hate speech prevalent in society, particularly its emergence in schools. In recent years, we have witnessed the presence of a phenomenon that is not new; however, it poses challenges to the teaching and learning processes for educators. Specifically, feminist movements and those advocating for diversity and nonconformity have triggered a strong response filled with violent and discriminatory messages and actions. To obtain some answers to this challenge, a case study was conducted with 6 teachers from various schools in Chile. Semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore, from their perspectives, aspects such as the origins of hate speech, the possibilities and proposals that teachers have for creating counter-narratives against hate, the effects of hate messages from gender perspectives in their teaching practices, and finally, the processes carried out with students. Among the main conclusions, it can be mentioned that there is a violent disruption that deepens gender inequalities, a situation that is becoming normalized and is of great concern for educators. Teachers express that they lack the tools and competencies to address these problems, other than continuing with the treatment of official content.

KEYWORDS

initial teacher education, gender, hate speech, inequality, social studies education

1. Introduction

In recent years, various feminist movements have emerged in society advocating for diversity and the recognition of gender dissidence. However, hate speech has also emerged that promotes traditional and conservative practices that marginalize, violate, and exclude those who stand for diversity. Education, particularly the teaching of history and social studies, has not been immune to this problem. Teachers face complex challenges when confronting this type of language in their practice. Therefore, a qualitative case study offers teachers suggestions for addressing these classroom challenges. Six teachers were interviewed at different stages and emphasized the importance of teacher training, the influence of social media, and the development of counter-hate narratives through work with history and social studies content. The results show that teachers view these speeches as complex situations that abruptly interrupt

their teaching and that they have limited resources to manage them. However, numerous opportunities exist to work toward eliminating inequalities and spaces of violence and marginalization while adopting a gendered perspective.

2. Theoretical framework

The spread of hate messages and narratives is not new in society or history. As Izquierdo Grau (2019) notes, aspects such as discrimination, violence, and marginalization, while not new, are articulated in contemporary hate speech. Emcke (2017) argues that it is complex to understand the return of narratives and actions that spread hate and violence, something that happened in the past and was thought not to happen again after all the traumatic experiences, such as the Holocaust and dictatorships. Thus, Waldron (2012) explains that hate speech aims to attack human rights and dignity. The Council of Europe (2017) defines hate speech as follows:

> "The hate speech covers all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, antisemitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, and migrants and people of immigrant origin" (p. 31).

Parekh (2012) states that three characteristics can describe hate speech:

- Hate speech focuses on a particular group of people with one or more common characteristics.
- Various "undesirable" characteristics and traits are given, which are often false.
- The hated group is marginalized and suppressed. Attempts are made to ensure that they are not part of society, as their presence is perceived as violent, hostile, and unpleasant.

One of the problems society faces in the presence of hate speech is related to the "spectacle" created around the victims. The more violent and unusual the narrative or action is, the more approval and reproduction the "spectacle" receives (Emcke, 2017). As a result, groups of people with common characteristics, such as a particular culture and religion, a particular skin color, and a sexual, gender, or identity orientation that differs from the traditional one, generally receive the most hate speech (Gagliardone et al., 2015; Ortega-Sánchez et al., 2021a). Therefore, a large part of the population is in a vulnerable physical and psychological state that limits their capacities and competencies to participate in eliminating inequalities of which they are a part (Arroyo et al., 2018; Apolo et al., 2019).

Similarly, Santisteban (2017) and Arroyo et al. (2018) argue that hate speech and narratives construct an "enemy image" around the hated group. They blame the community for everything we disagree with and interpret their actions as threats to our values, identity, and way of life. The authors mentioned an earlier claim that among the characteristics that are constructed around the hated group, the following could be mentioned: (a) distrust of the group targeted by the hate narratives; (b) blaming them for everything that is not agreed upon or dislikes; (c) all actions of the group have the intention of harming the others; (d) the hated group wants to destroy our way of life; (e) everything good and evil for the group is harmful to the others; (f) empathy towards the people targeted by the hate narratives is denied. Sponholz (2016) adds that hate speech focuses on attacking individuals and communities, not their ideas and values.

Social media and traditional media are the main mechanisms for spreading such narratives. The phenomenon of globalization contributes to the rapid spread of these messages, affecting countless spaces and people (Djuric et al., 2015). This rapid spread makes dealing with hate speech a social and controversial issue, as we need to understand what is happening in classrooms concerning the presence of such speech (Barendt, 2019). The presence and massiveness of the Internet have led to the emergence of new communication spaces where hateful comments and speech that are broadcast and disseminated find an audience that instantly massifies them immediately (Gagliardone et al., 2015). These communication spaces are exacerbated by hate speech spreading anonymously and shared by communities as a common narrative. Such hate stories are accompanied by a lack of identity online. The sense of impunity, therefore, motivates them to continue their attacks (Gagliardone et al., 2015; Castellví et al., 2022).

According to Ballbé Martínez et al. (2021), an effective strategy is addressing social issues based on spreading hate speech. This strategy must necessarily be combined with education for critical and participatory citizenship. Lilley et al. (2017) note that civic education should teach ways of exploring that enable students to understand the world's challenges from a socially responsible, critical, and ethically engaged perspective. Benejam (2002) states that social sciences instruction should focus on developing social thinking while also performing a counter-socializing task by attempting to uncover the ideological background of any social action. Pagès and Santisteban (2014), on the other hand, state that citizenship education should help provide critical analysis and reflection skills to achieve social justice by eliminating inequalities between genders, ethnicities, and classes. As Ortega-Sánchez et al. (2021b) state, citizenship is now linked to the global dissemination of information, which means that what is expressed can instantly reach different places and spaces. Ross and Vinson (2012) note that developing critical thinking should enable students to address complex and real social problems they face.

Lewison et al. (2002) suggest that four dimensions should guide citizenship education: (a) question what is established; (b) question the diversity of positions; (c) focus on sociopolitical issues; and d) promote social justice. Starting with citizenship, following Tuck and Silverman (2016), the priority must be on constructing counter-narratives to hate that promote the fight against extremism. The focus must be on human rights and social justice. Santisteban et al. (2018) explain that hate narratives can be addressed in teaching and learning social sciences through the following ideas: (a) identifying social conflicts, (b) identifying the context in which the narratives emerge, (c) identifying the actors involved, (d) reflecting on the arguments made, (e) interpreting the emotions associated with the narratives, (f) promoting empathy, (g) promoting the protection and preservation of human rights over each argument.

According to Waldron (2012), hate speech impairs human dignity and prevents people from developing recognition and diverse, plural, and particular identities outside the traditional norm. Denying identities and dissident groups on gendered grounds results in dehumanization that justifies the perpetration of violence and human

rights violations (Osler, 2015; Castellví et al., 2022). Butler (2004) and Sales Gelabert (2015) agree that excluding people and their identities are directly linked to violence. As Sales Gelabert (2015) states:

> "dehumanization allows, enables, and legitimizes the exercise of violence against dehumanized groups or groups excluded from the definition of the human" (p. 57).

Following Massip Sabater et al. (2021), citizenship education for constructing hate-counter-narratives can focus on Castellví et al.'s (2019) proposal. The author proposes three phases for developing critical thinking: (a) analysis and reflection on social problems and the information offered; (b) proposal of criteria based on social knowledge and the protection of democracy; and (c) participation in the defense of social justice. Ortega-Sánchez et al. (2021a) assert that, given the violence and discrimination that occur in society, it is urgent to include processes of reflection and questioning in the teaching of social sciences. This reflection and questioning would not be possible if teacher education programs did not include in their curricula and syllabi content and processes that enable teachers to incorporate such issues into teaching and learning. Ranieri (2016) notes that education is a fundamental pillar in constructing counter-narratives of hate and creating a consciousness that contributes to its eradication.

Gagliardone et al. (2015) and Osler (2015) agree that initial teacher education is essential to provide future teachers with the skills they need to work toward social change in the face of gender inequities. Gagliardone et al. (2015) argue that building counter-narratives of hate should focus on (a) critical media literacy and reflection on information, (b) global and digital citizenship education, and (c) the development of critical thinking. As Ortega-Sánchez et al. (2021b) add, teacher education must provide tools to interpret social reality and promote participation in problematic contexts, such as where hate speech is disseminated. This tool is not unproblematic, as Castellví et al. (2019) assert that emotions and feelings permeate our relationships. Indeed, much hate speech does not respond to coherent structures but reflects irrationality and is largely not a valid category for social analysis. Nevertheless, research shows that emotional literacy is generally not part of teacher education in the social sciences (Yuste Munté, 2017).

2.1. Gender perspectives, teacher training, and theoretical advancements

In social sciences education, studies by Díez Bedmar (2022), García Luque and Peinado (2015), García Luque and de la Cruz (2019), Marolla Gajardo et al. (2021), Marolla (2019a,b), and Ortega-Sánchez et al. (2021a) have focused on investigating teaching and learning processes from gender perspectives. In general, they all agree that even educational processes working from history are framed in the reproduction of patriarchal hegemonic social structures that highlight male protagonism over the inclusion of diversity (García Luque and Peinado 2015; García Luque and de la Cruz, 2019). Balteiro and Roig-Marín (2015) and Díaz de Greñu and Anguita (2017) agree that the persistence of androcentric structures in the teaching of history and social sciences, among other factors, causes the private and daily life to be undervalued and considered little relevant as knowledge of the past and present society. This undermines the

protagonism of public activities such as politics, war, and the economy, where powerful men stand out (Crocco, 2008). Conversely, traditionally private life has been dominated by women and girls (Díez Bedmar, 2022).

Learning history and social sciences from gender perspectives implies a change in the epistemological understanding under which we understand knowledge structures (Ortega-Sánchez and Olmos Vila, 2019). For this, critical thinking must be a fundamental objective in learning processes. This would mean, that students can analyze and understand the sources and purposes of historical content and knowledge. That is, the absence and ignorance we have about the actions, narratives, and history of sexual and gender dissidences, does not obey the lack of sources or information, but rather a political and ideological decision, from patriarchal structures, about who we grant a past and present history (Wiley et al., 2014).

It is essential that teacher training programs, therefore, undergo a reformulation that allows them to provide the necessary competencies, tools, and knowledge to future teachers so that they not only include new narratives and protagonists (Heras-Sevilla et al., 2021; Marolla Gajardo et al., 2021), but also be agents that contribute to social transformation in terms of justice (Santisteban, 2017; Massip Sabater and Castellví Mata, 2019). Muzzi et al. (2019) propose that the inclusion of women, dissidences, and other marginalized and silenced groups implies a deconstruction of hegemonic male normalcy patterns in favor of the systematic construction of a new normality where everyone who has been silenced by tradition has a place. Fontana (2002) says that it is imperative to overcome the excessive protagonism of dominant, powerful, and white men in developed societies, by constructing new historiographies that recognize the historical experiences of all those who have been invisibilized. Thus, educational spaces, in general, are one of the most affected fronts by marginalization situations, since it is where social and cultural patterns are produced and reproduced that will then be transmitted to society (García Luque and de la Cruz, 2017, 2019; de la Cruz et al., 2019).

If new identities are included in the teaching and learning processes, it is necessary to question who the protagonists will be included in the new narratives and, in particular, which type of people will be targeted to promote a teaching and learning towards diversity (Massip Sabater and Castellví Mata, 2019). In other words, an inclusion from a critical perspective involves questioning which identities will be given a voice, and therefore, how recognition policies will be worked on Díez Bedmar (2022). As Santisteban and González-Monfort (2019) and Massip Sabater and Castellví Mata (2019) say, it is convenient to consider the intersectional analysis as an axis that would allow us to understand the complexities we face in the fight against gender inequalities, as well as other types of social problems that occur in determined contexts.

It is not a matter of including in educational structures more historical contents and processes about women, diversities and gender dissidences (Heras-Sevilla et al., 2021). Ortega-Sánchez (2020) and Díaz de Greñu and Anguita (2017) agree that the goal is to rethink the entire educational process, from the curriculum, programs, to the contents and practices carried out by the teaching staff, in favor of a recognition policy towards diversities as agents and protagonists of a history that claims their narratives. Other discourses must be created that promote the deconstruction of inequalities and that cause the installation of new models of expression of diverse identities (De

Lauretis, 2015). Heras-Sevilla et al. (2021) propose that the work mentioned before follows the stages of what they call "gender technology," where: (a) gender is a representation of society; (b) gender representations have performative categories; (c) gender is constantly being constructed and; (d) gender can be deconstructed.

As García Luque and de la Cruz (2017, 2019) and García Luque and Peinado (2015) say, teacher training from gender perspectives must equip future teachers with a "gender awareness." In other words, the competence to be able to analyze and reflect on their own sexist and discriminatory patterns, and at the same time, on how such practices are translated into their daily life, work, and the rest of people who are part of society. This is possible by having a citizenship education that critically reflects on diverse identities and their participation and action in democratic construction (Triviño Cabrera and Chaves Guerrero, 2020). Teachers must recognize that the school space is a place of permanent conflict for the ideological and political control of the course of society (Bartual-Figueras et al., 2018), but at the same time it offers the possibilities to develop critical pedagogies that fight against sexism and propose social justice as a goal (Saleiro, 2017).

To promote a critical and participatory citizenship education, one of the minimum requirements is that the teaching of history and social sciences should provide students with references and protagonists with whom to identify (Marolla, 2019a,b; Marolla Gajardo et al., 2021). However, the solution does not pass through including a curriculum and programs saturated with contents, new knowledge about women, dissidents, ethnicities, among others (Pagès, 2018). The path is to deconstruct the entire educational and training process, delivering epistemologies that enable students to have the tools to understand society's problems, and in that way, participate with the goal of transforming inequalities (Molet Chicot and Bernard Cavero, 2015; Ortega-Sánchez and Pagès, 2018; Crocco, 2019; Heras-Sevilla et al., 2021).

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Study design

A qualitative methodology was used with an interpretive approach based on a phenomenological-hermeneutic design (van Manen, 2003; Ricoeur, 2006). These perspectives are useful because the construction of reality is governed by the multiple views of different individuals (González-Monteagudo, 2000–2001). The aim is to generate an interpretation of an understudied phenomenon where thoughts, values, and beliefs are interwoven to shape reality (Gutiérrez, 2017). The hermeneutic perspective is developed by searching for the experiences and their meanings (Ricoeur, 2006). This perspective is included in phenomenological definitions, highlights subjectivities, and privileges the understanding of reality through the meanings that emerge from the associated concepts (van Manen, 2003). It should be noted that for Ricoeur (2006), the hermeneutic process involves both understanding and explaining. In other words, interpretive design with a phenomenological focus provides the opportunity to examine complex experiences so that we can understand the world through understanding those experiences.

The study consisted of three phases following the study by Miles et al. (2014). The stages were: (a) reducing the information, establishing categories and codes that allow the creation of themes; (b)

processing the information by assigning relationships between themes and categories; (c) interpreting the categories and themes in light of the study's goals.

3.2. Instruments and participants

Participants were selected using criteria based on informant characteristics and study objectives (Bisquerra and Alzina, 2004). The criteria were: (a) more than 5 years of teaching experience; (b) coming from history, social science, or geography training programs; (c) having knowledge at the user-level knowledge of social media platforms; and (d) being willing to participate in the different phases of the study. The main characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

The instruments used were the semi-structured interview and the focus group. These instruments were deemed the most suitable for establishing a conversational and trusting atmosphere that would allow the participants to express their ideas freely (Marshall and Rossman, 2016). An expert judge validation was carried out (10), who contributed various improvement ideas. In addition, a pilot test was applied to students who were not part of the study, as defined by Birt et al. (2016). The information was processed using the Atlas.ti v.8 software for qualitative data analysis.

3.3. Data analysis

The information was analyzed through different stages, following the guidelines of Flick (2004) and Kuckartz (2014): (a) code and category collection; (b) joint interpretation of codes and categories, establishing groupings by theme; (c) theme reduction through data relationships; (d) final categorization and interpretation. To understand the results, an analysis matrix and theme organization was developed based on its relationship with the study objectives (Flick, 2004). Following Richards and Lockhart (2008), the defined stages and themes can be summarized as: (a) definition of hate speech; (b)

TABLE 1 Participants.

Code	Program	Years of experience
Teacher 1	Social sciences and history teacher	6
Teacher 2	Social sciences, geography, and history teacher	6
Teacher 3	Social sciences, geography, and civic education teacher	10
Teacher 4	Geography and history teacher	12
Teacher 5	Civic education, geography, and history teacher	7
Teacher 6	Geography and history teacher	8

presence or absence of hate speech in society and education; (c) interactions and manifestations of students where hate speech emerges; (d) possibilities and limitations for working with hate speech in teacher education. The obtained data was transcribed faithfully to the words of the participants (Flick, 2004). Categories from gender perspectives are not included, since such a construct is included implicitly (and often explicitly) in the hate speeches that are expressed. That is, a gender category will not be worked on, since expressions of hate contain and manifest not only gender discrimination, but also class, race, ethnicity, religion, among others.

3.4. Ethical criteria

The definitions outlined in the Helsinki Declaration were implemented, ensuring: (a) informing participants of the data being worked on; (b) guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality to individuals; (c) sharing the data with participants before it is published so that they can express their stance on suppressing or changing something said (Simons, 2009; Birt et al., 2016).

4. Results

The results will be presented under two large sections: "Initial teacher training to address hate speech" and "the influence of social networks on the production of hate speech." They are organized in this way since the categories stated in section 3.3 are contained in the proposed topics. At times, such categories are intertwined in their themes and contents, so to offer an orderly, clear and non-repetitive presentation of the results, it is advisable to construct two large themes where those categories can be seen contained.

4.1. Initial teacher education to address with hate speech

Teacher 1 argues that their training programs have not provided them, as teachers, with the necessary competencies to work from gender perspectives. This becomes even more complex if it is added that there is no initiative from the Chilean Ministry of Education to include such aspects in future teacher education programs:

"Then, it is difficult when from Mineduc, from the State, there is no initiative, or there is not a greater interest in generating this training that we lacked in university" (Teacher 1-Interview).

From the teachers' narratives, it is possible to recognize that they consider the breadth of social networks to be a space with educational potential, provided that the teachers who use them make the appropriate educational decisions to determine the purposes of their use:

"As I tell you, it can be used as a tool that facilitates learning or, on the contrary, as a tool where prejudices are promoted, where hate speech is promoted" (Teacher 4- Interview).

An important aspect raised by teacher 5 is related to continuous and professional training. In this sense, he considers it fundamental to promote that teachers can be updated in new educational dynamics and knowledges, such as the social problems of the 21st century and the strategies and paths to work with them in the classrooms. Teacher 5 adds that it is fundamental to generate non-traditional learning processes that pursue the development of skills and competencies such as critical thinking, argumentation, distinction between facts and opinions, as well as a reflective reading on social structures:

"we must develop critical thinking in students, for this we have to work with sources of information, and distinguish facts from opinions or contrast different sources, I think it is important to talk about hate speech, fake news too, and other aspects that are relevant in the 21st century" (Teacher 5-Interview).

Conflicts should be worked from the problematization of social structures, as well as social and controversial issues that can be discussed in the classrooms. In effect, a structural reform of the curriculum should be promoted, as well as such learning instances being meaningful and promoting student participation:

"in addition to promoting that girls and boys get involved in the learning processes. I think it is important to bring the conflicts and fix the conflicts in the classroom so that children can appropriate them, but feel the need to participate, comment, express an opinion, generate reflection instances and look for alternative solutions to what is established" (teacher 5-Interview).

In the narratives of the interviewees, continuing education appears as a relevant element in relation to the approach of hate speech from gender perspectives. A first aspect to highlight with respect to continuing education is related to the relevance that some teachers assign to working with hate speech from gender perspectives in the education of girls, boys and young people in school:

"Even so, I think it is very necessary that we train ourselves even more in all these topics, especially with feminism, with sexual dissidences, which we will see much more in our practices" (teacher 2-Focus Group).

Regarding continuing teacher education, teachers understand that it is necessary to access educating instances on feminism and sexual dissidence; educating on the knowledge and development of teaching tools that facilitate approaching their classes from a gender perspective; education on how to act from a work and administrative standpoint in potential situations of violation of rights related to this dimension, among others. For some teachers, their continuing education is a personal matter, which develops them both as individuals and professionals, while also helping students and their families to face processes of gender identity definition.

In this line, some teachers indicate that during their initial teacher education, there were no adequate and sufficient opportunities to learn about gender issues. Without the necessary tools to work from and towards social justice, the teaching staff agrees that their classes could become potential sources of elaboration and circulation of hate speech from gender perspectives:

"Regarding teacher education, I think it was a bit deficient and it should be like a process throughout life [...] in any profession, it is constant training" (teacher 5-Focus Group).

Regarding possibilities to consider for the development of continuing education processes in these topics, some teachers indicate that it is a cross-sectional responsibility. They argue that there are spaces and possibilities offered by the social environment for the teaching staff to choose to educate themselves or increase their knowledge about gender, whether for the improvement of their educational practices or for the improvement in their daily lives:

"there are a lot of feminist organizations or sexual diversity organizations that do free courses to instill these themes in schools" (teacher 1-Interview).

4.2. The influence of social networks on the production of hate speech

Teacher 1 states that social networks generate an ideal space for different speeches to be emitted, especially those that manifest situations of hate. They affirm that the comments are directed towards populations and communities traditionally discriminated and marginalized, all from the anonymity offered by social networks: "all these opinions and evaluations, or judgments, about women, children, foreigners, intensify with social networks, where there are no faces, no physical contact, a contact where we can actually sit down and talk.

"Hate intensifies more when we are not face-to-face" (teacher 1-Interview).

With regards to this, teacher 3 states that social networks are one of the main spaces from which hate speech is produced and reproduced. Even in such spaces, social problems are generated, such as harassment:

"I think the internet and social networks are a main factor of the speeches, or of everything that can be delivered in the lives of young people, through hate speech, words that can affect another, but in a harmful way" (teacher 3-Focus Group).

Teacher 5 states that social networks undoubtedly have a fundamental influence in the construction and reproduction of hate speech. For this teacher, the key is to work from the promotion of critical thinking, and in activities such as the distinction between facts and opinions, being able to delve into analysis, reflection, and ideological identification strategies:

"it is important to promote critical thinking, to work on what distinguishes data from opinions, facts from opinions, so that students can identify which things narrated there are real, are facts, and which are ideas made by people or the editorial line" (teacher 5-Focus Group).

Regarding the content of social media, the participants recognize that it is a factor that students appropriate and reproduce:

"When I've asked where they get that opinion from. They mention a social network or a publication referring to a social network to support their opinion" (teacher 2-Interview).

Therefore, students establish trust relationships with the content and information distributed on the networks:

"This proximity to social networks in the digital era promotes a certain uncritical acceptance of everything that is published there" (teacher 3-Interview).

On the other hand, the teaching staff references the pandemic situation as a space that potentiated the emergence of hate speech from the use of social media. The shift from daily physical contact to permanent digital contact would have allowed the emergence of scenarios of violence that found a suitable space in the anonymity of the turned off cameras and the use of chats for communication:

"I think that social networks, no matter how well used they are, tend to a certain extent to deliver words, images, etc., that may harm other people. And since everything around social networks is hidden behind a screen, these situations that generate hatred are developed, dilated, and sharpened" (teacher 3-Interview).

From the teachers' narratives, it can be inferred that certain resources present on social networks, such as memes, incite hatred towards certain groups, shaping a certain valuation towards them. One of the participating teachers indicates that for him, it is easy to see how certain memes or videos are influencing the students' view of, for example, sexual minorities or inclusive language, since these go viral on social networks:

"Sometimes I find students repeating, replicating these discourses, replicating this ridicule" (teacher 4-Focus Group).

Due to the algorithms of social media, it's very likely that a student who has a discriminatory view towards minority groups will constantly be exposed to similar views from other people through social media, which would help reinforce their belief that their view is correct:

"On the internet, people are constantly sharing these hate speeches, because in the end, that's how social media is functioning today, these are speeches that generate more likes, [...] in some way, students are exposed to these hate speeches" (teacher 6-Focus Group).

In this regard, the teaching staff mentions that social media is used to help students identify hate speech through the investigation of news that show different perspectives. The implemented educational strategy allows students to analyze the same news and determine how the journalist or media editorial promotes or not a gender perspective. Recognizing the potential for citizens to learn to identify these differences in the information we interact with on a daily basis, and the need to recognize hate speech. Similarly, teacher 4 states that schools face many complexities in confronting hate speech produced by boys and girls. Their comments are directed at the influence of the family in the production and reproduction of hate speech, both from within the family itself and from private use of social media:

> *"Hate speech is the expression of what they bring from their own home related to social media and their family"* (teacher 4-Interview).

5. Discussion

The results highlight the need for collaborative work within schools, supported by multidisciplinary teams that accompany the work of teachers, in order to raise counter-hegemonic discourses that can generate changes in some students' representations of gender. Recognizing the shortcomings in working from a gender perspective, the option to transform these issues into axes within the decision-making processes within schools emerges.

On the other hand, teachers indicate that there are few formal training opportunities on gender issues. They consider it crucial to be able to count on updates that allow them to conceptually and pedagogically appropriate the theme. From their own accounts, the proposal emerges that public policy must make decisions that allow instruction on gender issues to be included on the agenda of public policies.

Continuing teacher education is what has allowed some of the participants to gradually build a clearer vision of how to approach hate speech issues from a gender perspective. To some extent, the credentials that are evident from the continuing teacher education promote greater empowerment when making decisions about reinterpreting and implementing the prescribed curriculum.

In turn, post-degree education have allowed them to build a different relationship with the curriculum. To some extent, the maturation in the relationship they establish with it has allowed them to know it better and to detect those spaces and opportunities that open up for addressing social issues. A critical gaze from teachers towards initial training is evident. The participants agree that this would allow explaining the traditionality of the educational system and the absence of teaching social and controversial issues.

Deficient initial education is interpreted as one of the causes that leads this type of teacher to have and maintain a traditional perspective of teaching, not promoting innovation in the approach of their classes, and leaving out topics that would allow analyzing society. Rather, what prevails is a teaching focused on repetition and memorization based on white and Western male characters with some type of political, economic, and/or military power.

Despite the limitations, teachers identify a series of strategies that contribute to the development of attitudes of appreciation of diversities and sexual and gender dissidences. Thus, the participants affirm that, in order to work with hate speech, it is necessary to learn to identify it through a reading between the lines of the information with which we relate daily. This first learning focused on oneself as an educator who recognizes that his/her role must contribute to promoting a human rights-centered education is what allows us to think about proposals for addressing hate narratives.

Participating teachers argue that they must be attentive to situations that occur in the classroom and that could evidence the emergence of prejudices, stereotypes, or violation of the rights of some groups, instead of ignoring these situations, or just punishing those who are acting in a discriminatory or offensive manner. The path is to propose learning situations that contribute to transforming inequalities, encourage the development of critical thinking, and thus generate counter-hate narratives.

The resources present on social networks are also seen as an opportunity to work on hate speech. It is useful to work with the content of social networks as sources of information, to analyze and contrast them. This is a useful strategy, for example, to teach children to differentiate between facts and opinions and help them recognize hate speech.

National or international contingency situations are also valued as a key resource for addressing hate speech. It is important to note that teaching from social and controversial issues motivates students, as they understand that situations experienced in daily life can enter the classroom to be analyzed, seek their origins, and in turn, propose possible solutions.

The problem faced by educational processes and the teaching of social sciences is related to the phenomenon of globalization and social networks. In addition, civic education is a disputed field in terms of the formation of values and behaviors (Campos Zamora, 2018). Considering what Cabo Isasi and García Juanatey (2016) say, hate speech is expanding more and more quickly, both in everyday social circles and in audiovisual media such as social networks. As a consequence, it is urgent to propose civic education as an educational axis in the teaching of social sciences (Izquierdo Grau, 2019). This author adds that students have difficulties to face and understand hate narratives. This is due to the influence that networks have on the construction of their concepts, where the veracity and reliability of sources is not analyzed.

Butler (2004) and Fraser (2019) agree that exclusion and the inability to generate identities causes the denial of recognition policy positioning. This is because only what is perceived with the ability to assume such a social status can be recognized. Hate speech, in that way, denies personal stories, emotions, and empathy (Sales Gelabert, 2015).

In the context of deconstructing the social structures that have produced and reproduced inequalities, it is worth mentioning Santos and Aguiló Pons (2019), who state that any change that is desired must first position a struggle against the patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist system, from where most of the inequalities arise and are generated. Therefore, caution must be taken in the way in which new protagonists are included, as if it is done within existing structures, only social hegemonies will be reinforced (Díez Bedmar, 2022). Massip Sabater and Castellví Mata (2019) write:

> *"The diversification of protagonists makes sense when we can aspire to the construction of a joint narrative that understands all people and communities as social agents and attends to their experiences, concerns, and circumstances"* (pp. 146–147).

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because the datasets for this article are not publicly available due to concerns regarding participant anonymity. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to jesus.marolla@umce.cl.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Ethics Committee USACH institutional ethics committee N°248/2023 on 26/04/2023.

The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Evaluating the impact of conceptual change pedagogy on student attitudes and behaviors toward controversial topics in Iraq

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This study assesses the effect of conceptual change pedagogy on students' attitudes toward pluralism and related rights within culturally sensitive contexts. Global efforts to address the spread of intolerant ideologies that foment radicalization, discrimination, and violence are fraught with controversy. Prior research on the Middle East and North Africa region has found that efforts to address these challenges in the field of education — including reform to curricula, the promotion of narratives inclusive of religious diversity, and civics education initiatives — have had varied levels of success. Absent from these efforts is the development of an effective pedagogy and the training of teachers to identify and address ideologies and behaviors that foment intolerance and conflict among students. Hardwired Global developed a teacher training program based on conceptual change theory and pedagogy to fill these needs. Conceptual change refers to the development of new ways of thinking and understanding of concepts, beliefs, and attitudes. Hardwired Global implemented the program in partnership with the regional Directorate of Education for Mosul and the Nineveh Plains region of Iraq from 2019–2023. From 2021–2023, Hardwired trained 485 teachers in 40 schools across the region. Following the training, teachers implemented two lessons. A mixed method research study — with a primary focus on quantitative data collected — was conducted to determine the effect of the program on student perceptions, understanding, and behavior toward key concepts inherent to pluralism. Quantitative data consisted of a pre-post survey with four multiple choice questions. Scores on pre-surveys were compared to post-surveys and a two sample paired t-test was applied. We documented statistically significant developments in students' conceptual understanding of key concepts inherent to pluralism and associated rights, including: respect for diversity in expression inclusion of diverse religious and/or ethnic communities, gender equality, and violent or non-violent approaches to conflict. Qualitative data consisted of semi-structured interviews with teachers and students implemented at the conclusion of the program and observations reported by Master Trainers and teachers during training and activity implementation. Findings suggest conceptual change pedagogy on pluralism and associated rights is a promising approach to education about controversial topics in conflict-affected and culturally sensitive environments.

1 Introduction

Given the rise of religion-related conflict globally, governments and organizations have undertaken efforts to address growing concerns about the spread of intolerant ideologies that foment radicalization, discrimination, and violence among youth. But the religious, political, and social dynamics inherent to these efforts are fraught with controversy and tension (Smith et al., 2017).

Children are particularly vulnerable to ideologies that promote intolerance and polarization (United Nations, 2019). The classroom can often serve as a microcosm to observe the impact of the biases, fears, and misconceptions students hold about others, especially those who hold different or dissenting beliefs (Smith et al., 2017; Rea-Ramirez et al., 2020a,b; Abboud and Dbouk, 2022). This is reflected in observations made by teachers in distinct learning environments. On a playground in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, a group of children were playing a game where they pretended to be members of ISIS. As their teacher drew close to them, she observed her students pretending to behead one another. Thousands of miles away, on a playground in San Diego, California, a group of refugee students began fighting. As their teacher broke up the fight, they heard one of the boys say to his classmate that he was a member of ISIS and would "get him back" (Smith et al., 2017).

Religion-related conflict affects nearly every human right, including freedom of conscience, expression, belief, and association as well as equality and non-discrimination. It most often foments in societies in which pluralism is not understood or valued. A pluralistic society is one in which people with diverse ideas, beliefs, opinions, practices, and behaviors can live freely in community with others. Pluralism is not merely coexistence or tolerance — or even diversity — but a deep respect for the humanity of others who share the same inherent human rights. At the same time, pluralistic societies require energetic engagement with diversity and dialog, rather than blind acceptance of ideas or an aversion to debate or expression of dissenting opinions. Individuals in a pluralistic society recognize the equal rights of others who hold different beliefs and engage in different practices, especially when they disagree. In this way, pluralism is antithetical to intolerant ideologies that fuel social and violent conflict.

In the Middle East and North Africa region, most efforts to overcome intolerant ideologies that fuel religion-related conflict have included religious education curricula reform, the promotion of narratives inclusive of religious diversity, and civics education initiatives (Smith et al., 2017). However, these efforts have yielded varied levels of success. Reforms to religious education curricula have historically fomented conflict between civil society and the state as well as between diverse religious communities in the region. Religious authority and religious teaching can be highly sensitive topics. Any efforts to change curricula — either by removing religious texts or by introducing information about diverse religious practices — are often met with fear, hostility, and protest by both majority and minority religious communities (Smith et al., 2017; Rea-Ramirez et al., 2020a,b). Multi-lateral declarations and plans of action — including the Marrakech Declaration (2016), Rabat Plan of Action (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2012), and Beirut Declaration (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017) — have sought to reach a consensus about principles and practices to guarantee peace among diverse religious and political groups. While these efforts have established varying

levels of "common ground," tension often begins at points of disagreement. In this way, declarations and action plans fail to directly and concretely address topics or issues that are the basis for conflict.

Notably absent from these efforts is the development of a pedagogy and the training of teachers to identify and address ideologies and behaviors that foment intolerance and conflict among students. The classroom can be an important front line of efforts to confront discrimination, intolerance, and violence among youth (Smith et al., 2017; Abboud and Dbouk, 2022). But teachers in conflict-affected environments have reported they are not prepared to address sensitive topics — including issues relating to religion and identity — in their classrooms, and they are advised to avoid controversy altogether. The result is a learning environment in which students are unable to discuss critical issues that affect them, and teachers are unable to address the biases, fears, and misconceptions students have about others that fuel conflict in their schools and communities.

It is in this context that Hardwired Global, a non-governmental organization with Special Consultative Status at the United Nations, set out to answer the following questions:

1 How can teachers be equipped to facilitate discussion about controversial topics relating to pluralism and associated rights in a manner that mitigates tensions and increased respect for the rights of others?
2 How does conceptual learning about pluralism and associated rights inform student perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward controversial topics relating to these rights?

Based on research and experience in the field of human rights and education in more than 30 countries, Hardwired developed a new educational approach to these challenges using conceptual change theory and pedagogy (Smith et al., 2017; Rea-Ramirez et al., 2020a,b; Abboud and Dbouk, 2022). Conceptual change refers to the development of new ways of thinking and understanding of concepts, beliefs, and attitudes (Rea-Ramirez and Clement, 1998; Rea-Ramirez and Ramirez, 2018). While the use of conceptual change pedagogy in the social sciences is relatively new, it has been widely used for many years in the sciences. It is from the sciences that we can begin to understand the possible application and effect, particularly in difficult areas of the social sciences such as human rights. In the sciences, conceptual change occurs when the individual changes understanding and beliefs from naïve conceptions or misconceptions to those that are more scientifically accepted (Chi et al., 1994; Heddy et al., 2018; Vosniadou, 2019). This occurs through first recognizing one's own beliefs, conceptions, and biases, and then confronting often embedded fears and misconceptions (Hewson and Hewson, 1983; Rea-Ramirez and Clement, 1998; Rea-Ramirez, 2008; Rea-Ramirez and Ramirez, 2018). The curriculum fosters conceptual change in the way learners view the rights and freedoms of others and reconcile those ideals with their own beliefs (Rea-Ramirez and Ramirez, 2018).

When applied in the social sciences, particularly concerning human rights, it is not the intent of conceptual change to change an individual's beliefs, but rather to help the individual better understand where these come from and how they affect behavior. Conceptual change is also intended to open new avenues of communication with others who may believe differently, affecting their attitudes toward others and, in turn, participation in their communities. Cherry (2022)

states that, "Attitudes are often the result of experience or upbringing. They can have a powerful influence over behavior and affect how people act in various situations. While attitudes are enduring, they can also change." It is this change that conceptual change theory and pedagogy seeks to achieve.

Hardwired's application of conceptual change pedagogy to education on pluralism and associated rights has provided a deeper look into the process of "conceptually moving from actions based on inherent beliefs to new models of conceptual understanding of others and directly addresses the issues of intolerance, social conflict, and violent extremism" (Smith et al., 2017, 9). Conceptual change pedagogy has proven effective as a vehicle for introducing controversial topics and facilitating change in student attitudes and behaviors related to these topics in a safe classroom environment. But this requires training in ways to embrace, rather than avoid, situations that may cause dissonance and use it as a strategy to foster communication and conversation about controversial topics. Research suggests that dissonance can play an important role in conceptual change, particularly in the area of controversial and/or powerfully emotional topics (Rea-Ramirez and Clement, 1998; Kitayama and Tompson, 2015). Dissonance refers to a sensed internal discrepancy between a conception or belief and another conception or belief (Rea-Ramirez and Clement, 1998). Some have referred to this dissonance as cognitive conflict and have suggested that this conflict can play a positive role in conceptual change when it is integrated with a constructive process (Chan et al., 1997). The first step then is to induce dissonance and the second step is to introduce construction of new ways of thinking. Analogy may be used for the constructive part of this process (Brown and Clement, 1989; Clement et al., 1989; Mason, 1994; Clement, 2013).

Festinger believed cognitive dissonance is "an antecedent condition that leads to activity oriented toward dissonance reduction" (1957, 3). In the area of controversial topics, we suggest that a level of optimal dissonance may be necessary to provide the impetus for conceptual change while not causing the student to shut down because they feel unsafe or threatened. To create the discourse necessary for the dissonance and construction process to occur and that results in the development of critical thinking skills necessary for engaging positively with others who may hold different ideas and beliefs, the teacher needs to understand how to intervene to introduce sources of optimal dissonance. Optimal dissonance should induce the student to either question their prior model or begin to be curious about other possibilities. Recco (2018) suggests that "Students need to debate things they feel passionate about, even if those things are controversial." At the same time, however, we believe it is critical that this discourse occur in a safe space where students can verbalize controversial ideas and beliefs leading to not only learning but changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. Therefore, the teacher's role is the continuous monitoring to determine when, where, and how much dissonance is needed to obtain optimal reaction in the student within a safe space. But we have seen that teachers often do not have the knowledge of theory and strategies needed to engage in the dissonance and construction process.

In 2019, Hardwired Global was invited by the Directorate of Education — the regional authority under the national Ministry of Education — to support their efforts to overcome intolerance and mitigate conflict in the Mosul and Nineveh Plains region of Iraq. Historically, Iraq has been entrenched in conflict along religious,

sectarian, political and ethnic lines. Legal restrictions limiting freedom of religion and social hostilities targeting religious minorities have affected generations of Iraqis. Clashes between political and sectarian groups, foreign interventions, and the rise of al-Qaeda and affiliated terrorist groups have undermined the country's stability for decades. In 2014, ISIS fomented a radical ideology against anyone who did not adhere to their interpretation of Islam (Abboud and Dbouk, 2022). Their attacks on religious and ethnic minorities, in particular, were condemned as genocide (UN News, 2016). An estimated 70,000 civilians were killed by ISIS and in the battle to defeat the group, though the total number of casualties is likely much higher, and more than 5 million people were displaced from their homes (BBC News, 2018; Abboud and Dbouk, 2022). While the region was declared "liberated" from the terrorist group in 2017, their radical ideology — and its effect on Iraqis — remains a significant threat (Center for Preventative Action, 2023). Children are among the most vulnerable to this ideology, and teachers have reported that children in the region still openly identify with ISIS. Others returning to their homes remain fearful of those neighbors who lived under, and even supported, ISIS (Abboud and Dbouk, 2022).

It is in this context that the organization undertook a Training-of-Trainer (ToT) model program to train teachers in conceptual change pedagogy and to lead students in conceptual learning about key concepts inherent to pluralism and associated rights, including: human dignity, equality, non-discrimination, the human conscience, the expression of beliefs, and the balance of rights and responsibilities that affect how rights may be limited or restricted in certain circumstances to protect the rights of others. At the same time, the program challenges long held and embedded ideologies, misconceptions, and fears in a way that many other programs do not. This is an important distinction, since merely teaching about a concept is very different from teaching for conceptual change about a concept to achieve behavioral change.

This approach is unique in that it does not require reforms to curricula or any immediate revision of educational content. Rather, the program uses a pedagogy of conceptual change to promote key concepts inherent to universal human rights that lead people toward a greater respect for the dignity of others, including those with whom they disagree, and a greater appreciation for diversity of opinion and ideas (Smith et al., 2017; Rea-Ramirez et al., 2020a,b; Abboud and Dbouk, 2022). The curriculum builds upon five years of research that demonstrates the statistically significant positive impact of education for pluralism and associated rights can have upon teachers and youth, and ultimately their broader communities, by: (a) building a pluralistic environment where people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs are free to explore the spiritual dimension of life together; (b) encouraging dialog and active engagement with people of different backgrounds or beliefs to address underlying fears, misconceptions, and biases held by youth; and (c) building empathy toward others and resiliency to the ideas of hate and intolerance that contribute to violence and extremism (Rea-Ramirez et al., 2020a,b).

The training curriculum prepares educators to develop a robust understanding of pluralism and associated rights, and ultimately develop resilience to the intolerance that fuels conflict with people who hold different beliefs than their own. The curriculum also equips teachers with tools and resources that can be directly applied and implemented in their schools. Throughout the training, teachers participate in small group activities and lessons that actively engage

them in cycles of conceptual change: accessing prior conceptions, dissonance, construction, criticism and revision of ideas, and evaluation and application. The conceptual change process extends outside the training environment as teachers continue to experience dissonance and test, apply and revise their ideas as they interact with others in their classrooms and communities. In this way, conceptual change is a continual process that begins during the training and continues throughout life. (See Rea-Ramirez and Ramirez, 2018 article for a more detailed discussion of the conceptual change theory and strategy and Rea-Ramirez and Ramirez, 2018, and Rea-Ramirez et al., 2020a,b for discussion of statistical findings of conceptual change). Once teachers experience and understand their own conceptual change process, they can lead others through the same transformation.

This article evaluates the impact of conceptual change pedagogy on students' attitudes and behaviors toward key concepts inherent to pluralism and associated rights that are perceived as controversial or sensitive in their cultural context.

2 Materials and methods

To better understand the effect of a curriculum based on conceptual change applied to controversial issues inherent to pluralism and associated rights in Iraq, Hardwired Global designed a training program based on conceptual change theory to equip teachers to use the pedagogy with students. The program was implemented in partnership with the Directorate of Education for Mosul and the Nineveh Plains region of Iraq from 2019–2023. The training model was believed to allow for scalability and sustainability of the program.

From 2019–2021, Hardwired Global equipped 20 Trainers, referred to as Master-Trainers in the program, to train teachers in conceptual change pedagogy and curricula about pluralism and associated rights. Master-Trainers are experienced educators or school administrators from the Mosul and Nineveh Plains region and have worked with students and/or teachers in classroom and school settings. Hardwired identified and selected Master-Trainers based on their educational expertise, capacity to train others, interest in human rights and pluralism education, and ability to manage program activities. Prior to their acceptance into the training program, Master-Trainers completed two interviews, a written evaluation, and participated in a training session through which Hardwired staff assessed their engagement with training material and interaction with others.

From 2021–2023, 10 Master-Trainers facilitated trainings with 485 teachers in the region. Hardwired coordinated with the regional Directorate of Education to select 40 schools from across the region to participate in the program. These schools were selected to reflect the religious, ethnic, and social diversity of the region. Within schools selected for the program, school administrators and Directorate staff identified 10 to 15 teachers in each school — depending on school size — to complete the training. Teachers were selected based on their ability to complete program objectives rather than their previous training experience or understanding of pluralism and associated rights and, as such, reflect more diverse attitudes and behaviors toward key concepts and issues addressed in the program. To this end, the selection of participants — and the impact of the program on their attitudes and behaviors toward pluralism and associate rights — is consistent with what we would likely observe in the broad application of teacher training and curricula across the region.

The training program consisted of two main components: (1) conceptual learning on pluralism and associated rights; and (2) training on effective conceptual change pedagogy to teach about key concepts inherent to this right. Key concepts included: human dignity, equality, non-discrimination, the human conscience, the expression of beliefs, and the balance of rights and responsibilities that affect how rights may be limited or restricted in certain circumstances to protect the rights of others.

Teachers completed two trainings — one training in the spring of 2022 and a follow up training in the summer/fall of 2022. Master-Trainers provided ongoing training and learning support to their teacher cohorts through online meetings and in-person observation as they implemented activities with students. Following the trainings, teachers were required to implement two standardized lessons — one in the fall 2022 academic term and one in the winter 2023 academic term. However, not all teachers implemented a second lesson during the data collection period due to administrative challenges. As a result, the number of students who participated in the winder 2023 academic term is lower than the fall 2023 academic term. A total of 2,452 students participated in the lesson implemented in the fall 2022 term and 1,176 students participated in lesson implemented in the winter 2023 term. Teachers received training on the implementation of both lessons, and Master-Trainers observed the implementation of these activities with students. Teachers and students who participated the program represented the religious and ethnic diversity of Iraq and, notably, the population most affected by the occupation of ISIS and its radical ideology in the country. All teachers and students were displaced from the region or lived under ISIS occupation from 2014–2017. Training and lessons were implemented in single gender/religion and mix gender/religion classrooms as well as in urban and rural communities across the region.

A mixed method research study was conducted to determine the effect of the program on student perceptions, understanding, and behavior toward key concepts inherent to pluralism. Our research focused on two core elements: (1) knowledge about pluralism and associated rights and (2) change in degree and depth of empathy (Smith et al., 2017; Rea-Ramirez et al., 2020a,b). Quantitative data consisted of a pre-post survey made up of four multiple choice questions. The questions focused on the following topics: inclusion and respect for diversity, engagement with diversity, understanding rights, gender equality, and violent vs. non-violent approaches to conflict. The questions were scenario-based where the distractors, rather than being simply right or wrong, were based on a continuum of answers based on beliefs and attitudes. The questions consisted of seven possible scenario responses and were scored on a scale of 1–7. This score range represented the levels of conceptual understanding as well as specific biases, fears, and/or misconceptions exhibited in the community, from least, "threatened or defensive," through "fear of 'others'," "fear of dissent or disagreement," "conformity," "isolated," "interested or engaged," to the most sophisticated, "inclusive" (see Table 1). Survey scenarios and responses were selected and structured based on several assessments of the biases, fears, and misconceptions learners have about topics raised in each question. Response options for each scenario reflect actual, rather than hypothetical, behaviors and attitudes observed and/or reported by Hardwired staff, trainers, teachers, and education officials in classroom and community settings

TABLE 1 Levels of conceptual understanding of pluralism and associated rights.

Conceptual understanding	Assessment levels
Low level of understanding	1 – Threatened and/or Defensive
	2 – Fear of "Others"
	3 – Fear of Dissent and/or Disagreement
Moderate level of understanding	4 – Conformity
	5 – Isolation
Sophisticated level of understanding	6 – Engaged
	7 – Inclusive

over more than eight years of work in the Mosul and Nineveh Plains region of Iraq. Participants were asked to choose an answer that best expressed their knowledge, attitudes, or beliefs at that time.

Responses were grouped to reflect low, moderate, and high levels of understanding of pluralism and associated rights. Responses that reflected low levels of understanding indicated students felt threatened by or defensive of the actions of others, fearful of others who believed or behaved different from themselves, and/or feared dissent or disagreement about religious or cultural expectations. Moderate levels of understanding were reflected through responses that indicated students preferred conformity to religious, cultural, or social expectations and/or isolation from others who believe or behave differently from themselves. The highest, or most sophisticated, levels of understanding were reflected in responses that indicated students were engaged or interested in the beliefs and opinions of others and/or a willingness to defend the rights of others, even when they disagree.

The three levels used in our assessment reflect observable changes in attitudes and behaviors in the community, and therefore progress in conceptual learning about key concepts inherent to pluralism and associated rights. Students within a level of conceptual understanding exhibit similar attitudes and behaviors, and student responses within each level reflect the motivation for their attitudes and behaviors in response to the scenario. We employ three assessment levels to assess observable levels of progression in the conceptual change process. Student responses reflecting "Threatened and/or Defensive," "Fear of 'Others,'" or "Fear of Dissent and/or Disagreement" within the Low Level of Understanding are consistent with attitudes and behaviors resistant to or even antagonistic toward pluralism and associated rights. Progression to a Moderate Level of Understanding — reflected in "Conformity" or "Isolation" responses — indicates a decisive shift in attitudes and behaviors. These students are neither resistant nor receptive to pluralism and associated rights and, as such, are distinct from students exhibiting Low or Sophisticated levels of understanding. Finally, student responses reflecting "Engaged" and "Inclusive" within the Sophisticated Level of Understanding demonstrate yet another decisive shift in attitudes and behaviors, as they actively model or promote pluralism and associated rights.

Data was aggregated, scores on the pre-surveys were compared to post-surveys, and a two sample paired t-test was applied. Additionally, post-survey results following the Fall 2022 lesson implementation were compared to post-survey results following the Winter 2023 lesson implementation to assess the impact of teachers on students as they gained more experience teaching the curriculum.

Qualitative data consisted of semi-structured interviews of Master-Trainers and teachers collected throughout the program as well as trainer and teacher observations. Interviews were carried out in Arabic, the native language of participants. The interviews used open ended standardized protocol to engage participants in discussions about their own conceptual change through the training and teaching of the curriculum in the classroom. Master-Trainer and teacher observations were collected during training and activity implementation. Master-Trainers reported observations and examples of conceptual they observed during the implementation of activities with students. Teachers reported observations made during activities as well as in the classroom setting following the lessons. Observations were reported to Hardwired training staff through written assessments and/or online evaluation meetings with Hardwired training staff.

There are some limitations to the study to consider. Teachers received extensive training in survey implementation and data collection. Interviews and observations conducted in this study were structured to evaluate student responses to specific topics addressed in the pre-post survey, but were not effectively administered by teachers. Further training on monitoring and evaluation methodology is required for Master Trainers and teachers alike to produce adequate results. Nevertheless, these interviews and observations did provide deeper insight into the impact of conceptual change on both teacher and student interactions and engagement with others, particularly on issues relating to pluralism and associated rights. Qualitative data also provided context for pre-post survey responses. However, the data were not specific enough to assess conceptual change about the four topics — inclusion and respect for diversity, engagement with diversity, understanding rights, gender inclusion, and violent vs. non-violent approaches to conflict —addressed in the survey. Therefore, qualitative data presented in this paper provides some context for survey data. Moreover, survey results were aggregated for the fall 2022 and winter 2023 activities. As a result, this study does not evaluate how the composition of the classroom — mixed gender vs. single gender and/or mixed religion vs. single religion classes as well as urban vs. rural classes— impacts findings.

3 Results

3.1 Pre-post survey findings

We evaluated pre-post responses to four survey questions addressing specific controversial issues inherent to pluralism and associated rights. Analysis of each question — including the pre-survey baseline assessment, post-survey responses from participants in the fall 2022 lesson, and post-survey responses from participants in the winter 2023 lesson — is provided below (see Table 2).

3.1.1 Respect for diversity in expression and religious practice

The first multiple choice question addressed respect for diversity in expression and religious practice, both among various religions and within a single religious community. Fasting, and whether or how individuals choose to observe religious fasts, was identified as a controversial topic relating to pluralism by teachers in Iraq. Religious leadership and cultural or communal norms often dictate how

TABLE 2 Average pre-post scores fall '22 and Winter '23.

Question	Pre Fall 22	Post Fall 22	Post Winter 23
1	3.23	4.85	5.03
2	3.84	5.33	4.99
3	4.07	5.45	5.52
4	4.33	5.6	5.88
Pre-Post Fall 22 $p = 0.00015394$		Post Fall 22-Post Winter 23 $p = 0.37507034$	

individuals are expected to observe religious practice. The survey question assessed how conceptual learning on pluralism informed students' willingness to engage with diverse religious expression, particularly when a peer chose to observe religious practices different from the cultural or communal 'norm.' The question stated: "You are fasting, but one of your friends chose not to fast. Someone told your friend that it is shameful and disrespectful not to fast with everyone. How do you respond?"

Overall, 72% of students showed a positive move in understanding of respect for diversity and religious expression (see Figure 1). In the pre-survey, more than two-thirds of students selected responses that reflected the lowest levels of understanding of pluralism and associated rights. Nearly 16% indicated moderate levels of understanding, and 18% of students selected responses reflecting the highest levels of understanding. Following the Fall 2022 lesson, the proportion of students reflecting the lowest levels of understanding of pluralism dropped by more than half to 29%. More than half of students indicated the highest levels of understanding. Following the Winter 2023 lesson, the proportion of students indicating the lowest levels of understanding dropped to 15% and the proportion of students indicating the highest levels of understanding or engagement increased to 57%.

3.1.2 Inclusion of diverse religious and/or ethnic communities

The second multiple choice question addressed the inclusion of diverse religious and ethnic communities in society. Regional conflict has displaced millions of people from their homes, and teachers have reported the topic of refugees has become a flashpoint for conflict across all sectors of society. Teachers reported tensions between refugee and host communities, and refugees are regularly segregated or discriminated against. Fear or mistrust of "outsiders," perceived competition over resources, including international aid, employment, or other support, and inflammatory political rhetoric exacerbate tensions. The survey question assessed how conceptual learning on pluralism informed their response to and inclusion of refugees who hold different beliefs in their community. The question stated: "Several refugees moved into your community. They practice their beliefs differently from you and they have different ways of expressing themselves through their clothes, food, and celebrations. Some of your friends think they are dangerous and do not want them in your community. How do you respond?"

Overall, 67% of students showed a positive move in understanding of inclusion of diverse religious and ethnic communities (see Figure 2). In the pre-survey, nearly half of students indicated the lowest levels of understanding of pluralism and associated rights, 32% of students

indicated moderate levels of understanding, and less than one quarter of students indicated the highest levels of understanding or engagement. Following the Fall 2022 lesson, the proportion of students indicating the highest levels of understanding more than doubled to 56%. The proportion of students reflecting the lowest levels of understanding or engagement dropped to 16%. Following the Winter 2023 lesson, the proportion of students reflecting the highest levels of understanding was 48% and the proportion of students indicating the lowest levels of understanding was 26%.

3.1.3 Gender equality

The third multiple choice question addressed gender equality and non-discrimination in the classroom. Despite significant strides made toward gender equality, the MENA region "has made the slowest progress on gender equality across multiple indicators and indices" (UNICEF, 2021). Cultural preference and socioeconomic conditions affect education and employment for women, particularly in rural areas. Teachers have reported that girls are removed from school due to financial constraints, concern for their security, or in favor of domestic production. Despite broad advances made in gender equality, equal access to education and opportunities for women and girls nevertheless can be perceived as controversial. The survey question assessed how conceptual learning about pluralism informed student understanding of gender equality and non-discrimination as associated rights. The question stated: "Someone in the government thinks that girls should be excluded from science and technology courses at your school because boys are stronger in these fields. What do you think?"

Overall, 65% of students showed a positive move in understanding of gender equality (see Figure 3). In the pre-survey, nearly 43% of students reflected the lowest levels of understanding of gender equality and non-discrimination, 27% of students indicated moderate levels of understanding, and 30% of students indicating the most sophisticated levels of understanding. Following the Fall 2022 lesson, the proportion of students reflecting the lowest levels of understanding dropped by more than half to 15%. The proportion of students indicating the highest levels of understanding doubled to reach 61%. Following the Winter 2023 lesson, the proportion of students reflecting the most sophisticated levels of understanding reached 64%, and the proportion of students reflecting the lowest levels of understanding dropped to 12%.

3.1.4 Violent and non-violent approaches to conflict

The final multiple-choice question addressed the use of violence in response to conflict. This issue is a particular concern in Mosul and the Nineveh Plains because of the influence of ISIS on youth in the region. Teachers have observed varied responses to the occupation of ISIS from students. Some students, themselves subjected to violence at the hands of ISIS, reject violence altogether. Other students who shared the same experience under ISIS express strong desires for retaliation and retribution. The third and most concerning group of students are those who lived under ISIS or supported the group and share their violent ideology. In conflict-affected contexts, discussion about violent or non-violent approaches to conflict can exacerbate tensions (Abboud and Dbouk, 2022). Students and teachers must confront their own experience with conflict as well as their understanding of justice, including whether and by whom it will be carried out. The survey question assessed how

FIGURE 1
Pre-post scores for survey question 1. Sample size for Fall 22 is 2,452 students and sample size for Winter 23 is 1,176 students.

conceptual learning about pluralism and associated rights informed student approaches to conflict resolution, particularly when they or a member of their community was subjected to discrimination and injustice. It also assessed how students respond to *groupthink* promoting violence, which is often reflected in social media or other forms of communication with peers. The question stated: "Some new kids at school hit one of your friends because he was wearing a religious symbol they did not like. Some of your friends want to retaliate. How do you respond?"

Overall, 61% of students showed a positive move in understanding of non-violent approaches to conflict (see Figure 4). In the pre-survey, more than one-third of students indicated the lowest levels of understanding and favored more violent responses to conflict, nearly one-quarter of students indicated moderate levels of understanding, and nearly 40% of students indicated the most sophisticated, and non-violent, levels of understanding. Following the Fall 2022 lesson, the proportion of students advocating for violent responses to conflict decreased by more than half to 14%. The proportion of students reflecting the highest levels of understanding reached 71%. Following the Winter 2023 lesson, the proportion of students reflecting the lowest levels of understanding dropped to 12%, and nearly three-quarters of students reflected the most sophisticated and non-violent responses.

3.1.5 Interview and observation findings

Other broader changes in both teachers' and students' understanding, attitudes and behaviors were observed and documented by trainers and teachers through semi-structured interviews conducted at the conclusion of the program and observations documented during training and activity implementation. These changes reflect ongoing cycles of conceptual change that took place during the program and through further engagement with the curriculum and colleagues and/or classmates in their classrooms and communities.

Students demonstrated an increased willingness to express their opinions and beliefs about culturally and religiously sensitive practices. One student reported she wore the hijab due to community

and peer pressure rather than her own choice. Through the program, she understood her personal right to express her religious beliefs according to her conscience, and she reported she was able to express her beliefs to others with confidence. She reported the program gave her "tools to defend [her] beliefs courageously and to speak up and contribute to peace within our school."

Moreover, teachers and students demonstrated increased understanding of and respect for diverse religious beliefs, particularly among those who supported intolerant or violent approaches to conflict. A Master-Trainer reported significant conceptual change in a teacher who previously supported ISIS. At the beginning of the training, the teacher stated that the development of laws to govern the community were not necessary because the Quran — the religious text of Islam — includes every law needed to live. Through the training, he recognized his beliefs did not consider the rights and beliefs of others. At the end of the training, he stated, "I should always consider that there are people who have different references and that not all are the same."

Overall, teachers reported a decrease in fear and mistrust among students. A teacher reported observable changes among students who participated in the lesson, stating, "I was able to help students reduce their fears of others. Then, I observed how students transferred the concepts they learned into their daily behaviors. My students became more accepting of people who were diverse in race, ethnicity, religion, or appearance." Another teacher implemented the lesson with a group of students whose parents supported ISIS and students whose parents fought against ISIS. Through the lesson, these students were encouraged to interact with one another in mixed small groups. At the beginning of the lesson, the children of ISIS supporters did not participate and the children whose parents did not support ISIS sought to impose their opinions on their silent peers. But as the lesson progressed and the students discussed key concepts, their interaction became more inclusive of all group members. Students with no family connection to ISIS actively sought to collaborate with the other students to build peace and understanding. Similarly, the children of ISIS supporters began to share their perspective and opinions.
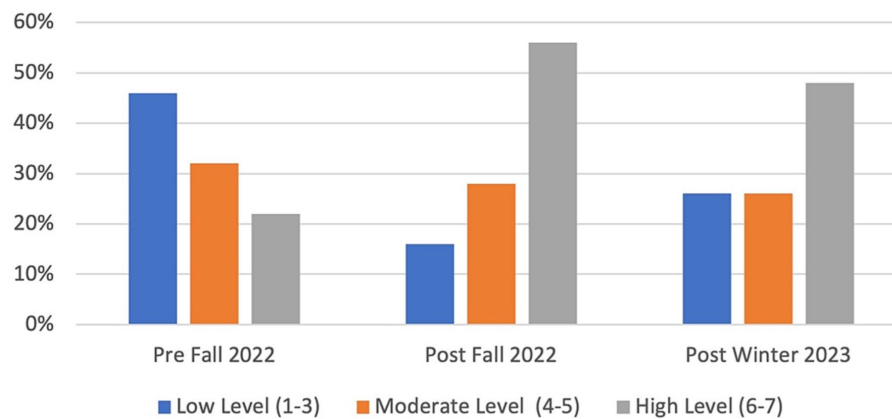
FIGURE 2
Pre-post scores for survey question 2. Sample size for Fall 22 is 2,452 students and sample size for Winter 23 is 1,176 students.
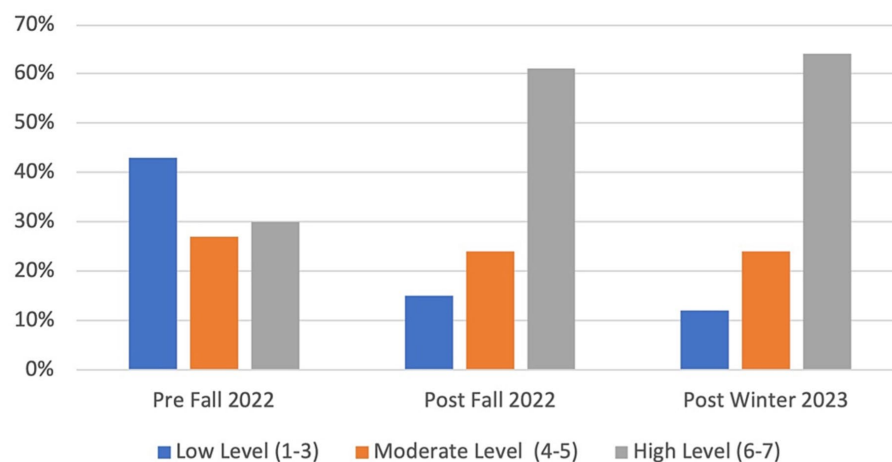
FIGURE 3
Pre-post scores for survey question 3. Sample size for Fall 22 is 2,452 students and sample size for Winter 23 is 1,176 students.

Interview and observation data suggested students became more respectful of others, not only in relation to pluralism and associated rights, but in relation to broader differences observed in the community. One teacher reported the lessons positively contributed to a culture of respect for students with physical and/or learning disabilities. He stated, "Pluralism is not only about people with different religious backgrounds; it is about people with different abilities and backgrounds… [The lessons] showed the school and community that stereotypes are wrong and that everyone should be respected for [who he or she] is."

Master-Trainers reported education about pluralism and associated rights effectively countered intolerant ideologies that have

historically fomented conflict between community members in the region. One Master-Trainer stated:

> "We have been able to bring [pluralism] into discussion and that was a very big challenge. Creating and developing this mindset is not easy where I live, but it certainly is not impossible. It takes time, and there is still a further need to keep this work going. We have addressed the child, the teacher, the family, and the community, but we must keep going to reach every household in the region. Radicalization is a disease that can never be completely eradicated, but we must always fight against it."
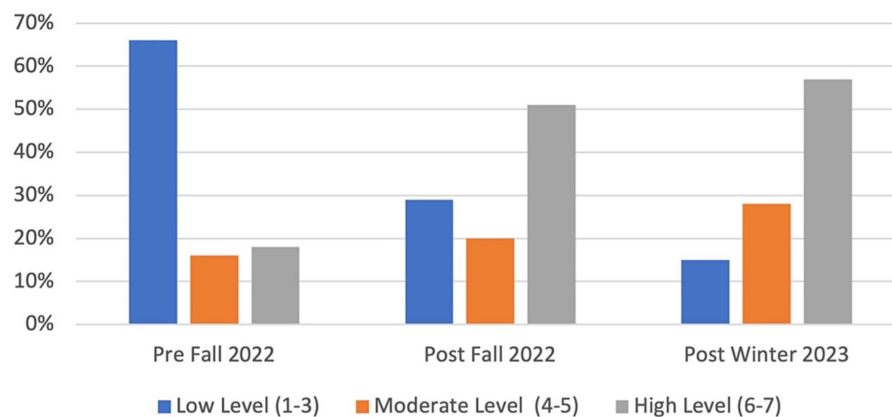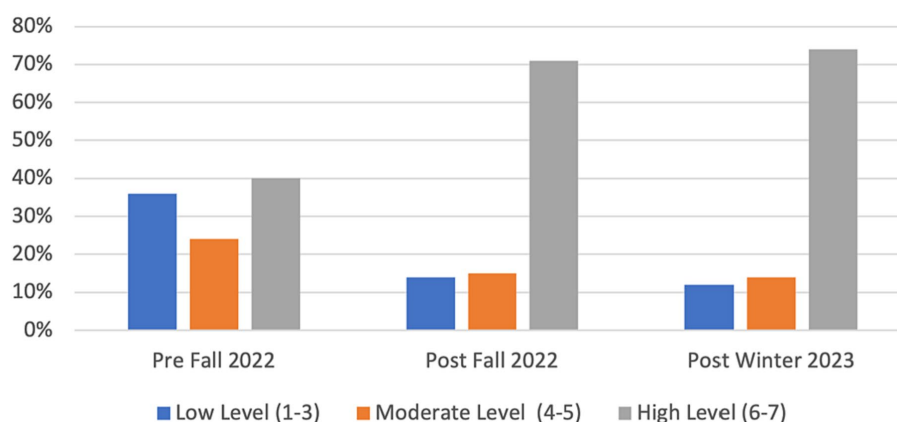
FIGURE 4
Pre-post scores for survey question 4. Sample size for Fall 22 is 2,452 students and sample size for Winter 23 is 1,176 students.

This is significant in this particular conflict-affected and geographic context, as teachers and students in the study were directly affected by the violence of ISIS.

4 Discussion

We set out to evaluate the impact of conceptual change pedagogy on student attitudes and behaviors toward key concepts inherent to pluralism and associated rights that are perceived as controversial or sensitive in their cultural context. We evaluated pre-post survey data from 2,452 students in the fall 2022 term and 1,176 students in the winter 2023 term. Due to administrative challenges, not all teachers were able to complete a second lessons during the data collection period, and thus fewer students were evaluated in the winter 2023 term. We documented statistically significant developments in students' conceptual understanding of key concepts inherent to controversial topics relating to pluralism and associated rights, including: respect for diversity in expression inclusion of diverse religious and/or ethnic communities, gender equality, and violent or non-violent approaches to conflict. Interviews and observations provide additional context on impact of the conceptual change process on individual and collective attitudes and behaviors.

The findings indicate that *even one lesson can instigate significant conceptual change in student understanding of controversial topics inherent to pluralism and associated rights.* Pre-post survey responses following the fall 2022 lesson indicate significant conceptual change in students' understanding of key concepts relating to pluralism and associated rights. No curriculum reforms were required. Teachers implemented lessons alongside their standard curricula and integrated the skills they learned through the training in their broader approaches to discussion and interaction with students. In this way, the training allowed teachers to integrate the program into the classroom.

Conceptual learning about pluralism has a positive impact on student perceptions, attitudes, and behavior toward diverse rights, including those related to gender, ethnicity, religion, and nationality.

While lessons did not teach explicitly about specific rights or values, conceptual learning on pluralism and the inherent dignity of individuals informed how students approached controversial topics, specifically in the way they viewed the rights and freedoms of others to live according to their conscience. Previous research supports this finding. In a program implemented in Lebanon from 2017–2018, teachers reported lessons on pluralism allowed students to speak openly and honestly about sensitive or controversial topics, including the rights of women and girls, individuals of different sexual orientations, and ethnic minority groups (Rea-Ramirez and Ramirez, 2018).

Conceptual change — specifically about the inherent rights of all people — has a positive impact on students' behaviors toward others. Pre-post survey answer choices reflect various responses students can have toward others in settings including sensitive or controversial topics. Responses reflecting low levels of understanding also demonstrate the most severe or antagonistic behavior, including responding with violence or discrimination. Responses reflecting moderate levels of understanding demonstrate isolated behaviors, with students opting to separate themselves from members of other groups or only interact with people who share their personal associations. Responses reflecting sophisticated levels of understanding demonstrate the most inclusive and empathetic behavior as students choose to bridge divides with whom they disagree to find mutual understanding and/or respect, even when they disagree. These observations are also reflected in interview and observational data, as Master-Trainers and teachers observed changes in the way students engaged with one another in classroom or school settings. It is important to note that the objective of the program was not to change students' personal beliefs, particularly concerning religious, cultural, political, or social identities or convictions. Anecdotally, students have acknowledged that increased conceptual learning about pluralism and associated rights actually increased their confidence in their own beliefs and convictions because they understood their individual right to hold them. Rather, students' perceptions of and attitudes toward others shifted in the conceptual

change process as they identified and explored the biases, fears, and/ or misconceptions they had about others that motivated their interactions. This suggests that, as students experience conceptual change about the inherent rights of all people, they demonstrate more respectful and empathetic behavior toward them, even when they hold conflicting or opposing views about controversial or sensitive topics.

The impact of education on pluralism on such diverse cultural topics also indicates the program can be adapted to diverse educational settings. Conceptual learning on pluralism creates an environment in which the issues most pertinent to learners can be introduced and discussed. It is not necessary to develop curricula addressing specific controversial topics, as discussion about key concepts inherent to pluralism and associated rights invites teachers and learners to consider issues that most directly affect their communities. It can also be applied to diverse learning environments, as reflected in the mixed religion-single religion and mixed gender-single gender classroom compositions represented in this study. This finding is further reflected in the expansion of Hardwired's program across the region. Hardwired presented the impact of the program assessed in this study to the Ministry of Education for the Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq and was subsequently invited to expand the program across the region.

Moreover, comparison of post-surveys from the fall 2022 lesson implementation to the winter 2023 lesson implementation show *students' conceptual learning about key concepts was maintained or increased as teachers developed more experience in conceptual change pedagogy.* Pre-post survey data evaluated the impact of two cycles of conceptual change on students through two lessons. In three of the four survey questions evaluated, students completing the lesson in Winter 2023 illustrated additional conceptual change in pre-post survey results. The exception was a question relating to the integration of refugees into the community. As noted in the previous section, the issue of refugee integration is a highly controversial topic; it relates not only to pluralism, but to concerns about political influence, access to resources, and security. Further data is needed to assess why students who completed the winter 2023 lesson reflected overall lower levels of understanding on this question compared the post fall 2022 survey results. Students' own refugee status and geographic proximity to other refugees as well as political or social discourse concerning refugees at the time may have influenced their responses. The inconsistent structure between the pre-post survey and the interview limited our ability to further assess these findings through interviews, which would have provided valuable insight to this end. These findings also suggest that ongoing training of teachers will increase the impact of lessons on students, particularly as teachers gain more experience navigating activities and discussion around key concepts and related controversial topics.

The research findings also suggest that *conceptual change pedagogy effectively allowed teachers and students to explore controversial topics inherent to pluralism and associated in a constructive and supportive environment with no reported hostility from teachers, students, school administrators or community members.* This suggests an optimal level of dissonance was created through the lessons, as students were challenged enough to demonstrate significant conceptual learning but not challenged so much as to elicit resistance or hostility toward the concepts introduced. Similarly, teachers and schools responded positively to the lessons and their impact on students. Teachers reported that parents who initially responded to activities with resistance or concerns ultimately

became supportive of them after reviewing the content and observing the impact of activities on their children. This was further documented when we attended community events hosted by participating schools and interviewed parents about the impact of the program on the community. This finding suggests conceptual change pedagogy about pluralism can be applied successfully to controversial topics in diverse cultural environments, including those contexts in which key concepts inherent to pluralism may be perceived as threatening. Previous studies have supported this finding, as students who experienced conceptual change in their understanding of pluralism and associated rights have demonstrated more confidence in their own convictions and beliefs while at the same time respecting the rights of others to do the same, even when they disagree (Smith et al., 2017; Rea-Ramirez et al., 2020a,b; Abboud and Dbouk, 2022).

Additional research can further investigate the impact of conceptual change pedagogy on education about controversial topics. As noted previously, interviews and observations conducted in this study were structured to evaluate student responses to specific topics addressed in the pre-post survey but were not effectively administered by teachers. This data would provide important context for how specific aspects of the program curriculum supported conceptual change about topics addressed on the survey as well as other topics or issues of particular interest or priority for educators and students. In this way, pluralism education can provide a safe environment in which controversial or sensitive topics of interest within a classroom or community can be identified and pursued. Further training on monitoring and evaluation methodology is required for Master Trainers and teachers alike to produce results for such a study. Additionally, study of the effect of the training and pedagogy on teachers and students in environments with different conflict, social, or political contexts and/or different geographic regions will provide more insight on the impact of the program in diverse environments, and therefore inform its applicability to other conflict-affected environments and regions.

5 Conclusion

This study assesses the effect of conceptual change pedagogy on students' attitudes toward pluralism and related rights within culturally sensitive contexts. The findings show conceptual change pedagogy can have a significant impact on student attitudes and behaviors toward key concepts inherent to pluralism and associated rights. Educators trained in the pedagogy were able to teach students about key concepts perceived as controversial in their social and/or cultural context. Importantly, teachers were able to navigate and address controversial topics in a way that instigated positive developments in students' attitudes and behaviors toward pluralism and associated rights without higher level education reforms or other initiatives that historically had varied levels of success. We documented significant conceptual change among students about key concepts inherent to pluralism and associated rights after one lesson. Conceptual learning about pluralism had a positive impact on student perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward diverse rights, including those related to gender, ethnicity, religion, and nationality. The impact of education on pluralism on such diverse cultural topics also indicates the program can be adapted to diverse educational settings. Conceptual change pedagogy effectively allowed teachers and students to explore controversial topics inherent to pluralism and associated

rights in a constructive and supportive environment with no reported hostility from teachers, students, school administrators or community members. These efforts were also accepted by regional government officials, as demonstrated by Hardwired's formal partnership with the regional Directorate of Education, as well as parents and community members. To this end, the pedagogy and program developed by Hardwired successfully filled a need observed in previous efforts to address issues relating to pluralism in conflict-affected environments. Further research is needed to assess the impact of the program in other conflict-affected and geographic contexts, but the study suggests conceptual change pedagogy on pluralism and associated rights is a promising approach to education about controversial topics that can support a culture of respect for diverse perspectives and opinions in culturally-sensitive environments.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the studies involving humans because we partnered with the Regional Directorate of Education to conduct the research. The Directorate reviewed and approved activities and data collection methods prior to the study. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The Regional Directorate of Education for Mosul, Iraq waived the requirement of written informed consent for participation from the participants or the participants' legal guardians/next of kin because activities implemented the classroom were part of the educational curriculum.

Author contributions

MR-R: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology. LA:

Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. TR: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Emotional competence profile in secondary school counselors: controversy or need?

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It is out of doubt that little attention is paid to the emotional competences of secondary school counselors in research activity, as well as in their initial and ongoing training. It seems that emotional well-being is still a pending issue that may even generate some controversy, even though, today, it is defined as a clear strategy in mental health plans. Undoubtedly, we are facing a content that facilitates the contrast of points of view and social commitment as an inherent part of the democratic process. Therefore, it was decided to carry out a study, of enormous relevance, with the purpose of knowing the perceptions of secondary school counselors within the Autonomous Community of Galicia regarding emotional competences for an ideal counseling practice in complex times and moments with great challenges in the field of educational equity. Specifically, an evaluation study was carried out on the level of training received by school counselors in emotional competences and thus be able to have a diagnosis, identifying possible strengths and weaknesses. A study with a quantitative based methodology which uses the questionnaire for data collection as a main research technique. The findings obtained suggest that the quality of the teaching and learning processes in secondary schools would be substantially improved if the emotional competence profile of the counselors was considered. In particular, the interest that emotional competences arouse in counselors is confirmed, at the same time, they recognize that they can help them properly to manage the relationship processes and, the personal balance. This research, one of the first carried out in Galicia on emotional competences in secondary school counselors, provides empirical data of great interest for future training plans that are more in line with social and professional expectations, since it provides an x-ray unique, revealing, valid and real statement of the state of the matter.

KEYWORDS
guidance, training, emotional competence, secondary education, well-being

Introduction

We live within a changing world, which evolves and progresses continuously, in which educational work presents rapid and constant changes in all areas. It seems that school settings, more than ever, must adapt to changing times. In this sense, teaching in Secondary Education has become an arduous task on which persists the need to reflect on the multiple secondary factors that condition it (Reoyo et al., 2017). Certainly, we are participating in turbulent moments with great challenges in educational equity, in which one of the main challenges of present society has to do with the training of educational professionals. An initial and continuous

training that may allow them to satisfactorily face the demands from their nearest working space becomes highly necessary. In this context, guidance becomes a tool for the expected change in the educational framework, with the primary function of promoting an action aimed at a personal, social, and organizational transformation. It is even considered as a key element in supporting the transformations that schools must carry out to adapt to a dynamic and changing society with new requirements (Martínez Juárez et al., 2017).

To try to provide guidance under minimum quality parameters, it is necessary that guidance practices could extend to the entire educational community and throughout student's entire life, both in the academic sphere and in the labor sphere. Therefore, the guidance activity involves the practice of a series of varied functions and demands, among which we can highlight attention to diversity, evaluation and promotion of students, health education, education in values, management of bullying situations, resolution of discipline problems, treatment of school failure, solving demotivation situations, addition of educational innovations, etc. (Hernández Rivero and Mederos Santana, 2018).

From this perspective, secondary school counselors are conceived as education professionals with the necessary pedagogical and psychological knowledge to be able to positively influence learning improvement processes and to be in a position which enables to collaborate with teachers in the comprehensive development of students from a specific role that includes the profile of counseling, consultation, trainer, informer, assistant, pedagogical director, communicator, and coordinator. Counselors are assigned a task of responsibility in the design, development, and evaluation of initiatives for the improvement of schools. They are expected to assume the role of an educational leader (Cejudo, 2016), since they are considered catalysts for change. In short, the guidance professionals seem to be obliged to adopt the role of collaborative experts who cooperate with other professionals from their own school context, with the main objective of optimizing the educational response to each student (Grañeras and Parras, 2008; Hernández-Salamanca, 2020). But to assume such an ambitious professional profile, initial training and professional development actions must be rethought (Amber and Martos, 2017).

As it can be seen, the assigned tasks are numerous, diverse, ambiguous, and poorly delimited, ranging from a more evaluative approach to a more preventive and informative one. Sometimes it is impossible to pay attention to them in their entirety, so it is crucial to establish priorities (Amor Almedina and Serrano Rodríguez, 2019; López Díez-Caballero and Manzano-Soto, 2019). Otherwise, it will give way to frustrated expectations and interventions that lack rigor. Secondary school counselors must be prepared to face the changes that are facing in their professional future as well as to overcome new goals every day. However, to achieve a correct performance of their profession, it is necessary to define their professional profile and the related number of functions. To be able to insist, at this point, on the difficulties that orienteering usually entails, whose path, to a greater or lesser extent, is strewn with pitfalls and several sources of stress, and in some cases causing risk situations such as burnout syndrome. Situations caused both by the breadth of the functions directly attributed by the educational administration and by the process of expanding the area of action itself toward curricular and organizational advisory processes, as well as the lack of knowledge of its functional profile by the teaching staff.

Sometimes, this lack of professional definition of the counselor produces a mismatch in the relational climate with teachers, since it becomes a figure that usually prescribes what is convenient to do, with

the consequent tension generated in social relations. The need to participate in meetings with the teaching staff and to foster collaborative work, without being aware of it, may be confused with supervision and evaluation.

It is inevitable to know what kind of roles high school counselors value most in their practice, that is, to know to what extent a profile of counseling, of changing agent, of communicator, of consultant or resource coordinator concerns them or they regard it as something strange and forced. In this line, emotional competences can provide the opportunity to effectively face the demands that are presented every day in the exercise of guidance, since they emphasize the interaction that occurs between the person and their environment. These types of skills allow interaction with others to be developed fluently, which is the reason why they are a good indicator for success in the counseling profession. It should not be forgotten that an emotionally intelligent professional is the one capable of correctly perceiving, understanding, regulating, and applying their own emotions and those of others, minimizing the negative effect of some and enhancing the positive results of others. Undoubtedly, knowing how to handle feelings is a basic matter to be able to carry out the counseling responsibilities. It should be noted that professionals with good attention to their emotions can transfer this ability to other fields.

Emotional competences emphasize the attitudes necessary to become aware of, understand, express and appropriately regulate the emotional phenomena that need to be addressed every second of our lives (Alonso Ferres et al., 2017; Cejudo and López-Delgado, 2017; Fernández-Berrocal et al., 2017; Hernández, 2017; López-Cassá and Pérez-Escoda, 2017; Márquez Cervantes and Gaeta González, 2017; Huertas-Fernández and Romero-Rodríguez, 2019; Barrientos-Fernández et al., 2020). They constitute a stress-absorbing factor and a better coping with the multiple conflicts and negative reactions that arise in the work environment. Therefore, they play a decisive role in the optimal performance of any type of work and in the achievement of professional success, promoting personal and social well-being and fulfilling a purpose aimed at providing added value to professional functions (Álvarez-Ramírez et al., 2017; Derakhshan et al., 2023). Paradoxically, to work as a secondary education counselor, it is not necessary to carry out any prior training activity related to emotional competences, although it is recognized that they play a fundamental role in that professional field (Schoeps et al., 2019). It is striking that they are not included in the training for the profession and that the basic competences that the high school counselor must develop are not clearly identified (Cejudo, 2017).

Salovey and Mayer (1990), when they talk about emotional competences, they refer to emotional intelligence, understood as the ability to control and regulate your own feelings and others and use them as a guide for thought and action. It should be noted that the term emotional intelligence is closely related to the ability to recognize our own feelings, the feelings of others, to motivate ourselves, and to properly manage the relationships we have with others and with ourselves (Goleman, 1998; Delgado-González et al., 2023). For this reason, it is not trivial to have the skills to recognize our own feelings and those of others, to motivate oneself and persist in the face of disappointments, control impulses, delay gratification, show empathy, regulate mood, prevent difficulties from diminishing one's ability to think, etc.

As an acquired capacity based on emotional intelligence, it can lead to an outstanding work performance, depending on the extent to which this potential has been transferred to the world of work (Goleman, 1998). The most decisive emotional competences are based

not only on abilities that have to do with recognizing and understanding one's own emotional states and their effect on other people, but also on the ability to control and redirect negative emotional impulses and states, as well as to foster empathy and socialization spaces (Pena Garrido et al., 2016). Emotional competences form the basis of a healthy and lasting professional development. However, emotional well-being is still a pending issue that can even generate some controversy, even though today it is defined as a clear strategy in mental health plans. Undoubtedly, we are facing a content that promotes the contrast of points of view and social commitment as an inherent part of the democratic process.

In this context, it seems convenient and adequate to carry out an assessment study specifically focused basically on emotional competences, under the focus of the training received. This study, pioneering in Galicia and of enormous relevance, seeks to provide a quality response to the demands arising from secondary school counseling, especially in difficult times like the ones we are witnessing. Specifically, it seeks to know the perceptions of Galician secondary school counselors about the level of training in emotional skills, as well as having a diagnosis of the level of training in emotional skills, identifying possible strengths and weaknesses.

Method

The emotional competences of secondary education counselors, as noted above, seem to constitute an element on which the effectiveness of their work lies to a certain extent. Therefore, this fact justifies an empirical approach that enables to identify possible deficiencies at this level and guide accordingly the training of these professionals. It is convenient, then, to examine the perceptions of high school counselors about their level of competence in the field of emotions to have a strategic diagnosis. In this sense, an unprecedented study was started in the Autonomous Community of Galicia to address the training of counselors in public secondary schools. An evaluation study that has a quantitative methodological design (Likert-type assessment scale).

Sample

In the quantitative phase of the study, the reference population is made up of the group of counselors who carry out their professional work in public secondary schools in Galicia (approximate number = 323). Contact was established with the entire population available to request their participation. Finally, the sample was made up of 184 guidance professionals who gave the corresponding consent to participate in the research, which represents an effective response rate of 57%, in this case more than reasonable for this type of study. A sample made up mainly of counselors, belonging to an age group between 36 and 50 years of age, with a permanent destination in the school where they work. They also have extensive experience in the educational world and in the field of guidance. 72.28% work in an IES (Secondary Education Institute) and the remaining 27.72% in a CPI (Integrated Public School). The subjects participating in the study are well acquainted with the ESO (Secondary) educational level and are used to be working with more than 250 students, in schools with more than 50 teachers. 30.43% develop their activity in urban areas and the remaining 69.5% in rural area schools. One of their most outstanding concerns is training since most of them systematically

participate in continuous training and updating activities. Few have some experience running schools, although most do hold the post of head of the Guidance Department. They do not usually work cooperatively with other guidance professionals, but they are used to be working with new technologies and are trained in foreign languages. Technological tools are quite useful for them, making easier their professional and valuing the task which they perform.

Instruments

Given the complexity of the subject of research and the lack of a single, empirically proven, and universally accepted tool by the scientific community, it was decided to develop an *ad hoc* instrument. Specifically, a Likert-type assessment scale, made up of 92 items that allow us to investigate the training of secondary school counselors around emotional competences. The response level of the 92 items is graded in 4 points, from least to most. Two open questions were included in the instrument, as well as questions of a general nature (age, studies completed, professional category, administrative situation, years of experience in guidance, hours of training received on school guidance, years of service in the educational field, etc.). For the external and internal validity of the scale, the evaluation provided by judges was used (2 university professors specialized in educational methodology and 8 high school counselors with extensive experience in the field of guidance) and the pilot test ($N = 20$), thus substantially improving the final instrument. The analysis of the internal consistency of the rating scale is performed by calculating Cronbach's α coefficient, obtaining an excellent result both globally ($\alpha_{Global} = 0.98$) and for each of the factors. The reliability coefficient was also calculated using the "Two Halves Method" (Spearman-Brown), reaching a global value of 0.97. It can be observed that the degree of internal consistency between the items of each one of the factors is considerably high, the reliability of the scale used proved to be remarkably accurate.

Procedure

After applying the research instrument online, the responses received were carefully reviewed. The data obtained were numerically coded through a coding table where the values given to each response in the different variables were recorded. To detect possible inconsistencies, both frequency and contingency tables were used, which in this case made it possible to correct the anomalies detected. To estimate the quality of the final data matrix, a representative sample of questionnaires (n = 37) was selected, 20% of the total number of questionnaires answered for its punctual verification. The percentage of error found was less than 0.05%, assuming the quality of the data as high and proceeding to its final analysis.

For the analysis of quantitative data, with the help of the statistical package SPSS.20 and the AMOS.20 program, strategies such as:

- "Uni" and "bivariate" tabulation, including percentages in the case of categorical variables and descriptive statistics (medias and standard deviations) for quantitative variables.
- Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) by the Principal Components method, for the identification of competence factors or "macro competences."

Results

To examine the internal structure of the scale and identify the underlying factors, using the Principal Components Method, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was carried out. As input data, the direct scores referring to training in 88 of the 92 initial items were used, setting aside 4 of them, given the scant relevance and applicability received by the study subjects. The KMO index was 0.935 and the Bartlett's Sphericity Test (13795.49) was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the input matrix could be estimated as suitable for factorization. The resulting analysis offered a total of 14 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, which jointly explained 70.04% of the Variance of the data. Later, a Varimax rotation was applied to allow the independence of the factors and thus achieve a better characterization.

After the first item screening, a second EFA was carried out, leaving the new scale made up of 60 items, once again using the Principal Components method and a Varimax rotation. The KMO index was 0.942 and the Bartlett's Sphericity Test was 8641.37 ($p < 0.001$). The resulting analysis provided a total of 10 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, which jointly explained 68.62% of the Variance of the data, almost 1% less than that obtained with 88 items. The factorial structure obtained is more consistent.

To check the internal consistency of the scale, Cronbach's ↦ coefficient was calculated, obtaining an excellent result both globally ($↦_{Global} = 0.98$) and for each of the factors separately, considering that some factors consist of only 4 items.

Hereinafter, the results obtained in the study are described after applying the descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum) to the items that make up the assessment scale to assess the level of perception that the guidance professionals themselves have about their training in emotional competences (see Table 1).

As it can be seen, the data obtained is revealing. In general terms, it is observed that the 12 competences with a high degree of training received by guidance professionals, on a scale from 1 to 4, are: "Respect" (3.49), "Confidentiality" (3.46), "Tolerance" (3.38), "Appreciation of diversity" (3.35), "Accessibility" (3.34), "Inclusion" (3.34), "Attention to diversity" (3.33), "Ability to listen" (3.32), "Responsibility professional" (3.30), "Consultation" (3.28), "Dialogue" (3.28), and "Opening" (3.25).

On the other hand, among the 12 competences with a lower level of perception are: "Indolence" (2.13), "Authority" (2.35), "Coaching" (2.52), "Sense of humor" (2.57), "Leadership" (2.60), "Stress management" (2.60), "Persuasion" (2.65), "Creativity" (2.66), "Courage and risk taking" (2.69), "Innovation" (2.69), "Initiative" (2.73), and "Dynamization" (2.74).

Likewise, the results of the study reveal that the secondary school counselors surveyed have a high level of training in the "Confidentiality" competence, the second-best valued option. It can also be seen that the research subjects feel specially trained in competences attached to capacities related to social sensitivity, since competences such as "Tolerance," "Appreciation of diversity," "Accessibility," "Inclusion" and "Attention to diversity," occupy the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh place, respectively.

The competence "Listening ability" (3.32) appears located in the eighth place, which indicates that the subjects participating in the study believe that they are well trained in a vital aspect for the knowledge of the oriented. The "Empathy" competence ranks 13th. In the group of competences in which Galician counselors perceive themselves to be specially trained, the "Advice" competence stands out (obtaining position 23) and the "Communication" competence, ranking in this case in position 26.

The "Teamwork" competence, as can be seen, appears located in position 39, which means a low training rate. Something similar happens with the "Assertiveness" competence (located in position 40) and the "Coordinate with others" competence, which is in 49th place. A striking fact is the position obtained by the "Self-control" competence, located in position 60. The "Collaboration" competence (located in position 63) and the "Motivation" competence, in position 78, reflect a significant lack of training. It is also necessary to underline the behavior of the "Coordination" competence, with a position of 70.

The "Proactivity," "Entrepreneurship" and "Initiative" skills, preferred skills for starting and leading genuine projects, occupy positions 77, 79, and 81, respectively. The "Innovation" competence receives a low rating, occupying position 82. The "Stress Management" competence appears as the fifth competence with the lowest score received on the evaluation scale, occupying position 87. The "Leadership" competence is located at position 88. The competence "Sense of humor" occupies position 89. The competence "Coaching" is in position 90. This reflects a low training of the counselor in this type of competence.

The secondary education counselors surveyed, on the other hand, consider themselves poorly trained in "Indolence." The extracted data reveal this if we consider that this competence is ranked 92. This implies that emotions such as apathy, neglect, laziness, lack of response or abandonment are not part of their work culture.

Below are the data obtained after applying an Exploratory Factor Analysis, EFA, to the items, thus bringing together the competences in 10 factors based on the saturations produced (saturations greater than 0.35). In Table 2, we present the corresponding results.

Planning

The data resulting from the 10 factors in which the items were agglutinated, after applying the Exploratory Factor Analysis, show a disparate behavior, appearing significant differences between them. Thus, for example, the factor "Tolerance" (3.31) yields higher results. This factor integrates competences such as: "Appreciation of diversity," "Tolerance," "Ability to listen," "Respect," "Consensus," "Attention to diversity," "Help" and "Dialogue." Followed by the "Ethics" factor (3.28), configured by the following competences: "Ethical behavior," "Discretion," "Confidentiality" and "Professional responsibility." And, of the factor "Communication and personal relationships" (3.13), which includes the competences "Communication," "Interpersonal skills," "Empathy" and "Assertiveness."

And at the other extreme, with a low formative appreciation, is the factor "Entrepreneurial attitude" (2.74), which is made up of the competences: "Initiative," "Leadership," "Autonomy," "Motivation," "Innovation," "Courage," "Creativity" and "Entrepreneurship." Followed by the "Self-regulation" factor (2.87) composed of the "Self-control," "Frustration tolerance," "Self-discipline," "Resilience" and "Stress management" competences. And, "Socialization and commitment" (2.99), made up of the competences "Socialization," "Coordination," "Social commitment" and "Planning."

Discussion

Emotional competences constitute a powerful tool that can greatly facilitate the work of guidance in secondary education, since they are decisive in personal interactions (Bisquerra Alzina and Lopez Cassa,

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics to assess training in emotional competences.

Competence	Media	Typical deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Respect	3.49	0.67	1	4
Confidentiality	3.46	0.72	1	4
Tolerance	3.38	0.70	1	4
Diversity appreciation	3.35	0.69	1	4
Accessibility	3.34	0.76	1	4
Inclusion	3.34	0.66	1	4
Attention to diversity	3.33	0.63	1	4
Listening ability	3.32	0.72	1	4
Professional responsibility	3.30	0.73	1	4
Consultation	3.28	0.67	1	4
Dialogue	3.28	0.66	1	4
Opening	3.25	0.69	1	4
Empathy	3.22	0.72	1	4
Integrity	3.22	0.73	1	4
Ethical behavior	3.21	0.78	1	4
Aid	3.21	0.68	1	4
Cordiality	3.21	0.75	1	4
Self-knowledge	3.20	0.69	1	4
Self-concept	3.20	0.71	1	4
Keen	3.17	0.76	1	4
Commitment	3.17	0.73	1	4
Discretion	3.16	0.77	1	4
Advice	3.16	0.67	1	4
Self-critical capacity	3.16	0.75	1	4
Equity	3.16	0.68	1	4
Communication	3.14	0.66	1	4
Professional development	3.14	0.69	1	4
Availability	3.14	0.79	1	4
Sanity	3.14	0.68	1	4
Reflection	3.13	0.70	1	4
Interpersonal skills	3.12	0.67	1	4
Consensus	3.12	0.64	1	4
Situational analysis	3.11	0.68	1	4
Veracity	3.11	0.81	1	4
Perseverance	3.09	0.74	1	4
Mediation	3.09	0.67	1	4
Assessment	3.08	0.60	1	4
Self-development	3.08	0.75	1	4
Teamwork	3.07	0.67	1	4
Assertiveness	3.06	0.69	1	4
Implication	3.06	0.73	1	4
Reliability	3.06	0.74	1	4
Flexibility	3.05	0.69	1	4
Socialization	3.04	0.71	1	4

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Competence	Media	Typical deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Facilitator	3.03	0.76	1	4
Patience	3.02	0.80	1	4
Update	3.02	0.76	1	4
Planning	3.02	0.66	1	4
Coordinate with others	3.01	0.66	1	4
Social commitment	3.01	0.75	1	4
Objectivity	3.01	0.69	1	4
Self-esteem	3.01	0.71	1	4
Ask effective questions	3.00	0.71	1	4
Negotiation	2.99	0.65	1	4
Problem resolution	2.98	0.69	1	4
Answer's capacity	2.98	0.64	1	4
Non-verbal communication	2.98	0.72	1	4
Enthusiasm	2.97	0.81	1	4
Critical capacity	2.97	0.73	1	4
Self-control	2.97	0.75	1	4
Permanent learning	2.97	0.70	1	4
Decision making	2.96	0.63	1	4
Delusion	2.95	0.75	1	4
Collaboration	2.94	0.72	1	4
Concern for success	2.94	0.76	1	4
Self-discipline	2.94	0.71	1	4
Resilience	2.92	0.73	1	4
Optimism	2.92	0.78	1	4
Analytical capacity	2.91	0.70	1	4
Coordination	2.90	0.69	1	4
Motivation	2.89	0.67	1	4
Public relations	2.89	0.75	1	4
Frustration tolerance	2.89	0.75	1	4
Introspection	2.88	0.71	1	4
Autonomous action	2.88	0.69	1	4
Investigation	2.87	0.74	1	4
Self-confidence	2.86	0.74	1	4
Pro-activity	2.80	0.68	1	4
Excellence	2.76	0.70	1	4
Entrepreneurial spirit	2.76	0.71	1	4
Dynamization	2.74	0.71	1	4
Initiative	2.73	0.73	1	4
Innovation	2.69	0.67	1	4
Value and risk assumption	2.69	0.77	1	4
Creativity	2.66	0.72	1	4
Persuasion	2.65	0.74	1	4
Stress management	2.60	0.80	1	4
Leadership	2.60	0.70	1	4

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Competence	Media	Typical deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Sense of humor	2.57	0.82	1	4
Coaching	2.52	0.77	1	4
Authority	2.35	0.71	1	4
Indolence	2.13	0.80	1	4

Source: self-elaboration based on data.

2021; Rodríguez-Pérez et al., 2021) and are essential to manage a work environment often characterized by conflicts, stress, and complex situations with the educational community (Rodríguez Álvarez et al., 2017; Prieto, 2018). It is verified, once again, that socio-emotional competences are considered a valuable instrument that offers guarantees for job success, since they help to quell job tension by facilitating work when the context is hostile and helping to manage relationship processes. and personal balance (Chianese and Prats Fernández, 2021; Martínez-Saura et al., 2021). Ultimately, they promote social commitment and democratic participation from an inclusive framework.

The professional exercise of guidance in secondary school presents certain vicissitudes that foster the need for a solid training load linked to the management of one's own emotions and those of others (Prieto, 2018). Some researchers (García-Domingo, 2021; García-Vila et al., 2022) regret the explicit exclusion of emotional competences in initial training programs, since they are essential for the successful development of any activity related to the human being. High school guidance professionals appreciate that, beyond knowledge in specific areas, it is essential to have robust attitudinal training to promote good professional work in the field of educational guidance. Despite the advances, we present a deterioration in the ability to manage emotions.

In the current context, it is increasingly appreciated that job performance cannot be predicted through school grades. Academic intelligence is not enough to achieve professional success. Therefore, as Martínez-Pérez (2023) states, emotional competences must be at the same level of training as other competences (conceptual and procedural). However, even though they are considered relevant for guidance practice, they represent a weak point in the training of secondary school guidance counselors, both initial and permanent. The exercise of the guidance profession requires some skills in which its professionals want to feel prepared, safe, and strong. The reality, unfortunately, does not seem to go in that direction. The secondary school counselors surveyed attribute severe deficiencies in the formation of emotional competences, as confirmed in the evaluation study carried out. For this reason, it is appropriate that the Galician Educational Administration assume the responsibility of facing this challenge with due coherence and energy, especially in times of maximum vulnerability such as those we are witnessing. It is urgent to establish a serious, rigorous, coherent, and well-structured training plan, which allows the development of training actions of this nature. A training plan that integrates the study of emotions in a structured way (García et al., 2018).

The findings of this study show that the three competences on which the training load of secondary school guidance professionals is focused on are: "Respect," "Confidentiality," and "Tolerance." Consequently, they constitute the emotional pillars of the counselors consulted. High school guidance professionals seem to have a high level of training to guarantee the autonomy of those guided, their freedom in decision-making and to make a careful and responsible use of the testimonials obtained, given

that the "Respect" competence obtains the highest score. An important issue in the guidance activity, as pointed out by Grañeras and Parras (2008). The fact that the "Confidentiality" competence obtains a good assessment shows the importance of the ethical code in the professionalization of the counselor.

The "Empathy" competence, which trains to know what others feel and understand the difficulties of a user (Goleman, 1995), ranks 13th. We are talking about a fundamental competence in building the relationship with the educational community and, therefore, involved in a wide spectrum of activities that secondary school counselors carry out. The secondary school counselors participating in the study perceive themselves to be specially trained in the "Counseling" competence, obtaining 23rd place. This is a key task in the work of guidance professionals, being among the competences assigned to the Departments of Guidance in Secondary Schools from the Galician Educational Administration.

At the opposite extreme, the competences that present a high level of lack from the perspective of the surveyed guidance professionals themselves are: "Indolence," "Authority" and "Coaching." Therefore, they make up the block of skills with a low training profile. In relation to the "Coaching" competence, with a position of 90, what is revealed is a lack of knowledge about this field of knowledge. It is still contradictory since the counselor gives counseling with a specific objective daily. The development of "Coaching" is a great challenge for the profession itself (Bisquerra, 2008), so this type of competence should be addressed in initial and ongoing training.

The "Teamwork" competence appears located in position 39, which means a low rate of training. It is striking because teamwork is necessary in the educational world. If we add to this data that the competence "Coordinate with others" is ranked 49th, clear indications are obtained that the predominant culture in secondary schools seems to be characterized by isolation (Martínez Garrido et al., 2010). Regarding the "Collaboration" competence, located in position 63, a significant training gap is reflected. This result seems to indicate that this competence is not always promoted in the initial training of secondary school counselors, despite being essential to be able to develop collaborative processes in schools. Therefore, it is necessary to promote the "Collaboration" competence from the educational administration, to achieve the necessary training and be able to break with the role of expert of the counselor. It is urgent here to favor a collaborative position with each one of the members of the educational community, from a preventive and systemic approach. Also highlight the behavior of the "Coordination" competence, with a position of 70. It shows, in some way, a lack of training, despite appearing among the functions of secondary school counselors.

The factors whose training is considered most suitable are: "Tolerance," "Ethics" and "Communication and personal relationships." In this sense, the results obtained reveal optimal training in the "Communication" competence, ranking in 26th place

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics for the formation of each factor.

Factors that bring together competences	Media	Typical deviation
FACTOR 1: SELF-KNOWLEDGE	3.04	0.57
Overall critical ability	2.97	0.73
Self-critical capacity	3.16	0.75
Analytical capacity	2.91	0.70
Reflection	3.13	0.70
Introspection	2.88	0.71
Self-knowledge	3.20	0.69
FACTOR 2: ENTREPRENEURIAL ATTITUDE	2.74	0.54
Initiative	2.73	0.73
Leadership	2.60	0.70
Autonomy	2.88	0.69
Motivation	2.89	0.67
Innovation	2,69	0.67
Worth	2.69	0.77
Creativity	2.66	0.72
Entrepreneurial spirit	2.76	0.71
FACTOR 3: DYNAMISM AND COLLABORATION	3.02	0.59
Dynamization	2.74	0.71
Accessibility	3.34	0.76
Enthusiasm	2.97	0.81
Self-confidence	2.86	0.74
Delusion	2.95	0.75
Availability	3.14	0.79
Optimism	2.92	0.78
Cordiality	2.89	0.67
FACTOR 4: PRAGMATIC AND RESOLUTIVE ATTITUDE	3.05	0.54
Answer's capacity	2.98	0.64
Perseverance	3.09	0.74
Permanent learning	2.97	0.70
Update	3.02	0.76
Situational analysis	3.11	0.68
Consultation	3.28	0.67
Research	2.87	0.74
FACTOR 5: INTEGRITY AND HUMAN VALUES	3.08	0.58
Excellence	2.76	0.70
Reliability	3.06	0.74
Veracity	3.11	0.81
Integrity	3.22	0.73
Commitment	3.17	0.73
Sanity	3.14	0.68
FACTOR 6: ETHICS	3.28	0.62

(Continued)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Factors that bring together competences	Media	Typical deviation
Ethical behavior	3.21	0.78
Discretion	3.16	0.77
confidentiality	3.46	0.72
Professional responsibility	3.30	0.73
FACTOR 7: TOLERANCE	3.31	0.52
Appreciation of diversity	3.35	0.69
Tolerance	3.38	0.70
Listening ability	3.32	0.72
Respect	3.49	0.67
Consensus	3.12	0.64
Attend to diversity	3.33	0.63
Aid	3.21	0.68
Dialogue	3.28	0.66
FACTOR 8: SELF-REGULATION	2.87	0.58
Self-control	2.97	0.75
Frustration tolerance	2.89	0.75
Self-discipline	2.94	0.71
Resilience	2.92	0.73
Stress management	2.60	0.80
FACTOR 9: COMMUNICATIVE AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	3.13	0.56
Communication	3.14	0.66
Interpersonal skills	3.12	0.67
Empathy	3.22	0.72
Assertiveness	3,06	0.69
FACTOR 10: SOCIALIZATION AND COMMITMENT	2.99	0.57
Socialization	3.04	0.71
Coordination	2.90	0.69
Social commitment	3.01	0.75
Planning	3.02	0.66

Source: self-elaboration based on data.

in this case. It is a competence perceived as essential by most experienced counselors (Grañeras and Parras, 2008). The result of the "Assertiveness" competence, located in position 40, is striking. A competence that allows promoting equality between human relations, an aspect present in the professional practice of the counselor/high school and highlighted by various authors (Goleman, 1995; Repetto and Pena, 2010). We are facing a competence that allows the counselor to be able to act in defense of their interests, defend themselves without unjustified anxiety, sincerely express their feelings and carry out their rights (Repetto and Pena, 2010). Consequently, it becomes a key competence for a good secondary school guidance professional.

The factors in which the level of training is perceived to be weaker are: "Entrepreneurial attitude," "Self-regulation" and "Socialization and commitment." The training deficit found in the "Self-regulation" factor, which integrates skills such as "Self-control," "Frustration

tolerance," "Self-discipline," "Resilience," and "Stress management," is surprising, considering that we are facing a determining factor when it comes to managing emotions. It should be remembered that this factor makes it possible to neutralize situations that generate negative emotions and that represent a significant waste of energy. Undoubtedly, it makes it possible to maintain the helm of obligations, despite the turbulence and even "tsunamis" in which school counselors are often involved. The "Stress Management" competence can help to design actions and strategies that allow the development of concrete prevention and intervention plans to avoid stress, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization. The training gaps detected in the "Stress Management" skill, the fifth skill with the lowest score received on the assessment scale, highlights the need for its inclusion in training plans. It cannot be ignored that we are facing a core competence in the counseling profession, since among the sources of stress perceived by secondary school counselors are: the breadth and diversity of tasks, the low awareness of teachers to assume a response to the specific needs for educational support, the difficulty in assuming the functions included in the regulations, the precarious ongoing training received, the problems in carrying out effective and efficient coordination between professionals, etc. It seems that the most emotionally competent high school counselors have the necessary resources to better cope with stressful situations and adequately manage the negative emotional responses that frequently appear in interactions with co-workers, family, and students. The position obtained by the "Self-control" competence, located in position 60, is amazing. It is not a high and expected score, as it is a competence that allows you to manage impulsive feelings, seeking balance at the most critical moments. At the same time, this competence makes it possible to think clearly despite the pressures received (Goleman, 1998). In short, we are facing a competence related to how to regulate one's own emotions and those of others, which moderates negative emotions, intensifying positive ones and minimizing negative ones. Similarly, the "Motivation" competence is shown (position 78). The competence par excellence, among the counselor's socioemotional competences (Repetto and Pena, 2010). Although, it is possible that this result is mediated by the culture of isolation, sometimes predominant in schools or may reflect the attitude of demotivation and lack of commitment in many teachers (Martínez Garrido et al., 2010).

The "Innovation" competence receives a low rating, occupying position 82. This seems to indicate that the secondary school counselor has not just received training in this field, as others have already confirmed (Velaz-de-Medrano et al., 2013). The "Leadership" competence is ranked 88th. It should be part of the competence training of all counselors, considering that a decision-making style is necessary to assume, promote and develop a new professional culture in the exercise orientation as proposed by Medina and Gómez (2014). And, even, in some cases, the role of leader must be signified by personal and professional pre-eminence over a group, capable of influencing the decisions and positions adopted (Amber and Martos, 2017). The score received in a competence such as "Sense of Humor" is notable, with a position of 89. On some occasions, this competence helps to cope with certain situations and guarantees personal well-being. It is increasingly considered in the professional field, although it is true that a sense of humor can be defined as a very subjective quality and is not always understood in the same way. In fact, sometimes it can even cause misunderstandings.

Conclusions and implications

The study which was carried out, was of great importance and interest for the entire educational community (teachers, students, tutors, families, etc.) and particularly for school counselors. Therefore, the results of the study will be of great help, even though the field of emotions and its research can be very controversial.

In any case, it is necessary to outline the nature of emotional processes in educational contexts, promoting the generation of valuable measurement instruments with adequate psychometric properties and the implementation of intervention programs that promote emotional competences. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges is to provide evidence regarding the benefits of emotional education, appealing to solid and cutting-edge research with contributions from new methodological frameworks.

This study is not an end point. Rather, it opens new horizons to continue investigating this complex reality. The needs for further study, given the scarcity of studies focused exclusively on the topic addressed, leading us to continue with line of work from a qualitative perspective, using discussion groups and/or in-depth interviews as data collection techniques.

The main limitation of this study is that its results cannot be generalized to the entire school context of the Spanish State. In this sense, it is convenient to expand the sample to other Autonomous Regions and even extend it to other educational levels in order to obtain greater empirical evidence, exploring possible differences.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

JV: Investigation, Writing – original draft. MF: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. MM: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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The conceptions of Spanish and Colombian students regarding processes of historical reconciliation

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In the field of history education research, the analysis of the construction, circulation and appropriation of controversial and difficult histories has become a particularly relevant issue. Based on this line of research, the present study seeks to analyze the historical judgments of Spanish and Colombian students regarding processes of historical reconciliation, linked to situations of a controversial and difficult nature. To achieve this objective, a quantitative, non-experimental, survey-based design was employed. A total of 648 Spanish and 764 Colombian students from schools located in the cities of Murcia (Spain) and Bogotá (Colombia) participated by answering a closed questionnaire. The results show that ethical judgments on controversial issues, established on what is considered to be politically correct, are more frequent when the problem being evaluated is situated in a frame of reference external to questions of national belonging. However, such judgments tend to decrease, or assume a neutral standpoint, when the controversial issue is related to the individual's own sense of identity. Thus, it is clear that the learning of difficult and controversial historical issues is not only built on a cognitive dimension. It is also supported by political, ethical and aesthetic dimensions, leading to the processes of making and receiving historical judgments being even more complex.

KEYWORDS

history education, controversial history, difficult history, historical reconciliation, students' conceptions

Introduction

The historical configuration of most modern societies is closely related to events, facts and controversial and traumatic processes. However, due to the nature and the sense of identity which defines the formation of the nation states, such events have become difficult experiences to process in that they call into question the legitimacy of the order established by those states and their reason for being. Therefore, although analyzing these controversial histories is essential to understanding the fact that the present is marked by different kinds of violence, it is not unusual to find official and unofficial discourses in different areas of society. These discourses directly or indirectly encourage the neglect, distortion or denial of controversial issues, considering them unworthy of public discussion (Ahonen, 2014; De Baets, 2015; Gellman, 2015).

In the context of education, this trend to deny or conceal certain historical experiences defined by symbolic and physical violence, in accordance with the sophism of an immaculate, exemplary and triumphal version of history, reaffirms a system of individual and collective

identity grounded in a reductionist approach to the learning of history. By neglecting the recognition of the needs, suffering and pain of others, this approach destroys all possibility of building a common present and future in which truth, reparation, justice, peace and the avoidance of repeating wrongs take pride of place.

Although it is socially and politically difficult to confront conflictive histories (particularly more recent events), this task has now become a priority in the teaching of history. Therefore, over recent years, both in terms of theory and methodology, research and reflection around the relationship between history education and controversial, traumatic and difficult issues have progressively become more important (McCully, 2012; Epstein and Peck, 2017; Ibagón, 2020; Vicent et al., 2020). This growing interest among researchers has been based, on the one hand, on criticism of forming a sense of identity via the reproduction and memorization of romantic history (Carretero and Van Alphen, 2014; Van Alphen and Carretero, 2015; Ibagón, 2023) and, on the other hand, on recognition of the potential of the teaching and learning of history as far as citizenship education and the promotion of peaceful and democratic scenarios in contexts marked by different forms of violence are concerned (Barton and Levstik, 2004; Nolgård et al., 2020; Pudar et al., 2020).

Along these lines, it has been established that history learning in education systems, rather than developing a univocal and one-sided identity grounded in a historical narrative defined exclusively by notions of triumph and grandeur, should prepare children and young people to make a critical reading of the past, the present and the future. According to different authors, to achieve this educational objective in schools would imply: (1) Questioning discourse and teaching and learning practices which directly or indirectly promote the exclusion, denial, segregation, annihilation and devaluation of others and their historical narratives (Han et al., 2012; Pudar et al., 2020; Miralles and Ibagón, 2022); (2) Rethinking the elements which give shape to the notion of an *us* (particularly in national terms) (Kokkinos, 2011; Bentrovato et al., 2016; Miles, 2018; Wallace-Casey, 2022); (3) Promoting the identification and analysis of multiple perspectives around historical experiences of a controversial and difficult nature (Ahonen, 2014; Maric, 2016; Goldberg, 2017; López-García, 2022); (4) Recognizing the influence that different spheres of socialization outside of schools have on students' ideas of history (McCully, 2012; Najbert, 2020).

Due to their nature, educational obligations deriving from such actions are not only associated with a cognitive dimension, but they also involve ethical and political dimensions. As a whole, these dimensions are essential for promoting the process of social reconstruction following the breaking of community links caused by violent confrontation in past or present conflicts. In other words, teaching and learning history via the study of a controversial or difficult past should not be limited to exercises which merely characterize the processes. Rather, it should also imply reflection of a political nature linked to a deep analysis of power relations and their pragmatic extent and the formation of positions of an ethical nature associated with the judgment of principles from which violent actions may or may not be legitimized.

From this point of view within the analysis of controversial, overwhelming and difficult histories, some authors consider that historical reconciliation emerges as a theoretical and methodological construct which makes it possible to change perspectives of the scope of history education via the integration of cognitive, political and ethical aspects (Borries, 2011; Kokkinos, 2011; Ibagón and Miralles, 2021). Conceived as a meta-historical concept which promotes the construction of a plural, heterogeneous and integral *us*, historical reconciliation requires subjects and communities to recognize their urgent need to understand their life experiences via a shared path with different *others*. Hence, this strategic concept is directly linked with the formation of an active citizenship which participates in dialogue in favor of the defense of the common good and life of the community (Pudar et al., 2020; Ibagón and Miralles, 2021; Ibagón, 2023). In this regard, historical knowledge is considered to be a democratic tool via which children and young people can confront the symbolic burdens of the past using their understanding thereof to generate critical positions concerning injustices which determine the present and endanger the future.

When the relevance of historical knowledge in building more peaceful and fair societies is recognized, it becomes important to identify and analyze the positions younger generations take with regard to historical problems which affect how they define their own expectations. This is particularly true if they are aware that many violent conflicts (be they symbolic or physical) originate from the cancelation or denial of the *other* as a valid interlocutor. Although making comparisons between different conflicts and the positions people take concerning them is a complex matter, the present study analyzes the conceptions regarding processes of historical reconciliation of a sample of young people whose national contexts have been marked by traumatic and difficult historical processes associated with fratricidal conflicts during the 20th century. Thus, via the evaluation of simulated situations, a comparison is made of the conceptions of Spanish and Colombian students regarding how they understand and resolve situations between states generated by territorial disputes, how they evaluate the possibilities of establishing peace agreements between the parties involved in civil wars and how they position themselves with regard to the possibility of publicly dealing with traumatic and painful histories.

In order to interpret the data collected, certain fundamental principles from temporal orientation theory were employed to gain an understanding of the logic which defines historical learning. These principles are essentially related to ways of making sense of history which influence and configure the processes of cognitive, ethical, political and aesthetic understanding of subjects concerning connections between temporal dimensions (historical consciousness) (Rüsen, 2005, 2012). These ways of making sense of history are associated with positions of a traditional, exemplary, critical and genetic nature. In the case of traditional positions, the experience of time is linked to the origin and repetition of a socio-cultural model which is taken to be an obligatory point of reference. On the other hand, ideas of an exemplary nature define history as a set of representative cases of general dispositions and rules which come to form unquestionable patterns of life. From a critical perspective, temporal relationships are understood according to problematic diversions from socio-cultural models which have now become naturalized. Finally, genetic ways of making sense of history assume the temporal experience according to the transformation of these models and opening up to different ways of seeing life (Rüsen, 2005).

The results presented here form part of one of five research nuclei of a macro research project analyzing the conceptions of Spanish and Colombian students on history as a school subject and the relationship between these conceptions and the learning of history.

Methods

Objectives

The objective of this paper is to analyze the conceptions of Spanish and Colombian students regarding processes of historical reconciliation linked to situations of a controversial and difficult nature.

SO1: To identify the historical judgments of Spanish and Colombian students regarding territorial disputes, the establishment of peace agreements and the relationship between the study of controversial historical issues and education.

SO2: To compare the types of historical reflection through which Colombian and Spanish students construct judgments regarding historical problematizations of a controversial nature.

Design

The methodological research was based on a quantitative non-experimental survey-based design. This approach was employed due to the fact that it makes it possible to identify or clarify relationships regarding pre-existing facts and realities (not intentionally generated by the researcher) in research fields where little prior research has been carried out (Hoy and Adams, 2015; Roni et al., 2020).

Sample

The sample population for the proposed analysis consisted of Colombian and Spanish students aged between 15 and 17 in their final year of compulsory education in their respective countries in the cities of Murcia (Spain) and Bogotá (Colombia). The population was defined on the basis that students of these ages, compared with younger children, have had a greater amount of contact with experiences of formal education associated with the teaching and learning of history. Furthermore, with the aim, on the one hand, of finding common ground and making subsequent comparisons with similar research carried out in Europe (Angvik and Borries, 1997) and Latin America (Amézola and Cerri, 2018) and, on the other hand, avoiding possible biases caused by the phenomenon of overage students, the selection criterion was established that participants should be between 15 and 17 years of age. As far as the definition of the national origin of the participants is concerned, substantive aspects linked to the historical background of both Spain and Colombia were taken into account, along with formal aspects relating to the place of residence of the researchers.

In terms of the first criterion, Spain and Colombia have both experienced internal conflicts which have had a great influence on social and political positions in their recent histories. Colombia has suffered an internal armed conflict for more than 70 years, in which guerrilla fighters, paramilitary organizations and state forces have participated, and which is still ongoing despite the recent signing of a peace agreement with the most important guerrilla group (FARC). On the other hand, Spain experienced a bloody civil war which, although it ended approximately 80 years ago, still affects the foundations of the nation-state. Therefore, although the origin, development and consequences of the conflicts are different in the two cases, the levels and examples of dehumanization experienced in these violent processes mean that they are difficult and controversial issues to deal with in different areas of the historical culture of the two countries, particularly within the education system (Rodríguez, 2012; Arias, 2015, 2018; Valls et al., 2017; Arias et al., 2019; Ibagón and Echeverry, 2021; Luna et al., 2021). Thus, the analysis of young people's judgments in these two countries regarding territorial disputes between states and internal armed conflicts makes it possible to identify certain obstacles and opportunities for fostering educational processes in history classes around the idea of historical reconciliation and the quest for the common good (two key strategic contents in the development of historical consciousness).

On the other hand, the second criterion for the definition of the sample is related to the material possibilities of the researchers to gain access to information. Thus, a convenience sample was used, located in the cities in which they work (Bogotá and Murcia). However, with the aim of fulfilling statistical requirements associated with the quantitative rationality of the study, the final number of participants was calculated to fulfil the scientific criterion of sample representativeness (99% confidence and 5% error). To achieve this, the statistical data available for students registered in the final year of compulsory education in Murcia and Bogotá was consulted before the tools were applied. In the case of Bogotá, this figure, according to the DANE (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística – National Administrative Department of Statistics), was 85,861 students, whereas in Murcia, according to the CREM (Centro Regional de Estadística de Murcia – Regional Centre for Statistics of Murcia), there were 4,597 such students. Based on these totals, the recommended size of the sample in order to fulfil the guidelines for statistical representativeness was 661 and 578 students, respectively. However, during the data collection phase, using the tools established for this purpose, it was possible to count on the participation of a greater number of individuals (648 students in Spain and 764 in Colombia). As the surplus number of participants did not have a big enough influence in terms of statistics to significantly alter the results, the decision was taken to include all of the responses gathered in both Murcia and Bogotá. This decision was based on the consideration of the importance, in terms of the consolidation of the information, of the different characteristics of the students' schools of origin and their geographical location in inner-city areas.

Tools

The data collection tool consisted of a closed questionnaire previously employed in quantitative and comparative research in Europe and Mercosur countries. This tool was adapted to the aims of the research by excluding some questions and partially modifying others, with some new questions also being included.

Procedure and data analysis

The questionnaire was submitted to a process of evaluation via expert judgment ($N = 9$) and its reliability and construct validity were reviewed via a pilot study involving 119 Colombian and 110 Spanish students. The final ACONHIS (Questionnaire on Historical Learning

and Historical Consciousness, in its Spanish acronym) questionnaire consisted of 25 questions and 180 items grouped into five analytical areas: (i) epistemological conceptions concerning history; (ii) school culture/historical culture; (iii) conceptions on first-order contents; (iv) the resolution of problems via historical thinking skills; and (v) perspectives of experience and expectation. For the purposes of this paper, three questions from nucleus 4, focusing specifically on the problem of historical reconciliation, are taken into account (Table 1).

It should be highlighted that the statistical evaluation of the reliability of the research nucleus of which these three questions form a part was confirmatory, in that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha = 0.857$. This indicator would suggest that the statistical measurements presented for this nucleus offer reliable data on the problem studied. Of the three questions analyzed, the first forms part of the questionnaire used in research projects conducted in European and Mercosur countries entitled "Territorial conflict between states (Terranova case)." The two other questions were new inclusions regarding an evaluation of signing peace agreements and the possibility of dealing with controversial issues in the classroom. It is important to bear in mind that, in this study, the fictional nature of the Terranova case proposed in the European and Mercosur studies was maintained with no alteration to its general conception and wording. This decision was taken due to the possibilities it offered to reduce possible biases deriving from the lack of knowledge among the students of specific real-world cases and from media influences surrounding them. Likewise, it was assumed that maintaining the imaginary Terranova case would facilitate comparisons not only among the Colombian and Spanish samples analyzed in this study, but also with the findings of the research conducted in Europe and Mercosur which employed this scenario. The criterion of simulation

was maintained for the other two questions as it prevented the judgment being made from being altered directly by allegiances and feelings affecting the present positions of the students concerning the conflictive historical backgrounds of their respective countries.

The three questions posed were accompanied by a series of items (closed-ended responses) which were to be evaluated by the students on a Likert scale aimed at establishing the *importance* (question 1) and the degree of *agreement* (questions 2 and 3) of the option chosen. The data collected via the ACONHIS questionnaire was transferred to a database, before being codified and analyzed using the SPSS (Statical Package for the Social Sciences) software. The descriptive statistical analysis was based on the calculation of the median (Md), mean (M), mode (Mo) and standard deviation (SD). The inferential statistical analysis employed to compare the data of the Spanish sample with that of the Colombian students was based on a process of the determination of statistically significant differences between the medians. This was performed via the non-parametric Mann–Whitney U test for independent samples.

Results

Ethical judgment and sense of belonging

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 provide a summary of the results of the evaluation made by the participants in the study concerning the six response items on the degree of importance of the arguments put forward (of a pacifist and pro-war nature) regarding the Terranova case and the inter-state conflict it represents.

In line with this statistical data, both in the sample of Colombian and Spanish students the greatest percentage rate of negative options

TABLE 1 Questions and items analyzed regarding historical reconciliation.

Questions	Items
Terranova is an imaginary territory. It was occupied by our country (A) from 1,500 to 1900. However, from 1900 to the present day, it has been occupied by country B. Our country wishes to regain Terranova and presents several arguments in order to achieve this aim. What importance do you attach to the following arguments?	P1.1. The people of Terranova speak our language and share our culture. P1.2. Terranova was under our control longer than it has been under the control of country B. P1.3. Our country's colonies were established in Terranova in 1500, while those of country B were only founded after 1900. P1.4. When asked, the inhabitants of Terranova say that they would prefer to live under our control rather than under the control of country B. P1.5. An international peace summit examined the case and recognized our country's right to recover Terranova. P1.6. We have military power and can exercise it to take Terranova back.
After decades of suffering the effects of a devastating war between the state and rebel forces, the conflicting sides have put forward a peace plan to seek to avoid future conflict. As a citizen of this territory, what would be your position regarding the following actions which form part of the agreement?	P2.1. The political participation of the rebels in state organisms and institutions. P2.2. The definition of new policies regarding the distribution of wealth. P2.3. Moral and economic reparations for victims. P2.4. The formation of a historical memory commission to seek the truth regarding what happened. P2.5. A legal pardon for rebels who participate in the peace process and provide reparations for their victims. P2.6. The insertion of the rebels into civil society with support from the state. P2.7. Economic and social reforms which benefit the population.
A country which has experienced violent internal conflicts with thousands of victims in its recent history finds itself deciding whether these events should be analyzed at school. What is your position regarding the following initiatives?	P3.1. Emphasis should be placed on what unites us as a nation, rather than on what divided us at a specific moment in time. P3.2. The version of the victims should be recovered enabling them to move past the injustices and pain which they had to endure. P3.3. National identity should be recovered by studying the feats of the great heroes of the homeland. P3.4. The study of these processes should be avoided as to analyze them would prevent society from closing the "wounds" left by the conflict. P3.5. These processes should be analyzed critically in order to avoid their repetition. P3.6. National reconciliation should be promoted by ignoring processes which, at times, have led to internal conflict.

(very little importance and little importance) were for the statements "Terranova was under our control longer than it has been under the control of country B" (P1.2) and "We have military power and can exercise it to take Terranova back" (P1.6). The figures for the Colombian group for these statements were 32.1% ($N = 245$) and 31.2% ($N = 238$) and for the Spanish group 35.6% ($N = 231$) and 35% ($N = 227$), respectively. On the other hand, the statements with a higher percentage of positive evaluations were "When asked, the inhabitants of Terranova say that they prefer to live under our control rather than under the control of country B" [Colombia (58.5%; $N = 447$) and Spain (72.9%; $N = 472$)] and "An international peace meeting examined the case and recognized our country's right to recover Terranova" [Colombia (63.3%; $N = 483$) and Spain (69.2%; $N = 449$)]. Finally, the statement with the highest percentage of the neutral option (average importance) was, among the group of Colombian students, "The people of Terranova speak our language and share our culture" (P1.1) with 39.8% ($N = 304$), whereas for the group of Spanish students, it was statement P1.3 "Our country's colonies were established in Terranova in 1500, while those of country B were only founded after 1900," a variable which reached 36.1% ($N = 234$).

When taking into account the median (Md) as a descriptive statistical indicator of the set of answers obtained for the items of the Terranova case (Table 2), the proximity of the main positions of the two sample groups is ratified. In this regard, for the six items evaluated, one divergent and five identical positions have been identified between the sample groups. Of the five items in which the same core value is shared between the groups, three (P1.2, P1.3, and P1.6) were evaluated from a neutral position (Md = 3) (items reflecting postures of accentuated coercion and domination) and two (P.4 and P1.5) were evaluated from a positive position (Md = 4) (items which were structured upon principles closer to conciliation). Finally, the item with a median indicating disparity between the two groups (P1.1) shows a neutral axis of central distribution in the group of Colombian students (Md = 3) and a positive central distribution among the Spanish students (Md = 4).

In a complementary way, the means (M) obtained for the six premises of the Terranova case (Table 2) indicate, in four cases, the existence of similar response trends in the two groups: three of a neutral character (P1.1, P1.5, and P1.6) and one negative (P1.2). The recorded means only show different positions between the two groups for two options (P1.3, P1.4). In both cases, these are neutral for the

TABLE 2 Comparison of evaluations of the items of the Terranova case.

Conception											
				Negative		Neutral	Positive				
Item				Very little importance	Little importance	Average importance	Important	Very important	Md	*M*	SD
P1.1	Col	Fr	764	42	129	304	221	68	3	3.19	1.000
		%	100	5.5	16.9	39.8	28.9	8.9			
	Sp	Fr	648	21	66	217	245	99	4	3.52	0.977
		%	100	3.2	10.2	33.5	37.8	15.3			
P1.2	Col	Fr	764	60	185	280	191	48	3	2.98	1.029
		%	100	7.9	24.2	36.6	25	6.3			
	Sp	Fr	648	45	186	210	156	51	3	2.97	1.059
		%	100	6.9	28.7	32.4	24.1	7.9			
P1.3	Col	Fr	762	43	157	262	242	58	3	3.15	1.016
		%	100	5.6	20.6	34.4	31.8	7.6			
	Sp	Fr	648	48	169	234	158	39	3	2.96	1.020
		%	100	7.4	26.1	36.1	24.4	6			
P1.4	Col	Fr	764	22	97	198	275	172	4	3.63	1.055
		%	100	2.9	12.7	25.9	36	22.5			
	Sp	Fr	648	23	46	107	180	292	4	4.04	1.104
		%	100	3.5	7.1	16.5	27.8	45.1			
P1.5	Col	Fr	764	12	53	216	300	183	4	3.77	0.943
		%	100	1.6	6.9	28.3	39.3	24			
	Sp	Fr	648	9	55	135	231	218	4	3.92	1.002
		%	100	1.4	8.5	20.8	35.6	33.6			
P1.6	Col	Fr	764	70	168	254	190	82	3	3.06	1.124
		%	100	9.2	22	33.2	24.9	10.7			
	Sp	Fr	648	101	126	161	155	105	3	3.06	1.306
		%	100	15.6	19.4	24.8	23.9	16.2			

group of Colombian students, whereas P1.3 is negative and P1.4 is positive for the Spanish sample.

Finally, in terms of inferential statistics, it is important to bear in mind that, after performing the Mann–Whitney U test, statistically significant differences were found ($p < 0.5$) between the conceptions of the two groups in four of the six items (P1.1, P1.3, P1.4, and P1.5) (Table 3).

Historical judgment and historical reconciliation

Table 4 shows the results of the evaluation of a hypothetical historical problem linked to a past marked by a war between the state and rebel forces, a present defined by the quest for a solution to the devastating effects of the war (a peace agreement) and the projection of a peaceful future (the conditions of the agreement).

According to the statistical data in Table 4, in both the Colombian and Spanish groups of students, the statement registering the highest percentage of negative responses ("disagree" and "totally disagree") regarding the agreement to resolve the problem proposed was "The political participation of the rebels in state organisms and institutions" (P2.1), which reached 32.5% ($N = 248$) in the first case and 36% ($N = 232$) in the second. This item also registered the highest percentage of the neutral option (indifference) in both groups, reaching 44% ($N = 336$) in the Colombian sample and 38.7% ($N = 249$) among the Spanish sample. On the other hand, as far as the statements which obtained the highest percentage of positive responses ("agree" and "totally agree") are concerned, the following can be highlighted in the two sample groups: "Economic and social reforms which benefit the population" [Colombia (74.9%; $N = 572$) and Spain (81.5%; $N = 528$)]; "Moral and economic reparations for victims" [Colombia (72.2%; $N = 552$) and Spain (70.8%; N = 459)]; and "The formation of a commission of historical memory to seek the truth regarding what happened" [Colombia (64.5%; $N = 493$) and Spain (56.9%; $N = 368$)].

In general, the similarity in the selection of the response options shown above is confirmed by the value of the median recorded in each of the items evaluated by the two groups (Table 4). Based on this statistical reference, six identically evaluated core values can be identified (P2.1, P2.3, P2.4, P2.5 P2.6, and P2.7), along with one different posture (P2.2). Of the six items in which shared core values were recorded between the two sample groups, three (P2.1, P2.5, and P2.6) indicate a neutral conception (Md = 3), while the three remaining items (P2.3, P2.4, and P2.7) indicate a positive conception (Md = 4). In the item with a median denoting a difference between the two samples (P2.2), the evaluation of the Colombian students was

neutral (Md = 3), while it was positive among the Spanish sample (Md = 4).

On the other hand, the means obtained (Table 4) for the seven items indicate similar response trends for both of the sample groups. Thus, there are no differences in the orientation of the positions between one group and another. The means show shared negative conceptions regarding one of the items (P2.1), neutral conceptions for five items (P2.2, P2.3, P2.4, P2.5, and P2.6) and positive conceptions for the final item (P2.7).

However, when the Mann–Whitney U test was performed, statistically significant differences ($p < 0.5$) were identified between the responses of the Colombian and Spanish students in four of the seven items (P2.2, P2.4, P2.5, and P2.7). Three of these correspond to issues of changes and measures related to society in general (Table 5).

Dealing with difficult and controversial histories in the classroom

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics associated with the students' responses regarding whether they perceive that it is possible and viable to deal with and discuss difficult and traumatic historical issues in the classroom.

According to the statistical data contained in Table 6, the statement with the highest percentage of negative answers ("disagree" or "totally disagree") among the sample groups was that "(t)he study of these processes should be avoided as to analyze them would prevent society from closing the "wounds" left by the conflict" (P3.4). This statement received a total of 51.9% ($N = 396$) responses associated to disagreement and total disagreement among the Colombian students and 55.7% ($N = 361$) in the case of the Spanish group. On the other hand, the statement which received the highest percentages of approval ("agree" or "totally agree"), in both the Colombian and Spanish samples, was that stating that "(t)hese processes should be analyzed critically in order to avoid their repetition" (P3.5), registering 73.7% ($N = 562$) in the former group and 71.3% ($N = 462$) in the latter. Also worthy of note are the percentages of positive ("agree" or "totally agree") and neutral ("indifferent") response options obtained for the following statements: "Emphasis should be placed on what unites us as a nation, rather than on what divided us at a specific moment in time" (P3.1); and "National identity should be recovered by studying the feats of the great heroes of the homeland" (P3.3). In the first case, the Colombian group recorded a high percentage of indifference (38%; $N = 290$), whereas the Spanish group attributed this statement with one of the highest percentages of agreement and total agreement (56%; $N = 363$). In the second case, the opposite occurred,

TABLE 3 Results of the Mann–Whitney U test for items in the Terranova case.

Item	Mann–Whitney U	Colombian group	Comp.	Spanish group
P1.1	$U = 201793.5$; z = −6.282; $p = 0.000$	Md = 3; rank = 646.63	<	Md = 4; rank = 777.09
P1.2	$U = 245,103$; z = −0.331; $p = 0.740$	Md = 3; rank = 709.68	No diff.	Md = 3; rank = 702.75
P1.3	$U = 219720.5$; z = −3.716; $p = 0.000$	Md = 3; rank = 741.15	>	Md = 3; rank = 663.57
P1.4	$U = 188,464$; z = −8.067; $p = 0.000$	Md = 4; rank = 629.18	<	Md = 4; rank = 797.66
P1.5	$U = 223379.5$; z = −3.320; $p = 0.001$	Md = 4; rank = 674.88	<	Md = 4; rank = 743.78
P1.6	$U = 246,468$; z = −0.144; $p = 0.886$	Md = 3; rank = 705.10	No diff.	Md = 3; rank = 708.15

TABLE 4 Comparison of frequencies and percentages of items in a case of historical reconciliation.

Item				Negative		Neutral	Positive		Md	M	SD
				Totally disagree	Disagree	Indifferent	Agree	Totally agree			
P2.1	Col	Fr	764	61	187	336	146	34	3	2.88	0.959
		%	100	8	24.5	44	19.1	4.5			
	Sp	Fr	644	58	174	249	131	32	3	2.85	1.006
		%	100	9	27	38.7	20.3	5			
P2.2	Col	Fr	763	21	120	261	293	68	3	3.35	0.942
		%	100	2.8	15.7	34.2	38.4	8.9			
	Sp	Fr	647	20	66	212	258	91	4	3.52	0.960
		%	100	3.1	10.2	32.8	39.9	14.1			
P2.3	Col	Fr	764	5	43	164	309	243	4	3.97	0.904
		%	100	0.7	5.6	21.5	40.4	31.8			
	Sp	Fr	648	7	37	145	260	199	4	3.94	0.924
		%	100	1.1	5.7	22.4	40.1	30.7			
P2.4	Col	Fr	764	5	49	217	322	171	4	3.79	0.884
		%	100	0.7	6.4	28.4	42.1	22.4			
	Sp	Fr	647	12	53	214	251	117	4	3.63	0.933
		%	100	1.9	8.2	33.1	38.8	18.1			
P2.5	Col	Fr	764	47	136	291	207	83	3	3.19	1.047
		%	100	6.2	17.8	38.1	27.1	10.9			
	Sp	Fr	648	35	99	218	220	76	3	3.31	1.040
		%	100	5.4	15.3	33.6	34	11.7			
P2.6	Col	Fr	764	39	108	328	240	49	3	3.2	0.937
		%	100	5.1	14.1	42.9	31.4	6.4			
	Sp	Fr	648	37	118	241	196	56	3	3.18	1.014
		%	100	5.7	18.2	37.2	30.2	8.6			
P2.7	Col	Fr	764	6	36	150	333	239	4	4	0.877
		%	100	0.8	4.7	19.6	43.6	31.3			
	Sp	Fr	648	3	15	102	219	309	4	4.26	0.838
		%	100	0.5	2.3	15.7	33.8	47.7			

TABLE 5 Results of the Mann–Whitney U test for items in the case of historical reconciliation.

Item	Mann–Whitney U	Colombian group	Comp.	Spanish group
P2.1	$U = 242,207$; $z = -0.526$; $p = 0.599$	Md = 3; rank = 709.48	No diff	Md = 3; rank = 698.6
P2.2	$U = 222,695$; $z = -3.341$; $p = 0.001$	Md = 3; rank = 673.87	<	Md = 4; rank = 742.8
P2.3	$U = 242995.5$; $z = -0.629$; $p = 0.529$	Md = 4; rank = 712.44	No diff	Md = 4; rank = 699.49
P2.4	$U = 224,185$; $z = -3.182$; $p = 0.001$	Md = 4; rank = 736.06	>	Md = 4; rank = 670.5
P2.5	$U = 229291.5$; $z = -2.492$; $p = 0.013$	Md = 3; rank = 682.62	<	Md = 3; rank = 734.66
P2.6	$U = 244678.5$; $z = -0.394$; $p = 0.693$	Md = 3; rank = 710.24	No diff	Md = 3; rank = 702.09
P2.7	$U = 205,107$; $z = -5.937$; $p = 0.000$	Md = 4; rank = 650.96	<	Md = 4, rank = 771.98

with the Colombian sample recording a high percentage of agreement and total agreement (54.6%; $N = 417$), while the Spanish sample registered its highest percentage of indifference (39%; $N = 253$) among the set of six items evaluated.

In terms of the median obtained for each of the items (Table 6), four shared and two disparate core values can be identified. As regards the identical values, three indicate the predominance of positions of a positive nature (Md = 4) (P3.1, P3.5, and P3.6), while for the remaining

TABLE 6 Comparison of frequencies and percentages of items regarding controversial issues in the classroom.

Item				Negative		Neutral	Positive		Md	M	SD
				Totally disagree	Disagree	Indifferent	Agree	Totally agree			
P3.1	Col	Fr	764	15	51	290	318	90	4	3.55	0.858
		%	100	2	6.7	38	41.6	11.8			
	Sp	Fr	648	18	51	216	236	127	4	3.62	0.976
		%	100	2.8	7.9	33.3	36.4	19.6			
P3.2	Col	Fr	764	21	119	268	279	77	3	3.36	0.953
		%	100	2.7	15.6	35.1	36.5	10.1			
	Sp	Fr	648	24	82	191	265	86	4	3.47	0.996
		%	100	3.7	12.7	29.5	40.9	13.3			
P3.3	Col	Fr	764	7	85	255	298	119	4	3.57	0.914
		%	100	0.9	11.1	33.4	39	15.6			
	Sp	Fr	648	22	120	253	195	58	3	3.23	0.964
		%	100	3.4	18.5	39	30.1	9			
P3.4	Col	Fr	763	155	241	212	120	35	2	2.53	1.117
		%	100	20.3	31.6	27.8	15.7	4.6			
	Sp	Fr	648	135	226	178	75	34	2	2.46	1.101
		%	100	20.8	34.9	27.5	11.6	5.2			
P3.5	Col	Fr	763	13	36	152	293	269	4	4.01	0.946
		%	100	1.7	4.7	19.9	38.4	35.3			
	Sp	Fr	648	10	35	141	229	233	4	3,99	0.966
		%	100	1.5	5.4	21.8	35.3	36			
P3.6	Col	Fr	764	23	81	248	263	149	4	3.57	1.015
		%	100	3	10.6	32.5	34.4	19.5			
	Sp	Fr	648	22	53	236	188	149	4	3.6	1.034
		%	100	3.4	8.2	36.4	29	23			

item (P3.4) the median indicates that more than 50% of the students from both countries (Md = 2) manifested their disagreement or total disagreement concerning the statement evaluated. In the case of the items with different core values, the first (P3.2) indicates a positive posture among the Spanish students (Md = 4) and a neutral position among those from Colombia (Md = 3). In the second item (P3.3), the opposite is true with a neutral position in the case of the Spanish sample (Md = 3) and a positive response among the Colombian students (Md = 4).

On the other hand, the means recorded (Table 6) for the evaluation of the set of statements linked to the problem posed suggest a similar response trend in both sample groups in five of the six items. In four of these five items, this trend was neutral (P3.1, P3.2, P3.3, and P3.6), while the remaining item (P3.4) was negative. In the case of item P3.5, the mean for both groups narrowly showed a dissimilar response trend, being neutral in the case of the Spanish students ($M = 3.99$; SD = 0.966) and positive for the Colombians ($M = 4.01$; SD = 0.946). It is worth noting that, in the responses of the two groups, statistically significant differences ($p < 0.5$) were only found in two of the six items related to the problem (P3.2 and P3.3) (Table 7).

Discussion and conclusion

First of all, the findings in the two sample groups show that the ethical judgments formulated by the participants concerning certain controversial historical processes in terms of their national identity depend, to a large extent, on this identity being associated to the idea of an *us*, and the underlying differentiation between this *us* and *others*.

These types of positions are particularly evident in the students' evaluation of the statements regarding the Terranova case. In general, the conceptions of the students in the two sample groups regarding this hypothetical case are characterized by a positive evaluation of the statements of a pacifist nature (a priority for negotiating toward peace and defending the will of the inhabitants based on the idea of the existence of a social contract) and, at the same time, by a rejection of positions based on the direct or indirect use of violence (putting into action the mechanisms of war and mentions of processes of domination). However, the statistical difference identified concerning the traditional option of resorting to language and traditions for claiming possession over a territory (P1.1) suggests the continued existence of a theory of identity sustained by the idea of an imposed *us*, which is legitimated or

TABLE 7 Results of the Mann–Whitney U test for items relating to controversial issues in the classroom.

Item	Mann–Whitney U	Colombian group	Comp.	Spanish group
P1.1	$U = 234442.5$; $z = -1.818$; $p = 0.069$	Md = 4; rank = 689.36	No diff	Md = 4; rank = 726.71
P1.2	$U = 228404.5$; $z = -2.635$; $p = 0.008$	Md = 3; rank = 631.8	<	Md = 4; rank = 736.02
P1.3	$U = 199131.5$; $z = -6.661$; $p = 0.000$	Md = 4; rank = 769.86	>	Md = 3; rank = 631.8
P1.4	$U = 237528.5$; $z = -1.316$; $p = 0.188$	Md = 2; rank = 718.69	No diff	Md = 2; rank = 691.06
P1.5	$U = 244,793$; $z = -0.335$; $p = 0.737$	Md = 4; rank = 709.17	No diff	Md = 4; rank = 702.27
P1.6	$U = 244,012$; $z = -0.482$; $p = 0.630$	Md = 4; rank = 701.89	No diff	M = 4; rank = 711.94

refuted depending on historical experiences. Thus, while the group of Spanish students established that the criteria of language and tradition have considerable weight when settling the hypothetical territorial dispute, the Colombian students (based on the statistics of the median) evaluated these elements neutrally. What is of interest in the position of the latter group is these students' closeness to the approaches of other Latin American students, who, when analyzing the same case in research carried out in Mercosur countries, have clearly expressed that language and a common culture are elements which do not possess sufficient legitimacy to justify the possible annexation of certain territories, along with their inhabitants (Cerri et al., 2014; Amézola and Cerri, 2018). The difference recorded in terms of this issue between Spanish and Colombian students may be related to the type of master narratives which have been used to build their systems of national identity. While in Spain the education system reinforces the idea of an identity rooted in the notion of the grandeur of the "Spanish Empire" and the civilizing role of the Catholic Monarchs (Sáiz and López-Facal, 2015; Sáiz, 2017), in Colombia the national narratives taught at school and in different spheres of historical culture are mainly based on the struggle against that empire and the process of independence.

As far as identity is concerned, the notion of belonging, therefore, begins to emerge as a variable which has a direct impact on the formation, orientation and scope of students' ethical judgments and their direct link with positions of a traditional, exemplary, critical and genetic nature. From this point of view, the statistical data gathered concerning the dilemmas analyzed by the two sample groups demonstrate that the learning of history is not only structured according to a cognitive dimension (although this is extremely important), but it is also supported by political, ethical and aesthetic dimensions, which make processes of the emission and reception of historical judgments more complex. Thus, it becomes clear that this capacity does not depend exclusively on historical knowledge, but also on the knowledge and mastery of operations which make it possible to give meaning and coherence to the interpretation of the past and a perspective to guide practical life. In other words, the learning of history is directly linked to the mobilization of students' historical consciousness (Rüsen, 2005, 2012; Körber, 2017).

Upon comparing the statistical data regarding the responses given by the Spanish and Colombian students on the three controversial hypothetical cases, it can be stated that the historical judgments made, supported by what is considered to be politically correct, and which are closely related to genetic ways of making sense of history, appear with greater frequency when the circumstance or problem evaluated is situated in a space of reference which is outside of that of national belonging. These types of judgment tend to diminish or be perceived from a neutral point of view, linked to positions of a traditional or exemplary order when the controversial phenomenon is closely linked to a place of identity (e.g., the country of origin). Along these lines, when real or hypothetical situations, such as the Terranova case are evaluated, it was easier for the students of the two sample groups to support and share pacifist postures defined by a constitution of a genetic meaning (as these are far removed from historical experience) (Körber, 2017), than when they were required to evaluate difficult realities which directly or indirectly affect their own spaces of identity and articulation.

In the historical dilemmas based on the analysis of historical reconciliation and the public debate of traumatic and painful historical events (questions 2 and 3), pacifistic principles became weaker in the conceptions of the students from both countries and, in some cases, were diluted through their denial or the predominance of neutral postures closer to exemplary and traditional criteria. Although the exercises did not mention data or direct information regarding particular controversial historical events in Colombia and Spain, the general sense of the dilemmas evoked, to a greater or lesser extent, characteristics of difficult processes experienced in those countries, to such an extent that in the data collection process attempts were made to veto these questions by the management teams of some schools.

In the first of the dilemmas (question 2), which sought to identify how the students of the two countries approach the issue of historical reconciliation when this includes different agents, the responses in the two groups of students concerning the victims (P2.3 and P2.4), with the exception of some statistical differences, maintained a line directly related with values such as justice and reparation. However, these types of positions oriented toward peace changed substantially with regard to policies aimed at combatants. In spite of the fact that the orientation of the three options (P2.1, P2.5, and P2.6) referring to these agents was designed based on criteria which have been identified as key policies for promoting reconciliation in real post-conflict scenarios (Cole, 2007; Bentrovato et al., 2016; Ibagón, 2020; Pudar et al., 2020), the postures of both Colombian and Spanish students in terms of the median (Md) were of indifference. Thus, it was assumed by a large percentage of students from both countries that neutrality is a viable option for processing highly complex decisions in which the exercise of empathy is difficult, ignoring the fact that impartiality in itself is not enough to reduce human violence as it prevents people from feeling empathy for the needs and limitations of others (Edling et al., 2020).

Although the evaluation of the reincorporation of combatants into civil society is a complex issue due to the different variables which must be taken into account, according to the results obtained,

it is clear that there is a predisposition among the students to assume a traditional posture. This is, in some way, an obstacle to overcoming a difficult past when the exercise of forgiveness is implied. In this regard, there is some indication in the students' responses of attitudes which go against the idea of historical reconciliation. This may be due to the fact that reconciliation requires certain mental preconditions, such as distancing the past without forgetting it, not allowing the past to completely determine the present and looking forward to the conditions and possibilities of a common future (Borries, 2018, p. 41).

It must be highlighted that the greatest difference between the Spanish and Colombian students in the solution of this historical dilemma focuses on the evaluation of the agreement generated by carrying out reforms leading to the transformation of the economic and social realities of the general population (P2.2 and P2.7), particularly in reference to the distribution of wealth. Thus, while more than half of the Spanish students stated that they were in agreement with this type of transformation as a means of ensuring peace, a considerable percentage of the Colombian students proved to be either indifferent or in disagreement with this statement. What is of interest in this response trend as far as the group of Colombian students is concerned is that the armed conflict which has afflicted the country for more than six decades has been grounded precisely on the concentration of wealth among a small minority of the population. One possible explanation for this posture may lie in discussions which took place in the media during the 2018 presidential campaign, around the time that the data for the present study was collected. At that time, right-wing factions succeeded in instilling in society the dangers for the institutional and economic status quo of the rise of the left and the application of its ideas to redistribute wealth in the midst of the implementation of a peace deal with the guerilla forces of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) (Cardona and Londoño, 2018; Alvarado et al., 2020). This demonstrates that the learning of history and the construction of historical judgments surpasses the field of education and involves different spaces of the historical culture in which people live.

In the second dilemma, which required the students to evaluate different positions concerning whether to deal with a difficult recent past in the classroom or not (question 3), the results show how different constitutions of meanings are mixed in the formulation of judgments on controversial issues. This strengthens the idea that young people's historical consciousness is expressed in different ways depending on the reality being evaluated, with there being no internal coherence between the structuring of positions. For instance, while more than half of the Spanish and Colombian students flatly rejected the statement suggesting the avoidance of studying painful historical processes (P3.4), both groups supported the promotion of national reconciliation based on forgetting the processes which led to the confrontation (P3.6). Furthermore, while a high percentage of students from both countries agreed with the need for critical analysis of painful periods of history in order to ensure that they were not repeated (P3.5), at the same time, the two groups also validated the idea of placing particular importance on the meaning of national unity, more than on the reality which called it into doubt (P3.1). Such evaluations indicate that positions of a critical and genetic nature coexist with those of an exemplary and traditional order when dealing with controversial issues. This coexistence should be problematized and taken into account when teaching historical thinking with the aim

of encouraging, via the mastery of the mental operations upon which it is based, the quest for a greater coherence between the different conceptions from which young people understand and organize their experiences of the past, present and future.

As a whole, the data collected makes it possible to establish three general lines of analysis: (1) In the students' positions regarding the approach to dealing with controversial and difficult histories, visions of democratic openness converge with limited perspectives which promote, to a certain degree, the continuation of (symbolic or physical) violent confrontation. The challenge facing the teaching of history and the social sciences in schools lies in strengthening the aforementioned openness while, at the same time, progressively and critically dismantling the persistence of ideas and postures which deny otherness and block possibilities of progressing together, moving past any differences which may exist; (2) The differences observed between the positions of the Spanish and Colombian students concerning the evaluation of controversial and difficult historical problems are, on the whole, linked to the particular historical experiences of their respective countries. This suggests that educational processes aimed at developing mechanisms and processes of historical reconciliation among younger generations should be based on the identification of particular needs and shortcomings, without this implying the legitimation of the nation as the only point of reference for identity; (3) Although it is important to acknowledge the specific historical backgrounds which affect the temporal frameworks of the subjects' identity, there are processes and events which, by engaging society's sense of humanity, require a unified position from society as a whole. When faced with violent and unjust situations of dehumanization, independently of the space and time in which they arose or arise, history education should provide students with tools which enable them to assume a critical position. The development of this critical, complex and genetic vision around the past and the present is a fundamental step in advancing toward processes aimed at the eradication of violence as a mechanism for conflict resolution.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Research Ethics Commission of the University of Murcia (Comisión de Ética de Investigación de la Universidad de Murcia). The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent for participation in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardians/next of kin.

Author contributions

NI: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. PM-M: Formal

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Teachers' experiences of continuous professional development for citizenship and social cohesion in South Africa and Zimbabwe: enhancing capacity for deliberative democracies

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While questions continue to be asked about teachers' content and pedagogical content knowledge to ensure quality education systems, less consideration has been placed on teachers' ability to teach for citizenship and social cohesion that contributes equally to quality education systems. This paper illuminates the understandings of citizenship and social cohesion held by South African and Zimbabwean teachers, their experiences of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) that promote the values of citizenship and social cohesion, and how they practice these learnings in their school contexts. The South African study presents the views of eleven high school teachers where data was procured through semi structured interviews. The Zimbabwean study presents the views of seventeen high school teachers, where data was procured through an open- ended questionnaire. The two studies suggest that teachers in South Africa and Zimbabwe share similar perspectives on citizenship and social cohesion, emphasizing nation-building and respect as key drivers. Teachers also report aligning their teaching practices with citizenship and social cohesion values with a limited focus on political participation, possibly due to fear of negative repercussions. Further, CPD for citizenship and social cohesion is fragmented, inconsistent and mostly absent. This study is an important contribution to debates about improving quality education and ensuring deliberative democracies in post-conflict and post-colonial states in the Global South. Teachers play a critical role in socializing schoolchildren for citizenship. As such, they need to be equipped with the skills that allow

them to do so. Further to this, teachers also need the freedom and autonomy to discuss politics in the classroom without fear of negative repercussions, including alienation and fear of losing their jobs.

Introduction

The positive effects of good-quality teachers and teaching cannot be overstated. Teachers not only have the ability to improve the quality of education systems in general but, as agents of citizenship and social cohesion, they are able to mold and influence the actions and beliefs of learners as these youths embark on their journey to becoming participatory citizens in society (Araujo et al., 2016). Whilst there are several factors that may realize the objective of quality education, including school context, teaching and learning resources, working conditions and teacher governance, it is teacher training that is the most impactful (Sayed et al., 2018). As a continuous process, the beginning of developing a teacher does not necessarily start at the onset of Initial Teacher Education (ITE), instead, teacher development starts when the teacher-to-be is still a learner in school. As such, given that what teachers do or do not do is in response to their early learning experiences (Allender and Allender, 2006). These beliefs are then sharpened, reinforced, or disrupted by formalized training.

This paper is concerned with the process of teacher training and development once students have graduated and have commenced their journeys as professionals. Training in this phase of teacher development is referred to as Continuous Professional Development (CPD), often interchanged in the literature as Continuous Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) or Teacher Professional Development (TPD). Popova et al. (2022, 108) note that "the principal tool that countries across the income spectrum use to improve the knowledge and skills of their practicing teachers is professional development (PD), which refers to on-the-job training activities ranging from formal, lecture-style training to mentoring and coaching."

In this paper, CPD is defined as "activities that increase the knowledge and skill base of teachers" (Sayed and Bulgrin, 2020, 8). In drawing on empirical data from two studies, one in South Africa and one in Zimbabwe, this paper aims to ascertain teachers' understanding of citizenship and social cohesion as well as teachers' experiences of CPD for citizenship and social cohesion, and how these learnings are realized in practice.

Social justice orientated, (see Rawls, 1971; Bell, 2007; Connell, 2014; De Sousa Santos, 2014), the findings suggest that, firstly, teachers' understandings of citizenship and social cohesion are influenced by varied training experiences, opportunities and socio-political contexts. Secondly, these affective elements of teaching and learning are rarely discussed and promoted through CPD programmes and, thirdly, despite very little exposure to CPD for citizenship and social cohesion, teachers still claim to promote and incorporate these values in their teaching practices and pedagogical approaches. The paper argues that equal emphasis should be placed on CPD for citizenship and social cohesion (and non-cognitive aspects in general) as this may support learners as they develop into adulthood to become participatory citizens who effectively utilize their agency to build strong democracies. This is particularly important in countries, such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, where the lived reality is suggestive of a crumbling democracy.

This paper is divided into seven sections. After the introduction, the paper commences with a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of citizenship and social cohesion and how this often materializes in post-conflict and post-colonial states such as South Africa and Zimbabwe. This is followed by a situational analysis of CPD in the SADC region by discussing the latest CPD framework. The paper then discusses the provision of CPD in South Africa and Zimbabwe, with a specific emphasis on CPD for citizenship and social cohesion. The last three sections discuss the methodology, the findings, and the conclusions, respectively.

Citizenship and social cohesion as foundational to democracy

Citizenship, social cohesion and democracy are interrelated, but interdependent for their full realization. They also operate at different levels. Citizenship has a focus on individual rights, responsibilities and belonging (Marshall, 1950; Westheimer and Kahne, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Singh, 2020); social cohesion focuses on group dynamics (Durkheim, 1893; Rudiger and Spencer, 2004; Barolsky, 2016); and democracy operates at a societal level (Rawls, 1971). Cuellar (2009, 5) argues that "democracy and social cohesion promote the establishment of citizenship with rights and responsibilities differently but in a complementary manner." Social cohesion is foundational to a stable democracy (Rawls, 1971) because it acknowledges the diversity of society, and promotes the values of citizenship, including the reduction of inequality. Whilst social cohesion can be defined as "the extent of connectedness and solidarity among groups in society" (Manca, 2014, 6026), citizenship is about individual rights, responsibilities and belonging to those groups (Singh, 2020). As such, the link between social cohesion and citizenship is that "social cohesion refers to people's relationships and interactions in society, including the role of citizenship" (Cuellar, 2009, 3). Citizenship and social cohesion together are required to realize a flourishing democracy and are all

underpinned by the values of respect, inclusion, tolerance, equality, and recognition. **Figure 1** below depicts the interrelated nature of citizenship, social cohesion, and democracy with their common embedded values.

South Africa and Zimbabwe are technical democracies in that their constitutions reflect states that subscribe to the values of democracy. However, in practice, the majority of their populations are not benefitting from this, putting these countries and their citizens in disarray. South Africa and Zimbabwe are regional neighbors, both situated in sub-Saharan Africa, and they also share some historical similarities, such as being colonized by the British, leaving behind a legacy that impacted and still impacts language and the provision of education. Howell et al. (2018, 127) note that "the provision of education in both South Africa and Zimbabwe has been strongly shaped by the inequalities of their colonial pasts and the efforts by their post-liberation governments to build new education systems where all children have equitable access to quality education."

South Africa, currently in its third decade of democratic rule, has been plagued with high levels of inequalities to such an extent that it has been listed one of the most unequal countries in the world. Coupled with high levels of crime and violence, poor leadership, infrastructural challenges, such as water and electricity outages, corruption, high levels of unemployment, and distrust in authority, it is obvious that the country needs a socially cohesive society. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, Gavin (2022, Para. 1) notes that "conditions for the people of Zimbabwe continue to go from bad to worse". Politically, the electoral process has been critiqued for inconsistencies and a lack of credibility given the outcomes over the past several decades. With the merging of the military and the ruling party, Zimbabwe has often been referred to as a "military dictatorship" (Grignon, 2008). Sigauke (2019, 246) also mentions that Zimbabwe has "been characterized by hyperinflation, social hemorrhage, and political conflict . . . [and for] most of the 1990s and beyond, Zimbabwe has been characterized by a gradual economic decline characterized by rising unemployment, underdevelopment, and disillusionment with elite corruption."

In countries where there is a history of violence and conflict, the pursuit of quality education is challenging when contexts remain shaped by inequality, exclusion, injustice and marginalization. However, despite this, education remains the key medium through which social cohesion, social justice, citizenship and social solidarity can be mobilized and promoted therefore interventions that seek to realize this remain important (Durkheim, 1964). Social cohesion is increasingly recognized, in policy and academic discussions, as an important determinant of communities' ability to absorb shocks, particularly in conflict and post-conflict affected contexts, where limited state capacity often meets extensive urgent needs.

In order to restore dignity, respect and recognition in post-conflict or post-colonial states, fostering the values of citizenship and social cohesion becomes a social justice imperative. Social cohesion, in particular, addresses critical development challenges where collective action is required to (re) build societies and regain trust in authorities. This is particularly important in conflict or post-conflict states, where values of citizenship and activities that foster social cohesion are under threat from being realized.

The state of CPD in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region

This section provides an overview of CPD developments in the SADC region as a way of providing a situational analysis for countries within this consortium.

The professional development of teachers has piqued the interest of governments and researchers alike as they acknowledge the positive effect CPD has on learner performance and teacher and teaching quality. As such, multilateral organizations, such as UNESCO, have engaged heavily with African states as a mechanism for improving the provision of public education on the continent. The UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa
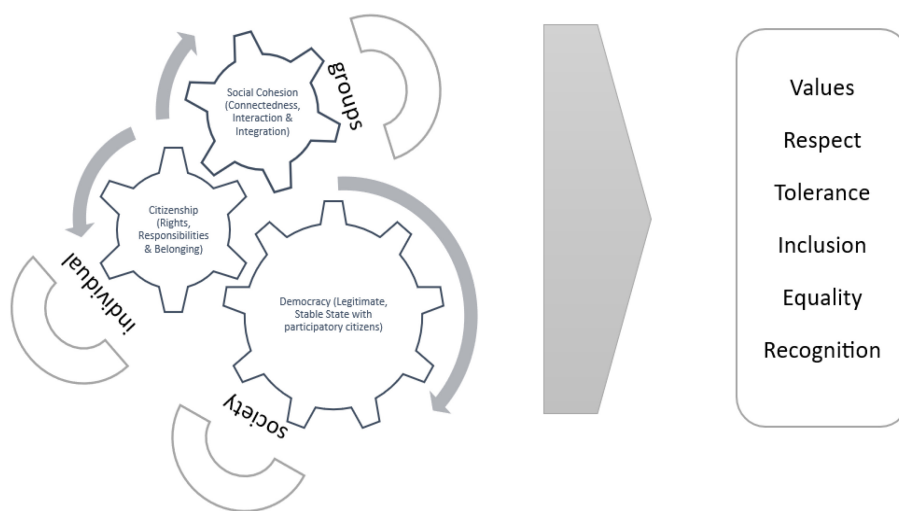

FIGURE 1
The interrelation and interdependence between citizenship, social cohesion and democracy.

(ROSA) has, since 2015, initiated a series of meetings, workshops and consultations with SADC countries to generate evidence about the importance of improving the quality of teachers. From these initial discussions, two key priorities emerged—*teacher standards and competencies,* and *CPD* (UNESCO, 2020). In the context of CPD, the SADC countries, represented by senior government officials in charge of teachers, agreed that:

- "countries needed to systematize and harmonize their teacher training policies and practices on CPD";
- "research was needed to collect more information and have a more in-depth understanding of the status of CPD practices for teachers in SADC countries"; and
- "a SADC regional framework would help countries develop and/or strengthen their own national CPD programmes", which includes a focus on TVET education (UNESCO, 2020, 5).

In 2019 and 2020, UNESCO commissioned an investigation into the state of CPD in the SADC region (SADC and UNESCO, 2019). The study was focused on Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, where each presented a country case study that would inform the CPD Framework to improve CPD in the region. A synthesis of the country reviews, drawn from the draft SADC Regional Framework on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for Teachers, is described below:

"All countries have documents that declare and acknowledge the importance of CPD in the region, as a way of improving the quality of education and working toward realizing SDG4. However, not all documents are presented as policies. A CPD policy overview in the region ranges from clear stand-alone CPD policies, to draft policies, or no policies. Where CPD policies are available, the governance structures differ ranging from autonomous institutions to Ministries of Education, with the overall responsibilities for implementing CPD in most countries residing with the Ministry or Department of Education. In some instances, authority is also given to quasi-governmental organizations, teacher training institutes and local government departments. At this stage, the synthesis could not establish the efficacy of centralized versus decentralized models and it was highlighted that more research needed to be commissioned to explore these differences. Whilst there is clear evidence in most states of training to improve teacher knowledge and skills, irregular and unpredictable funding remains a challenge, as only a few states have dedicated CPD budgets. Many states in the region depend on donor or external funding, and this has implications for how CPD is defined and what is prioritized. With the exception of Mozambique and Namibia, no reference was made to TVET sector or intersectional issues. Overall, the review found that CPD in the region is either [*sic*] inadequate, ineffective, not available or completely absent. There was also no evidence of rigorous monitoring and evaluation of CPD" Adapted from the Draft SADC Regional Framework on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for Teachers.

The framework is and continues to be developed in consultation with departments of education, teaching unions, teaching councils, civil society organizations, and the private sector. The framework aims to support the following functions (**Figure 2**).
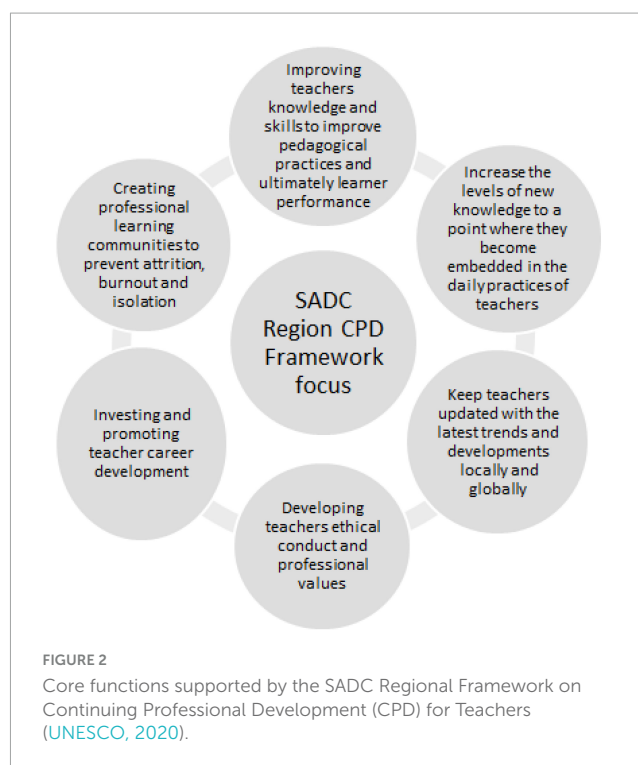
The review of CPD for teachers in the SADC region illuminates essential gaps in the professional development of teachers, which is a crucial indicator of the state of teacher support for professional development in these countries. Although there have been numerous developments instituted to improve the professional development of teachers who are currently in the classroom, these efforts are often fragmented and occur predominantly in affluent pockets, which highlights the levels of inequality within and between these education systems.

Continuous professional development in South Africa and Zimbabwe: policy frameworks and learning opportunities to promote citizenship and social cohesion in schools

South Africa

South Africa has an impressive policy landscape dedicated to the professional development of teachers. This is due to the prevailing consensus that teachers are central to transformation in a post-apartheid context. Policy frameworks in the country distinguish between the professional development of teachers and how the profession is governed. Initial teacher education is governed by the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) and professional development for qualified teachers is governed by the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (ISPFTED). In terms of teacher governance, there are several frameworks that

provide an oversight of the workload of teachers (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2003), the roles, competencies and standards for teachers (Department of Education [DoE], 2000), evaluation of teacher performance (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2013), and the teachers' conditions of service (South Africa [SA], 1998), amongst others.

With regards to citizenship, social cohesion, and democracy, several policies are specifically geared toward realizing this. Firstly, the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (Department of Education [DoE], 2001), which directly addresses the need to unite citizens through processes of social cohesion after many years of separate development in the country. The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education (Department of Education [DoE], 2006) employs schools to impart the necessary, skills, knowledge and dispositions to learners that promote the values of citizenship, social cohesion and democracy. More recently, the Department of Arts and Culture (2012) released a National Strategy for Developing an Inclusive and Cohesive Society and the Department of Justice (2016) released a National Action Plan to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Both these policies advocate strongly for the values of citizenship and social cohesion to be upheld. Citizenship, social cohesion, democracy and social justice are transversal themes in most of the country's policies. Thus, the realizing of citizenship and social cohesion is seen as a systemwide challenge, with various departments of government advocating for this, not making it the sole responsibility of the Department(s) of Education, through the institutions and the work of teachers.

From a curriculum perspective, citizenship and social cohesion are predominantly housed in a subject called "Life Orientation" or "Life Skills." Although this subject has aspects of citizenship and social cohesion as part of its content, these values and concepts also arise in history and languages and also serve as carrier subjects. CPD for citizenship and social cohesion for teachers in the country does not meet the enthusiasm of the policy landscape. Recent training and interventions in CPD for citizenship and social cohesion include the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation's Teaching Respect for All programme, a UNESCO initiated endeavor. Similarly, the Cape Town Holocaust Center runs a programme called "The Holocaust: Lessons for Humanity," which emphasizes the importance of tolerance and mutual respect. The National Professional Teachers Organization of South Africa (NAPTOSA), a teacher union, also provides programmes to schools, but this is often at a fee, thus only for schools that can afford to pay. Their programme offering also provides training on teaching and learning in diverse contexts and how to achieve quality education with a values approach. Shikaya is another organization that offers various programmes all aimed at citizenship, social cohesion and social justice. Their programmes include "Facing History, Facing Ourselves" in collaboration with the USA programme of the same name; they also run the Creating Inclusive and Caring Schools Programmes, which has similar objectives. Whilst there may well be several other offerings, often at school or district level, few opportunities exist for teachers in the country and, in many cases, the CPD is delivered by an NGO which often requires payment, making access a challenge for most schools. In summary, CPD for citizenship and social cohesion in the country is fragmented, inconsistent with no cemented national offering.

Zimbabwe

In 2019, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education initiated discussions with various educational stakeholders, including teachers, about the need to develop a CPD Framework in the country. The intended purpose of this framework, as noted by the Ministry, is to "… guide the design and implementation of continuing professional development programmes for the teachers and learners … [and] to improve the quality of teaching and learning practices, and raise student learning outcomes at all levels of the education system … to contribute toward the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG4)" (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2019, Para. 2). The need for a CPD framework also emerged from the newly instituted curriculum, launched in 2017, that now required teachers to "acquire a whole set of new competencies based on the principles" of this new curriculum (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2019, Para. 4).

The Ministry notes that it has put in place a number of effective in-service training programmes to capacitate teachers to teach the new curriculum. However, these programmes tend to be *ad hoc* with an overemphasis on certain subjects and an underemphasis on others. Thus, the new framework will be able to identify gaps in the development of teachers and supervisors, which should culminate in better and more impactful CPD opportunities for teachers (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2019).

Regarding the new curriculum, between Early Childhood Education and Form 6, there is evidence of several learning areas that tend to focus on citizenship, nationhood, heritage and social cohesion. Table 1 below provides an overview of these curriculum offerings:

The recently revised Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act (2020) has also focused attention on contextual and affective challenges. For example, the Act prohibits pregnant girls from being expelled; requires schools to provide menstrual health facilities to learners; ensures that parents do not deprive their children from receiving an education; forbids corporal punishment; upholds respect for learners' human dignity; and makes provision for schools to have infrastructure to support disabled learners. Despite all these progressive developments, there is no mention of inclusive and equitable education as a priority, despite this being a cornerstone of the SDG4.

These frameworks and amendments emphasize the state's dedication to providing quality education and promoting the ideals of democracy—including citizenship and social cohesion. However, Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru and Shizha (2011, 108) caution that "citizenship attainment cannot be separated from the political

TABLE 1 Overview of specific carrier subjects for citizenship and social cohesion in the Zimbabwean Curriculum.

	Phase	Subject/s
1	ECD—Grade 2	Family and Heritage Studies
2	Grade 3–7	Family, Religion and Moral Education Heritage and Social Studies
3	Forms 1–4	Family and Religious Studies Heritage Studies
4	Forms 5–6	None

ideology of the state". The authors further note that the repressive nature of the current regime has led to many citizens, including teachers, avoiding engaging in policy issues and challenging the state due to fear of repercussions as noted in the extract below:

"The content knowledge required to teach pupils about alternative forms of government, democracy, freedoms and human rights and to expand their knowledge of politics beyond the politics of coercion introduced by ZANU PF is lacking in schools. While teachers might be aware of other alternative forms of government and ideologies, they are afraid of informative and critical pedagogy that frees learners from developing a narrow tunnel vision of the political and governance system in Zimbabwe. Teachers who might want to develop rational and critical thinking and analytical skills are afraid of being labeled "enemies of the state" (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru and Shizha, 2011, 117).

This sentiment is echoed by Sigauke (2011), whose study notes that individuals rarely discuss political issues because there is suspicion that talking about politics may result in victimization. This means that, although there are policies available or currently being developed that advocate for citizenship and social cohesion, the practice of this remains a challenge. This has two implications. Firstly, it will impact how aspects of citizenship and social cohesion are taught and, secondly, it will also impact how teachers are trained to teach it. With widespread fear of speaking out against the government, teachers limit the content of their discussions about citizenship and social cohesion in the classroom which hampers the development of what Westheimer and Kahne (2004) refer to as "authentic citizens." The authentic citizen can move beyond a passive understanding of citizenship toward a more justice-orientated position in which citizens can analyze and address social injustices. The political turmoil that occurred after the 2000s has resulted in the erosion of democracy and an increase of populist rhetoric from the ruling party justifying its position, which has silenced the public from openly voicing their views against the economic challenges and corruption in the country (Sigauke, 2019). Further to this, the current political regime disallows teachers from fulfilling their role as transforming agents by pursuing social justice. The current civics curriculum does not contain any controversial topics to ensure that teachers do not contradict the views of the state. Attempts to make human rights a standalone subject "failed due to the same reason that teachers are hesitant to teach issues they regard as politically sensitive that would get them in trouble with the ruling party" (Sigauke, 2011). The narrow view of nation building, citizenship and social cohesion is also reflected in teacher professional development, both in initial teacher education and in CPD programmes and is thus inconsistent with the true values of citizenship and social cohesion. Matereke (2012, 97) notes that this political rule renders "both the school system and teachers as mere functionaries of the *status quo*, thus constricting the public sphere and eroding civil liberties, these being the very elements which enable citizens to fully participate in the political process and to hold public officials and institutions accountable. It is these developments that bring the dual crisis of citizenship and education into purview."

The overview presented here suggests that Zimbabwe's education system, through its curriculum and teacher pedagogies, conveys a distilled version of citizenship and social cohesion to learners which can threaten a deliberative democracy and lead

to passive citizenship having catastrophic social, economic and political consequences.

Methodology

This section discusses the methodologies used in procuring the data and the analysis process. It also provides an overview of each of the studies presented in this paper.

Study A: South African teachers' understanding and practices of citizenship

The data for the first study on citizenship were part of a larger study that investigated learners' and teachers' understanding and experiences of citizenship in four high schools in South Africa (Singh, 2020). These four public high schools were stratified by quintile (poverty index) and geography. A total of eleven teachers participated in this study. The sample was purposive as it selected teachers who taught English, Life Orientation or History as subjects that are often noted as being carrier subjects for concepts such as citizenship and social cohesion and are often part of the curriculum. This study did not ascertain any views relating to teachers' understanding of social cohesion as the study was citizenship-focused; as such, the findings presented will only reflect their views, practices, and CPD experiences relating to citizenship. Teachers participated in face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed using professional transcribers. Respondents had the option of having the interview done in English, Afrikaans or isiXhosa as these were the dominant languages in the Western Cape Province. Some guiding questions included:

1. What is their understanding of citizenship and how is this depicted in practice?
2. What kind of professional development activities do teachers at the school participate in?
3. Has there been specific training on citizenship, social cohesion, or similar? Elaborate?

Table 2 below provides an overview of the respondents in Study A.

Study B: Zimbabwean teachers' understanding and practices of citizenship and social cohesion

The Zimbabwean case study was carried out in four schools across three provinces—Harare, Midlands and Masvingo. Two schools were urban, one was rural (50 km) and the fourth was in a peri-urban (11 km) setting. This was a qualitative case study where data were generated through an open-ended questionnaire. This study sought to understand teachers' understanding, their practices, and CPD experiences related to citizenship and social cohesion.

TABLE 2 Overview of respondents in Study A.

	Respondent	School Type	Gender	Quintile	Geography
1	Teacher A (Lisa)	High School	Female	1	Rural
2	Teacher B (Raymond)	High School	Male	1	Rural
3	Teacher C (Zimkitha)	High School	Female	1	Urban
4	Teacher D (Tebalelo)	High School	Male	1	Urban
5	Teacher E (Jonathan)	High School	Male	5	Rural
6	Teacher F (Gillian)	High School	Female	5	Rural
7	Teacher G (Lilith)	High School	Female	5	Rural
8	Teacher H (Letitia)	High School	Female	5	Urban
9	Teacher I (Saleem)	High School	Male	5	Urban
10	Teacher J (Sylvia)	High School	Female	5	Urban
11	Teacher K (Reginald)	High School	Male	5	Urban

Participants were selected through snowball sampling. One teacher was identified at each school and asked to distribute the open-ended questionnaire to their colleagues in the History department who were teaching National Social Security Studies (NASS). Seventeen secondary school teachers participated in the study. Some guiding questions for the study included:

1. What is your understanding of citizenship and social cohesion?
2. Have you received any training or staff development on citizenship and social cohesion?
3. How do you implement the values of citizenship and social cohesion in your classroom?

Table 3 below provides an overview of the sample for Study B:

Both studies received ethical clearances through the Cape Peninsula University of Technology Ethics Board and the South African study also received ethics through the Western Cape Education Department. At all times, the research protocol was observed, and respondents participated voluntarily. They were also informed that they could withdraw their participation at any time without fear of repercussions.

The data were analyzed using content analysis (see Patton, 2014) as this was the most effective way to ascertain keywords, themes, and concepts from qualitative data. Within the domain of content analysis, the authors selected a conceptual analysis approach as the main goal was to investigate occurrences of phrases and terms as well as incidences (Krippendorff, 2018). Further to this, content analysis was used because "qualitative content analysis is not linked to any particular science, and there are fewer rules to follow . . . therefore, the risk of confusion in matters concerning philosophical concepts and discussions is reduced" (Bengtsson, 2016, 8). This analytic technique was paired with Braun and Clarke's (2006) iterative thematic analysis process for thoroughness. The authors favored qualitative techniques for this research because it "is uniquely positioned to provide researchers with process-based, narrated, storied data that is more closely related to the human experience" (Stahl and King, 2020, 26).

The data for the interviews conducted in Study A was validated through the process of triangulation, as Brown (2018) laments

it is often used as a safeguard in education research to ensure the research is valid and credible. At least three teachers at each school were interviewed, which helped confirm the school context, availability of CPD, and what teachers do in the classroom.

The data for the questionnaire administered in Study B was also validated using triangulation. Teachers from various geographical contexts (urban, peri-urban, and rural) were included in the study, and all their responses, as it relates to the focus of this paper, were included in the analysis and presented in this paper. As such, all voices were included, and any outliers or inconsistencies would have been highlighted and discussed. Further to this, the questionnaires only used open-ended questions, which means respondents were not limited in how they could respond, which is often a limitation of closed-ended questionnaires.

A key difference in validation techniques between qualitative and quantitative is where the responsibility of the validation lies. In quantitative research, much emphasis is placed on having "faultless" instruments. In the context of qualitative research, the responsibility for validation and credibility lies with the researcher. Here, the work of Guba and Lincoln (1985) remains a useful checklist for establishing the trustworthiness of data. These authors contend for a research study to be evaluated as trustworthy; it needs to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba and Lincoln, 1985).

Credibility refers to how "true" the findings are. In this research, teachers' views from various schools and geographical spaces were triangulated to establish credibility. Transferability refers to the extent to which the study could be adapted for another context. Whilst qualitative research does not necessarily allow for replicability, patterns, descriptions, and experiences may be observed if the study was conducted in another context, and the findings would highly likely align. The findings of Study A and Study B align with other studies relating to teachers' experiences of CPD and citizenship and social cohesion, such as Raanhuis (2022) and Sayed et al. (2018). Dependability refers to the accuracy of the interpretation of the findings. In this research, each author looked at and interpreted the findings, and the analysis was compared to ensure there was no intended bias in the reporting process and that the experiences and responses of participants were accurately represented. Lastly, Guba and Lincoln (1985) speak

TABLE 3 Overview of Respondents in Study B.

	Respondent	School Type	Gender	School Marker	Geography
1	Teacher A (Arthur)	High School	Male	BVD	Urban
2	Teacher B (Colin)	High School	Male	BVD	Urban
3	Teacher C (Jeffrey)	High School	Male	BVD	Urban
4	Teacher D (Caitlin)	High School	Female	BVD	Urban
5	Teacher E (Katy)	High School	Female	BVD	Urban
6	Teacher F (Kwazi)	High School	Male	MKO	Urban
7	Teacher G (Jason)	High School	Male	MKO	Urban
8	Teacher H (Jake)	High School	Male	MKO	Urban
9	Teacher I (Solomon)	High School	Male	MKO	Urban
10	Teacher J (Adam)	High School	Male	MSV	Peri Urban
11	Teacher K (Kenneth)	High School	Male	MSV	Peri Urban
12	Teacher L (Cody)	High School	Male	MSV	Peri Urban
13	Teacher M (Liza)	High School	Female	MSV	Peri Urban
14	Teacher N (Joseph)	High School	Male	BNFL	Rural
15	Teacher O (Oscar)	High School	Male	BNFL	Rural
16	Teacher P (Laura)	High School	Female	BNFL	Rural
17	Teacher Q (Grace)	High School	Female	BNFL	Rural

about confirmability, which refers to the degree to which the findings are shaped by the participant's responses and not the researcher's own bias and personal agendas. In this research, the authors ensured to follow a sound analysis of the data by using a double approach of content analysis and iterative thematic analysis. The triangulation of the findings also supports the neutrality in how the data was represented.

Findings

This section discusses the findings that responded to the following research questions:

(1) What are teachers in South Africa and Zimbabwe's understanding of citizenship and social cohesion?

(2) Have teachers in South Africa and Zimbabwe been exposed to CPD for citizenship and social cohesion?

(3) How do teachers in Zimbabwe and South Africa incorporate the values of citizenship and social cohesion in their classroom?

Teachers' understanding of citizenship and social cohesion

Investigating teachers' views and understanding of citizenship and social cohesion is important because it has implications for their teaching practices. Pajares (1992) notes that the beliefs and views teachers hold influence their judgment and directly impact their behavior in the classroom. Hannula (2004) maintains that the affective dimensions that impact the quality of teaching and learning include beliefs, emotions, attitudes, values, ethics and morals. The studies on which this data was procured aimed to

ascertain what teachers understood citizenship and social cohesion to mean and what values they associated with these terms. The findings that respond to the first research question are depicted in the two tables below. Table 4 depicts the responses for Study A (South Africa) and Table 5 depicts the responses for Study B (Zimbabwe).

The findings for teachers in South Africa suggest that citizenship is predominantly about belonging, as noted by Lisa, Raymond, Zimkitha, Sylvia and Gillian; about rights, as noted by Reginald; and about responsibilities, as noted by Tebalelo, Lilith and Letitia. The value of respect for others was also a recurring theme amongst participants. Sylvia's comment suggests that her understanding of citizenship involves a social contract and a mutually beneficial relationship between the citizen and the state. The responses from Jonathan and Saleem request that one should "forget the politics, forget who is running the country" and to enjoy the privileges of the country "without the political things attached". It is quite concerning for educators to hold these views because political participation is key to realizing full citizenship (see Marshall, 1950; Veldhuis, 1997). For Marshall (1950), citizenship, as a right, includes civil, social and political rights, the latter which require citizen engagement, not disengagement, as noted by Saleem and Jonathan. Similarly, Veldhuis (1997) notes that citizenship has four dimensions including the social, the cultural, the economic and the political with each needing to be exercised equally for citizenship to be fully realized. Whilst Jonathan and Saleem seemingly dismiss any discussion or engagement with the political element of citizenship, this could be due to the possible negative repercussions and backlash that may occur if they did engage in these discussions. This omission is of concern as schools are learning and socializing institutions and what learners learn (or don't learn) can shape and cement the ideas and values they hold as adults. Therefore, we reiterate the importance of fostering the

TABLE 4 Study A: Teachers' understanding of citizenship (South Africa).

	Respondent	Understanding of Citizenship	Understanding of Social Cohesion
1	Teacher A (Lisa)	I am born in South Africa, so the fact that I am born here makes me a citizen and to be a good citizen you have to respect peoples and look after the elderly. . . and to uphold what our parents and grandparents have taught us. . .	n/a
2	Teacher B (Raymond)	. . . citizenship means that I am born here and that I accept the values of the constitution and I try to live and strive towards living the constitution as a responsible citizen . . .	n/a
3	Teacher C (Zimkitha)	. . .you have to know who you are, in which country you belong to, are you a South African?, a Nigerian? and if you are a particular citizen of a country, you must know your rights and what to do. And being a citizen or with citizenship who has accountability and responsibility.	n/a
4	Teacher D (Tebalelo)	I think it simply means that is those people that abide by the law, or they abide by the law in terms of paying the taxes, in terms of respecting other people, in terms of like also respecting their environment, taking care of and of being responsible for your actions –	n/a
5	Teacher E (Jonathan)	Its to become a decent South African. To serve your country, and forget about politics, forget who is running the country. What I miss, if I compare South Africa at the moment to say...I don't like the English, Britain, but compare their culture with our culture, we're missing something at the moment. . .	n/a
6	Teacher F (Gillian)	If you live in a city or town. . ., then I'm part of [that city /town]. And that means that I belong to [that city/town] and I'm part of [that city or town], so it's very important that I then be part of the community and do everything which is part of the community and fit in and I belong to [that city/town] I have to keep [that city/town] name up and that then influences my social life, it influences my school, and then as a teacher, I also have to be part of [that city/town] and do it in a good way. . . .have a good name, and so that the children and the parents can respect me.	n/a
7	Teacher G (Lilith)	someone who obeys the law, who wants to create a decent environment	n/a
8	Teacher H (Letitia)	It can be lots of things, but essentially if it be your responsibility if you want, if you contribute to part of a greater system. . .. and accountability . . . because you can't expect to be considered part of a whole if you're not conforming to what is expected of that situation.	n/a
9	Teacher I (Saleem)	. . .to me its having the beauty of living in the country and enjoying the privileges of that country without the other political things attached.	n/a
10	Teacher J (Sylvia)	It can be very broad. . . . I would think not just belonging, but also loyalty and vice versa . . . like the citizens be there for the state, the state must be there to cater to maybe all their needs. . .	n/a
11	Teacher K (Reginald)	Knowing your rights, knowing our constitution, being aware of issues that are of discrimination, knowing your limitations, understanding people, being involved in outreach, making sure that other people share your knowledge and train them to get them, because, so constantly there's a cycle and you need to be part of that cycle. You need to be part of everything is a cycle in this universe, and you need to be part of the cycle, whether it be resources, be aware of, whether it be the food you eat, your fitness,.. and you're not an island, and therefore anybody who is different you have to engage, you have to make sure you build a bridge with that person. . .	n/a

values of citizenship and social cohesion in schools, with CPD for teachers being one of these mechanisms to support this process.

The findings for teachers in Zimbabwe suggest that citizenship is fundamentally about belonging as noted by Caitlin, Katy, Jason, Jake, Adam, Kenneth and Oscar. Others noted that it is about roles and duties of the citizen (Kwazi, Arthur, Solomon, Cody, Joseph, Laura and Grace) as well as a relationship with the state (Grace), civil rights (Kwazi), identity and patriotism (Kenneth), inclusion (Jake) and enabling choice and decision making abilities (Lisa). Although none of the respondents overtly mentioned political engagement as key to their understanding of citizenship, it could

be that their understanding of the concept may be more tangential and diverse rather than them dismissing the political dimension as important. Alternatively, teachers disengage due to the potential negative backlash. For social cohesion, all respondents noted relationships, connectedness, interaction and integration. Working toward a national consciousness and nation building (Oscar), anti-individualistic behavior (Lisa) and solidarity (Solomon, Adam) also emerged as viewpoints.

In comparison, in both studies, the manner in which citizenship and social cohesion is understood classifies these concepts as an on-going, daily, interactive process (such as respecting others,

	Respondent	Understanding of Citizenship	Understanding of Social Cohesion
1	Teacher A (Arthur)	The privileges of someone. . .acknowledging and promoting roles and duties. . .	The link between people in a society
2	Teacher B (Colin)	Legally belonging to a given country	The act of individuals and groups in society working together in harmony towards a shared goal
3	Teacher C (Jeffrey)	Means a position of being a citizen of a particular country	Refers to the strength of relationships, connectedness and the sense of solidarity
4	Teacher D (Caitlin)	State of belonging to a nation state by birth, origin or descendant or registration as per the legal given provisions of a particular state or country. . .	Co-operation / unity in the various interactions among people of a group inhabiting a specific geographical area
5	Teacher E (Katy)	When one belongs to a given state as enshrined in the constitution – could be by birth or as stated in the constitution	The ability to live and work together in a given social setting e.g., community
6	Teacher F (Kwazi)	Civic issues, rights and responsibilities	Unity within groups at different levels e.g., family, community and country
7	Teacher G (Jason)	Sense of belonging to a state or country	Unity within and across groups in a nation or country
8	Teacher H (Jake)	Position or status of being a citizen of a country, fighting discrimination, social exclusion and inequalities by to building social capital, Living according to good citizenship values	Strength of relationships and the sense of solidarity among members of a community
9	Teacher I (Solomon)	Social rights, obligations and engaging in positive behaviour	Shared values, a sense of solidarity between members of a community
10	Teacher J (Adam)	Status of being a citizen of a particular country.	Unity, strength of a relationship, a sense of solidarity between members of a society
11	Teacher K (Kenneth)	Identity, patriotism, ownership, belonging to a nation, sovereignty, desire to develop one's nation	When people work together for a common good, unity, team work and interaction of members in the society.
12	Teacher L (Cody)	The social responsibilities and accountabilities expected of persons living within set boundaries	The social bonds within communities that enhance peace, social and economic development
13	Teacher M (Liza)	It's about enabling people to make their own decision and also be able to take responsibility for their own lives and their communities	It's about people coming together, being interactive, cooperative and collaborative in every aspect of their social life. Its communally based and its not individualistic
14	Teacher N (Joseph)	Acquisition of civic responsibilities, and values for the for the formation of good citizens.	Integration of members of a society for nationhood
15	Teacher O (Oscar)	Members of a common society – cherishing common norms and values in a patriotic way	Unity or oneness for achieving a common goal which is a national consciousness and nation building
16	Teacher P (Laura)	The status of being a citizen along with the rights, duties, and privileges of being a citizen	Unity of a purpose amongst members of a community
17	Teacher Q (Grace)	The relationship between an individual and the state where one understands and fulfills their rights and duties within their society	The degree of social integration and inclusion in communities

helping others, helping the elderly and the community, and being inclusive, etc.) but also as a goal to be achieved (solidarity, peace, and economic development). For both the South African and Zimbabwean teachers, the political foundations of citizenship and social cohesion are weak. This means that teachers either overtly disengage from politics, as in the case of South Africa, or subtly disengage by not mentioning this in their understanding of these concepts, as in the case of Zimbabwe.

Singh et al. (2018) argue that it is important to understand the views that teachers hold because, once known, interventions can be developed to improve practice. If teachers are disengaging from politics and transferring these disengaged views onto learners, this may lead to catastrophic consequences for enabling a democracy. Studies conducted in South Africa about the political engagement of youth found that, although youth are pro-democracy, their civic and political engagement is very low (Mattes and Richmond, 2014).

Booysen's (2015) study is also illustrative of South African youth's views of political participation. Booysen's study included focus groups with youth in three different provinces in South Africa about their views on political participation and revealed that learners will only vote if they "get" something in return, such as jobs. In the absence of this, they do not see the necessity. Similarly, in the study conducted by Singh (2020) learners noted that ". . .distrust of leadership, corruption, high levels of unemployment, poverty, and apathy as reasons why they chose to not participate politically" (p, 222–223). This was also evident in the results of the 2019 national elections, where the youth turnout was very low. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, where the 2012 National Population Census revealed that 76.1% of the population are under the age of 34 and about 68% of this group are between the ages of 15 and 34. Although being the largest demographic segment, their civic participation is very low (Future Africa

Forum, 2023). The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission notes that, out of about 5.6 million registered voters, 44% constitute youth between the ages of 18 and 34. Booysen (2015) maintains that a reason for this could be due to youth social rights and basic needs that are not being met. Another explanation could be the socialization process at school where teachers do not readily engage learners about politics. This is substantiated by Willeck and Mendelberg (2021) who believe that formal education is fundamental to encouraging political participation. Several others also echo this sentiment, for example, Nie et al. (1996, 2) note that there is a consistent and overwhelming correlation between formal education and political participation of youth and that, in formal educational attainment, "the primary mechanism behind citizenship characteristics is basically uncontested"). Willeck and Mendelberg (2021, 89) mention that "the link between education and political engagement is among the most replicated and cited findings in political science" and Verba et al. (1995) state that, if scholars could use one variable to predict voting

patterns, the most reliable and variable would be the level of education.

There is also an assumption that individuals who are teachers are all good and wholesome individuals who are passionate about advancing democracy. This is not the case as teachers have their own histories, life experiences, political, religious and cultural beliefs that may mitigate against the values of democracy. As such, to ensure learners are being socialized for a democratic society, teachers require focused professional development to guide this process.

Teachers' exposure to CPD for citizenship and social cohesion and associated classroom practices

This section responds to the research questions 2 and 3 which are: "Have teachers in South Africa and Zimbabwe been exposed to

TABLE 6 Teachers' exposure to CPD for citizenship and their self-reported associated classroom practices (Study A).

	Respondent	Received CPD for citizenship/ social cohesion	Do you practice/ implement the values of citizenship and social cohesion in your classroom?
1	Teacher A (Lisa)	No, not at all	It's quite really difficult,… if I have to look at Grade 8 and Grade 9, many of them when we talk about sex, about gays and all this stuff, lesbians and all that stuff, then there are a few of them who are frivolous and laugh about these topics. But for me, and as you say, it's very sensitive,…there are homosexual kids in the class…but I say, we must learn to respect these people because these people have rights. So I'll always say they have their rights, we can't discriminate against them or whatever, especially if the kid is in the class, and you know
2	Teacher B (Raymond)	No	[referring to the practices of teachers at the school] No, not at all. Because we, many of our teachers in our time were at a university based on a certain race. So many of us at East Cape, or at the Colleges or at the Tech. The new type of teacher being trained is now being trained much more in a multi-racial culture…
3	Teacher C (Zimkitha)	Yes	when the child enters our school, then that child learns discipline in terms of being responsible
4	Teacher D (Tebalelo)	Yes	if you are in class teaching that child, but if you're seeing that child is doing something wrong, then it is your duty to speak with that child…
5	Teacher E (Jonathan)	Yes	If I can explain it to you. Once a guy comes into my office, let's say he's transgressing a rule, say for instance he stole something then my approach won't be, you stole something. We try to say, what value did you not obey? Respect for other people's property? So we throw this whole thing towards values.
6	Teacher F (Gillian)	No	I don't know…,sometimes you feel that children get more difficult and difficult and always to cope with them isn't so easy. Because ja, how to discipline them and after so many years in teaching, I believe I can, but sometimes you just feel I can't go on any longer…
7	Teacher G (Lilith)	No	I wouldn't say like to an exceptionally high level.…. I'm a Christian as well, but I have respect for the other, …. I would never put my personal opinion and say, I will say if you are Christian, then you would do this, but if you are Muslim, … Because I feel that they are that appropriate age to make their own choices.
8	Teacher H (Letitia)	No	Well…you can talk about anything, and you can discuss anything, and you can write letters about anything, and you can analyse people from different angles and all of that kind of thing.
9	Teacher I (Saleem)	No	[some teachers] discipline the child by putting the child outside the classroom, which is against the policy of the Department. And I say to them, why not tell the child to come and sit in front of your class? Start with that, you know. Or punish the child after school. Some teachers punish the child during an interval for example, which is also not right, because the child needs that break between sessions.
10	Teacher J (Sylvia)	No	Well, I have a lot of patience, and so I like talking and making the child understand, you know where the child maybe went wrong and then come back to talk, like maybe have a one-on-one.
11	Teacher K (Reginald)	No	For me it's orientating them for life, it's making sure that they carry those lessons through with them for life.

TABLE 7   Teacher's exposure to CPD for citizenship and social cohesion and their self-reported associated classroom practices (Study B).

	Respondent	Received CPD for citizenship/ social cohesion	Do you practice/ implement the values of citizenship and social cohesion in your classroom?
1	Teacher A (Arthur)	No	Yes. In every lecture, attempts are made to ensure that captures most of the different views.
2	Teacher B (Colin)	Yes	Yes. Appreciating diversity in teaching and learning…
3	Teacher C (Jeffrey)	Yes	Yes, by utilizing collaborating approaches to learning such as group work, class discussions and debates. Exposing learners to the history of different social groups in the Zimbabwean society in order for them to value social and cultural diversity.
4	Teacher D (Caitlin)	No	Yes. Encouraging the sharing of unique cultural values and practices…
5	Teacher E (Katy)	No	Yes. Always bringing in aspects of a citizen's rights when teaching topics such as democracy and human rights
6	Teacher F (Kwazi)	No	Yes. In teaching social studies, one of the goals is citizenship education so I teach my students about their rights and responsibilities.
7	Teacher G (Jason)	No	Yes. Through lectures on national pride and patriotism.
8	Teacher H (Jake)	Yes	Yes, by developing characters to become more mindful of our responsibilities, rights and roles in society.
9	Teacher I (Solomon)	No	Yes, through assisting other students in need of say fees and food. Accompanying and paying what is known as *chema* to a bereaved student's family.
10	Teacher J (Adam)	Yes	Yes. Classroom discussions, debates, voting, exercising of their rights, conservation of natural resources, participation in projects for the community…
11	Teacher K (Kenneth)	No	Yes, participation in national events, e.g., national cleaning up events, being involved in soil conservation and encouraging critical thinking….
12	Teacher L (Cody)	Yes	Yes, group work, educational tours….
13	Teacher M (Liza)	No	Yes. Students are allowed to work together and also make choices. They are responsible and accountable for their choices.
14	Teacher N (Joseph)	No	Yes, we sing the national anthem and raise the flag. We debate and dramatize national issues of a civic and social nature, we carry out educational tours as a way of learning…
15	Teacher O (Oscar)	No	Yes, I teach the values of both… we practice these values at assemblies, we participate in national events e.g., Africa Day, Independence Day, We also execute excursions to areas of national significance…also collaborative research and entrepreneurial projects.
16	Teacher P (Laura)	No	Yes, respect individual differences, volunteering, empowering students as leaders, encouraging children to be a good citizen.
17	Teacher Q (Grace)	Yes	Yes, I hold debates on issues to do with human rights and responsibilities, taking field trips around the community.

CPD for citizenship and social cohesion?" and "How do teachers in Zimbabwe and South Africa incorporate the values of citizenship and social cohesion in their classroom?" Tables 6, 7 respond to these questions from Study A (South Africa) and from Study B (Zimbabwe) respectively.

The findings from the South African teachers demonstrate that, out of the eleven teachers, only two teachers (from an urban, quintile one school) noted that they had received CPD that focused on citizenship. Most of the teachers had not received any form of CPD on these topics. However, when teachers were asked whether they teach in a manner that promotes the values and practices of citizenship, all the responses were positive and examples of these strategies were provided. For example, one teacher explained that fostering tolerance in her class is her way of enacting these values (Lisa), others noted that it is enacted through positive disciplining techniques (Saleem, Zimkitha, Tebalelo, Jonathan and Sylvia), and Reginald believed in creating a class environment that allows learners to develop life skills. These pedagogical and classroom

practices are essential for socializing learners toward enacting the democratic values. Goren and Yemini (2017) suggest that the characteristics and the approach of the adults involved in this socialization can determine the degree to which youth participate in public discourses and imbibe the values of citizenship and social cohesion. As such, all teachers, regardless of the subject, need to be consistently trained to ensure their classroom practices and pedagogies are consistent with the values of citizenship and social cohesion as their own understandings and views of these concepts may be misaligned. Although CPD is only one way of challenging teachers' beliefs, it becomes impactful if the CPD is consistent.

The findings from Study B demonstrate that, of the 17 teachers, only six noted that they had received CPD focused on citizenship and social cohesion. In this case, all teachers responded positively when asked whether they implement the values of citizenship in their classrooms. The methods used included: considering multiple viewpoints (Arthur); using a collaborative teaching style; having debates and encouraging discussions (Jeffery, Adam, Lisa); national

pride and patriotism (Jason); and participating in national events and educational tours (Kenneth, Cody).

This shows that teachers are implementing their understanding of citizenship and social cohesion in the classroom, informed by their own beliefs and views and not necessarily formal training. This begs the question: *Are these teachers' enacting values that are consistent with the values of democracy or are they perpetuating behaviors that encourage silencing of voices?* A study by Leek (2019) also suggests that teachers themselves recognize the importance of being trained in the effective dimensions of teaching and learning to encourage youth to become more active citizens. Leek's (2019, 181) study notes that "the teachers expressed their concern about the lack of training on a whole spectrum of civic participation, including classroom psychology [and noted that] the times are changing, and the youth changes over time too, so each generation has different needs as far as teaching is concerned. [As] a result, the teachers need to update their teaching methods accordingly and knowledge of how to teach in general."

For learners to become active citizens who utilize their agency and embody the values of citizenship and social cohesion, one or two lessons a week on values and society from the civics curriculum is not sufficient. Learners need these values to pervade every aspect of their schooling lives, facilitated by teachers who are professionally trained and equipped to do so.

This section discussed the findings that respond to the three research questions as noted earlier in this paper. The next section concludes the paper by summarizing the two studies, noting the contribution and limitation of the study, synthesizing the main findings, and reiterating the importance of teachers receiving consistent, good quality CPD on affective concepts such as citizenship and social cohesion in order to build and support a flourishing democracy.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to illuminate South African and Zimbabwean teachers understanding of citizenship and social cohesion, their experiences of CPD relating to these concepts as well as the ways in which they implement these concepts in their classrooms. This paper is a reflection on and a response to the dire political challenges and inefficiencies experienced in these nations, where democracy is being threatened and its values are eroding. Teachers remain beacons of hope in these challenging times as their agentic nature is catalytic in socializing youth about democracy. However, when teachers are silenced and threatened through political interference, limiting how and what they can and cannot discuss in the classroom, democracy is undermined and weakened. The findings draw from two separate studies. The findings from the South African case draw from a larger study investigating learners' and teachers' understandings and experiences of citizenship in South Africa, where the discussion of CPD was a subset (see Singh, 2020). This study only focused on the concept of citizenship, not social cohesion, and is presented in this paper as such. The Zimbabwean case draws on a study that investigated teachers' understanding of citizenship and social cohesion, their experiences of CPD relating to this, and the ways in which they implement this in their classrooms. A critical limitation of the study is that in some instances, the instruments posed leading

questions. This limitation was overcome by ensuring the analysis was more nuanced, acknowledging that it is quite possible that a differently phrased question may yield a different response.

Nonetheless, the findings demonstrate that in these studies, both South African and Zimbabwean teachers' understanding of citizenship promotes the ideals of the "Responsible Citizen" (see Westheimer and Kahne, 2004), who privilege the ideals of respect for each other and the environment. Teachers in both counties also find belonging to be an important aspect. Teachers avoid discussing politics and, in some instances, note that one should "forget the politics and forget who is running the country," demonstrating either their political disengagement with the state or fear of discussing politics due to the possible negative repercussions. For the teachers in Zimbabwe, social cohesion is about solidarity, togetherness, patriotism, integration, unity and cooperation. Most teachers in these studies had not received training on citizenship or social cohesion. However, all teachers declared that they teach in a way that is consistent with their views of citizenship and social cohesion. Both countries have evidence of policies that promote the values of citizenship and social cohesion, with South Africa's landscape being the more sophisticated of the two, but the offering for CPD does not meet policy objectives in practice. Reasons for the inconsistent and fragmented offering of CPD for citizenship and social cohesion include financial challenges, departmental capacity and political interference.

Teachers need to receive focused CPD on understanding and enacting the values of citizenship and social cohesion in the classroom because schools, through teachers, exercise a particular influence on the development of young people's democratic knowledge and political literacy skills (Kisby and Sloam, 2014). Learners in South Africa and Zimbabwe have the right to be taught the full meaning of citizenship and social cohesion and to understand the practices associated with this. By doing so, they will know when democracy and democratic values are not being upheld. Well-trained and suitably equipped teachers are a critical factor to realize this because quality teachers beget quality education systems. Raanhuis (2021, 44) reiterates this by saying that "teachers in all contexts should be supported as agents of change, through CPD". Thus, professional development for teachers, particularly in post-conflict and post-colonial states, becomes an issue of social justice and is critical in creating deliberative democracies.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology Ethics Committee. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

MS: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Writing—original draft, Writing—review and editing. TM: Formal Analysis, Methodology, Writing—original draft.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Exploring family models and SDG number five in picture books. Dialogical alternatives for secondary education

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Introduction: This contribution addresses the controversy that often surrounds the educational treatment of new family models. The literature, as a medium of fiction based on reality, reflects social changes, including the organization of families. Promoting gender equality—Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number five (United Nations)—is closely linked to understanding these new family structures. In this context, picture books—powerful literary resources that combine images and words—should be used to expose students to new realities and raise awareness of diversity, thereby fostering tolerance and respect.

Method: This study analyzes several picture books, including classics like *King and King* and more recent titles like *Well done Mummy*. The analysis will focus on their format and content to determine their suitability for secondary school classrooms, discuss family models, and raise awareness, potentially changing attitudes. Following the analysis, we explore how to incorporate these books into educational sequences, highlighting the use of dialogical discussions to promote critical thinking.

Results: The results of this contribution will include a list of suggested picture books, an evaluation of their suitability, and proposed didactic strategies.

Discussion: These aspects will strengthen the classroom treatment of this controversial topic, helping students grow holistically through axiological aspects and the development of SDG number five: gender equality. Additionally, this study will confirm the relevance of using picture books in the classroom within the context of liquid modernity, where audiovisual elements are key motivators for students.

KEYWORDS

education, culture, teaching education, literature, family

1 Introduction

In an era preoccupied with issues like artificial intelligence and its impact on daily life (Escotet, 2023; Strzelecki, 2023), this contribution addresses a controversial topic in education: the influence of new family models. Social conditions, the evolving understanding of interpersonal relationships, and changes in daily work dynamics have led to a broader concept of family. Medical, technological and legislative advances—such as the recognition of same-sex unions and the acceptance of unmarried couples—have also contributed to this pluralistic notion of family in the 21st century.

The notion that one type of family is better than another must not be accepted if respect for diversity and the development of inclusive education is to prevail. All family structures—regardless of whether these comprise single mothers, lesbian couples, homosexual parents, traditional families, families that unite but come from different nuclei, or adoptive

families—must be founded on communication, responsibility, care, and respect. And these diverse family models are increasingly represented in literary fiction.

Traditionally, a specific family typology has dominated the collective imagination and cultural manifestations. However, as society evolves, so do representations of the family (Jerez-Martínez and Hernández Delgado, 2015). Integrating different family models into the cultural system faces resistance, but the literature, particularly children's works, plays a crucial role in cultural transmission (Brown et al., 2016).

Our study will focus on new kinship and gender identities. As Butler (2004) noted, undoing gender involves rethinking personhood, recognizing rights, and fostering full social inclusion. Ashley (2023) emphasized that gender identity is inherently subjective. Through inter-subjective dialog, we aim to promote reflection on diversity, reducing discrimination and fostering acceptance. Our goal is to offer a more pluralistic vision and interpretation of reality, emphasizing knowledge and respect in accordance with democratic values.

Picture books, as artistic objects, transcend the realm of children and allow people of different ages to interact with them, establishing a narrative pact based on the interpretation of symbolism, mainly provided by the image (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006). The appropriateness of using picture books is given by the context of the audiovisual era, where users, whether in their role as learners or not, become prosumers of audiovisual environments (Navio-Marco et al., 2022). Picture books would, therefore, perfectly meet the expectations of the inhabitants of this third decade of the 21st century by placing their attention on the image and its connotations as well as its denotations.

Using fiction as our starting point, we aspire to build a discourse based on SDG number five: gender equality. We propose a dialogic approach in educational contexts to present new family models, aiming to prevent rejection and controversy. Analyzing a selection of picture books will help us identify characteristics that facilitate dialogic action in classrooms or other educational spaces, aiming for social transformation and promoting respect for diversity.

2 The context of hypermodernity and liquid modernity in the third decade of the 21st century

We aim to provide some insight into the context of human education and literacy in the 21st century, considering concepts like liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000) and media literacy (Cho et al., 2022). It is necessary to delve into anthropological aspects that affect the use of literature to raise awareness of social models of family and gender identity.

Bauman's theory focusses on certain aspects, such as uncertainty, instability, and lack of continuity, by means of which traditional structures give way to new forms (including family models). In other words, they are structures that, rather than stagnating, tend to be evanescent and changing. Globalization, technology, and economic trends contribute to this, inducing insecurity and inciting people to move away from traditional norms. Adapting to social changes and individualization significantly shapes new identities and their cultural aspects. Given this social polarization, we emphasize the importance

of respecting diversity and trusting in educational proposals as a means of necessary social transformation.

As a framework for human actions, hypermodernism values information and communication technologies for overcoming natural limitations (Charles and Lipovetsky, 2005). This perspective leaves aside Lyotard (1979) when he mentioned the metanarrative, where scientific, historical, religious, and social facts were socially assumed in an absolutist way. The democratization of information increases access to knowledge and critical thinking but also poses a risk of infoxication (Heiss et al., 2023). Augé's (2009) concept of non-places complements liquid modernity, suggesting a flexible but potentially dispersed learning context.

The transposition of these conceptual pillars to the literary sphere connects with Eagleton (2003) when he questions the cultural and literary theory of our times, indicating that there is a fusion between the two. This fact highlights the value of considering cultural issues relevant to people and their inclusion in works of fiction. Controversial topics can thus become part of the narrative arguments, and taking into account the aforementioned progression of collective thinking, they can be dealt with in a way that overcomes possible social censorship. In this sense, Stephens and McCallum (1998) already warned us of the versions of literary classics, whether children's or otherwise, in which myths and other works were reluctant to develop reinterpretations from the point of view of gender differences. Furthermore, taking into account the contribution of Zipes (1983) where he warns us of the subversive power of classic stories, motivates the need to search for texts that satisfy social needs and help in the formation of citizenship that should be governed by the construction of critical and autonomous thought.

Picture books are a literary resource that—through their use—we can approach in a didactic way topics that are still culturally and familiarly seen as problematic. The progress toward total democracy (Wolk and Labbo, 2004) through the display of these books will be the fundamental goal of the educational proposal that we want to carry out. To this end, we must be aware that we are supported by different contexts and institutional references—which are international—and which allow us to think about the design of socio-educational interventions aimed at intercultural dialog and the acquisition of intercultural competencies by individuals (Shuali, 2022).

3 Citizenship education in a changing society

We agree with Harari (2012) on the power of narratives. The ability to create collective human imaginaries enables cooperation and coordination among large groups of people. Paying attention to people's productions allows us to identify societal trends and symbolic elements that can be interpreted. This involves recognizing that, as human beings, we create semantic fields or constructions of meaning that guide the behaviors of social actors (Majfud, 2018). Therefore, we need to be aware of the significance of the narratives and texts that are culturally available to us, as they encode human thinking and behavioral orientations.

Today, citizenship education takes place in a context of liquid modernity, which induces uncertain social conditions (Meirinhos and de Portela, 2023). While access to information is immediate, there is no certainty that it can be recontacted or fully assimilated.

For this reason, written texts and literary works take on greater value because they preserve people's thoughts, experiences, beliefs, and attitudes, especially in their physical forms. These texts reflect cultural changes and enable comparisons with past times or future projections.

Logically, if, as we mentioned in the introduction section, the work in classrooms and other educational spaces that we propose is going to be developed through picture books, we will have to bear in mind that this type of artistic manifestation is associated with children's and young adult literature. In this assimilation, it is key to think that evolution also affects this literary demonstration and that children and adolescents are not the same as in previous decades (Nikolajeva, 2019). For this reason, reflecting on the identity and characteristics of these in the years in which we live and in the years to come will significantly help the socio-educational intervention approaches that are carried out (López-Valero et al., 2021).

The relative speed with which we perceive social change affects educators, and we cannot think of traditional teachers who, with their resources already acquired in previous times, manage to do their job well. In this text, by focusing on SDG number five: gender equality, we call for teachers who can adapt to current times and to a consideration of gender identity that gradually moves away from heteronormativity and toward greater diversity and inclusion (López-Valero and Encabo, 2021; Markland et al., 2022). In the following section, let us look at what is expected socially and educationally from the development of the above-mentioned UN target.

4 Sustainable development goals

Humanity's concern for survival and the maintenance of cultural conditions that facilitate it has led to the formulation of certain postulates common across societies. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) embody this quest. The 17 goals set by the United Nations aim to ensure that human evolution follows axiological guidelines centered on democracy and the common good, valuing shared resources to promote their preservation.

The call for social responsibility (Fallah Shayan et al., 2022) and awareness of the elements concerning these objectives is crucial for their implementation within the framework of each society's culture. The 17 goals are divided into different aspects, some focusing on the environment, others on labor and welfare conditions, and others on more sensitive elements—such as the one we address in this contribution: gender differences. All of these goals are underpinned by SDG number four: quality education. While this can be approached from an institutional or political perspective, we believe it should be addressed through classroom interventions and other educational spaces that form the foundation of people's education.

An ethical perspective is essential for making the SDGs effective (Arroyo, 2021; Gómez Gil, 2018; Puig Gómez, 2022). This approach involves moving beyond hypermodernism, where technology is postulated as a solution to human problems. The recovery of the axiological is the way to raise awareness of sustainable development and, therefore, to address the specific objectives to be achieved. The preparation of educators will provide the necessary bridge between the education system and the citizens it seeks to educate for the achievement of the SDGs. Currently, full access to knowledge about the 17 goals has not been sufficiently developed (Encabo-Fernández

et al., 2023; Serafini et al., 2022), preventing us from being optimistic about their optimal social implementation.

5 Goal five: gender equality

Gender equality, as a fundamental human right, is a crucial pillar in building a society that advocates for peace and sustainability. SDG number five targets the eradication of discrimination, equal opportunities in political, economic, and public life, and the empowerment of individuals regardless of gender in traditionally excluded contexts. Education must play a role in achieving these targets by analyzing social realities and guiding people to be educated in conditions of equality, being able to choose life and professional paths that are not constrained by reasons of possible gender discrimination.

The United Nations' guidelines for this goal align with recommendations from various political and educational systems, which advocate for equal opportunities between genders (Vaughan and Longlands, 2023). These aspects are recognized as transversal, cutting across different cultural and social dimensions relevant to people (De Miguel-González and Sebastián-López, 2022). In education, addressing this goal involves critically analyzing classroom materials, such as textbooks (De Miguel-González and Sebastián-López, 2022), acknowledging emerging realities like new masculinities (Heinz et al., 2023), and recognizing affective-sexual diversity (Kelly, 2012). These elements extend beyond promoting equal opportunities for women, encompassing current aspects with significant social impact. Next, we will explore the characteristics of society in the third decade of the 21st century.

6 The concept of family

In today's world, events and circumstances often lead to undesirable situations such as isolation and loneliness (Luhmann et al., 2023). Despite this, the human tendency toward social relationships fosters groupings that give meaning to culture, allowing people to transcend their instincts and manage key survival elements. Within this configuration, the family remains a fundamental concept of social organization. Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to its presence and evolution within the cultural framework that supports human existence and development.

Living together in the same dwelling, organizing roles with or without blood ties, and sharing a common economic and social lifestyle are usually characteristics the World Health Organization provides to define the concept of family. The evolution of this concept is clear, broadening to include a core that does not necessarily entail blood relationships. Additionally, social circumstances give rise to diverse family models, all of which deserve respect and social legitimacy without anyone being deemed superior due to tradition or other reasons.

Collins (2023) reflected on how new visions and practices of sexuality have transformed the concept of family in recent decades. Nowadays, we encounter various possibilities: childless families, two-parent families with children, same-parent families, composite (or reconstituted) families, single-parent families, foster families, adoptive families, and extended families. Tradition and persistent discourse have traditionally exalted the two-parent family model with children as the most frequent and valid societal reference. However, as mentioned in previous sections, the paradigm shift in collective

imagination and cultural meta-narratives necessitates visibility for other family models, which are equally legitimate.

Academic literature already includes several studies on single-parent families (Chick, 2008; Hedberg et al., 2022; Kelly, 2012; Sunderland and McGlashan, 2012), as reflected in picture books. This suggests that potentially controversial topics can be addressed through the reading and pedagogical use of literary works. Given this context, it is essential to train educators to become effective mediators between the artistic object—a picture book, in this case—and students in the learning process. Fortunately, the educational field is sensitive to social change and programs and experiences; for example, Davis and Hanline (2018) and Farr et al. (2019) are already addressing these potentially controversial issues.

7 Controversial issues

Certain issues elicit varying sensitivities among people, sometimes generating dichotomies of thought, conflicts, and tirades. When an issue touches on axiological questions and varies in acceptance based on individual sensitivities, it becomes controversial. Scientific literature indicates that addressing these topics, and the didactics linked to them is one of the most powerful tools for activating and training democratic and critical citizenship (Ortega-Sánchez, 2022). It follows that such issues should be a subject of pedagogy, especially for educators and trainers. Their perspective and attitude are crucial for discussing potential conflicts with cultural and family values in classrooms or educational spaces.

Gender identity and its formation are controversial societal issues. The previously mentioned absolutist meta-narrative in societal development is giving way to a more plural discourse, offering more possibilities of expression beyond androcentric or heteropatriarchal views (Apaolaza-Llorente et al., 2023). Moving toward the concept of personhood is a challenge, but acknowledging and settling differences is essential. For example, Van Houtte's (2023) study highlighted educational differences in disruptive behavior and academic commitment between males and females. These differences persist in social and working environments, with disparities in working conditions between women and men (Antón et al., 2023). Coeducational models are urgently needed in educational, social, and family contexts (Heras et al., 2021), along with openness to new social realities and situations, such as changing family structures based on diverse choices about love, sexuality, and lifestyles.

Children's literature can significantly influence social and cultural transformation due to its impact on early years and beyond. Reflecting on gender attributions or the construction of identities should be a relevant premise in teachers' daily actions (San Martín and Ortega Sánchez, 2022). In this case, we already highlighted the fact that picture books are not pigeonholed in terms of age groups. For example, this fact allows working groups such as secondary school students to access potentially controversial content such as sexual diversity through the reading and prior or subsequent teaching of picture books (Leung and Adams-Whittaker, 2022; Soler-Quílez et al., 2022). The link between this perspective and family models informs our focus on literary works that reflect new realities and contribute to inclusive awareness, fostering a truly tolerant and democratic society.

The concept of an implied reader is key to understanding our contribution in terms of the importance of controversial topics in children's literature. The conceptualization of this potential reader in the author's mind suggests that the user is expected to reconstruct the text based on their previous life and cultural experiences. If and when engaging actively and interactively with the text, reading becomes a social, active, affective, and intertextual framework rather than a solitary act. In doing so, individuals are enabled to understand and construct ideas, participate with their voice in society, and even form critical and autonomous opinions on controversial issues.

8 The use of picture books to address axiological and controversial issues

Previous research, such as that by Ortega-Sánchez (2023a), has highlighted the importance of literature in educational treatment of the affective-sexual diversity. The same author's didactic exploration (Ortega-Sánchez, 2023b) serves as a precedent for analyzing the impact of digital literature on the educational approach to affective-sexual diversity.

Training teachers in children's and young adult literature, including the knowledge and selection of picture books and distinguishing them from traditional stories, is challenging at various educational levels (Hernández-Delgado et al., 2023). The unique typology of picture books requires a specific conceptual understanding to avoid social stereotypes that equate them with children's stories. Therefore, the didactic guidelines provided to trainee and in-service teachers are crucial for identifying gender representations in picture books. These guidelines will help reflect on and shape critical thinking in students (Haghanikar et al., 2022).

Despite the stereotypical view of picture books as simple texts for young children, their value and complexity extend beyond this narrow perception, making them suitable for all ages. Studies have shown their successful use in secondary education (Bintz and Ciecierski-Madar, 2022; Carr et al., 2001; Giorgis, 1999). Content analysis of picture books reveals their diverse content and attention to diversity (Koss, 2015). The creation of picture books involves a significant esthetic component—illustrations—and a complementary creative aspect—the written narrative.

The pursuit of SDG number five in picture books fits perfectly with the target of education for social justice (O'Neil, 2010). Their narrative content, both visual and written, addresses controversial issues, and recognizing these through reading and interaction makes raising awareness more feasible. Previous studies support our study. Therefore, Evans (2015), Gunn et al. (2022), and Pomerantz (2018) have proposed specific work with picture books containing controversial topics, emphasizing the importance of critical awareness to change attitudes toward socially controversial topics. Similarly, we note that López-Valero et al. (2012) highlighted the value of using picture books to create European awareness from an intercultural perspective, thus demonstrating the above-mentioned effectiveness. Therefore, based on these studies, in this article, we would like to consider the work on equal opportunities between genders, focussing on the family models that can be seen in current times.

9 Method

We will adopt a hermeneutic paradigm, striving to understand the complexity of texts through reflection. We aim to interpret the

symbolism in the works by considering the culture and context of their creation. As Ricoeur (1986) pointed out, we will study the problem of the appropriation of the text, meaning the application of the text's meaning to the reader's life. This approach links themes to culture, transcending the individual. By studying picture books, we will assess their suitability for classroom or other educational settings.

The content analysis will involve a selected sample of picture books. We will access the literary works as documentary sources and identify the context of their creation, inferring both explicit and implicit messages. The selection criteria for the picture books correspond to the presence of family models in the texts and affective-sexual diversity. Additionally, the picture books should have a certain social presence, that is, dissemination among the educational and social community. The range of years established for the selection of these picture books is from 2000 to 2022. The 10 works that will be analyzed by means of a rubric aimed at detecting the topics and, above all, the didactic possibilities for socio-educational intervention with these literary texts are included in this category.

10 Sample

Our sample selection process was based on several criteria to ensure the chosen picture books would effectively engage pupils and allow them to reinterpret the messages and illustrations. First, we prioritized editions with significant literary value and excluded works that were mere contributions without depth (for our purposes, the texts with the least value will probably be those that are purely pedagogical, non-fiction or those that constitute merchandizing, for example, because they come from audiovisual productions, although this does not mean that they should be completely ruled out). Another essential criterion for selection was the narrative capacity or, in other words, whether illustrations and text complemented each other. That would allow the reader to complete and develop the horizon of expectations in accordance with the theme proposed—logically, an implicit criterion was that the topic corresponded to the main argument of the work. Additionally, the esthetic quality of the picture books was closely linked to these criteria. Enhancing imagination was also a key factor, as the combination of imagination and focus on the chosen theme determines the educational value of the work when used in the classroom.

The 10 selected picture books, published over three decades, address different family models with various affective-sexual sensibilities. The first book, *La familia del Ratón Pérez* (Riera, 2014), has a main character whose equivalents are the *Tooth Fairy* in English-speaking countries or *Le petit Souris* in French-speaking countries, uses a girl's question about the tooth fairy's family, to explore different models. The second, *Well done Mummy* (Haughton, 2022), presents a penguin mother as the referent for the little penguins, challenging androcentric traditions and demonstrating alternative family perspectives. The third book, *Red: a crayon's story* (Hall, 2015), while not focussed on family, involves the family in accepting the identity of a red crayon that feels blue, showcasing a classic narrative in picture books.

King and King (Nijland and De Haan, 2003) recreates a classic fairy tale by focussing on the prince's search for a marriageable princess, but what the court did not expect was that love with a person of the same sex would triumph. The creation of a same-parent family shows another of the models we already mentioned. The fifth text is

along the same lines: *And Tango makes three* (Richardson and Parnell, 2005). Sometimes censored, this picture book presents a model of a diverse family, raising the validity of same-parent families. The use of penguins in the zoo is a possible anthropomorphization that facilitates debate and awareness-raising.

The sixth picture book we selected is *Mom and Mum* are getting married (Setterington and Priestley, 2004) where the announcement of a gay wedding shocks Rosie, the main character. Once again, the presentation of diversity makes it possible to work with this work in educational contexts. The seventh book is in this same line of family type: *Molly's family* (Garden and Wooding, 2004), where, while drawing a picture of her family, *Molly* is scolded by other children for having a same-sex family. This motif will allow us to reflect on the acceptance of diversity and the weight of tradition in terms of family types. *Heather has two mommies* (Newman and Cornell, 1989) describes *Heather*'s two-mum family. The fact that they do not have a father does not prevent them from being a happy family and, therefore, allows us to show diversity through this picture book. Closely linked to it is *Felicia's favorite story* (Newman and Romo, 2002), where the main character demands the story of when she was adopted into a same-sex family, allowing us to see, in this case, the family structure that is both adoption and the presence of same-sex parents. Last but not least, the tenth book selected is called *Dragon's extraordinary egg* (Gliori, 2013), where another kind of family is shown, as the penguin who gets lost finds a mother in the dragon. As the story progresses, she returns to her penguin mother, but they will join the dragon to create a heterogeneous but equally valid and happy family.

The fact that these books have been published and translated into multiple languages may indicate a lack of severe censorship. However, the drawback is that their usage depends on teachers or family members discussing the included topics. By fostering a dialog between cultural progress and inclusive education that respects affective and sexual diversity as well as traditional family concepts, we aim to overcome censorship that contradicts modern times and SDGs.

11 Analysis of the selected picture books

In this section, we analyze the content of the 10 selected picture books. We focus on three dimensions: the potentially controversial subject matter of the work, the type of family presented, and the context of creation. These dimensions address the semantic and argumentative aspects of the books. Additionally, we consider the format, including illustrations and text length (see Table 1).

The use of picture books makes it possible to develop critical thinking in students as they engage with both images and text. The multimodal nature of these books allows them to be adaptable to different age groups. In secondary education, where students are transitioning from adolescence into young adulthood, their cognitive abilities are well-developed enough to explore these themes and form opinions that align with contemporary social trends.

Methodologically, the classroom strategies for using these picture books benefit from their treatment of same-sex and traditional families. This juxtaposition will act as a springboard to address stereotypical issues, forming the basis for dialogical classroom activities. Deconstructing these stereotypes is essential for nurturing a critical perspective on controversial issues.

TABLE 1 Content analysis of the selected picture books.

| Picture book | Content | | | Format | |
	What is a potential controversial issue?	Type of family presented	Cultural contextualization. Date of release	Illustrations (typology)	Length of the book
La familia del Ratón Pérez	Existence of different families in the school environment.	- Two-parent family with children - Same-sex family - Single-parent family	2014. Published in Spain. The political and social predisposition toward the issue is positive.	Classic. Similar to the successful text in Spain, *Teo* (Violeta Danou) in the 1970s.	32 pages. Balance between text and pictures, although the pictures are longer.
Well done Mummy	Sexist stereotyping of women's role (attributions) in the family.	- Two-parent family with children	2022. This picture book is in line with the times of women's empowerment.	Appealing. In line with the author's other works (Haughton).	40 pages. Supremacy of pictures over text.
Red: a crayon's story	Gender identity. Feeling other than social attribution.	Two-parent family with children	2015. The symbolism involved in the use of waxes does not allow us to gage the true social reception.	Appealing. Associating identity with colors means that the text revolves around them.	40 pages. Pictures are more important than text.
King and King	Same-sex couple versus tradition.	Two-parent family with children - Same-sex family	2000. The use of the classic story structure allows for better social acceptance.	Simple. They do not stand out when compared to, for example, Disney illustrations.	32 pages. Pictures stand out from the text, which is brief.
And Tango makes three	Same-sex family versus tradition. In this case, it is represented by two penguins (an aspect that generated social criticism).	- Same-sex family	2005. The choice of penguins was controversial, as the story could sometimes be misinterpreted literally.	Appealing. Trend toward *avant-garde* illustration.	36 pages. It emphasizes illustration over storytelling.
Mom and Mum are getting married	Same-sex family versus tradition.	- Same-sex family	2004. The book is released in a year when the reception of this kind of family is not as problematic as it used to be.	Classic. Similar to other texts such as *Oliver Button is a Sissy.*	24 pages. Pictures prevail over the text.
Molly's family	Same-sex family versus tradition. Non-acceptance in the school environment.	- Same-sex family	2004. The book was released in a year when the reception of this type of family was not as problematic as it used to be.	Classic. Situation similar to that of *Mom and Mum are getting married.*	32 pages. Pictures prevail over text.
Heather has two mommies	Same-sex family versus tradition.	- Same-sex family	1989. The text becomes a reference when looking for literature related to the topic. This work has a social impact and a subsequent route.	Classic. Situation similar to that of *Mom and Mum are getting married* and *Molly's family.*	30 pages. Pictures prevail over text.
Felicia's favourite story	Same-sex family versus tradition.	- Same-sex family and adoptive family	2002. The book was released in a year when the reception of this type of family was not as problematic as it used to be.	Classic. Situation similar to that of *Heather has two mommies.* However, it is the same creator (Newman).	24 pages. Pictures prevail over text.
Dragon's extraordinary egg	Are you family, even if you are not genetically related?	- Adoptive family	2013. The social acceptance of adoption means that the text *a priori* has no problems of acceptance.	Appealing. Trend toward *avant-garde* illustration. More along the lines of Donaldson and Scheffler.	32 pages. It emphasizes illustration over storytelling.

We now explore the educational intervention possibilities for each selected work. Based on the controversial topics they address, we provide guidelines for classroom action, focussing on dialogical discussions, debates, and literary creation.

As noted above, the 10 works are suitable to be dealt with from an educational point of view, delving into the possible controversial issues that they denote and connote through their narrative—mainly visual. In the next section of this contribution, we will discuss this evidence.

12 Discussion of results and pedagogical possibilities

The analysis of the selected picture books shows that diversity in family models has the potential to be a controversial topic, largely due to the long-standing tradition of the two-parent family model, which often emphasizes women's self-sacrifice. Deviating from this model can generate issues of acceptance, as societies exhibit a notable reluctance to change. Historically, it was uncommon to find cultural expressions depicting family structures different from the dominant model. However, social transformations and the emergence of diversity now allow for more varied representations, particularly in literary works like picture books, which narratively and visually explore different family structures.

Affective-sexual identity significantly influences family organization. Overcoming traditional constraints means that familial ties no longer need to be strictly genetic but can be based on emotional or shared interests. Many of the analyzed works depict same-sex families or advocate for equal opportunities among family members,

highlighting significant social changes. These works serve as valuable educational resources, offering visibility to diverse social circumstances embedded within culture. The nearly three-decade span of the selected period attests to these social changes and encourages debate on the prospect of further transformation.

The suitability of picture books as a resource for work, in this case in secondary education, but at the same time appropriate for other age groups, is reflected in their visual strength. The aspect that fits perfectly in today's society, where, as previously mentioned, the liquid prevails over the dynamics of people's daily behavior and interaction. The ability to combine the viewing of the images with the narrative of the stories themselves has an impact on the possibility of making people reflect, thus making it possible to modify their thinking or at least make them aware of diversity and the need to respect and include family structures that are different from the traditional ones.

In our opinion, the literary contribution must be complemented by pedagogical actions (see Table 2) that integrate the narratives into the lives and thoughts of students and the broader community.

TABLE 2 Possibilities for socio-educational intervention based on selected picture books.

Picture book	Possible controversial issue to be addressed (relevance in secondary education)	Possibilities of didactic intervention in secondary education after reading and interacting with the picture books.
La familia del Ratón Pérez	Diversity in family models	Classroom presentation of the models. Dialogical discussion on the social acceptance of such models. Search for the models in the picture books in the student's immediate environment and share them.
Well done Mummy	Women's empowerment	Dialog discussion on women's empowerment. Search for characters in literature—it can be children, young adult or general literature—where the heroine is a woman.
Red: a crayon's story	Gender identity	Dialog discussion that addresses gender identity. Deepening the discussion in the form of a debate that explores the need to promote respect for the thoughts and feelings of all people, trying to avoid prejudices and stereotypes.
King and King	Same-gender couples	Dialog discussion that addresses the same-sex marriage. Recreation in literary text form of the King and King text—keeping the theme—with another classic tale different from the one given in this picture book. Sharing and debate on the new productions.
And Tango makes three	Same-sex family	Dialog discussion on same-sex parent families. Deepening the discussion in the form of a debate that explores the need to promote respect for the thoughts and feelings of all people, trying to avoid prejudices and stereotypes.
Mom and Mum are getting married	Same-sex family	Dialog discussion on same-sex parent families. Deepening the discussion in the form of a debate that explores the need to promote respect for the thoughts and feelings of all people, trying to avoid prejudices and stereotypes.
Molly's family	Same-sex family. Acceptance problems in the classroom	Dialog discussion on same-sex parent families. Deepening the discussion through a debate that explores how classrooms should be dealt with, whether there should be no debate at all, and whether it should become a normal situation within the framework of diversity.
Heather has two mommies	Same-sex family	Dialog discussion on same-sex parent families. Deepening the discussion in the form of a debate that explores the need to promote respect for the thoughts and feelings of all people, trying to avoid prejudices and stereotypes.
Felicia's favorite story	-Same-sex family and adoptive family	Dialog discussion on same-sex parent families. Creation of a literary story about a fictional family that addresses this structure among its members. The story is narrated with the same enthusiasm as that of the girl in the original.
Dragon's extraordinary egg	Adoptive family. Legitimacy	Dialog discussion on adoptive families. Deepening the discussion through a debate exploring the legitimacy of using the term family for people who do not share genetic characteristics.

Dialog-based discussions are particularly well suited to this goal. Allowing students to express their opinions on controversial social issues can significantly impact societal reconstruction (García-Carrión et al., 2020; Rapanta, 2021; Van der Wilt et al., 2023). This pedagogical approach has roots in the work of Freire (1970) and Habermas (1984, 1987), who laid the groundwork for communicative action aimed at achieving consensus and moving beyond a solely logical positivist framework, where technological rationality dictates human actions (Laird-Gentle et al., 2023). The objective should be to enable students to articulate, deconstruct, and reconstruct their opinions based on arguments they formulate themselves (Kim and Wilkinson, 2019). These arguments will be grounded in evidence from literary works inspired by real social events. Consequently, we advocate for the use of picture books in pedagogical discussions as an educational strategy for fostering social and educational change. Such discussions can equip individuals with the critical capacity needed to navigate controversial issues.

13 Conclusion

In conclusion, achieving SDG number five, gender equality, necessitates deconstructing traditional concepts and incorporating them into teaching and learning processes (Eschenbacher and Weber, 2023), regardless of the educational space in which they take place.

Social changes related to diversity in behavior and associations that are taking place in the context of a changing culture must be reflected in cultural displays and educational and social spheres. Furthermore, in the context of education, attention should be paid to the transformations in the modes of formal and informal learning carried out by students. Therefore, if social trends are based on audiovisuals, these aspects should ideally not be neglected, given their motivational character.

Picture books, often stereotyped as children's literature, should be recognized for their broader applicability across age groups due to their symbolic and visual impact. This study reviewed 10 picture books addressing family types and gender identity, including affective-sexual preferences. The quest for responsible citizenship fits perfectly with the use of these literary works and caters for the visual everyday life of secondary school students. The axiological approach advocated is compatible with more contemporary literacy practices, which should not always be based on literacy alone. It is thus clear that we pursue citizenship in line with current social trends (Anditasari et al., 2023; Houser, 2023; Shaw, 2023), including potentially controversial issues.

The content of the literary resources proposed through the 10 selected books should be approached from a critical perspective and the possible empowerment of students' thinking (Guajardo and Vohra, 2023). As suggested, the literary gatherings will allow the themes to be addressed in the classroom. Language and literature classes may be the most suitable subjects for them, but other spheres can also adopt a cross-curricular perspective, and this critical debate can be addressed in the other subjects. We thus firmly believe in the power of the word and its potential to generate attitudes and thoughts of respect and acceptance in the face of diverse situations that do not correspond to hegemonic traditions. Addressing gender equality as a cross-cutting issue at various educational levels is crucial, especially in secondary education, where students face significant physical and emotional changes that arise and require reflection, and it should

be the educational institutions, formal or non-formal, that provide the appropriate frameworks for debate on possibly controversial issues that find acceptance and solution in consensus.

This article has limitations that could be addressed in future research. For example, in order to verify whether the emerging trend of publications on controversial topics is significant, the sample size could be expanded in future studies. Additionally, conducting classroom experiments with the selected works and using data collection instruments to assess their effectiveness in conveying ideas would be an area of great importance for future development. Another way to overcome the limitations of the present study would be by broadening the analytical perspective, that is to say, by incorporating an intersectional approach, examining how gender, ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation intersect (Crenshaw, 1991). This consideration of potential double discrimination could be explored through fieldwork with secondary education students. Such a multidimensional approach would provide deeper insights into identity formation among adolescents and young people.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

Author contributions

AL-V: Conceptualization, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft. LH-D: Conceptualization, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft. IJ-M: Conceptualization, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft. EE-F: Conceptualization, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Affective-sexual and gender diversity in Spanish education: a systematic literature review

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Introduction: The aim of this present work is to systematically compile, map, and review the scientific literature concerning education on affective-sexual and gender diversity, produced within the Spanish geographical context over the past decade (2013–2023). To this end, this systematic review offers an unprecedented and updated synthesis of the most prominent challenges and areas for improvement in Spain, for the purpose of identifying existing research gaps, as well as curricular and training needs in this transdisciplinary field.

Methods: To achieve this objective, the PRISMA guidelines are applied in the extraction and selection of indexed materials from two of the principal internationally renowned databases, namely the Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus. The analysis was facilitated through the use of bibliographic management software, as well as quantitative and qualitative data analysis tools.

Results: The findings obtained address the research question pertaining to the factors influencing the construction of attitudes and representations concerning this type of diversity within formal educational settings. Furthermore, the benefits, limitations, and obstacles surrounding its curricular integration are examined. Various socio-demographic variables of both students and educators, such as age, gender, religious beliefs, teaching experience, personal and social experiences, school-driven initiatives, and the persistence of hegemonic gender representations emerge as explanatory factors linked to these attitudes and representations. Similarly, the visibility of diverse identities, social inclusion, and plurality are associated with the necessity for education geared toward democratic citizenship. The sensitivity of the content and its curricular invisibility, along with training deficiencies, lack of academic recognition, and the absence of specific protocols for preventing LGBTIQphobia are identified as the most prominent limitations or hurdles for the comprehensive promotion of education pertaining to affective-sexual and gender diversity across distinct educational stages.

Discussion: Instances of discrimination, harassment, and both physical and symbolic violence against non-heteronormative groups, grounded in the sex-gender system and cis-heteronormativity, continue to be recognized by educators. In this vein, scientific literature underscores the significance of education concerning affective-sexual and gender diversity as a means to eradicate stereotypes and negative attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ individuals, thereby striving toward genuine equity.

KEYWORDS

affective-sexual and gender diversity, LGBTIQ+, formal education, teacher training, systematic review

1 Introduction

Advancing toward a gender-equitable education grounded in the theoretical principles of social justice (Bittner et al., 2016) inherently leads to a greater democratization of the concept of gender within the school system. The necessity to transcend the pedagogical boundaries of heteronormativity and cisgender norms in schools (Martino and Cumming-Potvin, 2017) has been underscored by transgender and gender diverse students (non-binary or fluid, non-conforming gender, expansive gender, or agender; Mangin, 2019; Ullman, 2016). Similarly, the lack of training or teaching competence has constituted one of the fundamental explanatory elements for the challenges in addressing these types of identities (Payne and Smith, 2014). From this perspective, the study conducted by Meyer et al. (2016) aimed to identify and analyze the obstacles and supports for educators in creating affirmative learning environments for transgender and creatively gendered students. Among the well-established systemic barriers was the confirmation of the persistence of transphobic expressions, as well as training and support limitations, among other factors.

In this regard, certain areas demanding additional reinforcement have already been recognized, such as actions to counter stress related to the context and cisnormativity, overcoming school-related barriers, and advocating for increased institutional responsibility (Horton, 2020). This institutional responsibility aligns with the need to promote school policies capable of providing comprehensive safe and equitable environments (Kurt and Chenault, 2017) and furnishing the necessary tools and resources for comprehending the complexity of the conceptual framework of gender (Neary, 2021). This complexity should also involve questioning the normalizing categories of the binary gender concept and establishing schools that are more affirmative in relation to this type of diversity (Meyer and Keenan, 2018). Along these lines, noteworthy outcomes are connected to the active creation of inclusive educational and training environments aimed at minimizing the hegemony of cisnormativity (Blackburn, 2021), as well as the evaluation of educational innovation programs focused on developing and acquiring competencies related to affective-sexual diversity (Alfonso-Benlliure and Alonso-Sanz, 2023; Morales-Rodríguez, 2021).

The social representations and attitudes toward sexual diversity among university faculty have been explored by Soria-Barreto et al. (2022), whose findings emphasize the need for more specific training for teaching practices. These results align with those obtained in the study by Breull-Arancibia and Agud-Morell (2023), who argue that an increase in gender awareness is mediated by teacher training—an aspect of improvement similarly highlighted in the study by Coulter et al. (2020). In this context, Johnson (2023) underscores the persistent reproduction of heteronormativity in primary education, despite the existence of favorable discursive attitudes toward the integration of LGBTQ+ community-inclusive actions and a heightened awareness of this diversity (Tinoco-Giraldo et al., 2021).

The existence of subtle unfavorable attitudes toward affective-sexual and gender diversity underscores the relevance of teacher training and awareness for enhancing learning environments and the systematic implementation of specific strategies. The viability of these actions and improvements has been confirmed in studies such as McQuillan and Leininger's (2020) for the North American context, Francis et al.'s (2019) for the African context, and Kwok and Kwok's (2021) for the Asian context.

The construct of the cultural cisgender concept indeed impacts the construction, self-perception, and societal perception of other gender identities (Kennedy, 2018). Thus, the school, understood as a cultural nucleus of socialization, leaves little room for transgressions of normative gender. In dealing with and surpassing this, educators emerge as crucial figures (Smith and Payne, 2015). From this perspective, it has been demonstrated that disrupting binary gender norms and constructing broader school cultures has implications for generating more inclusive and diverse environments (Mangin, 2019), and for distancing from restrictive social systems aligned with gender and sexuality norms. Therefore, the promotion of diverse gender identities and expressions, as a foundation for social anti-discrimination and eradicating school bullying (Feijóo and Rodríguez-Fernández, 2021), demands reflections on sexual and gender conformity (Frohard-Dourlent, 2015).

The assessment of curriculum inclusion of topics related to gender and sexuality diversity has been explored by researchers like Kwok and Kwok (2021) and Ferfolja and Ullman (2021), whose conclusions emphasize the need to enhance professional development for educators in this realm. In these inclusion processes, the conditioning effect of educators' sociodemographic characteristics and the influence of their disciplinary and academic affiliation have also been highlighted (Tabler et al., 2022). International scientific literature recommends, in this regard, the application of pedagogical principles associated with critical and queer pedagogies, as well as promoting discussions around the intricate gender concept as a key content of social justice in curriculum development, and instituting more structural changes to mitigate pressures of gender and sexual conformity (Frohard-Dourlent, 2017).

In this context, the objective of this study is to systematically compile, map, and review the scientific literature on education for affective-sexual and gender diversity, produced in the Spanish geographical context over the last decade (2013–2023), and indexed in two of the foremost international impact databases (Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus). Given the deficit in teacher training regarding education on this type of diversity (challenge 1), this research aims to analyze, for the first time in the Spanish context, the factors conditioning teachers' attitudes and representations in this domain (objective 1). Likewise, considering the limited curricular visibility of affective-sexual diversity in teacher training plans, curricula, and school textbooks (challenge 2), this study seeks to systematize the didactic strategies, methodologies, and teaching interventions that have proven most effective in formal contexts (objective 2).

2 Method

2.1 Design and procedure

The methodology employed corresponds to systematic literature review studies. Although a consensus regarding its proper application is lacking (Tricco et al., 2018), systematic

review necessitates a rigorous protocol, which distinguishes it from traditional narrative review by being less susceptible to bias and more objective, detailed, and explicit in study inclusion criteria (Higgins and Green, 2008). Through this form of inquiry, the aim is to provide a comprehensive and reliable perspective on a research topic, with the purpose of circumventing random error limitations by means of systematic and exhaustive retrieval of pertinent records, application of well-defined and reproducible criteria, description of their designs, assessment of the selected literature's quality, synthesis of obtained data, and interpretation of results (Sánchez-Serrano et al., 2022). The literature review method thus seeks to identify prior research advancements and challenges related to the formulated research question(s), facilitating result consolidation and knowledge construction regarding previous works, preventing duplication, and identifying omissions or gaps (Grant and Booth, 2009). The guiding questions for the search strategy were as follows: what factors contribute to the formation of attitudes and representations concerning affective-sexual and gender diversity within Spanish formal educational contexts? What are the benefits, limitations, and obstacles to their curricular or formative inclusion?

The databases were selected and the search was executed in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Moher et al., 2015), adopted to ensure transparency and rigor in the selection process (Moher et al., 2009). These guidelines stipulate a checklist of 27 items for verification and a flow diagram composed of four phases (Page et al., 2021; Rethlefsen et al., 2021). Studies included in this review were culled from two databases in August 2023: Clarivate Analytics' primary Web of Science (WoS) collection and Elsevier's Scopus. The five criteria for document inclusion were as follows:

1. The studies incorporate terms related to gender and affective-sexual diversity within the educational context in their titles, abstracts, and/or keywords, regardless of the educational/formative stage and didactic-disciplinary specialty.
2. The studies comprise scientific articles, book chapters, books, and conference proceedings published between 2013 and 2023.
3. The studies encompass scientific articles written in either english or spanish, irrespective of the mode of access to the full text (open or subscription-based).
4. The studies are conducted within the Spanish educational-geographical sphere.
5. The studies provide rigorous analyses of the impacts, effects, or influence of diagnostic or outcome-related aspects on teaching and/or specific learning processes pertaining to gender and affective-sexual diversity. They contribute educational conclusions and relevant theoretical-practical implications within the realm of formal education.

Theses for university degrees, state-of-the-art reports, theoretical reflections, conceptual reviews, systematic reviews, and narrative literature reviews, book chapters, books, conference proceedings, as well as scientific articles lacking in-depth exploration and substantive conclusions and implications related to gender and affective-sexual diversity were not included. Studies conducted outside the Spanish educational and geographical

context were also excluded, even if authored by individuals or groups from Spain. Additionally, studies written in languages other than English or Spanish, and those published before 2013, were excluded. Furthermore, works unrelated to educational contexts of formal teaching or those that, while situated within this sphere, fail to explicitly mention university degrees/faculties or the educational level of non-university teachings of interest were not considered.

The focus of the present research on the Spanish educational context stemmed from the need to analyze, in a situated manner, attitudes, representations, needs, and training processes surrounding gender and affective-sexual diversity. The selected time frame was determined by its recency, as such analysis was not previously available in other systematic literature reviews within the Spanish context. The inclusion of sources written in English or Spanish adhered to the methodological requirement of evaluating and synthesizing accessible studies typically subjected to quality editorial review in the globally and regionally most relevant scientific communication languages, respectively. Meanwhile, the exclusion of theses, theoretical reflections, or state-of-the-art reviews without empirical contributions was driven by the intention to include exclusively research with clear and applicable educational contributions. Similarly, the non-selection of studies conducted outside the Spanish educational-geographic context, despite potentially being authored by Spanish researchers, responded to the need to contextualize and coherently understand the dynamics effectively taking place in this country. A comprehensive record of excluded studies was compiled, rigorously adhering to exclusion criteria. Although some non-indexed works or those written in other languages might contain valuable information, consistency in quality and relevance to the study's objectives was prioritized.

The search was conducted using free terms based on their prevalence in the international scientific literature. The combination of words entered in the basic search option of each database was entered across four fields. In the first field, 'gender' was entered, in the second (AND), 'divers* OR equality OR egalitarian OR inequality OR unequal OR identit* OR inclus*', and in the third (AND), 'teaching OR learning OR curriculum OR education OR teacher OR training', and fourth (AND), 'lgbt* OR lgtb'. The asterisk (*) was added to capture various word forms. The requirement for inclusion of the latter term (LGBT+–LGTB and its derivatives or extensions) necessitated a comprehensive consideration of gender identities and affective-sexual orientations. Consequently, studies solely based on one or some of these dimensions were excluded.

The initial search conducted within the main WoS collection yielded a total of 2001 results. Subsequently, the dataset was refined by applying the chosen time range (2013–2023), resulting in 1961 documents returned by the database, with 40 excluded. The next filter applied pertained to the thematic area, restricted to the categories Education Educational Research, Education Scientific Disciplines, Psychology Educational, Education Special. This resulted in 482 records being retained and 1,479 excluded. The search was further refined by selecting the document type (scientific article), which produced a total

of 449 records and excluded 33. Next, records written in English and Spanish were chosen. This new search yielded a total of 441 documents that met the prior inclusion criteria, with eight documents failing to meet them. Finally, the search was limited to works produced within the Spanish geographical scope, resulting in 13 records being retained and 428 excluded.

The second search was carried out in the Scopus database, following the same parameters, Boolean operators, and terminological truncations in the order applied in the previous database. Initially, the general parameters were executed, yielding an initial total of 1,680 records. The search was narrowed to the 2013–2023-time range, resulting in 1,623 records retained and 57 excluded. Subsequently, filtering was done by thematic areas, with the selection of categories such as Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, and, due to potential scientific proximity, Psychology. This yielded 973 documents and excluded 650. Then, the mentioned document types were selected, with 897 records retained and 76 excluded. Finally, filtering by language was performed, focusing on articles written in English and Spanish, resulting in 879 studies retained and 18 excluded, and by geographic origin, yielding 40 records retained and 839 excluded.

Next, duplicate documents between both databases were removed ($n = 8$ documents), followed by a thorough reading of the resulting full texts with two objectives: (1) Assess their quality based on the criteria for evaluating quantitative and qualitative studies by Kmet et al. (2004); and (2) Identify the relevance of impacts, effects, or influence of outcomes, along with contributions, conclusions, and theoretical-practical implications, specifically within formal education, for each study ($n = 25$ documents excluded). This process yielded a reliable volume of 20 valid documents for the current systematic review (Figure 1). Finally, the designs and research levels of the selected studies were described, and the main general results were synthesized and interpreted.

During the extraction process, researchers made individual contributions by inputting the included and excluded records independently, aiming to ensure and corroborate the absence of bias in the gathered information. This approach adhered to the evaluation of individual study bias risk outlined in the PRISMA protocol, and effect measures were employed to ensure the absence of geographical and full-text bias errors.

2.2 Data analysis

The acquired data underwent analysis based upon two categories of variables: substantive variables and methodological variables (Table 1). The substantive variables align with the intrinsic attributes of the chosen records. Their metrics materialized as follows:

Indicator 1: Authors and year.
Indicator 2: Sample and educational stage.
The methodological variables pertain to the fundamental aspects of the designs and methodologies employed within the selected records. Their metrics concretized as indicators 3–6:
Indicator 3: Objectives.

Indicator 4: Research design (non-experimental cross-sectional or longitudinal quantitative design; quantitative experimental design: pre-experimental, quasi-experimental, or pure experimental; qualitative design; mixed or multimethod methodological designs).
Indicator 5: Method (Quantitative: Exploratory, descriptive, relational, correlational, explanatory [causal], predictive, or applicative; Qualitative: Grounded theory, ethnographic, narrative, phenomenological, action research).
Indicator 6: Primary findings.

In order to guide the reading of the complete texts and streamline the information while preserving its essential content, a database (descriptive sheets) was established. This database contained the requisite informational synthesis dictated by the substantive and methodological variables/parameters of the documentary corpus under review (Appendix). The configuration of this database was underpinned by the PICoS strategy (population sample, phenomenon of interest, educational/formative context, and study design) as outlined by Pertegal-Vega et al. (2019). To facilitate its subsequent analysis, the discussion of the key findings was formulated in alignment with the research questions, with citations to the chosen studies.

The research team selected 20 studies that conformed to the selection criteria through two independent rounds of assessment, followed by a final consensus round. After the winnowing and selection process, the documentary corpus underwent content analysis through deductive coding and categorization procedures in accordance with the posed research questions. Initially, a predetermined list of codes was generated, and their segments were compiled into three categories: Category 1. "Factors Associated with Representations and Attitudes"; Category 2. "Limitations or Obstacles in Curricular or Formative Inclusion of Affectional-Sexual and Gender Diversity"; Category 3. "Benefits of Curricular or Formative Inclusion of Affectional-Sexual and Gender Diversity" (Figure 2). This process adhered to the overarching procedural phases outlined by Kuckartz (2014): delimitation of research purpose, definition of attributes of evaluated data (codes), data coding, method determination (deductive), assignment and description of pertinent defining dimensions (categories), and analysis and interpretation of results. The presentation of the deductive coding and categorization process is substantiated by qualitative evidence, exemplifying 1 to 3 textual segments per most recurrent code.

Furthermore, data analysis was approached from a mixed-methods perspective, aiming to triangulate potential results and reduce the impact of divergent approaches. In this way, the attributes of the ultimately included works were numerically encoded to facilitate descriptive (absolute and relative frequencies) and inferential analyses. This was achieved through the application of the $\chi 2$ test of independence, aimed at discerning statistically significant interdependency relationships among the study variables. Effect sizes of the identified associations were computed employing the CC statistic (coefficient of contingency).

The qualitative data obtained underwent analysis aided by MAXQDA 2020 software. Additionally, SPSS v29 software was employed for quantitative analysis, while JabRef 5.9 served as the bibliographic management tool.
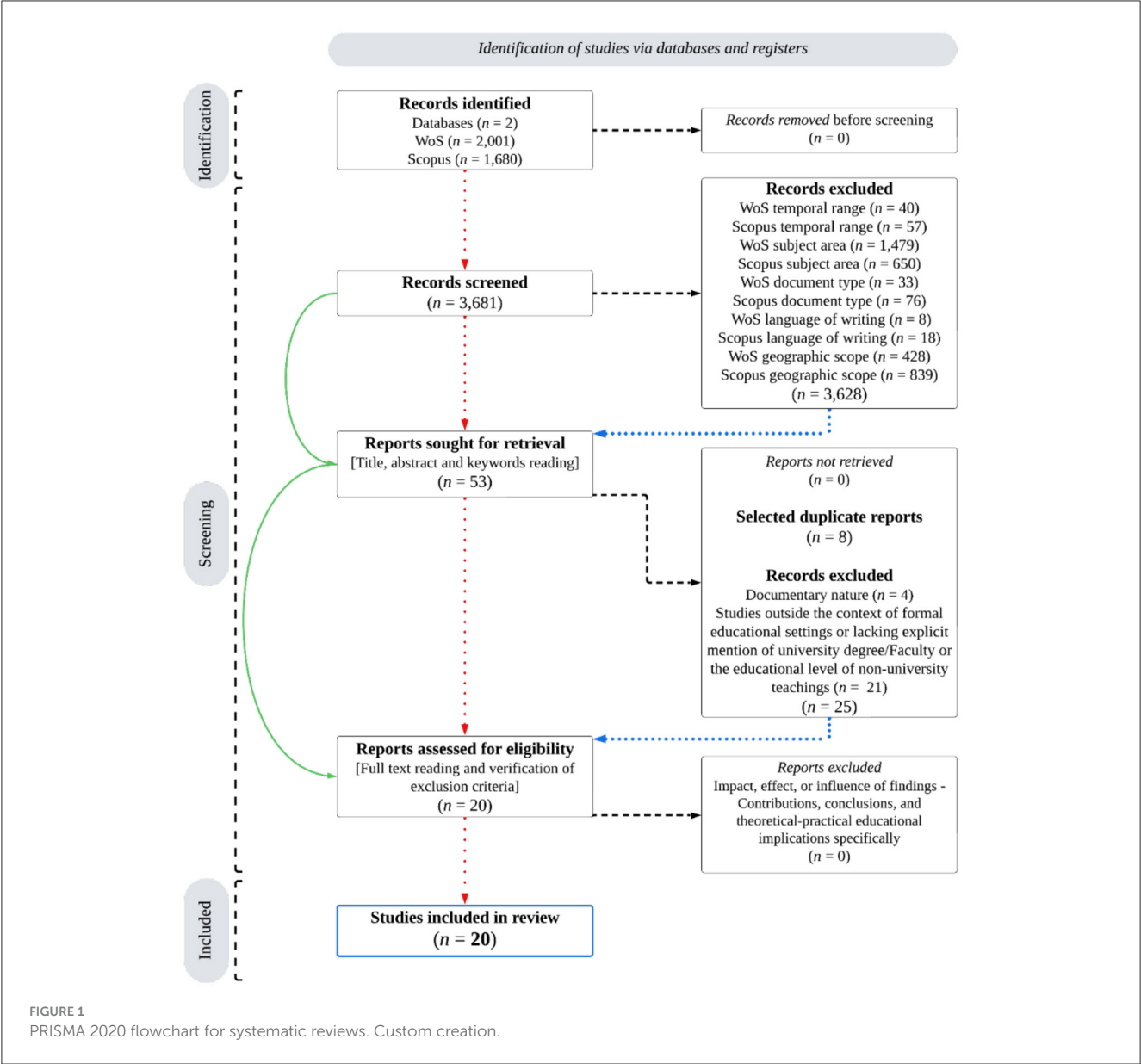
FIGURE 1
PRISMA 2020 flowchart for systematic reviews. Custom creation.

TABLE 1 Systematic depiction of results by indicator and variable type.

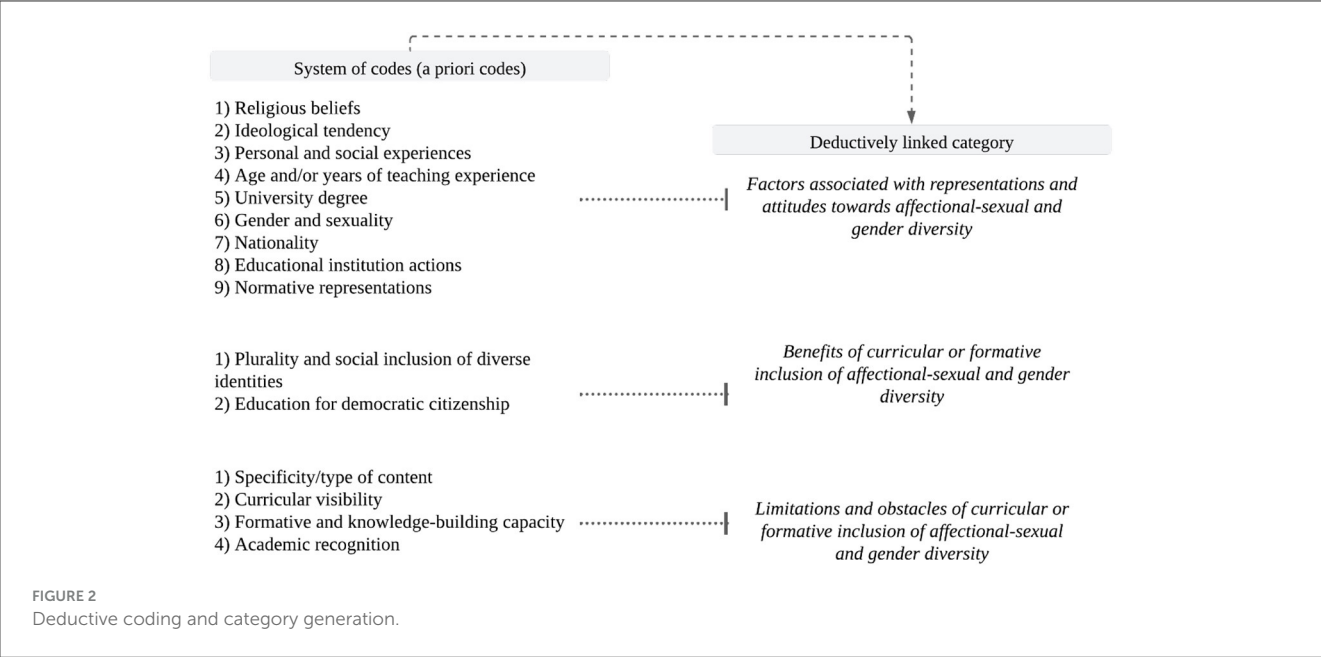| ID	Substantive variable		Methodological variable			
	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6
[Num.]	[...]	[...]	[...]	[...]	[...]	[...]

I1, authors and year; I2, university degree/faculty or non-university educational stage, and sample; I3, objective/s; I4, research design; I5, method; I6, primary results.

2.3 Reliability

In order to obtain evidence of inter-rater reliability, reproducibility, and stability among operators in the final selection of the study corpus, we assessed the degree of selective agreement between two evaluators—a representative from the research team and an external evaluator. This assessment was accomplished through the calculation of Cohen's kappa coefficient

(K), a measure applied in other systematic reviews (Lee et al., 2020). This statistic stands as one of the most commonly used indices for measuring inter-rater reliability, derived from the utilization of a harmonized probability based on the coincidental classification of data into the same category by researchers. The results of this metric range between -1 and $+1$, wherein 1 signifies agreement between evaluators and 0 indicates that the agreement corresponds to chance (Figure 3). Although uncommon, negative values denote opposing viewpoints among evaluators. Interpretation of the kappa statistic is based on the following classification: poor (below 0), slight (0 to 0.20), fair (0.21 to 0.40), moderate (0.41 to 0.60), substantial (0.61 to 0.80), and almost perfect (0.81 to 1). The K value obtained in the current study was 0.78 in the initial evaluation/selection phase. This value was subsequently improved through a second and third round of cross-review and subsequent discussion, resulting in values of 0.83 and 0.91, respectively.

FIGURE 2
Deductive coding and category generation.

FIGURE 3
Cohen's Kappa statistical formula (**K**).

$$K = \frac{P_o - P_c}{1 - P_c}$$

Where

P_o = proportion of units with observed agreement.
P_c = proportion of units with expected chance agreement.

TABLE 2 Absolute and relative frequencies by time frame.

Time frame	n_i ($f_i = n_i/n$)	$f_i = n_i/n$ cumulative
2019–2023	18 (90)	90
2013–2018	2 (10)	100
Total	20 (100)	

3 Results

The obtained results reveal a pronounced concentration of publications in the most recent time frame (90%) (Table 2) and a predominant focus on educational stages within secondary and higher education (teacher training; 65%; Table 3). In line with these levels, 50% of the sample is distributed among teacher education and secondary education students (Table 4).

The applied research designs and methods exhibit a prevailing affiliation with non-mixed designs, augmented by supplementary applications of cross-sectional quantitative relational and qualitative approaches (75%; Tables 5, 6). Within this distribution, mixed-method studies constitute 25% (Table 5).

Despite the widespread absence of statistically significant relationships among the study variables, an interdependent association can, nonetheless, be identified between the participating or documentary sample and the employed research method ($\chi^2_{(63, n=20)} = 83.333$, $p = 0.044$). Indeed, the applied methods exhibit statistically significant relationships with the type of participant or curricular document under analysis. In this regard, investigations conducted with secondary education students tend to employ quantitative methods of an *ex post facto* relational

nature, whereas research-action is selected when the participating sample encompasses students and faculty from diverse university specialties (Table 7).

With similar frequencies, levels of relational-correlational research are preferred for application among students from other professions or university specialties, whereas descriptive and content analysis methods tend to be chosen for participants linked to teacher education. Other relationships, however, are to be expected due to their inherent methodological association, such as the one established between documentary samples and content analysis. Nevertheless, their effect size remains low (<0.1, CC = 0.044).

4 Discussion

In this section, the key findings are deliberated upon in accordance with the research questions: what factors influence the formation of attitudes and representations regarding affective-sexual and gender diversity in formal Spanish educational contexts? What are the benefits, limitations, and obstacles to their curricular or formative inclusion?

TABLE 3 Absolute and relative frequencies by educational stage.

Educational stage	n_i ($f_i = n_i/n$)	$f_i = n_i/n$ cumulative
Secondary education	8 (40)	40
University (teacher training)	5 (25)	65
Other university professionals or specialties	5 (25)	90
University (teacher training) and non-university	1 (5)	95
Inter-level	1 (5)	100
Total	20 (100)	

TABLE 4 Absolute and relative frequencies by sample.

Sample	n_i ($f_i = n_i/n$)	$f_i = n_i/n$ cumulative
Teacher education students	5 (25)	25
Secondary education students	5 (25)	50
Students and faculty from other university specialties	3 (15)	65
Students from other professions or university specialties	2 (10)	75
documentary	2 (10)	85
Teacher education students and active faculty	1 (5)	90
Teacher education students and professionals from other fields	1 (5)	95
Active faculty from basic, secondary, and higher education	1 (5)	100
Total	20 (100)	

TABLE 5 Absolute and relative frequencies by research design.

Research design	n_i ($f_i = n_i/n$)	$f_i = n_i/n$ cumulative
Qualitative	8 (40)	40
Non-experimental cross-sectional quantitative	7 (35)	75
Mixed or multimethod	5 (25)	100
Total	20 (100)	

TABLE 6 Absolute and relative frequencies by research method.

Research method	n_i ($f_i = n_i/n$)	$f_i = n_i/n$ cumulative
Ex post facto relational	4 (20)	20
Narrative	3 (15)	35
Content analysis	2 (10)	45
Case study	2 (10)	55
Action research	2 (10)	65
Relational-correlational	2 (10)	75
Descriptive and content analysis	2 (10)	85
Ex post facto relational and narrative	1 (5)	90
Ex post facto relational and case study	1 (5)	95
Ex post facto explanatory relational and phenomenological	1 (5)	100
Total	20 (100)	

4.1 Factors associated with representations and attitudes toward affective-sexual and gender diversity

A significant 87.51% of the factors influencing the construction of representations and the shaping of attitudes toward affective-sexual and gender diversity are rooted in the gender identity and affective-sexual orientation of the participating students and/or faculty, the impact of hegemonic representations, specific actions undertaken by the educational institution in this sphere, religious beliefs, personal and social experiences, as well as age or years of teaching experience (Table 8).

The selected studies reveal gender identity and affective-sexual orientation (Cantos et al., 2023; Garrido-Hernansaiz et al., 2017; Huerta and Alfonso-Benlliure, 2023; Huertas-Abril and Palacios-Hidalgo, 2022; Lara-Garrido et al., 2022) as one of the primary explanatory factors for the representations and attitudes of secondary education students, prospective teachers, and non-teaching university students toward this diversity. The research by Huertas-Abril and Palacios-Hidalgo (2022), focused on perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ topics in their teaching practice, highlights the influence of gender identity and affective-sexual orientation on their inclusive perceptions. Their study suggests explicit reflection on the perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of future teachers to enhance their competencies and skills for attending to LGBTIQ+ students and fostering safe and inclusive educational environments. Cisgender male identities (Ramírez-Díaz and Cabeza-Ruiz, 2020) and internalized homonegativity unfavorably influence perceptions among both secondary education students (Ojeda et al., 2023) and those in higher education (Álvarez-Bernardo et al., 2022) (Figure 4).

The hegemony of heteronormativity and gender-related stereotypes underlies unequal gender relations, both in curriculum development and interpersonal social interactions within secondary education (Wilson-Daily et al., 2022). Indeed, the gathered evidence reveals the continued reproduction of naturalized heterosexual male/female identities in textbooks (Ruiz-Cecilia et al., 2020) and the absence of pertinent LGBTQ+ content in subjects (Wilson-Daily et al., 2022), along with a lack of representation for this community (López, 2022). Furthermore, cis-centrism, gender binarism, and monosexuality are identifiable in affective-sexual education practices in secondary education (Granero, 2021). In this vein, the cognitive, attitudinal, and relational acceptance of affective-sexual and gender diversity is still mediated by hegemonic heteronormative representations (Liscano Rivera and Jurado de los Santos, 2016).

TABLE 7 Cross-tabulation of participant-documentary sample and research method variables.

Group	Research method										Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	n_i (f_i)	n_i (f_i)	n_i (f_i)	n_i (f_i)	n_i (f_i)	n_i (f_i)	n_i (f_i)	n_i (f_i)	n_i (f_i)	n_i (f_i)	n_i (f_i)
G1			1 (33.3)	1 (50)			1 (100)			2 (100)	5 (25)
G2						2 (100)					2 (10)
G3	2 (50)		1 (33.3)	1 (50)					1 (100)		5 (25)
G4	1 (25)										1 (5)
G5	1 (25)										1 (5)
G6			1 (33.3)								1 (5)
G7					2 (100)			1 (100)			3 (15)
G8		2 (100)									2 (10)
Total	4 (100)	2 (100)	3 (100)	2 (100)	2 (100)	2 (100)	1 (100)	1 (100)	1 (100)	2 (100)	20 (100)

G1, teacher education students; G2, students from other professions or university specialties; G3, secondary education students; G4, teacher education students and active faculty; G5, teacher education students and professionals from other fields; G6, active faculty from basic, secondary, and higher education; G7, students and faculty from other university specialties; G8, documentary.

1, ex post facto relational; 2, content analysis; 3, narrative; 4, case study; 5, action research; 6, relational-correlational; 7, ex post facto relational and narrative; 8, ex post facto relational and case study; 9, explanatory relational-ex post facto and phenomenological; 10, descriptive and content analysis.

P_i within the research method variable.

$\chi^2_{(63,\ n=20)} = 83.333$, $p = 0.044$.

TABLE 8 Volume of coded text segments and relative frequencies.

A priori codes	Coded segments	$f_i = n_i/n$	$f_i = n_i/n$ cumulative
Gender and sexuality	280	29.17	29.17
Normative representations	160	16.67	45.84
Educational institution actions	120	12.50	58.34
Religious beliefs	100	10.42	68.76
Personal and social experiences	100	10.42	79.18
Age and/or years of teaching experience	80	8.33	87.51
Ideological orientation	60	6.25	93.76
University degree	40	4.17	97.93
Nationality	20	2.08	100
Total	960	100	

In the presence of higher levels of homonegativity and transphobia, individuals with religious beliefs emerge as a recurrent explanatory sociodemographic characteristic in studies involving university students (Álvarez-Bernardo et al., 2022; Lara-Garrido et al., 2022) as well as research encompassing both teachers and secondary education students (Garrido-Hernansaiz et al., 2017; Huerta and Alfonso-Benlliure, 2023). With similar relative frequencies (10.42%), the influence of personal and social experiences on the evaluation of these levels is confirmed in the studies by Garrido-Hernansaiz et al. (2017) and Lara-Garrido et al. (2022).

Positive impacts of school initiatives on affective-sexual diversity topics are identified in relation to levels of diversity

acceptance (Garrido-Hernansaiz et al., 2017). Institutional efforts to integrate gender and LGBTQ perspectives are equally recognized in the higher education context (Villarroya and Boté-Vericad, 2023; Villarroya et al., 2022) and teacher education. In this perspective, the implementation of educational initiatives, specifically focusing on addressing sexual and gender diversity, yields substantial evidence regarding the elimination of stereotypes and biases in this domain, as well as the fostering of inclusive teacher training (Huerta, 2021).

Additionally, age, years of teaching experience, or academic year significantly influence tolerance levels among active primary school teachers (Amigo-Ventureira et al., 2022), teacher education students (Cantos et al., 2023), non-teaching university specialty students (Lara-Garrido et al., 2022), as well as secondary education students (Garrido-Hernansaiz et al., 2017) and teachers (Huerta and Alfonso-Benlliure, 2023).

Finally, political inclination, university degree, and, to a lesser extent, nationality are suggested as intervening factors in the acceptance of this diversity within educational contexts. Political trend or affiliation is exemplified in studies by Álvarez-Bernardo et al. (2022) and Lara-Garrido et al. (2022), while the influence of university degree is underscored in research by both Lara-Garrido et al. (2022) and Amigo-Ventureira et al. (2022). Lastly, nationality is tangentially mentioned as the final associated factor with representations and attitudes toward affective-sexual and gender diversity (Garrido-Hernansaiz et al., 2017).

4.2 Benefits of curricular or formative inclusion of affective-sexual and gender diversity

With a frequency of 68.75% of the coded text segments, plurality and social inclusion, along with the visibility of diverse

FIGURE 4
Associated factors.
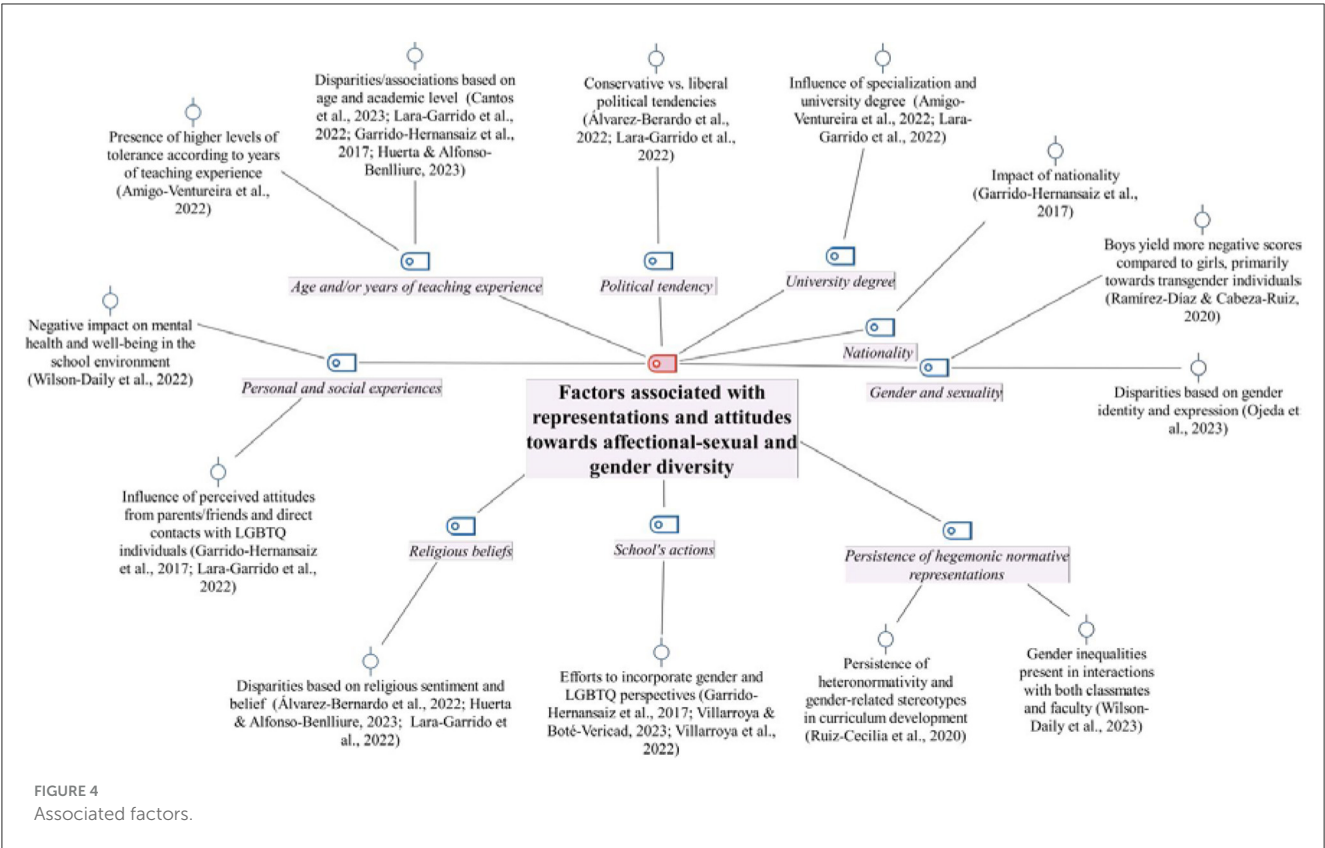
identities, are explicitly highlighted as positive factors in curricular or formative approaches to affective-sexual and gender diversity. This frequency is further augmented by the promotion of transversal democratic citizenship as an educational objective (Table 9).

The selected studies reveal a widespread interest and identification of positive attitudes among secondary education students (Ramírez-Díaz and Cabeza-Ruiz, 2020), university students and faculty members (Villarroya and Boté-Vericad, 2023), prospective teachers (Huertas-Abril and Palacios-Hidalgo, 2022; Palacios-Hidalgo, 2020; Pérez-Jorge et al., 2020), and active teachers in both non-university and university settings (Huertas-Abril and Palacios-Hidalgo, 2023) toward the significance of affective-sexual diversity and its thematic inclusion (Figure 5). However, studies such as those conducted by Huerta and Alfonso-Benlliure (2023) and Amigo-Ventureira et al. (2022) qualify these findings with nuanced observations between active teachers and prospective teachers, with the latter demonstrating more favorable attitudes (Amigo-Ventureira et al., 2022), and in the case of secondary education teachers, their self-perceived creativity and commitment to innovative and unique initiatives result in a more dynamic and positive disposition toward diversity.

In this context, the need to expand the concept of hidden gender curriculum to that of hidden cis-heterosexist curriculum in textbooks is recommended (López, 2022), along with the resolute and integrated treatment of these contents within the realm of higher education (Villarroya et al., 2022). Promoting the values of respect, tolerance, and empathy, while facilitating the process of personal discovery and self-acceptance for LGBT+ students

**TABLE 9** Volume of coded text segments and relative frequencies.

A priori codes	Coded segments	$f_i = n_i/n$	$f_i = n_i/n$ cumulative
Plurality and social inclusion, and visibility of diverse identities.	120	37.50	68.75
Education for transversal democratic citizenship	100	31.25	100
Total	320	100	

alongside addressing the reduction of school bullying, stand out as notable advantages (Palacios-Hidalgo, 2020).

4.3 Limitations or obstacles of curricular or formative inclusion of affective-sexual and gender diversity

With an 80% prevalence in textual frequencies, the reviewed studies point out the educational and knowledge deficits of teachers, as well as the invisibility of content related to affective-sexual and gender diversity as evident explanatory factors for limitations in educational inclusion (Table 10). The absence of institutional recognition and the sensitive and controversial nature of these topics contribute to the observed obstacles.

The selected studies point to specific educational deficiencies in addressing affective-sexual and gender diversity, which also

FIGURE 5
Advantages of educational inclusion.
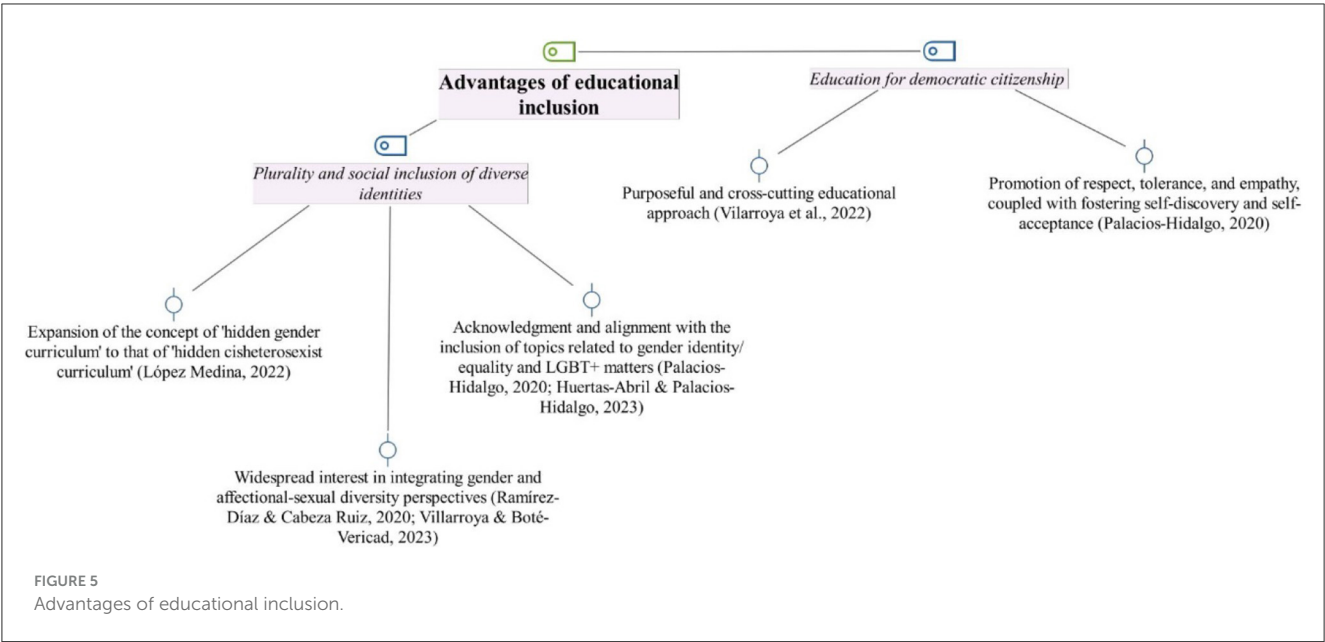
extend to the legislative realm (Álvarez-Bernardo et al., 2022; Lara-Garrido et al., 2022), hindering the effective integration of teaching practices (Huertas-Abril and Palacios-Hidalgo, 2023; Pérez-Jorge et al., 2020). These deficiencies are inadequately acknowledged within the university academic sphere (Villarroya and Boté-Vericad, 2023; Villarroya et al., 2022). The preparation to confront societal challenges and the provision of access to these contents are proposed as educational justifications for their inclusion in the school curriculum (Palacios-Hidalgo, 2020) (Figure 6).

Additionally, the curricular invisibility and superficial treatment of the transgender community in affective-sexual education practices are emphasized (Granero, 2021), as well as in textbooks (López, 2022; Ruiz-Cecilia et al., 2020). Ultimately, the contentious and sensitive nature of this type of content (Huertas-Abril and Palacios-Hidalgo, 2023) is put forward as one of the notable challenges faced by both active non-university and university-level educators.

4.4 Contextualization of findings and practical implementation strategies in policies, training, and curriculum

Based on the findings, it is recommended to offer teacher training programs on affective-sexual diversity, periodic sensitization workshops for active teachers, and the (re)elaboration of school manuals aimed at increasing the visibility of non-hegemonic identities. Collaboration with LGBTIQ+ associations and the implementation of institutional protocols against homophobia and transphobia are proposed as central pillars for improving coexistence in educational environments. These results find solid support in the most recent literature. Along these lines, Amigo-Ventureira et al. (2022) highlight the persistence of significant challenges related to the lack of specific training in the field of affective-sexual and gender diversity. Similarly,

TABLE 10 Volume of coded text segments and relative frequencies.

A priori codes	Coded segments	$f_i = n_i/n$	$f_i = n_i/n$ cumulative
Formative and knowledge capacity	180	60	60
Curricular visibility	60	20	80
Academic recognition	40	13.33	93.33
Content peculiarity/type	20	6.67	100
Total	300	100	

Aguirre et al. (2020) emphasize that, although teachers are aware of the presence of LGBTphobic attitudes in classrooms, they lack practical and methodological tools to intervene effectively. Likewise, Huertas-Abril and Palacios-Hidalgo (2023) point out that teachers recognize the importance of addressing these contents but warn about the lack of concrete strategies to do so effectively. This evidence reinforces the importance of periodic sensitization workshops as practical spaces for reflection and the acquisition of inclusive pedagogical competencies.

On the other hand, Martínez-Merino et al. (2024) document that teachers who work closely with LGBTIQ+ associations tend to feel more supported and empowered to address situations of discrimination in the classroom. This collaborative approach facilitates access to specialized resources and enables the establishment of support networks in institutional interventions. Furthermore, the literature agrees that the mere existence of protocols against homophobia and transphobia does not guarantee their effectiveness unless they are accompanied by rigorous implementation and constant monitoring. In this regard, Bradbury-Jones et al. (2019) indicate that teacher training must include both the theoretical foundations of sexual diversity and the practical exercises necessary to address real classroom situations.

FIGURE 6
Limitations and obstacles of educational inclusion.
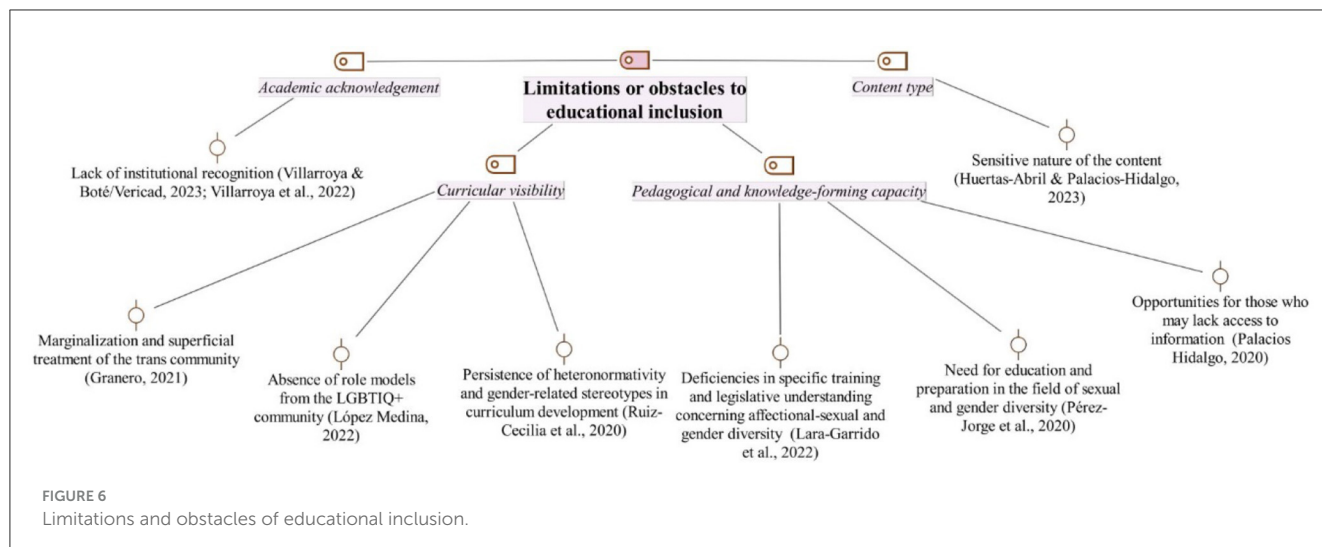
Effective strategies in this field, informed by international literature, indeed consider continuous teacher training, inter-institutional collaboration, the implementation of critical and participatory methodologies, and the curricular inclusion of sexual and gender diversity. In this way, Keuroghlian et al. (2022) reported the success of the Harvard Medical School initiative, which integrated specific competency training, community participation from the LGBTQIA+ collective, and continuous teacher education in creating inclusive and safe educational spaces for both students and teaching staff. On the other hand, Hamidaturrohmah (2023) proposed a strategic approach to sex education in primary school students, with actions aimed at implementing specific regulations in school policies, cooperating with local health institutions, and actively involving families. These strategies sought to prevent sexual violence and foster a culture of respect for diversity. In this regard, Rarieya et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of gender-sensitive pedagogy in primary teacher training. Strategies such as mentoring, structured reflective practice, and collaborative teaching are proposed as core actions to accelerate outcomes in adopting inclusive pedagogies.

Likewise, Breull-Arancibia and Agud-Morell (2023) presented the case of a program in Chile that combined feminist critical pedagogies and queer theory to address education on gender, affectivity, and sexuality. Teacher training emerged as a key element in reducing gender-based violence in school environments. Finally, García-Rojas et al. (2022) emphasized the need to incorporate official affective-sexual education programs into university curricula, both in virtual and face-to-face formats. The results showed a significant improvement in university students' knowledge and attitudes toward sexual and gender education.

5 Conclusions

Scientific literature underscores the significance of education on affective-sexual and gender diversity to eradicate stereotypes and negative attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ individuals, and to achieve true equity. In this regard, both initial and continuous teacher education play a pivotal role. Despite intense public debates about their relevance and timing, the safeguarding

of LGBTIQ+ rights and integrity, coupled with international efforts to promote comprehensive democratic citizenship education, the comprehensive integration of these contents across various curricular domains and targeted teacher training remain outstanding tasks.

The persistence of situations involving discrimination, harassment, and physical and symbolic violence against non-heteronormative communities, rooted in the sex-gender system and cis-heteronormativity, continues to be identified by educators. This reality necessitates the design, implementation, and assessment of pragmatic actions capable of permeating effective teaching practices, founded on detailed analyses of experiences, perceptions, and attitudes among both future and practicing educators, as well as students across different educational stages.

5.1 Limitations

Despite the systematic review's interest in examining factors, benefits, limitations, and obstacles of affective-sexual and gender diversity education within the Spanish context, its geographical confinement stands as an initial constraint, limiting the availability of potentially valuable and comparable studies beyond the chosen locale. Additionally, other biases inherent to this study must be considered: documental bias (scientific articles), linguistic bias (solely English and Spanish), coverage bias, selection or publication bias concerning gray literature (unindexed studies), and temporal bias (2013–2023). Likewise, the inherent limitations of any systematic literature review should be acknowledged. In this vein, the application of a pre-established selection of free terms might exclude relevant outcomes for the study's purpose. The choice of WoS and Scopus, combined with the focus on the Spanish context, may lead to the omission of relevant studies in other languages, regions, or non-indexed sources, a circumstance that would significantly restrict the generalization of the findings. Consequently, caution is recommended when extrapolating the obtained results to different realities, as well as conducting new reviews aimed at broadening the selection criteria applied in the present research.

5.2 Future research directions

Future studies should broaden the search for new findings to include other languages, databases, and gray literature—such as technical reports, doctoral theses, institutional documents, and conference proceedings—which could be potentially valuable for contrasting and discussing the obtained results. This expansion would offer the opportunity to reveal emerging trends, innovative approaches, and specific challenges, along with diverse perspectives, methodologies, and contexts, ultimately contributing to a more holistic and representative understanding of education on affective-sexual and gender diversity.

Finally, approximately 85% of the analyzed studies feature a cross-sectional design, while around 15% are longitudinal. Given the clear predominance of cross-sectional designs in the analysis and treatment of affective-sexual and gender education, it is recommended to incorporate more robust experimental and longitudinal designs, as well as methodological triangulation (quantitative-qualitative), in order to delve deeper into the temporal evolution and potential modifications of teachers' attitudes and practices related to this type of education.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

DO-S: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Software, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. JI: Supervision, Visualization, Writing – review & editing. ES: Supervision, Visualization, Writing – review & editing. EE-F: Supervision, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

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The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declare that no Generative AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

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