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Evolution in the Perception of Students Between 6 and 13 Years of Age on Citizenship: Peruvian Context.

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Abstract

Citizenship is a fundamental pillar in the integral development of individuals within contemporary democracies, since it allows facing the social, political and cultural challenges of the 21st century. This article analyzes the evolution of the perception of 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade students compared to 4th, 5th and 6th grade students (6 to 13 years old), in the socio-political, socio-cultural, socio-affective and socio-economic dimensions of their citizenship training. The study had a qualitative approach, with an interpretative paradigm. Fifty-two interviews were conducted. The results show a progression in the understanding of the four dimensions evaluated, showing an increasingly broader and integrated perspective as the student's advance in grade, which favors a gradual and reflexive construction from an early age.

Keywords: Perception, Citizenship, Child Development, Citizenship Education, Elementary Education, Evolution.

Introduction

Among the great challenges of the 21st century is to ensure citizenship that responds to current democratic needs. According to Schulz et al. (2025) “citizenship education in Latin America faces many particular challenges, taking into account the fickle socio-political context, more than 60% of educational institutions have difficulties in developing effective citizenship programs”. Along the same lines, another great challenge is to achieve a fair education committed to the demands and needs of society. The analysis and intervention of social problems must be considered a priority in society in order not to neglect the welfare of communities (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In this sense, citizenship should be understood as a key formative process to prepare citizens to participate in society in an effective and responsible manner in the public sphere (Cauch & Heredia, 2023). Likewise, citizenship must be associated in the defense of rights, and the fulfillment of duties, in order to contribute to society (Delbury & Cárcamo, 2020); it is also required to promote an evolutionary approach that considers the cognitive and social development of students, providing them with meaningful experiences that build consistent community bonds (Pardo-Beneyto & Abellán López, 2023). Therefore, this process should not be limited to a unidimensional perspective, but should promote the inclusion of theoretical knowledge and ethical principles for society (Ojeda & Zuñiga, 2020).

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State of the Art

Making an analysis, the historical review on the beginning of citizenship, we can mention the ancient civilizations, such as the Greek and Roman culture, who instituted the terms *demos* and *civitas* and implanted the bases of citizen interaction between people and their communities, also established the beginning of the democracies that exist today in the West. This cultural legacy underscores the continuing concern for cultivating engaged citizens. As Gonzalez (2019) indicated, "the education of citizens was a significant concern for those who forged our shared cultural heritage" (p. 7). This emphasizes how the cultural practices of citizenship, which, since very ancient times, has played a fundamental role in the formation of people, citizens, capable of actively engaging in a democratic society.

At the international level, we can mention some regulations that seek the development of citizenship. From the position of the United Nations (2019), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, in its article 26, points out that education is essential to foster respect for human rights and citizen participation. Similarly, the United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF (2019) points out in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, in its articles 12 and 29, the importance of preparing young people to be active citizens and ensure their right to give their opinion on issues concerning their immediate environment, as well as being aware of their duties. According to the Organization of American States (2001), in the Inter-American Democratic Charter manifests the need to strengthen democracy, human rights and citizen participation as essential factors for progress in the nation, and the United Nations (2015) mentions Agenda 2030 and through Goal 4. 7, indicates the need to develop education in favor of sustainable development, global citizenship and gender equality. Faced with what has been pointed out at the international level, the regulations in the Peruvian context have been analyzed, the Congress of the Republic of Peru (2018;2003) develops in the Political Constitution of Peru and the General Law of Education (Law No. 28044) that the integral education of the individual is a fundamental objective. Specifically, Article 8 of this legislation promotes democratic values and Article 9 emphasizes the importance of cultivating a responsible citizenship that respects human rights and duties. In addition, the Congress of the Republic of Peru (2007) expresses in the law of equal opportunities between genders (Law No. 28983), in its Article 3, the objective of ensuring gender equity as a pillar of a fair citizenship and the National Council of Education (2020) proposes the national educational project to 2036 as a fundamental axis in the formation of citizenship, education for democratic life and active participation in society.

It is essential to point out the relevance of cultivating citizenship from childhood, since education in the early stages of life allows children to acquire an understanding of their civil, political and social duties and rights, providing them with the necessary tools to be active participants in the community. According to Olvera (2016), educating in citizenship from early childhood not only develops civic competencies, but also fortifies the aptitude to defend their rights, ethical values and knowledge. In this way, education promotes student ownership of their responsibilities, which consolidates the citizen role in society (Šerek, J., & Lomičová, L. (2020)). Among the main problems faced by citizenship education in the educational context is the gap between curricular proposals and their effective implementation in the classroom. In this sense, Salado et al. (2022) believe that, although the curricula incorporate citizenship education, its development is subject to an interruption between the curricular design and the contexts of student participation, due to the deficient preparation of teachers in methodologies, and the lack of spaces that allow effectively linking theory with meaningful citizenship experiences.

These barriers increase the gap between the intended learning and the civic competencies that need to be developed. As a result, it limits the development of primary skills and attitudes against comprehensive citizenship (Pardo-Beneyto and Abellán, 2023). Furthermore, another relevant challenge is the presence of a subject-centered approach. In this context, Reyes (2020) argues that students tend to see citizenship training as a set of knowledge aimed at personal improvement, isolated from their social role. This way of seeing things is largely due to the attribution of a social environment characterized by individualism and the scarcity of spaces for dialogue and dynamic development (Gauche, 2019). Therefore, this perspective hinders the development of a collective consciousness that drives solidarity and commitment to the community (Delbury and Cárcamo, 2020).

For this reason, this study highlights the importance of citizenship education in the formation of new generations. Citizenship education is shown not only as a valuable resource for building a conscious, participatory and democratic society, but it should also inspect the current challenges brought about by the globalized world, characterized by technological transformations and social trends (Rotolo et al., 2020). Thus, teaching children and adolescents knowledge, skills and values such as justice, equity, respect, empathy and tolerance are a necessity to certify that they understand their position in the world and act as responsible citizens (Scott et al., 2020).

Citizenship should not be understood only as the act of voting, but as a constant and necessary process in education and personal development. As expressed by Ojeda and Zúñiga (2020), active citizenship is where agents of change are able to make informed choices that benefit their communities. To achieve this end, the teaching of citizenship must include practical methods that entice students to become actively involved in their community (Serna and Alzate, 2022). Experiential developments strengthen the sense of belonging and promote a sense of personal and social identity (Cuenca, 2020).

In the Peruvian context, the citizenry is facing many challenges due to the political crisis that the country is going through, as well as the increase in inequalities, which seriously afflicts the population. Districts such as La Esperanza, in Trujillo, reflect the need to improve citizen education. While recognizing the fundamental role of education in promoting civic values, previous studies have revealed challenges such as the disconnection between the curriculum and daily life, the lack of teacher training and the prevalence of individualistic approaches. Therefore, it is necessary to go deeper into students' perceptions of citizenship in order to understand and find strategies for improvement in society through the development of citizenship strategies. In this context, the research analyzes the perception of primary education students (6 to 13 years old) of citizenship in its socio-political, socio-cultural, socio-affective and socio-economic dimensions during their educational training process, and what differences are observed between students in the first grades (1st to 3rd) and those in the last grades (4th to 6th).

Method

Design

The research was conducted using a qualitative method, with an interpretive approach, this approach allows a thorough exploration of personal perceptions, while considering how the sociocultural context affects the creation of meanings (Duque and Aristizábal, 2019).

Participants and context

The study group was composed of 52 students from the primary level of regular basic education, comprising ages 6 to 13 years. The children come from a state educational institution in the city of Trujillo, Peru.

Grade	Number of Students	Male	Female	Age range in years
1st, 2nd,3rd	28	16	12	6-9
4th,5th,6th	24	13	11	10-13
Total	52	29	23	6-13

Table 1: Distribution of Participants by School Grade, Gender and Age Range in the Public School of Trujillo.

Note. Participants were selected by theoretical sampling from a public educational institution in Trujillo, Peru.

Inclusion criteria consisted of students being regularly enrolled, informed consent from parents/guardians and the child's own consent to participate in the study.

Collection Instruments and Techniques

Two semi-structured interviews were designed and applied differentiated according to age group, the first instrument was for students from 1st to 3rd grade (ages 6 to 9 years) and the second was for students from 4th to 6th grade (9 to 13 years), dichotomous questions were used (Yes/No) with justification, distributed in 17 items for students from 1st to 3rd grade and 19 items for students from 4th to 6th grade, with answers of critical level completely agree, agree and disagree. Four dimensions were assessed in both instruments: Sociopolitical, sociopolitical, sociocultural, socioaffective and socioeconomic. The instruments were validated through expert judgment and a pilot test that allowed adjusting the wording and comprehension of the questions according to the developmental level of the participants. To ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments used in the study, several validation procedures were carried out following rigorous qualitative research standards (Maldonado-Suárez and Santoyo-Telles, 2024; Moscoso, 2018).

The first step was to evaluate the content validity through the analysis of five specialists in the area. Then, the validity of the instrument was assessed with Aiken's V coefficient, the result was 0.89, exceeding the acceptance level set at 0.80. This suggests that the instruments used correctly reflect the constructs of interest and are pertinent to the study (Maldonado-Suárez and Santoyo-Telles, 2024). Additionally, a pretest was conducted with ten students to test the clarity of the instruments. The results indicated that 90% of the respondents adequately understood the questions, which exceeds the acceptance threshold of 85%. This result suggests that the instruments are clear and appropriate for the group studied (Maldonado-Suárez and Santoyo-Telles, 2024).

In relation to inter-rater reliability, a parallel coding of the information was performed. The Kappa coefficient obtained was 0.85, surpassing the acceptance level of 0.80. This shows a high level of agreement between coders, which validates the consistency and repeatability of the analysis (Gonzales and Gonzales, 2024). Finally, the robustness of the analysis was verified by

data saturation. This point was reached after analyzing 85% of the interviews, exceeding the established acceptance threshold of 80%. Such a result evidences that sufficient information was collected to fully understand the phenomenon studied and that additional data would not provide significant new findings (Gonzales and Gonzales, 2024). It should be noted that all validation parameters were previously established according to strict qualitative research standards. This ensures that both the methodology and the analytical procedure are consistent, reliable and adequate to answer the research questions posed in the study.

Procedure

Data collection was carried out between June and December 2024, applying a systematic protocol that ensured the quality and rigor of the research process. Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza (2018), indicate that in qualitative studies it is essential to establish clear and systematic mechanisms that capture the depth and multiple dimensions of the phenomenon studied. The procedure was organized in four consecutive stages: Phase 1 or preliminary covered the approach to the school environment, the management of authorizations, the verification of instruments and a pilot test; Phase 2 or collection consisted of conducting interviews and transcribing the responses obtained; Phase 3 or analytical focused on the codification of information and the detection of regularities; and Phase 4 or integration comprised the crossing of data, the elaboration of findings and the confirmation of the interpretations made.

Analysis

This was carried out using the thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2021), appreciated for its methodological rigor and systematic structure for the treatment of qualitative information. This process was developed through five sequential phases that were approached in an iterative and reflexive manner, allowing a fluid movement between phases according to the demands that emerged during the analytical process.

Phase	Procedure	Quality criteria	Outcome
Familiarization	Repeated readings of the material	Deep immersion in data	Comprehensive understanding
Initial coding	Systematic code generation	Completeness and accuracy	72 initial codes
Search for themes	Grouping of codes into categories	Conceptual coherence	6 preliminary themes
Review of themes	Checking internal consistency	Clear distinction between themes	Refined themes
Definition and naming	Specification of characteristics	Precise denominations	Final thematic framework

Table 2: Phases of the Thematic Analysis: Procedures, Criteria and Results By Stage.

Note: The first phase involved repeated reviews of the transcripts, thus facilitating an overall understanding of the content and initial recognition of relevant trends. In the second phase, initial codes were created using the ATLAS. Ti. This open coding work generated a set of 72 codes, which were clearly defined and uniformly used in all transcripts. To reinforce reliability, collaborative pair coding was implemented on 20% of the data, achieving an inter-coder

agreement coefficient of 85%. The third phase involved the exploration and detailed analysis of emerging themes as they emerged (Table 3). The codes were grouped into preliminary categories according to their semantic and conceptual similarities (Table 4), ensuring the internal coherence of each theme and the clear distinction between them. For example, the codes “child participation”, “children's voice” and “youth agency” were grouped under the theme “Child participation and agency”. This process resulted in the identification of 6 main themes.

Dimension	Main categories	Associated codes	Frequency
Sociopolitical	Citizen participation	12 codes	156 mentions
Sociocultural	Identity and diversity	14 codes	143 mentions
Socioaffective	Bonds and emotions	8 codes	127 mentions
Socioeconomic	Economic Awareness	10 codes	98 mentions

Table 3: Frequency of Codes and Main Categories By Citizenship Dimension.

Emerging themes	Grouped codes	Dimension
1. Child participation and ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children's participation - Children's voice - Youth agency - Right to have a say - Decision-making - Political advocacy - Social change - Community involvement - Volunteerism - Collective action - Sense of community - Common good 	Sociopolitical
2. Safety and security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School safety - Child protection - Violence prevention - Teacher care - Safe environments 	Sociopolitical

3. Values education and social skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Values education - Respect - Empathy - Solidarity - Justice - Equality - Responsibility - Honesty - Tolerance - Friendship - Social skills - Teamwork - Conflict resolution - Assertive communication - Mutual support - Affective links 	Socio-affective
4. Cultural identity and valuing diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural Identity - Diversity - Traditions - Customs - Sense of belonging - Cultural pride - Intergenerational transmission - Intercultural dialogue - Valuing difference - Inclusion - Non-discrimination - Equal opportunities - Respect for disability - Gender equity 	Sociocultural
5. Socioeconomic and environmental awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Socioeconomic awareness - Inequality - Poverty - Social justice - Economic solidarity - Labor rights - Entrepreneurship - Financial education - Environmental awareness - Sustainable development - Recycling - Care for nature - Responsible consumption 	Socioeconomic

6. Rights, duties and culture of peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Human Rights - Citizenship duties - Rule of law - Democracy - Political participation - Informed voting - Accountability - Transparency - Culture of peace - Harmonious coexistence - Dialogue - Conflict transformation 	Sociopolitical
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Table 4: Clustering of Codes Into Emerging Themes And Dimensions During the Third Phase of the Analysis

Note: This table shows the grouping of the 72 initial codes into six main themes, together with the dimensions corresponding to each theme. The groupings were made considering conceptual and semantic similarities among the codes, which allowed us to identify broader patterns in students' perceptions of citizenship in relation to the four dimensions studied: socio-political, socio-cultural, socio-affective and socio-economic. In the fourth phase, the identified themes were refined and accurately named. Each theme was reviewed to ensure its soundness and internal consistency, and its distinguishing characteristics and hierarchical relationships were clearly established. The fifth phase culminated in the production of the final report, where the findings were articulated in a coherent narrative that integrates the empirical evidence, such as verbatim quotes from participants, with the theoretical framework of the research.

Results

The research on the perception of citizenship in elementary school students revealed significant patterns in the four dimensions analyzed, showing differences between students in grades 1-3 and grades 4-6. The descriptive results structured by dimensions are presented below.

Dimension	1st-3rd grade		4th-6th grade		
	Yes	No	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
Sociopolitical	85%	15%	62%	28%	10%
Sociocultural	92%	8%	73%	21%	6%
Socio-affective	96%	4%	88%	9%	3%
Socioeconomic	87%	13%	67%	24%	9%

Table 5: General Results of the Perception of Citizenship By Dimensions and Cycles

Grade	Textual quotations	Code	Emerging themes
1st	We children can also help the community and society"	Child participation	Participation and active citizenship in childhood
	"This way we work and play in peace", "We can play without fear", I want to play safely"	Community organization	Participation and active citizenship in childhood
2nd	"This way we will grow up in a safe place, we must help the community"	Child protection, social change	Safe and protective environments for children
	"Because if there is no change we will get bored"	Political participation	Participation and active citizenship in childhood
3rd	"Then accidents would no longer happen"	Social change	Safe and protective environments for children
	"If there were no rules, we would all be bad"	Political participation	Exercise of democratic citizenship and culture of peace
4th	"Let them lower the price of things and not throw garbage away"	Political participation	Exercise of democratic citizenship and culture of peace
	"It is not fair that there is corruption and it is not fair that we do not vote"	Political participation, Perception of authority	Exercise of democratic citizenship and culture of peace
5th	"They can help society and the community"	Community participation	Participation and active citizenship in childhood
	"More security for people"	Child protection	Safe and protective environments for children
	"It is not fair that there is corruption and it is not fair that we do not vote"	Perception of authority	Exercise of democratic citizenship and culture of peace
	"They can help society and the community", "No more crime"	Community participation, School safety	Participation and active citizenship in childhood
6th	"Today's youth are focused on claiming their rights"	Political awareness	Exercise of democratic citizenship and culture of peace
	"Let them hire more street cleaners"	Community participation	Participation and active citizenship in children
	"We should all have a say"	Community participation	Participation and active citizenship in children.

Table 6: Perceptions of Citizenship in the Socio-Political Dimension By Grade

Note. The table presents the perceptions of citizenship of students from 1st to 6th grade in the sociopolitical dimension, including textual quotes, associated codes and emerging themes identified in the analysis.

Grade	Textual quotes	Code	Emerging theme
1st	"We must respect them, they are equal" "It will be a beautiful country" "My country and locality will grow better"	Equality Social wellbeing Cultural identity	Valuing diversity and rejecting discrimination
2nd	"It is good to be respectful" "We must respect the laws" "It helps us to protect ourselves"	Equality Rights and duties Solidarity	Valuing diversity and rejecting discrimination, Exercise of democratic citizenship and culture of peace, Comprehensive training in values and citizenship skills
3rd	"It would help people with disabilities" "It would help us to respect each other and live happily"	Social inclusion Equality	Valuing diversity and rejecting discrimination
4th	"No littering in the street" "Everyone has a say" "They may have good ideas"	Environmental awareness Community participation	Responsible citizenship with the social and environmental surroundings Participation and active citizenship in childhood
5th	"No to theft, sexual abuse and decrease pollution" "Everyone has a say" "They may have good ideas"	Environmental awareness Community participation	Responsible citizenship with the social and environmental surroundings Participation and active citizenship in childhood
6th	"No to theft, sexual abuse and decrease pollution" "Dialogue more with different people and do not criticize anyone" "Sometimes young people and children have good ideas for society"	Environmental awareness Social inclusion Community participation	Responsible citizenship with the social and environmental surroundings Appreciation of diversity and rejection of discrimination Participation and active citizenship in childhood

Table 7: Perceptions of Citizenship in the Sociocultural Dimension By Grade

Note. The table presents the perceptions of citizenship of students in grades 1-6 in the sociocultural dimension, including textual quotations, associated codes and emerging themes identified in the analysis.

Grade	Textual quotes	Code	Emerging theme
1st	"Friends are always helped" "It is good to help friends" "It is nice to help people"	Solidarity	Solidarity ,Empathy , Integral formation in values and citizenship competencies

2nd	"Having friends is good"	Solidarity	Comprehensive training in values and citizenship skills
3rd	"It helps us to respect each other" "For something new and improve our country" "It would help us to respect each other and live happily"	Empathy Solidarity Empathy	Comprehensive training in values and citizenship skills
4th	"Respecting rules of coexistence" "It would help children"	Solidarity Empathy	Comprehensive training in values and citizenship skills
5th	"That they respect the rules of coexistence" "That they stop stealing, making wars, not bullying"	Solidarity Empathy	Comprehensive training in values and citizenship competencies
6th	"Bullying" "We make a better person"	Solidarity Empathy	Comprehensive training in values and citizenship competencies

Table 8: Perceptions of Citizenship in the Socioemotional Dimension By Grade

Note. The table presents the perceptions of citizenship of students from 1st to 6th grade in the socioemotional dimension, including textual quotes, associated codes and emerging themes identified in the analysis.

Grade	Textual quotes	Code	Emerging theme
1st	"So we can buy other things" "We should not waste" "We learn for our future"	Responsible consumption, Financial economic education	Responsible citizenship with the social and environmental surroundings
2nd	"It's good and I behave better" "I can help take care of the environment" "So I can have more friends"	Economic solidarity, environmental awareness, economic awareness	Responsible citizenship with the social and environmental surroundings.
3rd	"My ideas can be useful" "Everyone in our country should be kind" "If we help we would be in solidarity"	Economic awareness, social justice, solidarity	Responsible citizenship with the social and environmental surroundings.
4th	"There can be less violence and there can be changes" "It is dangerous to be with strangers" "We can be robbed or raped"	Social justice, economic awareness, economic awareness	Responsible citizenship with the social and environmental surroundings.
5th	"Decrease crime, pollution, etc." "We must defend people" "There is	Social justice, economic	Responsible citizenship with the

	security and we are cared for, there are no violent people”	awareness	social and environmental surroundings.
6th	“Avoid polluting the environment” “You can improve students” “It will be achieved together with the opinions and participations of others” “We can learn new things” “Podemos aprender cosas nuevas”	Economic awareness	Responsible citizenship with the social and environmental surroundings.

Table 9: Perceptions of Citizenship in the Socioemotional Dimension By Grade

Note. The table presents the citizenship perceptions of students in grades 1-6 in the socioeconomic dimension, including textual quotations, associated codes and emerging themes identified in the analysis.

Discussion

The present study offers an in-depth and contextualized view of how this transformation in the perceptions of citizenship takes place in the Peruvian school environment, detecting trends and specific needs for each educational grade. Patterns were found in the perceptions that define the growth of citizenship thinking and awareness in students from 1st to 3rd grade and 4th to 6th grade of primary education. The findings coincide with previous studies that have emphasized the relevance of taking into account the cognitive and social advancement of students when addressing the topic of citizenship education (Arroyo et al. 2020). One identified need is the urgency of strengthening civic education, through the implementation of participatory spaces, as well as promoting activities concerning the design of collaborative initiatives that integrate other educational levels (Pardo-Beneyto and Abellán López, 2023).

This approach is aligned with the proposals of the Congress of the Republic of Peru (2024), which seeks to strengthen citizenship education through the active participation of all educational actors, in order to build a democratic system of well-being for all. In addition, citizenship education in Peruvian schools has traditionally been understood as civic-patriotic education, but the need to develop more collective and democratic citizenship skills among students has become evident (Reátegui, 2009).

The findings in the sociopolitical dimension revealed a significant contrast in the way of perceiving between the two school cycles, finding that students, as they advance in their schooling, move from an intuitive and optimistic vision to a more critical and reflective perspective on their role in society, coinciding with Piaget's (2003) statements, who argued that thinking is adaptive, and moves from a purely representative function to a transformational function of reality. Students from 1st to 3rd grade expressed a predominantly positive view (85% of favorable responses) about their ability to participate and generate social change. As one 2nd grader stated, “We children can also help to improve our community”. In contrast, students in grades 4-6 showed a more nuanced stance, with 62% strongly agreeing, reflecting a more critical understanding of political and social dynamics. Pardo-Beneyto and Abellán López (2023) mention that students go through an evolutionary approach that determines their cognitive and social development, which can be facilitated by meaningful experiences that build strong community bonds. Likewise, this dimension revealed three main patterns: civic participation,

political awareness and perception of authority. Regarding citizen participation, 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade students expressed a strong desire to participate, although from a more intuitive point of view and linked to their immediate environment. The 4th, 5th and 6th graders evidenced a more elaborated understanding of citizen participation, but also greater skepticism regarding its effective results. Regarding political awareness, younger students focused on concrete aspects such as “having a cleaner neighborhood” or “helping neighbors,” while older students addressed more complex issues such as the relevance of student representation and collective decision-making. Regarding the perception of authority: Both groups recognized the importance of norms and authority figures, but with different approaches. 85% of 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade students participated with protection and order, while 4th, 5th and 6th graders demonstrated a more critical understanding of their role in society these findings agree with Alvarez and Pinedo (2024) & Moreno (2016) who indicate that a central element in the development of citizenship are civic and ethical foundations.

In the socio-cultural sphere, students develop a progressively more reflective appreciation of cultural diversity and socio-cultural identity. While younger students accept differences spontaneously and linked to their family experiences, older students demonstrate a more critical understanding of the importance of cultural inclusion and preservation. For Vygotsky (2013), learning occurs through social and cultural interaction and the social and cultural context influences people's thinking and behavior and, therefore, their cognitive development. Students in grades 1, 2 and 3 showed a more natural acceptance of cultural differences (92% favorable perceptions), while those in grades 4, 5 and 6 showed a more reflective understanding (73% strongly agree), recognizing the complexity of cultural diversity. Freire (1970) emphasizes that children's learning should not only be the transfer of knowledge, but an active process in which they reflect on their context and participate in the construction of their sociocultural environment, which is key at an age when they begin to broaden their identity and interact more critically with society. The results also showed the need to reflect on cultural identity, diversity and inclusion. In terms of cultural identity, younger students showed a strong attachment to family traditions and cultural festivities, while older students showed a deeper understanding of the importance of preserving and valuing different cultural identities. Regarding diversity and inclusion, progress in understanding diversity was revealed. As a 5th grade student stated: “It is important to not only respect, but also learn from the different cultures present in our community”. Kohlberg (1984) argues that childhood is not limited to the simple reproduction of social rules, but is nurtured by interaction with the sociocultural context, where infants internalize values and develop their own moral judgment.

The socio-affective dimension reflected the deepest indexes of positive perception in both groups (96% in 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades and 88% in 4th, 5th and 6th grades), which shows a solid empathic and social bonding base. The students revealed a strong appreciation for interpersonal relationships and harmonious coexistence. Empathy and solidarity, as well as conflict resolution, were identified as primary elements. Younger students presented a more immediate and emotional empathy, while older students expanded a deeper understanding of the needs of others. Likewise, the ability to resolve conflicts progresses with age, moving from more instinctive responses to more careful strategies supported by dialogue and cooperation. Serna and Alzate (2022), as well as Martínez (2016) indicate that early intervention in social media allows students to understand the impact of their actions in the community. In relation to conflict resolution, students in grades 4, 5 and 6 used more polished strategies to handle disagreements and promote harmonious coexistence. As Kohlberg (1984) points out, moral maturity involves not only the

judgment of social norms, but also the ability to welcome the other's perspective and resolve conflicts through dialogue and cooperation (p. 98).

In the socioeconomic dimension, marked contrasts were found according to grade level. Younger students presented a basic and optimistic view regarding savings and the value of money, while older students showed a more analytical perspective, identifying economic inequalities and highlighting the importance of social responsibility. In quantitative terms, 87% of students in grades 1, 2 and 3 expressed a basic but positive understanding of economic concepts, while in grades 4, 5 and 6, 67% expressed a more complex and reflective level of understanding. Delors (1996) stresses that education should provide tools to face socioeconomic challenges and extend their future opportunities. Another notable aspect found was economic awareness and social responsibility, from basic concepts of savings and the value of money in grades 1, 2 and 3 to a broader understanding of economic inequalities in grades 4, 5 and 6. Along these lines, Freire (1970) emphasizes that education should be a critical and liberating process, enabling children to understand economic differences and develop a social conscience aimed at building a more just society.

Conclusions

Based on the results, the perception of citizenship evolves throughout primary education, going from an intuitive and optimistic view in the early years (1st to 3rd grade) to a more critical and reflective stance in the higher grades (4th to 6th grade), confirming the relationship between cognitive development and the construction of social awareness, as proposed by theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky and Kolberth.

In relation to the socio-political aspect, it can be identified that in the evolutionary process the younger children show a spontaneous enthusiasm to participate in the immediate community, although with a simpler understanding of civic commitment, as opposed to the older students, who recognize the existence of more complex social problems and show a higher level of critical analysis of their role as citizens.

In relation to socio-cultural issues, students in the first years of primary education accept cultural diversity as a matter of course, while in the higher levels, a more conscious and reflective appreciation of cultural identity and diversity emerges. There is also a deeper understanding of the importance of inclusion and coexistence in society.

In the first years of primary school, children tend to have an idealistic and uncritical perspective on economic and social aspects, while in the last grades, the perception of economic and social inequalities is clearer, which may contribute to a greater sense of social justice and a commitment to equity.

In summary, this study shows the importance of adapting citizenship education to the cognitive and social development of students, as well as demonstrating that the educational system should not only promote knowledge about citizenship, but also experiences that allow the construction of a critical and ethical conscience and a sense of social responsibility.

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