

Sexual and Family Diversity in Education: Attitudes of University Students in Teacher Training

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Abstract

The objective of the present study is to examine attitudes towards sexual and family diversity in Ecuadorian students and its relationship with variables such as type of training program, age, gender, among others. For this study, the information obtained from a group of university students belonging to the pedagogy career has been considered. A quantitative approach within the naturalistic paradigm was used to explore the dimensions of (1) family diversity, (2) personal attitudes towards sexual diversity, and (3) predictive factors of institutional stance towards addressing sexual diversity. Surveys and Likert-type questionnaires were administered to a sample of 637 participants, including students and teachers of both sexes, aged between 18 and 54 years, affiliated with a public university in Ecuador. A nonparametric analysis of the data was presented, which revealed significant differences according to sex, age and study program. Likewise, a correlation was found between age and attitude towards sexual and family diversity of future teachers. This underlines the importance of developing positive attitudes towards sexual and family diversity in teacher training programs, with a focus on inclusion and attention to diversity.

Keywords: *Peace education; global citizenship; teacher training; sexuality; university.*

Introduction

Although global acceptance of sexual and family diversity has increased, there is a clear lack of focus on developing the necessary skills to address student diversity in teacher training programs (Toro, 2012; Jiménez & Rodríguez, 2017). This deficiency is concerning, as there is ample evidence of injustices and crimes committed against individuals who express sexual orientations and practices that differ from those expected based on their sex assigned at birth (Barboza & Badilla, 2020).

Discrimination and harassment against people with sexual orientations and identities that differ from heterosexual continue to persist in many countries. In over 70 nations, homosexuality is persecuted and penalized, and in 9 of them, the death penalty is considered as punishment (HRW, 2020). The transgender population has experienced waves of violence that have claimed hundreds of lives in short periods of time (Amnesty International, 2018).

In defense of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans (transgender, transsexual, and travestis), and Intersex (LGBTI) community, the Pro-Equality movement proposes applying existing legislation and categories to approach common language (Comité Directivo CLADE, 2014). Laws such as those in Ecuador promote respect and inclusion for all citizens (Guamán et al., 2019). In 2006, the United Nations developed the Yogyakarta Principles (Indonesia), a legislative compendium of existing norms to address the various forms of abuse against the LGBTI community (Alston et al., 2007). In 2018, the World Health Organization removed the categorization of "mental disorder" from transsexuality and renamed it as "gender incongruence". This new biomedical classification of transsexuality somewhat weakens the dominant social model of heterosexuality, but also violently refers back to disqualify and exclude those from this minority (Barboza & Badilla, 2020).

In Latin America, LGBTI people suffer from severe forms of discrimination and violence, limiting their employment opportunities and social relationships (Juárez, 2015). In Ecuador, only 37% of young people who self-identify as members of the LGBTI community have completed their high school studies, suggesting the existence of stigma and rejection towards this community (Consejo Nacional para la

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Igualdad de Género, 2018). Although Ecuador's legal framework favors social and educational inclusion, demonstrations of discrimination in multiple forms persist in society (Guamán et al., 2019).

Regarding sexual diversity, as a sociocultural construct, it is based on the trichotomy of sex-gender-desire and continues to be the universal basis for relationships conceived as "normal," with the roles of provider and procreator assigned to men and women, respectively. Those who do not fit into this category are often viewed with prejudice, labeled as immoral, pathological, or deviant (Peinado, 2009).

It is essential to study and develop attitudes for addressing sexual and family diversity in future teachers (Guamán et al., 2019), as exclusion is linked to both the economic and social transformations of the population and to discriminatory behavior patterns rooted in society. People with homosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender orientations face problems beyond prejudice and social upheaval (Jiménez & Rodríguez, 2017).

Stereotypical filters are latent in society. These filters include both public and private life matters, where society creates roles that are normalized and, in many cases, legally regulated (Mercado, 2018). These roles are based on conceptions, behaviors, interests, and desires that even condition people's sexual orientation and preference. In this sense, the main barrier is that gender, sexual, and family diversity are often approached from a network of beliefs, personality traits, attitudes, feelings, behaviors, and activities (Caldas et al., 2012).

From the perspective of family diversity, today's society is experiencing constant changes, which Yáñez (2018) calls "Living in fluidity," where large differences and complexities are minimized. The transformation of the family has been one of the greatest social changes in the last six decades, and it has evolved from the existence of a single model of traditional nuclear family to a multiplicity of forms of family organization, resulting from multiple social changes (Coronel et al., 2022). This diversity is reflected in different family models, such as same-sex parent families in the case of families with two homosexual heads of household (Rodríguez & Moreno, 2017) and family diversity, which emphasizes the perspective of respect from diversity (Fuentes, 2022).

Juárez (2015) highlights two positions: one that defends the right of people with diverse sexual orientation to same-sex marriage and the adoption of children, and another that opposes and criticizes these relationships and initiatives. One criticism is the influence of same-sex parenting on the sexuality of infants, to which Huaiquivil et al. (2019) respond that most people in the LGBTI community were raised by heterosexual couples, so the correlation between same-sex parenting and children's sexuality should be considered incorrect.

Far from this discussion, the reality is that children of same-sex parents face rejection in educational institutions and recreational places, while same-sex parents have limitations regarding the participation of their children and guardians in formal educational institutions (Juárez & Chávez, 2016; Rodríguez & Moreno, 2017).

In this sense, it is important to examine the possibility that variables such as age, sex, culture, political affiliation, and education are related to the incidence of negative attitudes toward sexual and family diversity. For example, studies such as those by Romero and Gallardo (2020) have allowed for the recognition of low averages on the scale of prejudice towards different sexual identities in a sample of university professors. It is also noteworthy that works such as that of La Roi and Mandemakers (2018) conclude in a positive correlation between education level and the acceptance of homosexuality.

It is essential to value the presence, participation, and achievements of all people to overcome exclusion, which is deeply rooted in the social, political, economic, cultural, legal, and educational structures of the country. Recognizing the benefits of diversity and paying special attention to those who suffer from marginalization or exclusion is also important (Guamán et al., 2019). Therefore, education continues to be a fundamental tool to promote social transformation and guarantee a better quality of life for all (Tubay, 2020).

In this sense, Booth and Ainscow (2015) highlight that sexual diversity should be addressed within the framework of educational inclusion, where racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, disability, and bullying share a common root: intolerance of difference and the abuse of power to create and perpetuate inequalities. Therefore, actions are required to guarantee safe conditions and access for all types of students and all types of families (Duk & Murillo, 2018).

To address these issues, this study aims to explore the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards addressing sexual and family diversity in Ecuadorian students and their relationship with variables such as training program, age, sex, among others. To do this, the following null research hypotheses have been formulated: Ho1: There are no significant differences between attitudes towards addressing sexual and family diversity based on variables such as program of origin, age, sex, level of study, among others; Ho2: There are no significant correlations between the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards addressing sexual and family diversity and the age factor.

Methods

This work is framed within a post-naturalist paradigm and develops from a sociohistorical approach, while in its empirical part, the quantitative approach to socio-educational research is used. For statistical analysis, the recommendations of Malmberg (2018) are followed

Sampling

The sample used for this research consists of 637 individuals, representing 51.67% of the total student population of the educational institution. Of these, 92% are students and 8% are teachers. The sample is considered heterogeneous and includes individuals aged between 18 and 54 years who self-identify as belonging to the Afro-Ecuadorian, mestizo, and white ethnic groups. A non-probabilistic purposive sampling method was considered due to the size and nature of the population and its representativeness. The criteria used for selecting participants were (1) being a student at the project's host institution, (2) committing to participating in the activities of this project, and (3) agreeing to participate in this project voluntarily and without any payment (see Table 1)

Instruments

The instruments used in the study are detailed below:

Survey - An ad hoc form was designed by the research team, initially with 17 items. After a review and evaluation by experts, as well as a pilot test of the instrument, a final instrument with 9 items was established. The personal data collected correspond to the items (a) study program, (b) level of studies, (c) age, (d) nationality, (e) ethnicity, (f) socioeconomic level, (g) sex, (h) sexual orientation or practice, and (i) prevalence of disability (Figure 1). The degree of religious conviction (j) was also included, as the possibility of a relationship between this variable and the attitude of future teachers towards sexual diversity was considered. The items were formulated in structured questions with response options of "Yes", "No" or "I don't know". The instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which obtained a value of 0.80, meeting international standards for this type of research.

Table 1. Sample

Subjects		Levels									Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9	n	
Prospective teachers	Program 1	9	34	31	38	21	1	8	1	0	143
	Program 2	41	44	44	38	15	0	0	0	0	182
	Program 3	22	2	0	28	9	0	1	0	0	62
	Program 4	0	0	22	0	5	0	18	1	0	46
	Program 5	0	33	0	39	14	0	1	0	0	87

	Program 6	0	24	2	25	16	0	0	0	0	67
	Sum	72	137	99	168	80	1	28	2	0	587 (92%)
Teachers	Teachers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	50 (8%)
Total		72	137	99	168	80	1	28	2	50	637 (100%)

Likert-type Questionnaire - The instrument was designed ad hoc by the research team. The dimensions studied are (A) Family diversity, (B) Individual attitude, and (C) Institutional stance towards sexual diversity. For dimensions (A) and (B), 6 items were presented, and for dimension (C), an analysis case was proposed. All items can be answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree". The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient obtained a value of 0.72, meeting international standards for this type of research (see Figure 1).

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this research was conducted using SPSS Statistics version 25. Initially, the Shapiro-Wilk normality test was applied to assess the relationships between personal information variables and the study dimensions. The results obtained were less than 0.040. Given that the data series did not pass the normality test, non-parametric tests were subsequently administered.

Figure 1 illustrates the structure of the dimensions studied, where 4 dimensions are presented in a positive (+) direction and 2 items are inverted (-).

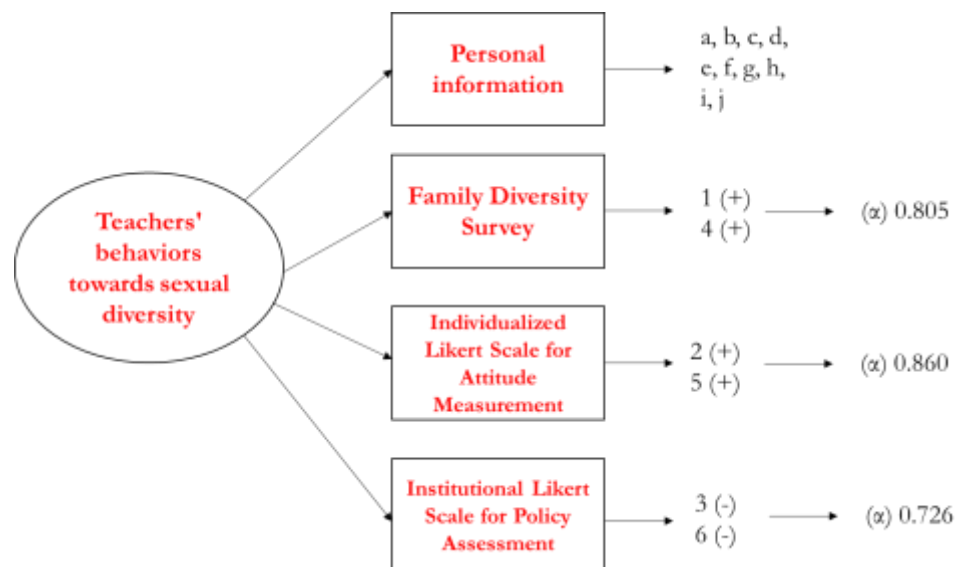


Figure 1. Organization and reliability of survey dimensions.

Figure 1 identifies the questions evaluated for each dimension, which correspond to a Kruskal-Wallis test to detect differences between samples based on parameters such as (a) study program, (b) level of studies, (c) age, (e) ethnicity, (f) socioeconomic level, (g) sex, and (h) sexual orientation and practices. Additionally, the Mann-Whitney U test was applied to identify significant differences between participants grouped by variables (i) prevalence of disability and (d) nationality of the participants. For both cases, after detecting significant differences between groups, the independent samples t-test was used. Finally, Spearman's rho correlation coefficients were determined to identify correlations between the participants' chronological age and variables (j) degree of religious conviction; (A) family diversity, (B) individual attitude, and (C) institutional stance.

Results

The following presents the results of this study, addressing the questions raised in the introductory section.

Table 2 presents the results of a survey on attitudes towards sexual diversity in a specific institution. Survey items are expressed as percentages of responses in five categories: strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), no response (NR), agree (A), and strongly agree (SA).

The results show that a significant proportion of participants (22.9%) disagree with the idea that a man can dress as a woman within the institution (item 1). Moreover, an even higher percentage (37.7%) believe that sexual diversity is a moral transgression (item 2). These results suggest a lack of tolerance for sexual diversity within the institution. On the other hand, a high percentage of participants (72.5%) report having positive attitudes towards working with people who have sexual diversity (item 3). This could indicate that, while there is a segment of the population that is not in favor of sexual diversity, a large majority is willing to work with individuals who have this condition. Finally, regarding item 4, only 4.7% of participants strongly disagree with the institution's stance of not accepting sexual diversity, suggesting that most participants agree with this position.

To address the question of differences between groups of future teachers regarding attitudes towards diversity, the null hypothesis H01 was proposed: There are no significant differences between groups of pre-service teachers regarding their attitudes towards addressing sexual diversity. In this sense, the Kruskal-Wallis test with independent samples showed significant differences in all participant groups between the study program factor and the family diversity item (attitude towards sexual diversity), with a p-value less than 0.050.

Table 2. Attitudes towards attending to sexual diversity among participants.

Items	SA	A	N/A	A	SA
1. I think that if a man wants to dress as a woman, he should do it outside the institution.	15,4%	22,9	32,5	17,0	12,2
2. I think that sexual diversity is a moral transgression.	7,4	13,5	37,7%	24,8	16,6
3. I have a positive attitude towards working with people who have sexual diversity.	10,4%	72,5%	17,1%	0,0%	0,0%
4. I support the institution's position of not accepting sexual diversity.	4,7%	16,0%	42,2%	22,8%	14,3%

Note: SA= Strongly agree, A= Agree, N/A= Neither agree nor disagree, A= Agree, SA = Strongly agree.

Analysis of these differences using a one-way ANOVA with Tukey's post hoc test determined that there were no significant differences between participants in the programs of Basic Education, Language and Literature, and Special Education. However, significant differences were found in attitudes towards sexual diversity between participants in the Special Education and Physical Education and Sports programs (Sig. = 0.051), as well as between participants in the Early Childhood Education and Basic Education programs (Sig. = 0.50).

Regarding the gender factor of pre-service teachers, the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there were no significant differences for both items, (A) family diversity (Sig. = 0.021) and (B) individual attitude (Sig. = 0.031), between males and females. Table 3 shows the results obtained by applying the Student's t-test for items (A) Family diversity (Sig. = 0.016) and (B) Individual attitudes (Sig. = 0.044). Therefore, it is confirmed that there are no significant differences between male and female pre-service teachers.

The results of the Student's t-test revealed significant differences in the dimensions of (A) Family diversity and (B) Institutional stance, with values of 0.011 and 0.028 respectively.

Table 3. Independent samples t-test: Family diversity and Attitude.

	t	g1	Significance (two-tailed)	Mean		Mean difference
				F	M	
Family diversity	2,412	433	0,016	4,542	4,058	0,483
Institutional stance	2,019	510	0,044	3,712	3,573	0,139

Note: F= female, M= male

Tukey's HSD was applied to identify differences between age groups in item (A) family diversity. Significant differences were found in adulthood compared to adolescence (0.012) and early adulthood (0.010), with mean differences of (-) 1.48370 and (-) 1.32474, respectively.

Regarding dimension (C) institutional stance, significant differences were observed between middle adulthood and early adulthood (0.034) with a positive mean difference of (+) 1.21984.

Regarding factors (c) education level, (f) ethnicity, and (g) socioeconomic level of pre-service teachers, according to the results obtained, no significant differences were found with respect to the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards sexual diversity (See Table 3).

On the other hand, when analyzing factors (c) prevalence of disability and (d) nationality of pre-service teachers, significant differences were found between groups only for item (A) Family diversity within the competencies for attention to sexual diversity, when applying the Mann-Whitney U test for differences between two groups (See Table 4).

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U test and independent samples t-test.

Parameter	Test statistic	Dimensión: diversidad familiar	
		Mann-Whitney U	Independent samples t-test
(j) Person with a disability vs. people without disabilities	U de Mann-Whitney	5454,500	
	Z	-2,072	
	Significance (two-tailed)	,038	,049*
	Mean difference		-,63614
(d) Foreign citizens and citizens.	U de Mann-Whitney	981,000	
	Z	-2,338	
	Significance (two-tailed)	,019	,021*
	Mean difference		1,47005

Note: * Variances are assumed to be equal.

Regarding the hypothesis about the correlations between attitudes towards sexual and family diversity and the factors of age and study program, Spearman's correlation coefficient was applied with a significance level of p -value = 0.50. The results showed moderate positive correlations for the age factor (see Table 5).

Regarding the correlations found between the variables, it is observed that there is a low positive correlation between (A) individual attitude and (C) institutional stance, with a Pearson correlation of 0.295. It should be noted that the correlation between age and family diversity is low and negative, with a Pearson index of -0.203. No significant relationships were found between the age factor and the other items.

Table 5. Spearman's Rho Correlation between Attitudes towards Sexual Diversity

items		Age
(A) Family diversity	Pearson correlation	-0,203
	Significance (two-tailed)	0,000
(B) Individual attitude towards sexual diversity	Pearson correlation	-0,047
	Significance (two-tailed)	0,285
(C) Institutional stance on addressing sexual diversity	Pearson correlation	0,047
	Significance (two-tailed)	0,274
(k) Religious conviction	Correlación de Pearson	-0,024
	Significance (two-tailed)	0,578

Among other findings, the data collected suggests that as age increases, religious conviction decreases in the study participants.

Discussion

In light of the results, the authors of this work agree with Tubay (2020) that more radical efforts are needed from a gender perspective to achieve significant changes in the social order and to introduce the principle of social justice.

After finding significant differences between various educational training programs, it is agreed with Sánchez (2021) that sexual and family diversity remains a taboo topic in teacher training. Moreover, the study noted that men have more negative attitudes towards sexual and family diversity compared to women. These findings align with the results obtained by Saraç (2015) in the context of Turkish students and by Toro-Alfonso (2012) in the Central American context. Regarding the influence of religious conviction on perceptions of sexual diversity, it was found that it does not influence the participants in the study, which is consistent with the finding of Guamán et al. (2019) in the university context of Ecuador. However, this result contradicts the findings of Saraç (2015) and Romero and Gallardo (2020), who found that religion opposes a favorable attitude towards sexual diversity. This suggests that religion may be a contextual factor rather than an objective influencer in itself.

In the context of Singapore, Lim and Bin (2021) found that 61% of participants had negative or neutral attitudes towards homosexuality, while the rest had positive attitudes. However, most accepted homosexual individuals. Additionally, it was observed that knowledge about homosexuality was limited, with an average score of 6.9 out of a maximum of 13. A strong correlation was found between the scales of attitudes towards

lesbians and gays (ATLG) and the acceptance of homosexuality, as well as moderate correlations between acceptance and knowledge, and between ATLG and knowledge.

Wuestenenk and colleagues (2022) highlight the importance of social context in research on homosexuality, especially in the educational field. There is potential for gender discrimination in schools, making it necessary to have educational institutions that promote discussion about it (Rodríguez and Moreno, 2017). Furthermore, conceptions about family diversity often emphasize the pathological, asocial, and psychological aspects, resulting in an epistemology and practice that do not contribute to the mental health of this collective (Angulo, 2017).

Regarding the attitudes of teacher trainees from a public university in Ecuador towards sexual diversity, significant correlations were found, although at a low to moderate level. This agrees with the finding of Romero and Gallardo (2020) that students in the Spanish university context have low prejudices against sexual diversity. Lo Roi and Mandemakers (2018) found similar results, highlighting the importance of cultural and individual factors in the acceptance of diversity.

The figure of the educator is closely related not only to the student but also to the family and the people who accompany the child. Therefore, it is common for them to be asked for advice on situations related to the interaction of various members living in each family. It will be the educator's task to recognize that we live in a society undergoing continuous transformation, reflected in new family models. There is no ideal model for the proper development of children, and it does not seem appropriate to attribute pathology to the existence of a different family model. The child needs a clear family structure and an adult who is available and empathetic, capable of meeting emotional, psychological, and physical needs, as well as having time available to fulfill these functions. It is essential that parents can provide security and continuity in care and differentiate their own needs from those of their children, which can be achieved within multiple family contexts (Coronel et al., 2022).

This study has some limitations that should be considered. As it is an open questionnaire, not all participants answered all the questions of the instruments. Additionally, since it is an exploratory study, future studies are recommended to delve deeper into variables such as ideological and political stance (Romero and Gallardo, 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the conducted study provides a deeper understanding of attitudes towards sexual and family diversity. The authors state that they have fulfilled the proposed objective for this research based on the review of the available literature and the results obtained in the empirical part. In response to the hypothesis concerning the differences in attitudes towards addressing sexual and family diversity based on certain variables, it is concluded that age correlates negatively with attitude, that males tend to hold more negative attitudes, that there are differences in attitudes among various study programs, and that religious affiliation does not influence attitudes towards sexual and family diversity.

These results underscore the importance of considering the social context in which attitudes towards sexual and family diversity develop. Additionally, it is necessary for educational institutions to work on preventing school discrimination based on gender and to promote educator training on diversity issues.

Regarding the significant correlations between the attitudes of teacher trainees towards sexual and family diversity and age, the results showed differences and low to moderate significant correlations between the age factor and the participants' study program. Furthermore, a positive correlation was established between age and sexual discrimination. These variables are important because they influence the attitudes and beliefs of teacher trainees regarding sexual diversity. It is crucial to understand educators' pedagogical and didactic stance towards cases of children who openly express their sexual diversity. It is also necessary to investigate their stance on bullying in such cases and their considerations regarding sexual education.

Looking ahead, although the majority of participants accepted sexual and family diversity, a significant proportion still maintains negative attitudes. The limitation of this study may be related to the size of the sample, which consisted of participants from a single university. Therefore, the scientific community is invited to conduct future studies including a larger number of institutions and addressing training in inclusive classroom processes for children with sexual diversity.

The presented results highlight the need to strengthen the professional profile of future teachers as a strategy that can contribute to building more inclusive, peaceful, and progressive societies. In this sense, it is important to emphasize the necessity of addressing sexual diversity in education and fostering debate on the topic, both in the classroom and in society at large. It should be noted that more research is required in this field to better understand the attitudes and beliefs of educators regarding sexual diversity and how they relate to their teaching and educational practice. This will help create a more inclusive and just society.

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