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TITLE:

Gender Inequality in Education in the discourse of the Sustainable Development Goals: The case of the city of Portoviejo, in Ecuador.

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality allows providing women and men with the same opportunities, conditions, forms of treatment, and actions, without leaving aside the particularities that each of them has as such, to guarantee access to the rights that individuals of a society have as citizens. The following study targeted a population of students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo. This document aims to provide an accurate understanding of gender inequality in education. As part of its development, theories that articulated gender equality in the study centers were applied. In addition, opinion surveys were conducted, targeting students, both male and female, and teachers and personal interviews with the school authorities. The results call for the attribution of the crucial importance of the implementation of gender equality, serving as a source for future strategies in educational environments since it was perceived that there is no total empowerment in terms of gender equality

Key words: Gender inequality; education; development; educational environment

RESUMEN

La equidad de género permite brindar a las mujeres y a los hombres las mismas oportunidades, condiciones, formas de tratos y acciones, sin dejar de lado las particularidades que tiene cada uno de ellos como tal, para así garantizar el acceso a los derechos que tienen como ciudadanos los individuos de una sociedad. El estudio realizado a continuación fue dirigido a una población a estudiantes del Colegio Olmedo en la ciudad de Portoviejo. Este documento tiene como objetivo proporcionar una comprensión precisa sobre el tema de la desigualdad de género en la educación. Como parte de su desarrollo, se aplicaron teorías que articularon la igualdad de género en los centros de estudio, y se realizaron encuestas de opinión a estudiantes, hombres y mujeres, docentes y entrevistas a las autoridades. Los resultados obtenidos permiten atribuir la debida importancia de la implementación de la equidad de género en la actualidad, sirviendo como fuente para futuras estrategias en entornos educativos, puesto que fue percibido que no existe un total empoderamiento en término de equidad de género.

Palabras claves: Inequidad de género; educación, desarrollo, entornos educativos

ABREVIATION INDEX

DECE –	Student Counseling Department
ECLAC –	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
INEC –	National Institute of Statistics and Census
MDG –	Millennium Development Goals
NDP –	National Development Plan
SDG –	Sustainable Development Goals
SENPLADES –	Secretaría Nacional de Planificación
UN –	United Nations
UNDP –	United Nations Development Programme

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Subject and Justification

Education, family, religion, and society are some of the factors that influence gender norms. From the gender perspective, education implies the creation of the individual's personality, based on equality, to enable access to the educational system without any discrimination. In the face of constant injustice and discrimination, feminism-focused social movements have urged governments and international entities to create and maintain equal social conditions among the genders, focusing on the principle of a dignified life embraced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

A further vital element for understanding gender disparities in education is the historical background of the dominant culture, bringing light into the cultural context, social conditioning, traditional roles, socio-cultural disadvantages, and a patriarchal system, which raise limitations for the development of the young female population.

Therefore, in this context, gender equality means that all men and women have equal opportunities to fully exercise their human rights regardless of their gender identity, whether they are female or male. Eliminating gender disparities is the responsibility of all. Society's development should not be defined or identified by sex or by traditionally imposed roles, and this would be detrimental to the development of any country, in this case, Ecuador. It is also necessary to consider that given the precariousness of the economy in Ecuador if discrimination and inequality are added, it is easy to foresee failure in the development of Ecuadorian society.

Highlighting the function of educational establishments as a "social environment and... a community of practice with rules, codes, values" (Rebollo et al., 2011 p.524). Scraton (1995, as cited in Rebollo, 2011) asserts that ideologies already exist within institutions, influencing people's beliefs and ways of thinking. Throughout institutions, such as schools, that ideology is accrued. As a dominant social environment capable of persuading young people's mindsets, schools should take a leading role in promoting egalitarian practices.

Starting from this premise, the description of the research topic to be carried out specifically in the educational unit "Olmedo" in the city of Portoviejo, province of Manabi, Republic of Ecuador, is proposed. The Olmedo High School is an emblem of

education in Portoviejo, whose origin dates back to 1852. Initially, it was an all-male institution until the graduation of the first female student in 1931. This milestone marked the door opening for women to study at the prestigious school. In such a manner, the Olmedo High School was primarily chosen as the object of study given its predominantly male-run history, which was considered relevant for the present study. Other factors include geographical proximity and access to the High School personnel.

With those mentioned above, this final degree paper will enunciate the inequalities that schooled-age females face in secondary education in Portoviejo, Manabí, in Ecuador, focusing on gender and socio-economic issues centered in this specific area. For this purpose, it is relevant to analyze the Ecuadorian population structure. In the last census in 2010, women in urban areas represented 51,03% of the population, whereas those in rural areas accounted for 49,95% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, 2018). The present investigation will be directed toward lower-income families in an urban area. Another component that will define the research is age, and the impact of the predominant culture, which, together with the elements mentioned above, causes conditioning limitations for girls in their high school education.

The motivation behind this paper is born out of a personal observation of the stereotypical gender perceptions ingrained in people's thinking and behavior. As a woman born and raised in Ecuador, I have constantly seen how women are treated differently in a society that undermines women's ability to make outstanding achievements. Indisputably, education is the basis for development, but beyond that, it is a human right of which millions of children are deprived. This discrimination is frequently grounded on social patterns that, according to the cultural context, involve gender norms and limitations. In some cultures, including Ecuadorians, young women are destined to carry out household chores.

Consequently, these women drop their studies in extreme situations to take care of their home, which later turns into non-remunerated work. This is not the case for men, who perform the role of providers, and whose development is prioritized. The reason for this choice of theme is to shed light on a social issue that is widely accepted in the global south, with the hope of raising awareness about the topic and inciting actions to confront it.

Discrimination against women is addressed in several conventions and treaties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981) and the four UN World Conferences on Women (Mexico City, 1975, Copenhagen, 1980, Kenya, 1985, and Beijing, 1995 which lead to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). (United Nations, n.d.). These milestones have marked an enormous difference in the fight against gender inequality. Countries all over the globe embrace the pillars of these agreements, and governments' agendas assert a zero-tolerance policy against discrimination and violence against women. Still, in practice and implementation, gender-equal policies are not fulfilling the desired standards expressed in the documents mentioned above.

Despite the remarkable achievements throughout the 20th century that have brought a broader sense of equality to women worldwide, the issue of gender inequality persists as one of the most critical social issues to be confronted in the search for a fair society.

1.2. Objectives

According to what has been previously stated, among the objectives of the research, one can find the following: the general one aimed to determine the incidence of gender equality in education, which allowed to expand and identify specific objectives:

Identify the perception of gender equality in the Educational Unit "Olmedo" student population, where it was possible to examine the causes and effects that hinder the empowerment of young women. A second objective is to propose educational tools to raise awareness and reduce social inequality in the Olmedo High School. Understanding gender-related policies in the High School will require examining the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals within the Ecuadorian Planning for well-being, setting a final objective of the research.

The results of this research will aim to improve the understanding of the perception of gender equality in the student population. In that line, this paper hopes to be helpful for those, directly and indirectly, involved or interested in this type of information.

1.2. Methodology

Aiming to provide a precise understanding of gender inequality in education, the development of the present research involved both qualitative, carrying out a study

focused on a single entity, in which the principal and the coordinator of the Student Counseling Department were interviewed; and quantitative methods. It included the implementation of measuring tools. A survey was directed to students and teachers to assess their scope of knowledge regarding gender inequality within the institution.

As mentioned earlier, the investigation intends to identify the patterns of gender inequality and trace the challenges that obstruct the search for an equal society, applying the theories that enunciate gender equality in educational centers, as established by Vélez et al. (2002). A sample was taken from 50 students, including males and females, enrolled in the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo. Twenty-five male and twenty-five female students took part in a survey of 10 closed questions; likewise, 25 teachers completed an opinion poll. They were asked to identify some of the perceived conduct among the student population.

Subsequently, the principal of the educational institution and the coordinator of the Student Counseling Department (DECE, for its Spanish acronym) were interviewed. The techniques and tools used for this case study consisted of an interview and surveys, which questions aimed to measure the level of understanding of gender inequality in the educational unit.

In addition to those previously mentioned, resources implemented while executing this research were of a secondary type. On the other hand, scientific articles whose information was extracted from digital journals were used, and the information was also gathered from official websites that served as support tools.

Moreover, intending to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the topic in question, the research was divided into several sections. The introductory part includes the objective of the research, its importance, justification, and the methodological tools used for its elaboration. Subsequently, the second part refers to the theoretical framework, which is structured in several subsections that serve as an indicative footprint for the reader. The third part corresponds to the content of the research. The methodological instruments, collection of results, tabulation and presentation of the results in tables, and interpretation of graphs are disclosed. Finally, in the concluding section, there is a brief discussion of the research findings and possible suggestions on the existing problems.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. History and Background of Inequality in Latin America

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, inequality is an ancient and structural characteristic of Latin American society that is ever-present, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2016). Nonetheless, a diminishment of the issue in question has been observed in recent years, as the concern for people's welfare and the planet has fraught the agendas of several governments, who have prioritized the development of the social and environmental components. Still, contemporary achievements are frequently outshined by the inexhaustible social and economic inequality cases, which obstruct sustainable progress and aggravate social exclusion. (ECLAC, 2016). In that context, the enforcement of the social and sustainable goals reflected in the 2030 Agenda is a fundamental blueprint to be assumed by Latin American governments to tackle inequality in the region.

Lopez and Perry (2008) point out that Latin America has always had high income and wealth inequalities compared to Europe and the U.S., which are industrial nations. The inception of inequality in Latin America is often attributed to the conquest by the Spanish and Portuguese. This occurred because institutions sought economic returns, which explains the disappointment in the region's growth performance until recent years (Williamson, 2015).

Scant historical evidence used to compare this effect with the rest of the world exists, where inequality, until 1492, was not exceed in numbers. Notwithstanding, it would eventually become a trend that would define the region in upcoming years, as seen earlier. However, after commodities during the '*belle époque*'¹ inequality in Latin America increased due to the absence of egalitarian matching in the 20th century that began in the larger economies after the First World War. Thus some authors argue that inequality in Latin America is rooted in its colonial past, where there is little

¹ Cultural development of European society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It began with the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 and ended with the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

evidence documenting inequality for Inca, Aztec, and other American tribal civilizations prior to the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors. (López, J. H., y G. Perry, 2008).

2.2. Gender inequality in Latin America: Present time

A lot has been mentioned in this paper about culture and its influence on gender inequality incidence. Culture, as Wallerstein (1990) notes, “[I]s probably the broadest concept of all those used in the historical social sciences. It embraces a vast range of connotations, and thereby it is the cause perhaps of the most difficulty.” (Wallerstein, 1990, p.31). In Latin America, the cultural factor is predominant. The colonization of the Americas can be placed as the historical root of the subjection of women in Latin America. As one of the primary unequal areas globally, Latin America is characterized by the power relations of rulers and subordinates and the elites against the poor. (Bose, 1990)

The structure of gender inequality in Latin America is a deep-rooted, intersectional matter. It is related to other dimensions such as class, race or ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation, in which public policies and data in the region have not been addressed (Bidgegain, 2016). It is then shown that development, employment, and social policies, do not have a systemic approach based on human rights, which tend to perpetuate and reproduce gender inequality instead of reversing it, according to Bidgegain.

The social phenomenon encompassing discrimination of people because of their gender, generally framed in the role of women, is established in several laws, regulations, and public policies. Still, the expected progress towards gender equity has not yet been achieved. Direct and concise transformations are required concerning the governance of the global economy and its forms of financing (Antonopoulos et al., 2012), where women are responsible for sustaining national economies through unpaid work and care for children and the elderly. For this reason, feminist movements seek to make inroads into the political space to advance toward equality, sustainability, and guarantee of women's rights in Latin America.

In the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), women hold an unfavorable position compared to men, as noted in a UN Women 2018 report. Sara Duarte alerts that when analyzing the progress of the SDGs, it was found that women

were "lagging behind men" in all of the pointers of the Agenda 2030.² The report, which was based on 89 countries, further points out that there are 4.4 million more women who are under extreme poverty compared to men, primarily due to the social injustice pointed towards women. (United Nations, 2018)

Inequality unfolds in the legal and economic spheres and health and education, and global data reveals that two-thirds are women out of the 759 million illiterate people. In the occupational sphere, women are also discriminated against: whereas male participation in the workforce accounts for nearly 78%, that of women corresponds only to 52.6% (UNESCO Global Gender and Education Digest, 2010, as cited in UN, 2021).

Correspondingly, women perform most unpaid care work, working three times more than men. It was also noted a clear contrast between low-income and higher-income groups, as women with precarious economic conditions will work 103 minutes more than those with a stable economy. (UN Women, 2019). Also, the wage gap harms women's livelihoods, as they earn less money than men for the same work. Ferreiro (2021) states that in Latin America, women earn 63% of what men earn. Thus, the 'feminization' of poverty is born since it predominantly affects women. Furthermore, it was established that daughters do not have the right to inheritance in 39 nations, primarily situated in the global south, while sons do. (UN, 2018).

2.3. World System Theory

The end of the 60s marked the detonation of a series of social unrest protests who sought to end military rule and bureaucratic elites. The following years noted the need for an advanced approach to the phenomenon. The concept of a *World System Theory* was born out of the analysis of such reality. However, its historical origin dates back to medieval times. In the sixteenth century, the modern world-system was characterized by what can be described as a European World Economic based on capitalism. (Wallerstein, 2011). The historical origins of the World System Theory will not be described in this paper, as the author himself notes, "Concepts can only be understood within the context of their times" (Wallerstein, 2005, p.1).

² The official Spanish account of UN News shared a video via Twitter featuring Sara Duarte Valero, who work in Statistics at UN Women. The tweet discusses how women stand behind men in all of the SDGs pointers.

A primary concept to develop is that of a world economy. Which Wallerstein explains as a "large geographic zone within which there is a division of labor... And a world economy contains many cultures and groups – practicing many religions, speaking many languages, differing in their everyday patterns". (Wallerstein, 2005. P.23).

Moreover, concepts of 'development' and 'dependency' should be highlighted. The former was created as theorists believed that *all* units within the world economy could fulfill their needs, giving pace to the idea that units growing at a smaller pace had to be guided by the model of those with better economic and political performance. The concept of dependency in the World System Theory can be traced back to the era between the 40s and 70s. The ECLA created the concept of 'core-periphery,' which can be popularly understood as developed-developing nations, or global north and global south. (Wallerstein, 2005)

The basis of the core-periphery notion was that exchanges and flow of goods in the world system were unequal. Economic activity in the international arena was guided by the countries with economic power, namely the core states. This idea further generated the concept of dependency. One of the theory's main, although one-dimensional points, were the appraisal of the Western economic system, which kept benefiting core countries who created the terms that periphery countries had to follow.

As such, Wallerstein, as one of the main precursors of the theory, defines the World System analysis as follows: "[A] spatial/temporal zone which cuts across many political and cultural units, one that represents an integrated zone of activity and institutions which obey certain systemic rules" (Wallerstein, 2005, p. 17). A notable issue is that said systemic rules were created and continue to be endorsed by core, or developed countries, notably the Western World.

The notion of developing nations being poor is an ambiguous and perhaps, even equivocal one. The richness of the 'third world' lies in its resources. Unfortunately, given the lack of capacity to exploit them, resources flow from the periphery to the core. Then, the dependency theory argues that this unequal economic activity advantages only the more affluent states, at the expense of the poor ones, who instead keep getting poorer. A sad truth can be outlined: periphery countries are deprived, trying to fit in a system that was not made for them.

Trimberger (1979) alludes to Amin's analysis of the World System Theory. Amin (as cited in Trimberger, 1979) notes that a country in the periphery can have to follow a capitalist model of production. However, they are used jointly with their "pre-capitalist relations of production" (p. 130). These will be based on the existing capitalist formations and depend on the way and time they took part in the world economy. He further suggests that the maintenance of the supplementary pre-capitalist production model serves as a promoter of the low-income rates that workers obtain in third-world nations. Once again, benefitting developed nations and debilitating progress efforts in periphery countries.

Development and underdevelopment constitute a significant part of the WST. Correspondingly, on a narrower level, the theory can be applied to power relations within the context of gender inequality. Tracing back the source of 'underdevelopment' of third world nations, in this case, Latin America to the Spanish and Portuguese rule could provide a more centered understanding of the historical portrayal of women as an agency inferior to men.

"Understanding the history of Third World societies requires the fundamental recognition of their incorporation and survival into a global capitalist system of material and social relations in which the subordination of women has always been ideologically conceived as an integral part of the natural order and perpetuated by cultural praxis, religion, education, and other social institutions."
(Acosta-Belen and Bose, 1990, p. 299)

Bose denotes the closeness of colonial times to today's world. In the 19th century, the colonizers set out a model for the colonies to follow, including political, social, economic, and religious clauses that functioned according to European societies. In contemporary times, the world economy is shaped according to Western societies, to which the periphery adapts. The same theory of dependency in the world economy can be applied at the micro-level. As Bose highlights, there is an established social position in which women are "appropriated, controlled, and placed in subordinate positions of dependency by those who own the means of production and dominate access to capital."

Etienne and Leacock (1980, as cited in Acosta-Belen and Bose, 1990) point out that the European model set for the colonies erased the analogical roles that pre-hispanic women had, dispossessed them from land, and removed their autonomy, creating their latter subordination.

Considering the inexorable link between gender inequality and an established western, capitalist, patriarchal system (that dates back to colonial times), analyzing why women are positioned in an adverse social position is fundamental. Since the 19th century, the relationship between colonizer States and former colonies has been one of dominance, from which the former can gain at the expense of the latter. At the macro level, the stagnation in development that countries in the global south have had in the wake of a Western model seen since colonial times is unsuited for the periphery nations. At the same time, a closer analysis following that guideline can be applied to the underlying position of women in society.

2.4. The United Nations and the Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, member states of the UN approved a series of objectives (17) in the attained fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda to achieve these goals within 15 years. (ECLAC, n.d)The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for the local action of the States to include policies, budgets, and frameworks that allow regulating destructive acts against the planet and humans. The Agenda 2030 promotes the inclusion of civil society and all stakeholders to participate in the embodiment of the SDGs. (UN, 2015)

Numerous leaders, and governmental and non-governmental organizations, demand the following years to be of great environmental activism to accelerate progress concerning the objectives of sustainable development. World leaders have been urged to intensify initiatives to reach the laggards and strengthen institutions, hoping that these actions will balance the relationship between people and nature and obtain more special financing for sustainable development.

Among the national, regional, and international agendas that Governments worldwide are bound to, it is worth emphasizing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in their role in attaining gender equality and empowerment of all women. They serve as the input for social movements to fight against social discrimination, inequality, and poverty. What is to note about the SDGs is that their formulation involved meetings, discussion

panels, debates, and the construction of coalitions and alliances, which accelerates the legitimate establishment of social movements, strengthening civil society. (Esquivel and Sweetman, 2016). According to the authors, the latter gave the SDG a more promising inflection than its predecessor: the Millennium Development Goals (2000).

Like the MDGs, the restructured agenda has a dimension solely focused on women and gender equality. Goal 5: Gender Equality targets the reduction of gender inequality while focusing on the social, economic, and political spheres.

The Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030) stipulates the necessity to act more quickly to address the increase in poverty and empower women and girls to face discrimination, exclusion, poverty, and climate emergencies. Inequality and climate change are threats that can reverse the progress made to date. Inclusive and sustainable investments allow better opportunities for prosperity in various solutions, which can be political, technological, and financial. Still, changes are needed to adapt the former to sustainable development objectives.

The nuances of the SDGs include a broader concept of development. Instead of being captured by economic advantage, one recognizes the social, political, and environmental aspects it entails. The 2030 Agenda also sets one of the most significant yet challenging points to address: the reduction of poverty “in all its forms and dimensions” (UN General Assembly, 2015, Preamble), embodied in Goal 1, which shifts the approach from an understanding of development based in the economic competition that is measured in GDPs. (Koehler, 2016)

The new discussion creates a path toward an intersectional approach, in which it becomes evident that social injustice of all kinds has a point in common. Thus, the addition of political and social factors and sustainability as components of poverty pinpoints how poverty, exclusion, and resource exploitation are related and urges the construction framework that combines these different implications is needed.

Women endure discrimination and exclusion throughout all stages of their life, affecting different realms, such as education, work, health, income, and participation. Although the practical dimension poses a severe challenge for women’s empowerment, the historical-rooted beliefs regarding women should not be obliterated but instead considered one of the causal factors for gender inequality. As such, Goal 5 declares to

eradicate discrimination against women, eliminate violence, and guarantee equal opportunities and participation in civil society.

2.5. Gender Inequality in Ecuador

In all corners of the world, discrimination and exclusion of women are prevalent. Ecuador is not the exception, as Ecuadorian women have been historically oppressed and excluded from participation in civil society, including all prevailing areas of human life: education, work, and social groups.

Ecuador is characterized by its pluricultural quality, where different indigenous, afro-descent, and *montubios and mestizos*³ groups co-exist in a nation filled with diversity. Similar to its neighboring countries, Ecuadorian society is marked, in the words of Herdoíza (2015), by "...a painful process of Spanish colonization, with the consequent miscegenation and forced displacement in the slavery of populations of African origin, and the birth of a republic with a Eurocentric, patriarchal and discriminatory imprint." (p. 21). According to the author, the basis of inequality is built from this process.

Although the situation of women has improved on account of gender-focused programs and the development of national plans based on parity and integration, the data has not resulted favorably in the efforts of the Ecuadorian Government. (Cordova, 2011)

The elimination of gender discrimination is a crucial element in the further fulfillment of the indicators of the SDGs, such as Goal 1, the eradication of poverty.

2.5.1 General Data:

The Republic of Ecuador achieved a score of 0.73 on the Global Gender Gap Index (2021). The country ranks 42nd out of the 156 countries that took part in the study. According to the Index, the differences between men and women remain, especially in political empowerment, where women do not assume leadership roles and economic participation and opportunities, as gender gaps and income inequality are highlighted.

According to data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (INEC, 2018) the global employment rate for women is 94.1%, and for men, 96.5%, showing a slight

³ Mestizo is the predominant ethnicity in Ecuador. It could be referred to as 'mixed'. They are the mixed inheritance of the settlers and the indigenous. The Montubios are a mestizo people of peasant origin who live in rural areas of the coastal provinces of the country.

disparity. In addition, it was noted that 52% of women believe that men have better access to better jobs, while it should be highlighted that only 37.2% of women have managerial positions in the country.

Although women's labor participation has increased in recent years, according to the INEC (2018), this has not equaled the participation of men, where at the national level, 38.90% have a suitable job. Of this value, 44.90% corresponds to men and 30.70% to women with suitable jobs.

For its part, the National Development Plan proposed to reduce the inequality gap from 33.8% to 28.80% by 2021. While in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, an objective was incorporated to achieve full and productive employment to ensure decent work for women and men. This principle assumes that an inequality gap of 18.30% is reached in the country, although the purpose is to eliminate this gap to avoid gender conflicts. What policies are implemented

Regarding Ecuador's performance in complying with Goal 5 of the SDGs, the numbers are not uplifting. In 2017, the average Ecuadorian woman had a monthly income of USD 277.1, compared to USD 354.7 for male revenue. (INEC, 2017) Similarly, the social role of women is deemed affected, as less than 30% of Ecuadorian women are the heads of the household, compared to nearly 73% of men who hold that position. (Encuesta de Empleo, Desempleo y Subempleo, 2015)

2.5.2 National plan against gender inequality

The Ecuadorian Constitution, being the supreme legal framework of the country, entails particular regard for women's position in Ecuador. Throughout the text, gender equality is outlined as a fundamental pillar of Ecuadorian society, subsidizing a series of rights for the citizens and the duty of the State to achieve an equal society (Cordova, 2015).

In addition, the Ecuadorian Government applies planning tools that seek to eliminate the gap between men and women. As a UN member, Ecuador follows the global guideline of the 2030 Agenda. However, it also counts on national planning to diminish inequalities. Guided by the Constitution, the Ecuadorian Government establishes its

most relevant planning tool: The “*Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2017 – 2020 Toda una Vida*”, as an initiative of the Rafael Correa Administration (2007- 2017).

The National Development Plan (NDP) is designed and conducted based on the global commitments to sustainable development, namely the 2030 agenda and the SDGs. According to the National Secretariat of Planning and Development (SENPLADES, 2017, as cited in INEC, 2018), The first NDP (2007 – 2010) had as its primary objective the promotion of equality, cohesion, and social and territorial integration. It was based on a gender approach, focusing on sustainability and gender, generational, intercultural, and territorial equality. The latest version of the NDP (2017 – 2021) recognizes the persistency of the gender issue and sets a further agenda for the fulfillment of gender equality in all areas of social life. Its main objective is to “guarantee a life with dignity, equal opportunities for all people” (SENPLADES, as cited in INEC, 2018)

2.5.3 Legal Basis

Article 11.2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador outlines principles for the application of rights:

“All persons are equal and shall enjoy the same rights, duties, and opportunities. No one may be discriminated against for reasons of ethnicity, place of birth, age, sex, gender identity, cultural identity, marital status, language, religion, ideology, political affiliation, judicial background, socio-economic status, migratory status, sexual orientation, health status, HIV status, disability, physical difference; nor for any other distinction, personal or collective, temporary or permanent, which has the purpose or result of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of rights. The law shall punish all forms of discrimination.” (Constitución de la República del Ecuador, 2008, Art. 11)

In a like manner, the National plan for *Buen Vivir*, ‘Good Living’ in English, stipulates, in accordance to article 341 of the Constitution, the duties of the State in fulfilling inclusion and equity for all its citizens:

“The State will generate the conditions for the integral protection of its inhabitants throughout their lives, ensuring the rights and principles recognized

in the Constitution, particularly equality in diversity and non-discrimination, and will prioritize its action towards those groups that require special consideration due to the persistence of inequalities, exclusion, discrimination or violence, or by virtue of their age, health or disability. Comprehensive protection will operate through specialized systems, in accordance with the law. The specialized systems will be guided by their specific principles and those of the national system of social inclusion and equity.” (Constitución de la República del Ecuador, 2008, Art. 341)

In the educational sphere, the country is governed by the Organic Law Of Intercultural Education (2011), in which its second article outlines the scope, principles, and purposes of any education-related operation. The principles of Art. 2 are the following:

“Educational activity is developed in accordance with the following general principles, which are the philosophical, conceptual and constitutional foundations that support, define and govern decisions and activities in the educational sphere:

I. Gender equality. - Education must guarantee equality of conditions, opportunities, and treatment between men and women. Affirmative action measures are guaranteed to make effective the exercise of the right to education without discrimination of any kind.” (Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural, 2011, Art. 2)

Despite the progress made in recent years with the implementation of national plans and the follow-up of international instruments, eliminating all types of discrimination against women is well underway. Current initiatives and proposals must continue to be strengthened and reformed. Therefore, compliance with the laws and plans mentioned above that support gender equity and protect the vulnerable group, in this case, women, is emphasized. Enforcement of these policies should also be ensured through monitoring and follow-up.

2.6 Development in Ecuador: The 2030 Agenda

Following constitutional principles and guided by the SDGs, the NDP was created as the tool to which public policies and programs are bounded. This section will discuss development in Ecuador concerning Goals 1 and 4 of the SDGs.

The first pillar of the NDP seeks to achieve “a dignified life with equal opportunities for all.” This first goal falls on the State of the duty, as seen in the section above. To this end, the Ecuadorian Constitution conceives the notion of a State that guarantees the optimum welfare of its citizens, improving the quality of education, healthcare, food supply, access to clean water, and social security. (Proaño et al. 2020)

Among the achieved progress, the improvement in maternal mortality, pregnancy, and breastfeeding could be highlighted, complying with their right to sexual and reproductive health. Nonetheless, according to Proaño et al., from the Parliamentary Group for the Eradication of Poverty and Fulfillment of the SDGs, a 42% setback has reflected the estimated targets. The affected spheres include child labor, extreme poverty levels, multidimensional poverty, child mortality, malnutrition, and overweight and obesity in children. This evidences that the State has not been able to maintain a stable condition in protecting the wellbeing of the people.

Moreover, the first objective of the NDP can be directly related to Goal 1 of the SDGs, as it concentrates on the elimination of extreme poverty by income. The goal was to reduce poverty by 5.2% by 2021; however, no progress was made. Instead, poverty levels have increased. As noted by Proaño, almost 100,000 Ecuadorians were affected by extreme poverty levels in three years (2016 to 2019). In Ecuador, nearly 5 million people are under a condition of extreme poverty, surviving with less than 3 USD. The recession in reducing poverty in Ecuador signifies a worrying drawback in the achievement of development, failing to comply with the first indicator of the 2030 Agenda.

A further dimension of the first NDP objective concerns education. The first goal assesses enrollment and completion of High School. The former presents a stagnated advancement. Starting from a baseline of 72.25% of young people who attended High School, results in 2019, three years later, show slight improvement, accounting for 72.40%. On the other hand, the latter has had positive progress, as it managed to

augment from 63% to 67.80% the percentage of students aged 18 – 29 who finished High School. (Multi-Year Follow-up of the National Development Plan, 2019, as cited in Proaño et al., 2020)

Concerning Goal 4 of the SDGs, the first objective of the NDP does not meet the standards of the fourth indicator: Quality Education. The scope of the Development Plan is not developed around the quality of education but instead focused on educational coverage. Although advances in this field have been made, the first goal can not be directly related to Goal 4.

The predominant issues that the Ecuadorian Government pledges to confront are the lack of access to food, clean water, and essential services, disparities between males and females in all areas of social life, employment scarcement, poor economic growth, and poverty. The inclusion of the 2030 Agenda in the planning for development in Ecuador requires a reformation of the development models, notably influenced by the economic, social, and environmental policies. Likewise, The fulfillment of indicators established in the 2030 Agenda calls for significant cooperation among national and local governments in the economic, social, and environmental spheres. The Ecuadorian State faces challenges, especially in planning, financing, and coordination among different institutions in their respective areas.

3. INVESTIGATION

3.1. Type of Investigation

The investigation was developed in Portoviejo, in the province of Manabí, Ecuador, in the Olmedo High School. The study was focused on an educational center, resorting to measuring tools, namely surveys, which counted on the participation of both students and teachers, and an interview for the principal and the director of the Student Counseling Department (DECE by its Spanish acronym). This required selecting a series of items to constitute a valid, reliable, and precise criterion to measure social phenomena, as Ocaña (2007) points out.

Likewise, the study included reviews of updated bibliography through data available on the Web and in the archives of this institution. The sample was chosen in an aleatory manner, that is, a convenience sampling, which consisted of selecting the population

sample so that it would be accessible to the researcher. The duration of this field practice was four weeks. The study's objective was to analyze and determine the incidence of gender equality in education and the limits and challenges that hinder women's empowerment.

The investigation was also considered descriptive, as the research aimed to understand and describe the specific attitudes presently, as those involved apply in the context of this research. (Aguilera, 2013)

3.2. Techniques and Tools

The techniques employed for the elaboration of the present research paper were surveys and an interview. For the collection of quantitative information, a questionnaire was applied with questions typified in a questionnaire related to the objectives established for this purpose.

In such reason, for the quantitative research, questions aimed at disclosing the teacher's point of view of the student's demeanor, thus endeavoring an approximation of teacher's attitudes regarding gender inequality.

In this case, the analyzed phenomenon was translated as an attitude that the paper aims to measure, and was therefore adapted to the context to avoid confusion or impediment at the time of being answered by students and teachers. The questions can be found in the Annex II section of the paper.

The different dimensions sought to know if there are differentiated approaches to gender inequality among students and teachers, and to identify the existing concepts of gender roles within the educational entity, which also refers to the reactions and behaviors in gender issues, not only within the classroom, but in the broader context of the educational establishment.

3.3. Data collection and tabulation

The first method employed for data collection was the student surveys. The interviewees replied with close-ended questions to an inquiry consisting of ten items. In the second place, the opinion poll for the teachers was completed. A series of seven plausible events were outlined for the teachers to identify which have occurred within

the institution. Lastly, the principal and the coordinator of the DECE engaged in a personal interview consisting of 10 questions.

Once the information was gathered, the tabulation of each of the questions with their respective alternatives was carried out using Microsoft Excel, which handles basic statistics that allowed the results of the surveys to be obtained. The latter were quantified and reported in percentages, which determined the attitude both the students and teachers maintain concerning gender inequality and the challenges to women's empowerment.

Moreover, a different tool was applied, consisting of the interviews directed at the High School authorities, aiming to assess the attitude toward gender equality in the Olmedo High School of Portoviejo and examine the causes and effects that hinder the empowerment of school-age women.

3.4. Field Observation

A field diary was used to record everything observed about the alternatives established in the survey questions, which technique recorded the application of 7 days in this institution inside and outside the classroom.

Likewise, this information was handled strictly for this research to identify the inequalities faced by school-age women in primary and secondary education in Portoviejo, Manabí. Similarly, the study focused on gender and socioeconomic issues centered in this specific area, and at the time of socializing the information, the participants of this research were kept anonymous.

3.5. Surveys directed to students at the Olmedo High School

This section will exhibit the results of the surveys in which the High School students participated. The tables and figures were implemented to condense the participant's responses in the most comprehensible way. Below the figures, a discussion highlighting the main findings takes place.

Table 2. What is your understanding about gender equality?	Male and Female Students	Students			% M response	% F response
		M	F	%		

It is the equal treatment of men and women regardless of gender, race or social status.	17	7	10	34%	14%	20%
It is the ability to be fair considering the individual needs of each citizen.	24	11	13	48%	22%	26%
Nothing	9	7	2	18%	14%	4%
Total	50		100%		50%	50%

Source: Surveys directed to students at the Olmedo High School

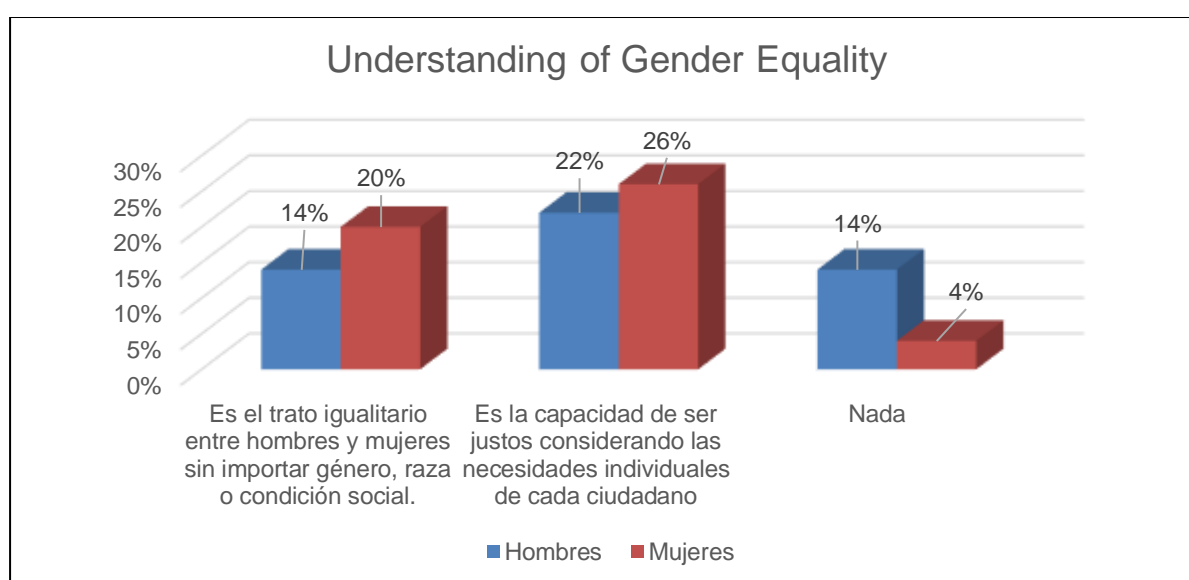


Figure 2. Understanding on Gender Equality

Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

The first table represents a synopsis of what the students who participated in the research understand about gender equality. From the data obtained, both women and men, with a percentage equivalent to 26% and 22%, can be fair, considering the individual needs of each citizen, which represented a total of 48%. Meanwhile, a similar behavior was maintained in the dimension of equal treatment between men and women regardless of gender, race, or social condition. Female students with 20% reported a higher value than men, which was 14%, for 34%. This result was noted, although there is a more significant presence of male students in this educational entity than female students.

Table 3. Have you ever felt discriminated based on your gender?	Male and Female Students			% M	% F	% M Response	% F Response
	Students	M	F				
YES	29	12	17	58%	24%	34%	
NO	11	9	3	22%	18%	6%	
SOMETIMES	10	4	5	20%	8%	10%	
TOTAL	50	25	25	100%	50%	50%	

Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

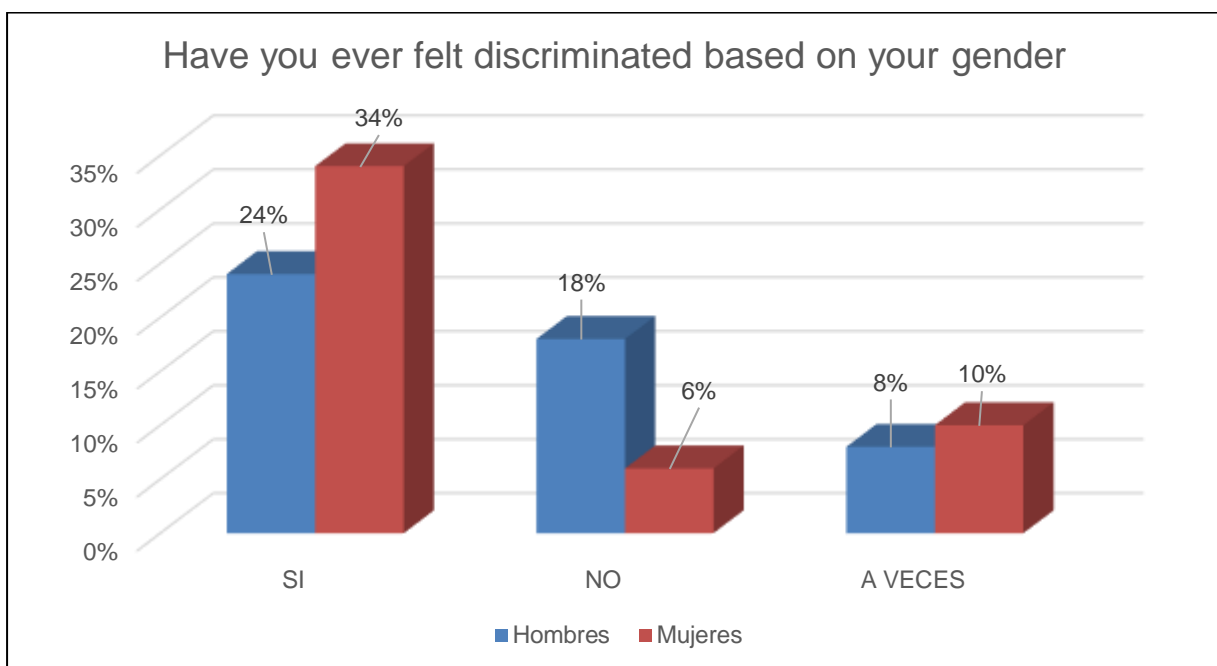


Figure 3. Feeling discriminated against because of being male/female
Source: Surveys of students at Olmedo School in Portoviejo.

Table 3, concerning whether students of both genders have felt discriminated against, shows that discrimination has occurred in both cases. However, the majority is attributed to women, with 34% of cases in contrast to men, whose responses accounted for 24%, overall reporting 58% of events. Meanwhile, 18% of men and 6% of women stated that no discrimination had occurred. However, 10% and 8% in the dimension indicated that they happen sometimes. The latter implies that they happen in moments of expectations of games, groups, and activities among students where this type of discrimination has occurred.

Table 4. Do you consider that men and women have the same opportunities?	Male and Female Students				% Response	% M Response	% F Response
	Students	M	F	%			
YES	15	6	9	30%	12%	18%	
NO	28	16	12	56%	32%	24%	
SOMETIMES	7	3	4	14%	6%	8%	
TOTAL	50	25	25	100%	50%	50%	

Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

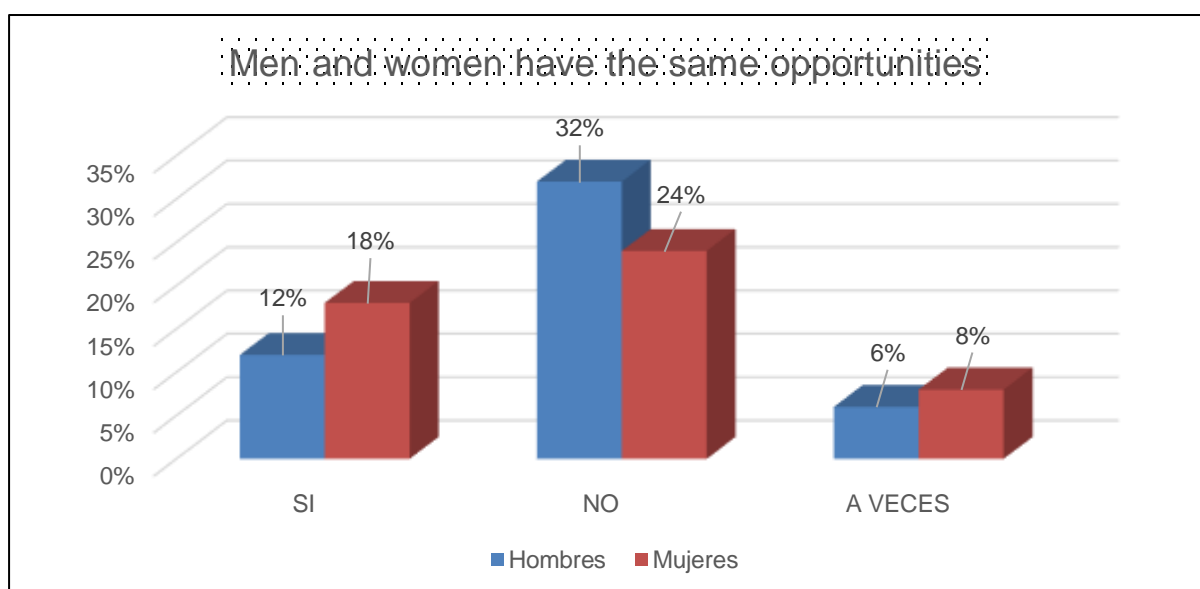


Figure 4. Women and men have the same opportunities

Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

Regarding the fourth question, the results showed that 24% of women and 32% of both genders disagreed with this dimension. However, 18% and 12% indicated that they have the same gender equity that allows them to perform egalitarian actions. The range of 8% to 6% corresponds to the students who believed that only in specific circumstances do men and women enjoy the same opportunities. The latter statement implies that education, family, religion, and society influence gender norms by participating in a social circle usually led by men. Nonetheless, this has decreased as women now take part in areas that men used to do.

Table 5. Are women in your family given the same	Male and Female Students				% Response	% M Response	% F Response
	Students	M	F	%			

treatment as men in terms of equality?

YES	28	16	12	56%	32%	24%
NO	17	9	8	34%	18%	16%
SOMETIMES	5	0	5	10%	0%	10%
TOTAL	50	25	100%	50%	50%	

Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

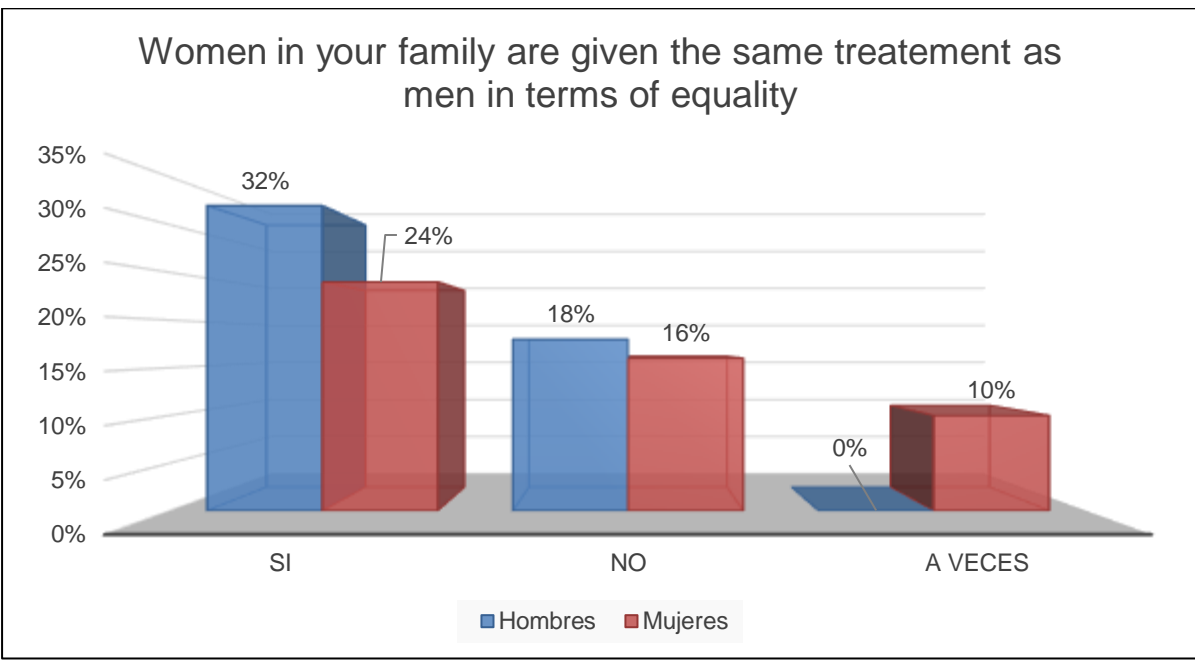


Figure 5. Women in your family are given the same treatment as men in terms of equality
Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

The fifth table determines that 32% and 24% of male and female students believe that the women in their families are treated equally and respected the same as their male counterparts. Nonetheless, 18% and 16% of male and female students, overall 34%, stated the opposite. There are contradictory opinions among the results, but it can be noted that discrimination is based on social patterns of Ecuadorian culture since it is questioned that women are destined to perform household chores. This situation has now changed with the existence of gender equity.

Table 6. Do you consider that men and women receive different treatment?	Male and Female Students			Students			
	Male Students	Female Students	Students	M	F	%	% M Response
YES	25	11	14	50%	22%	28%	
NO	15	8	7	30%	16%	14%	
SOMETIMES	10	7	3	20%	14%	6%	

TOTAL **50** **26** **24** **100%** **50%** **50%**

Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

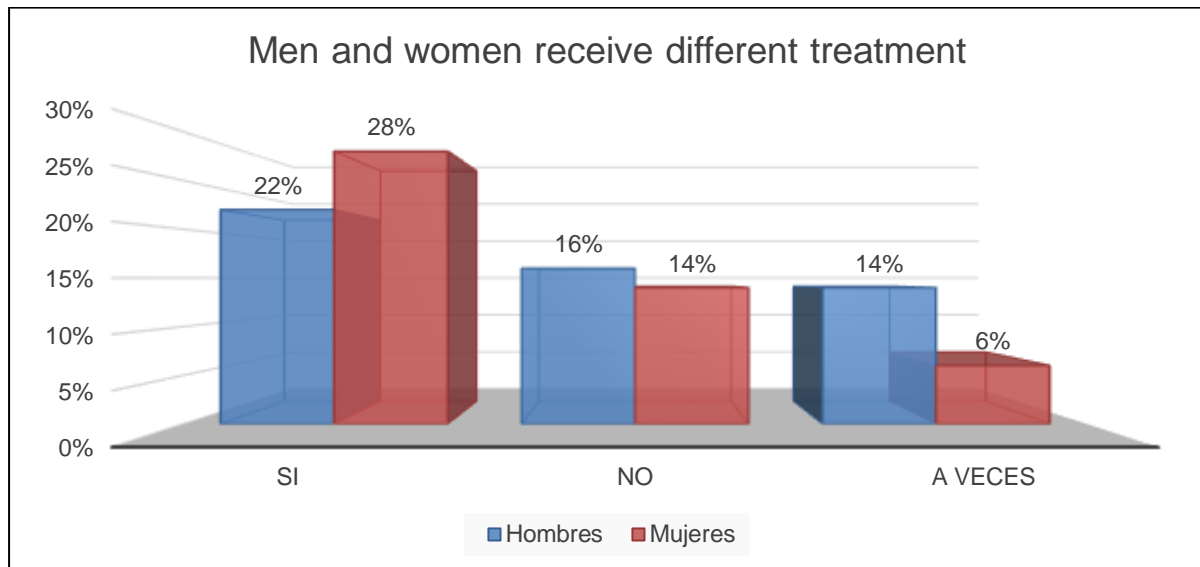


Figure 6. Men and women receive different treatment

Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

Table 6 indicates whether women and men are treated differently. Correspondingly, responses were affirmative for both genders, accounting for 22% males and 28% females, equaling 50%. While 16% and 14% of male and female students disagreed, registering 30% of the total. Lastly, the third dimension, corresponding to 'sometimes,' reported 14% for men and 6% for female students, with 20% of the total. It is evident that the phenomenon of inequality and exclusion, which has always been a source of controversy in human society, is present in the opinions of the students of the school.

Table 7. Why is it usually said that men have more rights in comparison to women?	Male and Female Students			% Responses	% M Responses	% F Responses
	M	F	%			
Male gender is predominant in society	9	6	3	18%	12%	6%
Men are economic providers	15	8	7	30%	16%	14%
Old beliefs, patterns and tradition	22	9	13	44%	16%	26%
Other	4	2	2	6%	6%	4%
TOTAL	50	25	25	100%	50%	50%

Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

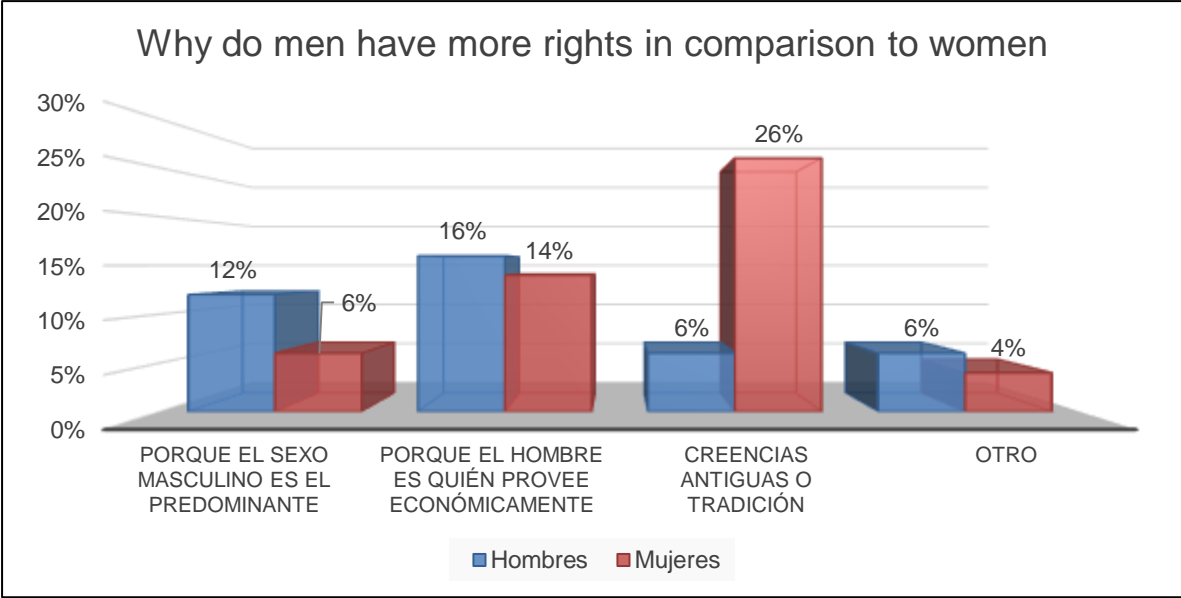


Figure 7. Why do men have more rights in comparison to women
 Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

In Table 7, whether men have more rights than women was determined to be due to old and traditional beliefs, as expressed by 26% and 16% of female and male students, accounting for 44% of the sample. Meanwhile, 14%, segmented into 30% and 16% of men and women, attributed their opinions to the basis that men are the leading financial providers. On the other hand, 6% of the students (12% and 6%) stated that the male sex is predominant. Still, it can be established that women have greater participation and represent managerial and executive positions.

What rights do you believe should be the same for both genders?	Male and Female Students	Students			% M Response	% F Response
		M	F	%		
Employment and education	21	12	9	42%	24%	16%
Public participation in society	7	2	5	14%	14%	10%
Health and well-being	20	10	10	40%	20%	20%
Other	2	1	1	4%	2%	2%

Total	50	25	25	100%	50%	50%
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Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

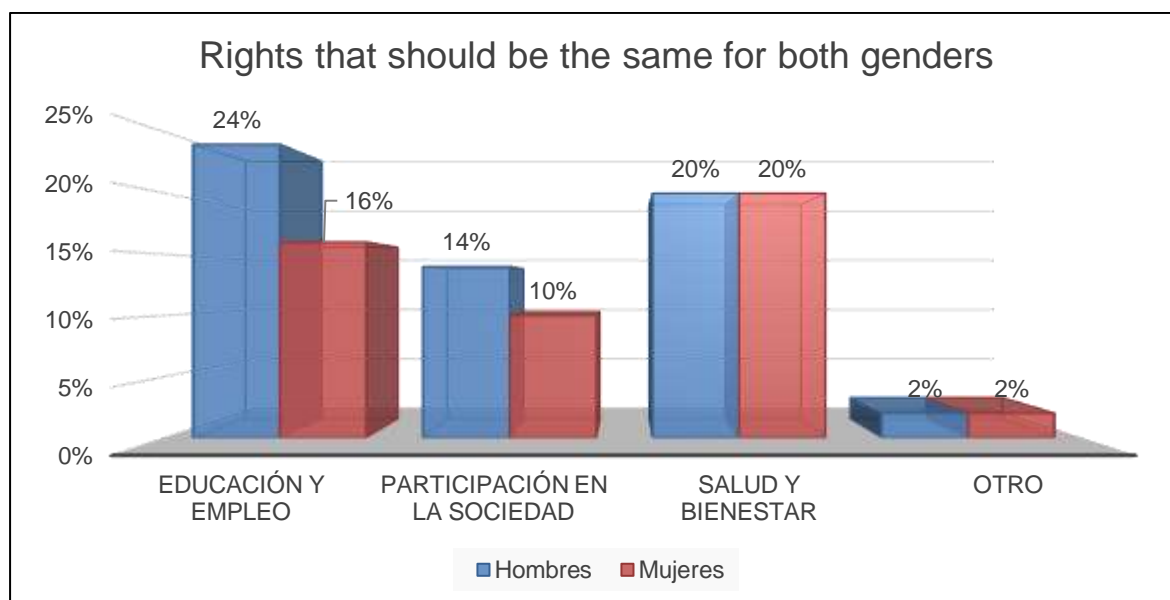


Figure 8. Rights that should be equal for both sexes

Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

In this eighth dimension, where participants were asked if rights should be equal for both sexes, 24% of men and 16% of women indicated that education and employment should grant equal opportunities, achieving 42% overall. On the other hand, 40% of males and females stated that equal rights were more important in health and well-being. Meanwhile, 14% of males and 10% of females considered the rights should be included as part of participation in society. In Ecuador, the distortion for opportunities in education and the work field, health, and civil society involvement is still palpable, especially in the labor sector, where informal jobs, gender pay gap, and unemployment have turned into conventional struggles in women's life. The existing breach between men and women in access to schooling and healthcare, as well as the gender pay gap, limit women and their development

Table 9. Do you consider that you have the same right to social participation as your male/female counterpart?	Male and Female students	Students			% M Response	% F Response
		M	F	%		
YES	28	12	16	56%	24%	32%
NO	12	9	3	24%	6%	6%
MAYBE	10	4	6	20%	8%	12%
TOTAL	50	25	25	100%	50%	50%

Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

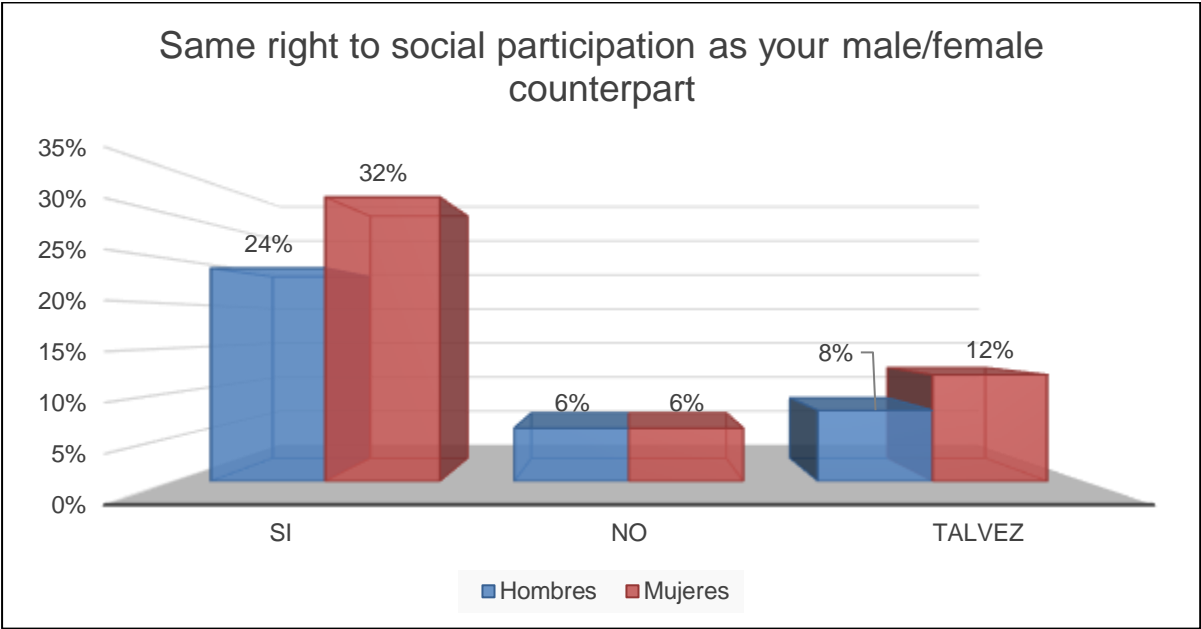


Figure 9. Same right to social participation as your male/female counterpart
 Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

The ninth variable showed whether women should be considered to have the same right to social participation as men. The results indicated that 32% of women and 24% of men, equivalent to 56%, agreed with the premise above. In contrast, 12% of women and 8% of men, equal to 20%, were unsure of their answer and opted for "maybe." Finally, a unified result for both sexes (6% for men and women) considered that they do not have the same rights to public participation. This diagnosis shows that although certain women feel supported, a small percentage still think they do not have the same level of participation as men, thus exalting the discrimination in Citizen Participation. These responses allow us to look at their capacity to make changes and to be able to make decisions freely. Within the school, these cases should be considered. A follow-up should be provided, where the causal factors of this type of situation and discrimination of all kinds can be identified.

Table 10. Do you think the way you were raised has affected your view of gender equality?	Male and Female Students		Students			% M Responses	% F Responses
	M	F	M	F	%		
YES	33	15	18	66%	30%	36%	
NO	15	8	7	30%	16%	14%	

MAYBE	2	1	1	4%	2%	2%
TOTAL	50	24	26	100%		

Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

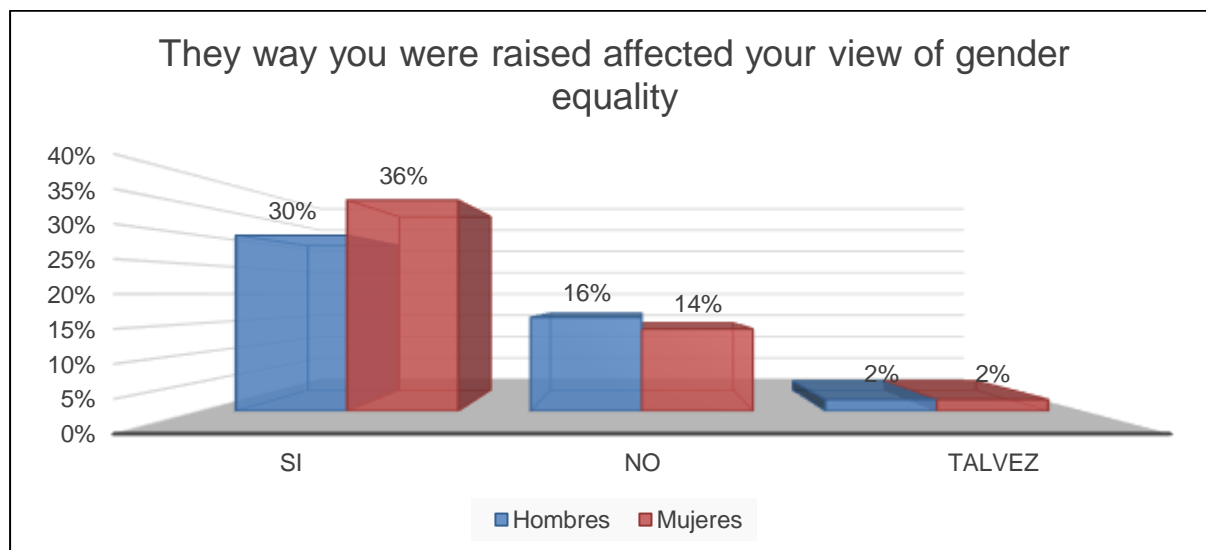


Figure 10. The way you were raised has affected your view of gender equality
Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

The objective of this question is to see the students' perspective on their education, looking for the incidence of gender inequity from the most important factor for young people: their household. The results determined that 36% of female students and 30% of male students believe that their education at home has affected their vision of equity. This alternative made up 66% of the total. On the other hand, 16% and 14% of the male and female students, equivalent to 30% of the total, thought the opposite. In addition, 4% of the surveys attributed the alternative "maybe" itemized into equal parts of 2% for both genders. Education in the family and the educational entity is fundamental for school-age youth. A gender-based education from home will allow women to empower themselves in social, political, and productive jobs and actions, thus achieving a significant incursion in the country's labor market.

Table 11. Do you consider that your education [at home] was based on gender equality?	Male and Female Students			% Response	% M Response	% F Response
	Students	M	F			
Yes, my parents taught me that we all share equal rights and equal status.	16	9	7	32%	18%	14%

Yes, although in my family traditional customs are still preserved.	25	10	15	50%	20%	30%
No, women are more fragile, they do not have the same conditions and therefore do not enjoy the same rights.	9	6	3	18%	12%	6%
TOTAL	50	25	25	100%	50%	50%

Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

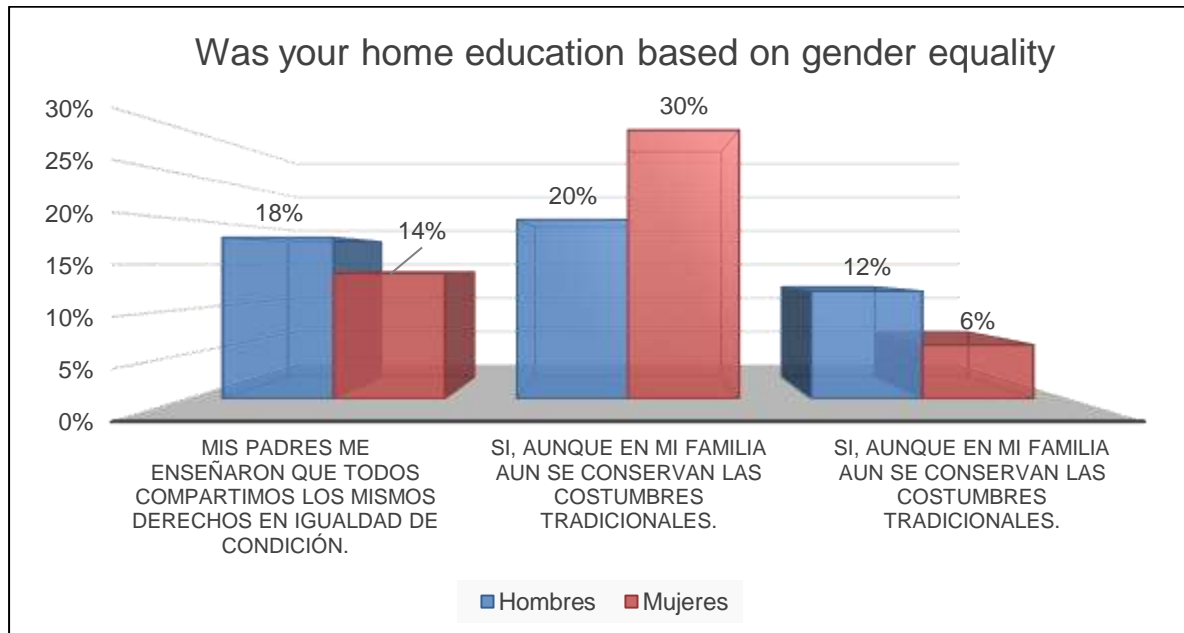


Figure 11. Was your home education based on gender equality
Source: Surveys directed to students of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

This last variable is related to the previous one; both focus on the issue from inception: non-scholar education acquired in the student's households. Children assimilate the teachings from an early age; these could be direct and intentional or indirect (as behavior or expressed thoughts) used by their parents. (Wingrave, 2016). The responses reveal that 30% of female students and 20% of male students indicated that although their education is based on gender equity, their families still conserve their traditional customs, leading the survey with 50%. On the other hand, 18% of men and 14% of women stated that their parents taught them equal rights and equal status, equivalent to 32% of the total. On the contrary, 12% of men and 6% of women believe that women do not have the same conditions and do not enjoy the same rights. Finally, this dimension obtained minor support, with 18% of the total.

It would then be possible to consider gender inequality in the school as a social problem that frequently develops at home. Although the genesis of the individual attribution of gender is produced since birth, it is reinforced as years pass. (Collins, 2000, as cited in Wingrave, 2006). In many cases, gender roles are passed on from older generations. Still, the influence of the educational environment is of crucial importance for the life of any individual, as schools and high schools serve as primary mediums where socialization takes place. As such, it is not only relevant to note how children and adolescents are ‘gendered’ from home but to observe those incidences and attempt to dismantle them. Maintaining gender-discriminatory thinking hinders the path toward a fair society guided by the principles of Human Rights and the SDGs.

3.6. Surveys directed to the educators at the Olmedo High School in the city of Portoviejo

The further development of the investigation included an aleatory selection of female and male teachers to whom an opinion poll was applied. Eight alternatives with closed answers were detailed for the execution of this research. Twenty-five teachers took part in the survey. The participation of the teachers was an essential element of the study, as they are the middle ground between the students and the authorities. They have access to a closer grasp of the occurrences in the classroom and identify sooner the students' behaviors. They would act as observers and middlemen and report incidences to the School authorities.

Dimensions the survey directed to teachers of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

		YES	NO	%	% YES	% NO
12. There are different study modalities for men and women.	M	9	7	48%	36%	28%
	F	3	6	52%	12%	24%
	TOTAL	25		100%	48%	52%

		YES	NO	%	% YES	% NO
13. Female students are more committed to their studies than their male peers	M	8	8	56%	32%	32%
	F	6	3	44%	24%	12%
	TOTAL	25		100%	56%	44%

		YES	NO	%	% YES	% NO
14. Leadership roles are usually taken in charge by male students	M	6	10	32%	24%	8%

	F	2	7	68%	4%	64%
	TOTAL	25		100%	32%	68%

		YES	NO	%	% YES	% NO
15. Female students perform better as learning group secretaries than their male peers	M	5	11	64%	20%	44%
	F	3	6	36%	12%	24%
	TOTAL	25		100%	32%	68%

		YES	NO	%	% YES	% NO
16. Authorities have differentiated treatment with male and female students	M	8	7	60%	32%	28%
	F	7	3	40%	28%	12%
	TOTAL	25		100%	60%	40%

		YES	NO	%	% YES	%NO
17. Do you consider that in some areas (e.g., physical education) the activities should be different	M	6	10	36%	24%	40%
	F	3	6	64%	12%	24%
	TOTAL	25		100%	36%	64%

		YES	NO	%	%YES	%NO
18. Do you consider male students to be more perseverant in their studies than their female peers?	M	5	11	36%	20%	44%
	F	4	5	64%	16%	20%
	TOTAL	25		100%	36%	64%

		YES	NO	%	%YES	%NO
19. Other manifestations	M	3	13	20%	12%	52%
	F	2	7	80%	8%	28%
	TOTAL	25		100%	20%	80%

Source: Opinion poll directed to teachers of the Olmedo High School in Portoviejo

The first point of discussion proposed to the teachers (n° 12) aimed first, to detect if the school counts with gender-neutral modalities that were to benefit all students in equal manners. The results demonstrate that 36% of male respondents agreed with the premise shown in the table above, whereas a lower percentage of 12% was registered on the women's side. Correspondingly, the percentage of the teachers who do not believe that there different modalities for the students based on their gender was quite close: 28% of male teachers and 24% of females. The first dimension evinced a slight positive approach regarding the school study program, as teachers the majority of teachers (52%) manifested that the study modalities are the same irrespective of gender.

However, important attention must be directed towards the remaining 48% who think that study modalities are differentiated. Sensible and conscious teaching practices must be applied at all times, following the respective care and commitment in the selection and implementation of the study methods recommended by the 2030 Agenda and international programmes such as the UNDP, which stressed the predominance of gender inequality as a challenge to development which is majoritaruly faced by women and young girls who continue to be discriminated against not only in the field of education, but in the health sector, labor market and in politics. (UNDP, 2013)

The following question (Nº 13) is explicitly grounded in the theoretical behavior of female students. Teachers were asked to consider if young women in the school are more devoted to their studies than the male students. These question refers to female students being more dedicated to their scholarly duties, such as handling the homework in time and handing their notebooks and school material in order and well-presented. The results demonstrated that six out of the nine female participants (24%) think that young girls are more dedicated at school than their male counterparts. However, 12% of the responses on their part stated the contrary. In addition, the male teachers' responses were equal, accounting for 32% for both 'yes' and 'no' answers.

The diagnosis about gender culture in education proposed by Rebollo, García, Piedra and Vega (2011), pinpoints the teachers' attitude towards equality in education. They highlight the difficulties of applying equality into the educational sphere, attributing it to the lack of training for the teachers, which extends into a deficient application of gender-equal policies. Low participation towards equity on the part of the teachers were observed, which denoted passivity and lack of commitment. [While explaining the opinion polls to the teachers, once the inquiry sheets were handed, a male teacher read out loud question Nº13, expressing, also in an audible manner, his disagreement with the premise, stating that female students were 'lazier']. Rebollo et al. identify three types of teaching profiles: blocking, adaptative, and co-education. Schoolers who teach from a blocker perspective refuse to cooperate and could even publicly reject initiatives destined to promote a gender-equal framework. Adaptive teachers are socially-guided, following a politically correct protocol. Lastly, the co-education approach allows teachers to fully recognize the ongoing inequalities within the school and are cooperative with gender-equal initiatives and policies. (Rebollo et al., 2011)

Regarding the assessment undertaken at the Olmedo High School, it could be possible to classify teachers under the adaptive profile. Although it was perceived as a light disinterest and lack of comprehension of the issue's dimension, teachers did not wholly disagree that there is an existing problem within the school concerning discrimination against the female population.

Regarding dimension 14, on whether male students usually performed leadership roles, it was revealed that most female teachers disagree with the premise, as respondents in this category account for 64%. Likewise, the minority of male teachers disagreed with the statement above (8%). On the other hand, 24% of the male surveyees assert that male students are frequently in charge of essential roles in the school. An even lower percentage is attributed to the positive response of female teachers, where only 4% of the reactions accounted for 'yes.' Briñón (2007) mentions the importance of analyzing the basis of the gender perspective, starting from the teachers. Identifying the starting position between men and women in this type of situation from a quantitative point of view is a fundamental tool for measuring the incidence of gender inequity in the school.

Moving forward, question N° 15 deals with female behavior, aiming to discover the existence of stereotypical gender patterns such as men taking leadership positions. At the same time, women work below, rather than next to them, within the school. For this dimension, the participants were asked if female students perform better as secretaries than their male peers. The findings exhibit that from 17 male participants, a majority of 44% replied 'no' to the premise above. On the contrary, 20% of the responses were affirmative. The female side of the replies showed that 24% of the female respondents disagreed with the premise, while a minor percentage of 12% agreed. The general results lean towards the negative side, where 68% of the participants do not believe that female students develop better in functions as secretaries.

The negative results from the latter and present dimensions (N° 14 and N°15) suggest that gender roles are not flagrantly established within the institution. According to the teachers, both men and women get involved in leading and auxiliary activities, irrespective of gender. When dealing with gender roles, it could be helpful to highlight Moncayo et al. (2012), They indicate that education serves as an element of transformation and change, as long as it promotes education with gender equity, where

both male and female students are considered without becoming elements of discrimination. It is then aimed to implement initiatives that seek to influence the capabilities independently of their sex, achieving their integral development.

For question N^o16, teachers were asked to consider whether there is a difference in how authorities treat students based on their gender. This question was included in the survey as an attempt to locate incidences of discrimination from the institution's heads, seen from the teachers' perspective, who, as mentioned above, stand between a student and an authority figure such as the principal. The results were deemed successful for said purpose, exposing that 60% of the respondents agree with the initial statement. The male participants led the positive answers, accounting for 32% compared to 28% of female respondents. Likewise, among the teachers who disagreed with the premise, the majority were men, accounting for 28% of the responses, contrasted by a significant difference in the responses from women, 12%. The importance of school personnel as a transforming element and as a basis for social roles and values in each society, ethnicity, and culture (Rebollo, et al., (2011) is once again highlighted in this dimension.

Moreover, question N^o17 takes as a benchmark the opinion of the teacher in regards to the activities boys and girls could or should carry out. This dimension takes the subject back to gender roles, an essential concept of this study. The participants were asked to consider if recreational activities should be guided according to the student's gender. An example would be recognizing some sports, such as soccer or boxing, as predominant male sports. In schools in Portoviejo, students are separated in physical education, assigning female students different activities than those designed for men. This reinforces the typecasting of women as "the weak gender," incapable of taking part in what has been historically considered "men's activities." The social perception of items, actions, and behaviors could also be highlighted. The development of recreational activities bears a clear distinction of what is considered gender appropriate, based on societal definitions. For instance, boxing and soccer are considered manly sports, emphasizing robust, challenging, or fast characteristics. On the other hand, ballet has a more "feminine" connotation, accentuating the features like delicate and smoothness. Thus, to promote gender equality, the school needs to recognize that such stereotypes exist in order to reject and tackle them.

Finally, the last question asked teachers to compare who they believe to be more perseverant in their studies. The latter means to analyze which is more prone to take their studies seriously, to invest more in their assigned work, and concerning the future, both genders manifest the desire to keep studying in the future. The results show that most male respondents (44%) do not deem men to be more perseverant in their studies than their female peers. On their part, female teachers raised similar percentages for both negative and positive answers: 16% believe that male students are more assertive in their studies, whereas 20% disagreed. In general, 64% of the participants do not deem men to be more perseverant than women regarding their educational ambition.

3.7. Interviews with the High School authorities

As previously mentioned, the implementation of qualitative tools involved the design of an interview comprised of 10 questions⁴. The questionnaire was directed at Margarita Moreira, the principal of the Olmedo High School, and Marco Irazábal, who leads the Student Counseling Department.

Following Colás and Jiménez's (2006) analysis of gender consciousness, it is worth emphasizing that the competence to acknowledge the discrimination incidence is influenced by the level of consciousness that the educational personnel has regarding gender. As described by the authors, the levels of consciousness are, in a like manner, dependent on how the educators have internalized the gender culture. In the Ecuadorian case, the latter is guided by a historical chauvinistic ideology in which women are placed below men.

Moreover, Colás and Jimenez describe a specific type of consciousness: one that assumes an even justifies established social norms. In the education sphere, this type of consciousness represents a setback in the path toward gender-equal policies in education. It imperils the ability of educators to recognize discriminating gender roles as a problem.

As discussed earlier in the paper, the chosen establishment is one of the most emblematic schools in Portoviejo. It should be estimable that holding a chief position

⁴ The template in its original language can be found in the Annex section of this paper.

in the school may have affected the interview responses. The authorities could have sustained a politically-correct approach considering the institution's prestige.

The first interviewee was Mrs. Moreira, who has carried out her directorate role for four years. She is confident that respect is the central pillar of the Olmedo High School, where every measure and policy implemented is based on this core value. She states that gender equality is a fundamental factor within the institution, enunciating the importance of generating an accompaniment process for the students to feel listened to and encouraged.

Concerning the institutional policies that the school implements to tackle gender inequality, Mrs. Moreira wasn't precise in her answers. She said the school applies "the same tools that the Ministry of Education promotes." When asked to dig deeper into said policies, Moreira highlighted the work done through the Student Counseling Department (which will be explained in more detail when analyzing the following interview) and the reliance on the teachers. She is very aware that to deal with the issue from the student's perspective, it is necessary to work with the teachers, who receive constant formation through training seminars.

Furthermore, the principal mentions as a possible constrain of gender equality the way of thinking – not only that of the students, but their parent's too. For that matter, the school provides seminars specifically designed for the parents. However, an element that she highlights that can be improved is the ambiguity of the policies, which are frequently prepared in a general manner, without considering age, for instance. She states that depending on the age of the students, specific topics should be prioritized.

Mrs. Moreira asserts that students act with respect and tolerance, and she doesn't recall seeing a specific case of gender discrimination. Instead, she maintains that inclusivity is abundant at the Olmedo High School, where students integrate and carry out activities together regardless of their gender.

The second and final interview aimed to analyze the commonness of gender inequality in the institution from the perspective of the coordinator of the Student Counseling Department. The DECE is a fundamental entity of any educational center that must be present in all establishments with more than 450 students enrolled as ruled by

Ecuadorian law. Per Ministry of Education Regulation 00046-A, the main objective of the DECE is to:

“[S]upport and accompany educational activity by promoting life skills and the prevention of social problems, encourages harmonious coexistence among the actors of the educational community, and defends the integral human development of students under the principles of the Organic Law of Intercultural Education.” (Normativa de los DECE, 2016)

For the DECE to fulfill its goal, cooperative work from all educational community members is needed. The former includes parents, legal representatives, authorities, teaching, support, and administrative personnel. Due to the many factors and actors that affect the development of a fair and equal educational environment, the DECE considers the influence that the actors exert in a situation where discrimination could occur. Thus its line of action includes prevention, detection of the issue, intervention to solve the problem, and follow-up.

Given the importance of the Student Counseling Department in education in Ecuador, the interview with Marco Irazábal intended to provide an expert’s point of view on the issue. Mr. Irazábal recognizes cases of gender inequality within the institution as a prevailing situation that occurs predominantly in the youth. He mentions a “game of power” in which males and students with slighter favorable economic conditions are dominant. In public education, the economic factor can also be reflected. On some occasions, the parents’ social situation poses limitations at home that influence discrimination in the school.

Irazábal notes that one of the most evident discriminating behaviors is social exclusion: “this is not your business, this is for men.” As he has heard some male students express. He recognizes that there is not a complete understanding of equality when participating in activities of preference. Nonetheless, as director of the DECE, Mr. Irazábal believes that the policies implemented by the department have been helpful. It was managed to involve parents in the gender conversation, as workshops and seminars designed to integrate parents were deemed successful. In the interviewee’s words, “The DECE’s job is to ensure that there is equality and respect, a feeling of understanding between young men and young women.”

Moreover, he considers that both male and female students understand that they have rights thanks to the workshops. He further notices that There is equality in the conversation and the topics to be discussed. However, he is aware that reinforcing such gained awareness is needed, especially after the virtuality due to the pandemic, which caused a decrease in such achievement.

Irazábal suggests resolving the psychosocial issue affecting young students' behavior through institutional programs, such as the so-called protocol routes. The Ministry of Education provides the departments with action routes when facing events of violence, discrimination, illicit substance use, and teenage pregnancy. The awareness programs are preventive, in which students will learn about their rights. They understand that the environment on the educational and social side is inclusive, and both males and females are encouraged to participate.

Among the changes he has perceived in the school is the evolution in the student's behavior. He observes there is more participation and a tolerant understanding. Also, he emphasizes the work of the DECE through the seminars and workshops, which include follow-up and guidance. Likewise, he highlights the substantial role that parents play in this process. Regarding the parent's non-intentional damaging behaviors, he estimates that overprotective parents could tell their daughters "not to be around boys" to safeguard the young women's safety. Thus, the work designed for parents must be functional and specific.

Finally, when asked about the Government's current performance in education policies, Irazábal suggests that the programs should be drafted according to achievable objectives and include follow-up to measure the incidence and possible recurrence of the issue. Also, agreeing with the principal, he mentions that the social environment, social relations, and unstable economic situation must be contemplated.

3.8. Results from the quantitative tools

Regarding the result of the first question, it is observed that a particular part of the students is not very clear about the concept of gender equity; instead, they confuse it with the concept of gender equality. Regardless of their gender, it is essential to mark

criteria concerning what the word represents in terms of equity. The differences and opportunities girls face begin at birth and tend to be pursued throughout their lives. By educating from an early age, significant changes to promote a society with healthier habits, where women acknowledge and exercise their rights, can be achieved.

Regarding the third question, "if at any time students of both sexes have felt discriminated against," the student's opinion shows that they have felt segregated from certain activities that a specific gender has historically performed. The influence of socialization at school affects the youth, as they grow up with this thought further developed in their adult lives.

The results obtained from this variant show that half of the female students do not consider to have the same opportunities as males, who have a more favorable condition in society — considering that the educational sphere reproduces cultural stereotypes, the latter can transform these paradigms and encourage a more favorable environment for both genders.

The fifth question examines the family environment in which respondents have grown: "Are the women in your family treated and respected in the same way as the men?" This type of socio-cultural construction is combined with the incidence of the male-female relationship in which there is a practice of religion, values, and cultural norms.

This question looked for the determinant factor behind the premise that "men have more rights than women" within the alternatives, 'traditional beliefs' were the most valued by the students regardless of their gender. A smaller percentage believed that men being the primary economic providers is the reason behind the predominance of males. It can be noted that the responses are born from the socio-cultural perspective. This type of behavior comes from their family upbringing, religion, and society, which allows them to participate in a social circle that men frequently rule. This behavior has diminished as women now incursion into said social circles. By seeking to improve these stereotypes concerning attitudes and cultural perceptions, a balance in sustainable development can be achieved.

The eighth dimension considered "the rights that should be equal for men and women," in which the impact of the participants was measured, reiterating "education and employment" as one of the most chosen alternatives, followed by "health and well-

being." One of the least considered alternatives was "participation in society." Considering these responses, it is clear that the participants perceive that equality in their education and employment rights should be improved for both men and women, without looking at any gender distinction or cultural practices to maintain a status in society. Nowadays, women in Latin American societies lead relevant positions at the administrative and political levels; nonetheless, a minuscule part of the population enjoys this benefit.

After the analysis of the tenth question, which talks about the right to social participation, it was shown that half of the surveyed population considers that both men and women participate similarly. However, a group considers that their opinion has no relevance, which points out that a satisfactory degree of public participation is not yet achieved.

Gender inequality is a problem that afflicts Latin American countries; undoubtedly, significant progress has been made in specific sectors. Notwithstanding, the eradication of disparities has not been achieved in certain areas where economic growth and social and human development are obstructed.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained from this research demonstrate the following conclusions:

One of the incidences by which it has been possible to determine gender inequality within the given context is the lack of knowledge of the criterion of what the word "equality" means, as it was observed that a part of the results show that students do not know or do not have a clear concept. The difficulties regarding the concept point out that the educational practices are not adopted in a pedagogical way that helps to promote an integral education for all, on the one hand, leaving aside traditional stereotypes and, on the other, forming empowered students and women who are not restrained in a cultural context that oppresses them.

It was possible to recognize that the students' impressions regarding the recognition of gender equality show a positive attitude and an open mentality where the participants themselves recognize that gender equality is not exercised in its intended

manner, as within their family and student environment, they continue to perceive traditional and discriminatory behaviors of gender roles.

Educational policies are a guaranteed condition to expand inclusion. However, a correct formulation of policies needs the implementation of a fair educational model inspired by the global efforts for development. The educational model found in Ecuador is traditional, which maintains and reinforces gender patterns, encouraging attitudes of passivity, dependence, obedience, and feeling of inferiority, particularly affecting the female population. These are the same patterns that the students perceive at home, as they have affirmed and recognized the traditions that they have inherited from their families.

It was noted that the Ecuadorian Government follows the guidelines provided by the 2030 Agenda, as its most recent National Plans for Development are designed based on the pillars embraced in the SDGs indicators. For the most part, this implementation in the Ecuadorian context has positively impacted the lives of Ecuadorians. Nonetheless, the problem arises when these programs present a shortage in implementation. The design of policies and programs needs the most precise application within its demographic context.

There is a historical and cultural disparity between men and women linked to the deprivation of control in the social model that describes the roles of these individuals in society. This aspect has managed to transcend the social, cultural, economic, and political rights, exhibiting conditions and restrictions on women's freedom. The human development and experience of participants in the social and labor system will not be possible without the fair integration of women. Governments must undertake political commitment and strategies, and it is also necessary to establish alliances between industrialized countries and those in the development process.

Improving student methodologies through didactic processes that facilitate understanding oriented to gender equity will help shift gender perspective thoughts towards an approach based on equality and enhance the opportunities for transformation. It is equally essential for educators and school authorities to leave behind the cultural patterns that establish gender roles grounded on discrimination.

Coeducation, a study method based on the equality principle, suggests a model where boys and girls can grow in an environment with the same opportunities without getting caught up in societal gender norms. However, the development of the research appreciated the lack of interest on the part of the institution's authorities, where perhaps they do not count on efficient didactic models and tools to reach the students and assist them in understanding the process of development. This evidences that policies proposed by the Government are frequently not designed according to specific cases or efficient implementation is absent. Also, the required follow-up by the entities in the educational systems that regulate the sufficient interest in the subject was not detected.

According to the conclusions, it is recommended:

Teachers and authorities of the academic unit should receive training to improve their perspective on gender norms, emphasizing a clear comprehension of gender equality and educating them about women's rights so that it can be transitioned to the practical sphere, namely, transmitting to their students forming an equitable society.

A didactic program could be based on conducting workshops with other educational institutions, where educators can achieve enrichment through shared knowledge. The teachers and directors of any educational entity should implement a clear and precise orientation through educational proposals that allow them to experience values and models directed towards gender equity.

As mentioned earlier, a significant role is also performed by the families; in such, progressive training for parents, together with the students, could enhance the reinforcement of the work done during classes. The joint efforts of both parents and children can create a proposal guided by coeducation, enabling them to experience values and models of gender equality. The family should be introduced since it is the fundamental axis for the development of the students. Therefore, it would be valuable to create a link between parent, institution, and student.

Lastly, continuous and specific training should be given to students regarding educational issues allowing them to experience conceptual and technical capabilities and facilitating a proper education regarding gender equality. It is likewise substantial

that other educational entities of Portoviejo carry out research on gender equality due to scarce investigation within this particular area.

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6. ANNEXES

6.1. ANNEX I

A. Interviews with the authorities of the Olmedo Educational Unit



Photo 1. Olmedo Educational Unit



Photo 2. Interview with Marco Irazábal, DECE Coordinator, Olmedo Educational Unit



Photo 3. Interview with Margarita Moreira, Rector of the Olmedo Educational Unit.

6.2. ANNEX II

B. Original format of the student's survey translated to English

What is your understanding of gender equality?

- A) It is the equal treatment between men and women regardless of gender, race or social condition.
- B) It is the ability to be fair considering the individual needs of each citizen.
- C) Nothing

Have you ever felt discriminated against because you are a man/woman?

Yes

No

Sometimes

Do you believe that women and men have the same opportunities?

A) Yes

B) No

C) Sometimes

Are women in your family treated and respected the same as men?

A) Yes

B) No

C) Sometimes

Do you consider that men and women are treated differently?

A) Yes

B) No

C) Sometimes

Why is it said that men have more rights compared to women?

A) Because the male sex is predominant.

B) Because men are the economic providers.

C) Ancient beliefs or tradition

D) Other

Specify: _____

What rights do you think should be equal for both sexes?

A) Education and employment

B) Participation in society

C) Health and welfare

D) Other

specify: _____

Do you consider that you have the same right to social participation as your opposite sex?

A) Yes

B) No

C) Maybe

Do you think the way you were brought up has affected your view of gender equality?

A) Yes

B) No

C) Maybe

Do you consider that your education was based on gender equality?

A) My parents taught me that we all share equal rights in equal status.

B) Yes, although in my family traditional customs are still preserved.

C) No, women are more fragile, they do not have the same conditions and therefore do not enjoy the same rights.

C. Original template of the teacher's opinion poll translated to English

Indicate all the situations that you have observed among the students of the Institution.

You may indicate as many as you consider appropriate

There are different modalities of study for men and women.

Female students are more dedicated to study.

The course presidents are mostly male.

Female students take notes better

Female students perform better as secretaries of learning groups than their male peers.

There is a difference in the treatment of boys and girls by the authorities.

Considers that in some areas (e.g., physical education) the activities to be carried out should be different.

Considers female students to be more persevering in their studies (compared to their male peers).

Consider female students more perseverant in their studies (compared to their male peers).

Detail other manifestations

D. Original questionnaire for the school authorities with its transcription translated to English

Interview with Marco Irazabal, DECE coordinator, Olmedo Educational Unit

1. From your experience, how do you perceive gender equity and inequality among students?

There is often a situation, especially among young people, that because they are male or because they have more money, one believes they are more dominant over the other. It is necessary to strengthen this situation because it intensifies gender inequity.

2. What kind of institutional policies does the Educational Unit have to banish gender inequality?

Student council: workshops for students and the help of parents, talks to parents to be able to start this conversation with young people. Involve parents in that conversation. DECE's job is to make sure that there is equity and respect, a sense of understanding between young men and young women, but above all, respect.

3. Do you consider that there have been achievements in the reduction of gender inequality among the students of the institution?

Yes, we have been able to understand with the workshops that both men and women have our rights. There is equality in the conversation and the topics to be discussed, however, it is necessary to continue reinforcing. After the virtuality due to the pandemic, the equality that had been gained has been lost.

4. Can you describe some of these policies

Routes of protocol. The psychosocial problems that affect the behavior of young people are addressed through institutional programs. Programs for parents. topics such as equality are addressed to give an "injection" of respect, positivism. The DECE monitors that the psychoemotional aero can be well maintained in the educational environment.

5. What tangible results have you achieved

Young people understand their rights, and also their obligations.

Joint activities are possible. No more "this sport is not for you".

Gender equity generates inclusion: young men and women do the same activities.

With awareness programs, young people understand that what is within a society, an educational and social environment is for both genders. It is on a par.

6. Could you point out some of the most evident behaviors of Gender Inequity in students

Rejection: "this is not your business, this is for boys" there is still no understanding of the equity of being able to participate in what you want. Discrimination and exclusion.

7. What do you consider to be more predominant in the behavior of the students? discrimination or equity, integration?

Thanks to the workshops we have seen a positive result. there is more participation and understanding. Student participation programs help groups become more heterogeneous and groups become more integrated. There has been progress in reducing discrimination.

8. What significant achievements could you share with us about Gender Equity in the Institution.

Once again, thanks to the workshops we have achieved follow-up and monitoring, seeing the behavior of the students and how it evolves through the talks.

The support of parents is very important, it should be worked from home. Parents might say things like "don't hang out too much with boys (if you are a woman)".

Students become more participatory

9. Could you list some factors that limit gender equity practices among the student population.

In fiscal education you can see the economic factor, sometimes because of the social condition of the parents there are limitations at home that influence discrimination at school.

10. Do you consider that the current policies implemented by the government are sufficient to deal with gender inequality?

We hear about projects (from the government), that they will work on education, but the policies are not reflected. there are no programs that help or motivate young people (activities or materials). The ministry made programs - but in the end they could not be carried out. Programs should have specific objectives that can be met. Or they are carried out but the program culminates and there is no follow-up. Social environment, social relations, variable economic situation should be taken into account.

Interview with Margarita Moreira, Rector of the Olmedo Educational Unit

1. From your experience, how do you perceive the relations of gender equity and inequality among students?

Gender equity is a very important factor within the U.E. Olmedo. Generate accompaniment processes among students.

2. What kind of institutional policies does the Educational Unit have to banish gender inequity?

The institutional policies are the same that the Ministry of Education is promoting. Based on trust, respect and consideration for each of the members.

3. Do you consider that achievements have been made in the reduction of gender inequality among the students of the institution?

At the level of the institution, yes. There is a lot of respect and consideration

4. Can you describe some of these policies

Dialogue with students. Talks through the Student Counseling Department (DECE), through teachers. Constant encouragement is given to the children to instill respect and combat discrimination. In order to work with the children, you have to work with the teachers. Through the ministry, we give training talks to teachers.

5. What significant achievements could you share with us about Gender Equity in the Institution?

Students share time together, they complete activities in a joint manner.

6. Could you list some factors that limit gender equity practices among the student population?

The way of thinking - parents may disagree, that's why we work with them through the talks.

7. Do you consider that the current policies implemented by the Government are sufficient to deal with gender inequity?

The policies are made in a general way, perhaps not taking into account certain factors such as age.

E. Approval for interviews.

