

Latin American Perspectives on Civic and Citizenship Education

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Introduction

The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) focused on the ways in which young people are prepared to undertake their roles as citizens. Preparing students for citizenship involves developing relevant knowledge and understanding as well as encouraging the formation of positive attitudes toward being a citizen. The conceptual background for, and the design of ICCS were described in the assessment framework (Schulz, Fraillon, Ainley, Losito, & Kerr, 2008) and the international results were reported in its international reports (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito, 2010a & 2010b).

This paper gives an overview of the results from the regional assessment of civic and citizenship education in the Latin American region based on data from Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico and Paraguay. The regional study results for these countries are described in greater detail in the Latin American report on ICCS (Schulz, Ainley, Friedman & Lietz, forthcoming).

Background of the ICCS Survey in Latin America

Regional contexts are important for civic and citizenship education because they shape how people undertake their roles as citizens. ICCS included regional modules in Europe, Latin America and Asia as well as the core international survey. This paper focuses on the six countries that participated in the study's Latin American regional module. It is based on a regional student survey and an assessment of regionally specific knowledge as well as on data from the international student and school instruments.

The results reported in this paper are based on data gathered from random samples of just fewer than 30,000 students in their eighth year of schooling in more than 1000 schools from the six ICCS Latin American countries. The regional module for Latin America was connected to a broader initiative (known as the Regional System for the Development and Evaluation of Citizenship Competencies (SREDECC)). The aim of SREDECC was to establish a common regional framework for citizenship competencies, an evaluation system, and basic criteria for effective citizenship education.

The Latin American module of ICCS investigated variations in civic knowledge across the ICCS Latin American countries as well as region-specific aspects of civic knowledge. It generated information about perceptions of public institutions, forms of government, corrupt practices as well as obedience to the law. It formed the basis for reporting on dispositions of student towards peaceful coexistence including attitudes toward their country and the Latin American region, sense of empathy, tolerance toward minorities as well as attitudes toward use of violence and contexts for learning about citizenship including home, school and community. In addition the paper provides a profile of the contexts for civic and citizenship education in each of the six countries.

Contexts for civic and citizenship education

Common themes across all six ICCS Latin American countries, in the curricular agenda for citizenship, include violent conflict, democracy general interest in sustainable development and environment, issues related to globalization, tolerance and plurality as well as the social and political inclusion of large formerly excluded segments of the society. Civic and

citizenship education is viewed as important in a number of countries and has been the focus of public debate in three of the six countries. In many countries there has been a broadening of civic and citizenship education toward the inclusion of democratic values and participatory skills. However, the data also show that evaluation and assessment are not common practice.

Civic knowledge

The results from ICCS suggest that civic knowledge in the ICCS Latin American countries tends to be relatively low. Table 1 sets out student achievement on the international civic knowledge test for all Latin American countries participating in ICCS. The distribution of student scores for each country is represented graphically by the length of the bars. The table details the average age of the participating students and presents Human Development Index (HDI)¹ data for each of the countries. Average performance on the civic knowledge test across the countries in the Latin American region ranged from 380 to 483; the average for the six countries was 439. Three countries (Chile, Colombia, and Mexico) had average civic knowledge scores significantly higher than the Latin American ICCS average; Paraguay and the Dominican Republic scored significantly lower. The average civic knowledge score in the six Latin American countries was over half an international standard deviation lower than the average from all participating countries.

Table 1: Country averages for civic knowledge, average age, and Human Development Index, with percentile graph

In five out of the six countries more than half of the students had civic knowledge achievement scores at or below Proficiency Level 1. These findings indicate that majorities of students in these countries are not familiar with the concept of representative democracy as a political system and that they lack specific knowledge about institutions, systems, or concepts. The civic knowledge of many students in these countries does not extend beyond basic knowledge of fundamental principles or broad concepts.

The results for the regional civic knowledge items illustrate that consequences of dictatorships in Latin America and characteristics of authoritarian governments are largely unknown to students in this region. However, majorities of students were able to identify reasons for the inappropriateness of vigilante justice and bans on providing minors with alcohol and tobacco. Within the region, those countries with relatively higher scores on the Human Development Index were also those whose lower-secondary students had higher levels of civic knowledge.

Perceptions of public institutions and government

Students in the ICCS Latin American countries expressed relatively low levels of trust in political parties, courts of justice, and the police whereas larger majorities of students expressed trust in the armed forces, schools, and the media. However, there were also considerable differences in levels of trust across countries. In addition a considerably larger

¹ The HDI, provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is “a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development including a healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living” (UNDP, 2009). Values on the HDI lie between 0 and 1, with values above 0.9 indicating “very high development.”

percentage of students in Mexico and the Dominican Republic than in Chile, Colombia, and Paraguay reported a preference for one political party more than others.

In Table 2, students from all Latin American countries participating in ICCS expressed disagreement with authoritarian forms of government. Students in the Dominican Republic held the most positive attitudes on this scale (four points above the Latin American ICCS average) whereas the averages of students in Chile and Colombia were significantly lower than the regional ICCS average. In all countries, the male students' scale scores were significantly higher than those of the female students. On average, the gender difference was three scale points, which is about a third of a standard deviation. However, despite these results, more than half believed that dictatorships were justified when they bring order and safety or economic benefits. Male students tended to have more positive orientations toward authoritarian governments than females.

Table 2: National averages for students' attitudes toward authoritarian government overall and by gender

Generally, students did not accept corrupt practices in government. However, male students were more inclined to accede to corrupt practices in government than females. Male students were also more inclined than female students to accept disobedience to the law in some circumstances. Students' acceptance of disobeying laws depended on circumstances; acceptance was highest when it was considered to be the only way to help one's family.

Attitudes toward authoritarian government, corrupt practices in government, and acceptance of disobedience to the law were associated with civic knowledge. More knowledgeable students tended to be less accepting of authoritarian government, corruption in government, and justifications for disobeying the law. This pattern suggests that increasing levels of civic knowledge constitute an important element in the development of democratic societies.

Dispositions toward peaceful coexistence

Students in the ICCS Latin American countries generally expressed positive attitudes toward their country and had a relatively strong sense of Latin American identity. Students with more positive attitudes toward their country also reported a stronger sense of regional identity.

Majorities of ICCS students in Latin America expressed empathy for classmates experiencing adversity but female students were more compassionate than males. More than half of the students tended to accept minority groups as neighbors. However, acceptance was lowest for homosexuals or people with AIDS. Students with more positive attitudes toward neighborhood diversity were also those with higher levels of civic knowledge. Most students said they did not agree with the use of violence, but in all but one country more than half agreed that vigilante justice was justified when authorities failed to act.

Home, school, and community

As in most ICCS countries, civic knowledge in Latin America was strongly associated with family background. Students whose parents were employed in higher status occupations, and

those whose parents were more interested in political and social issues, had higher levels of civic knowledge. There were also large differences between students from private and government schools. In three of the six countries, these differences between types of school remained significant even after control for the socioeconomic status of students and the social context of schools.

Most students in the Latin American ICCS countries were being taught civic-related content by teachers of subjects related to human and social sciences. Generally, majorities of students in each country said they had discussed a wide range of issues at school, including citizens' rights and responsibilities, illegal drug use, AIDS, integration of minorities, and provision of facilities for people with disabilities.

As seen in Table 3, in all six countries there were differences in civic knowledge between students in urban communities and students in non-urban communities. However, these differences tended to disappear when allowance was made for the effects of socioeconomic background of students and the social context of schools.

Table 3: National percentages of students and averages of civic knowledge by school location and its association with civic knowledge

Conclusions

There were many common contextual factors for civic and citizenship education in the region. Curricular frameworks for civic and citizenship in all six countries were concerned with building and strengthening more inclusive, more peaceful, and more democratic societies. However, many students in the ICCS Latin American countries showed to have only limited civic knowledge. There was a general lack of knowledge about non-democratic forms of government and majorities of students believed that dictatorships could be justified under certain circumstances. The link between higher levels of civic knowledge and rejections of authoritarian government, corrupt practices, and excuses for breaking the law suggests that improving civic learning would be an important step in strengthening democracy and civil society in Latin America.

Socioeconomic factors appeared to influence students' civic knowledge in different ways. Students were influenced directly not only by their home background but also by school context factors interacting with other school and community factors. This pattern of influence can also be seen from a broader perspective because those countries with higher economic, social, and educational development also had students with higher levels of civic knowledge. The important point here is the apparent link between lack of civic knowledge and a general lack in equity both across and within the participating countries in the region.

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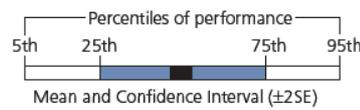
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Table 1: Country averages for civic knowledge, average age, and Human Development Index, with percentile graph

Country	Civic Knowledge								Average scale score	HDI
	Average age	200	300	400	500	600	700	800		
Chile	14.2								483 (3.5) ▲	0.88
Colombia	14.4								462 (2.9) ▲	0.81
Mexico	14.1								452 (2.8) ▲	0.85
Guatemala ¹	15.5								435 (3.8)	0.70
Paraguay ¹	14.9								424 (3.4) ▼	0.76
Dominican Republic	14.8								380 (2.4) ▼	0.78
Latin American ICCS average	14.7								439 (1.3)	
Overall ICCS average	14.4								500 (0.6)	



▲ Achievement significantly higher than Latin American ICCS average
▼ Achievement significantly lower than Latin American ICCS average

Notes:

() Standard errors appear in parentheses.

¹ Country surveyed the same cohort of students but at the beginning of the next school year.

Table 2: National averages for students' attitudes toward authoritarian government overall and by gender

Country	Gender Differences for Attitudes Toward Authoritarianism in Government				
	All students	Females	Males	Differences (males-females)*	
Chile	48 (0.3) ▼	47 (0.4)	49 (0.3)	2 (0.4)	
Colombia	48 (0.2) ▼	47 (0.2)	50 (0.3)	2 (0.3)	
Dominican Republic	54 (0.3) ▲	53 (0.3)	56 (0.4)	3 (0.4)	
Guatemala ¹	50 (0.3)	49 (0.4)	51 (0.3)	2 (0.4)	
Mexico	49 (0.3) ▼	47 (0.3)	51 (0.4)	4 (0.3)	
Paraguay ¹	50 (0.2)	49 (0.3)	52 (0.3)	3 (0.4)	
Latin American ICCS average	50 (0.1)	49 (0.1)	51 (0.1)	3 (0.1)	

National average

▲ More than 3 score points above Latin American ICCS average

△ Significantly above Latin American ICCS average

▼ More than 3 score points below Latin American ICCS average

▽ Significantly below Latin American ICCS average

■ Female average score +/- confidence interval

■ Male average score +/- confidence interval

On average, students with a score in the range indicated by this color have more than a 50% probability of responding to positive statements regarding authoritarian government with:

Disagreement
Agreement

Notes:

* Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) gender differences in bold.

() Standard errors appear in parentheses. Because results are rounded to the nearest whole number, some totals may appear inconsistent.

¹ Country surveyed the same cohort of students but at the beginning of the next school year.

Table 3: National percentages of students and averages of civic knowledge by school location and its association with civic knowledge

Country	Average Civic Knowledge Scores in ...					
	Non-urban communities (< 100,000 inhabitants)	Urban communities (> 100,000 inhabitants)	Non-urban communities (< 100,000 inhabitants)	Urban communities (> 100,000 inhabitants)	Difference (urban–non-urban)	Difference (urban–non-urban) after controlling for socioeconomic background*
Chile	49 (3.3)	51 (3.3)	465 (4.3)	500 (4.7)	-35 (6.2)	-8 (4.9)
Colombia	46 (3.2)	54 (3.2)	448 (3.8)	474 (4.4)	-26 (5.5)	-4 (5.9)
Dominican Republic	86 (2.8)	14 (2.8)	377 (2.6)	402 (9.5)	-25 (10.3)	8 (9.3)
Guatemala ¹	77 (3.5)	23 (3.5)	422 (3.6)	475 (12.0)	-52 (12.4)	15 (6.8)
Mexico	55 (2.8)	45 (2.8)	435 (4.6)	471 (3.9)	-36 (6.3)	6 (5.3)
Paraguay ¹	70 (4.4)	30 (4.4)	408 (5.1)	460 (7.9)	-52 (10.5)	8 (5.4)
Latin American ICCS average	64 (1.4)	36 (1.4)	426 (1.7)	464 (3.1)	-38 (3.7)	4 (2.6)

Notes:

() Standard errors appear in parentheses. Because results are rounded to the nearest whole number, some totals may appear inconsistent.

¹ Country surveyed the same cohort of students but at the beginning of the next school year.