Inclusion and culture of peace at university: student perceptions in the context of criminal violence

Inclusión y cultura de paz en la universidad: percepciones de estudiantes en contexto de violencia delictiva

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a research study conducted with university students, whose objective was to analyze their perceptions of institutional practices that promote a culture of peace and inclusion in the context of an environment marked by criminal violence in the state of Colima, Mexico. The study was conducted using an exploratory qualitative approach. A questionnaire composed of eleven multiple-choice questions and seven open-ended questions was used as a data collection instrument, validated by the judgment of three experts on the subject. The questionnaire was administered to a simple random sample of 200 higher education students from 20 undergraduate programs. The theoretical framework is based on specialized literature on educational inclusion, a culture of peace, and criminal violence, which supports the need to promote peace practices in educational institutions located in violent social contexts. The findings reveal how students conceive of a culture of peace and inclusion in an environment affected by violence. It is observed that

the experiences of the social context are reflected in the academic environment, and both positive aspects and areas for improvement are identified in institutional actions aimed at promoting these values. Likewise, the way in which students contribute to the culture of peace and inclusion within the school environment, in their interpersonal relationships, and in the family environment is analyzed.

Keywords: Culture of peace; Higher education; Inclusion; Violence.

Resumen

El artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación realizada con estudiantes universitarios, cuyo objetivo fue analizar su percepción respecto a las prácticas institucionales que promueven una cultura de paz e inclusión en el contexto del entorno marcado por la violencia delictiva en el estado de Colima, México. El estudio se desarrolló con enfoque cualitativo de carácter exploratorio. Se utilizó un cuestionario como instrumento de recolección de datos, compuesto por once preguntas de opción multiple y siete preguntas abiertas, validado mediante el juicio de tres expertos en la temática. La aplicación del cuestionario se realizó a una muestra aleatoria simple de 200 estudiantes de educación superior, pertenecientes a 20 programas de licenciatura. El marco teórico se sustenta en literatura especializada sobre inclusión educativa, cultura de paz y violencia delictiva, lo cual permite fundamentar la necesidad de promover prácticas de paz en instituciones educativas ubicadas en contextos sociales violentos. Los hallazgos evidencian cómo los estudiantes conciben la cultura de paz y la inclusión en un entorno afectado por la violencia. Se observa que las experiencias del contexto social se reflejan en el ámbito académico, y se identifican tanto los aspectos positivos como las áreas de mejora en las acciones institucionales orientadas a fomentar estos valores. Asimismo, se analiza la forma en la que los estudiantes contribuyen a la cultura de paz e inclusión dentro del entorno escolar, en sus relaciones interpersonales y en el ámbito familiar.

Palabras clave: Cultura de paz; Educación superior; Inclusión; violencia.

INTRODUCTION

Over time, the concepts of a culture of peace and inclusion have gained greater importance in the pursuit of building more just, equitable, and harmonious societies. Their evolution addresses the social, political, and cultural challenges arising from violence, inequality, and exclusion. Understanding their origins and the role they play in education allows us to appreciate their relevance in developing citizens committed to respect for human rights and peaceful coexistence.

It is therefore important to note that the concept of a culture of peace formally emerged at the end of the Second World War. International organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), aim to promote initiatives that prevent future conflicts and foster values like tolerance, respect, and nonviolence. Inclusion, for its part, is rooted in the fight for civil

rights, gender equality, and the defense of historically marginalized groups, such as indigenous peoples, ethnic and cultural minorities, and people with disabilities.

In education, both approaches have been progressively integrated as part of an effort to transform schools into learning spaces that promote peace and inclusion. Their incorporation has entailed changes in educational policy, the implementation of programs and methodologies, and the adaptation of educational environments, among other aspects, to guarantee quality education under conditions of equality.

As Cruz-Vadillo (2024) points out, achieving a culture of peace begins with education and is particularly based on inclusive education. Therefore, both concepts are closely linked through education and constitute fundamental pillars for social and educational transformation. Promoting them allows us to form generations that contribute to building a more respectful, supportive, and committed world with social justice.

From this perspective, higher education plays a crucial role in training citizens to integrate principles of inclusion and promote a culture of peace in their professional lives. However, establishing these values in educational policy is not enough; they must be incorporated across the curriculum so that they become embedded in the awareness and practice of students and future professionals.

In conflict contexts, higher education institutions face an even greater challenge: promoting inclusive and community-based thinking through strategies that foster inclusion and community engagement. However, it is equally crucial to understand students' perceptions of these issues, identify how they interpret institutional actions related to inclusion and a culture of peace, and understand what practices they consider effective in promoting these principles.

Therefore, there is a need to investigate these perceptions as a starting point for determining which institutional aspects should be strengthened, which elements should be incorporated into the training process, and how to improve the cross-cutting approach to inclusion and the culture of peace in higher education.

In summary, the study sheds light on students' thinking regarding institutional actions related to inclusion and a culture of peace in an environment affected by criminal violence. This research contributes to understanding, from a student perspective, the best practices that strengthen these thematic areas; what aspects require attention at the institutional level to define concrete actions for improvement; and how to develop curricular proposals that consolidate inclusion and a culture of peace in vocational training.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Educational inclusion

Education is a human right, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights promulgated by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, which considers that it should be free, compulsory and equal and that its objective is the full development of the

human personality, respect for human rights, understanding, tolerance and friendship in order to promote and maintain peace among all nations.

Aligned with this Declaration, the international policy proclaimed in the World Declaration on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand (UNESCO, 1990), the Incheon Declaration towards inclusive and equitable education and lifelong learning for all (UNESCO, 2016), as well as Sustainable Development Goal number 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2017), establish inclusion, equality and equity as fundamental in promoting opportunities for excellent learning throughout the school career of the student population.

School is a key factor in social transformation because it contributes to the formation of citizens through transversal contents that focus on values, the culture of peace, and the promotion of democracy, equity, and equality for all. Regarding educational institutions, higher education professionals are agents of change in the knowledge society. They must therefore be equipped with theoretical and methodological foundations to permanently increase their capacity to adapt in a dynamic world, and thus respond urgently to the speed of changes and educational, social, political, economic, and cultural approaches (Márquez-Cabellos et al., 2016).

To this end, higher education must undertake actions that focus on promoting inclusion, understood as a continuous process related to the participation and learning of individuals, the creation of inclusive school coexistence systems, and the promotion of inclusive values. It involves increasing participation in cultures, communities, and the curriculum, and reducing all forms of exclusion and discrimination (Booth & Ainscow, 2015). Thus, it is considered a systematic process that involves decision-making for educational improvement, transforming pedagogical practices, enhancing student performance, and designing a flexible and innovative curriculum that responds to the rapid changes in society. Jiménez (2014) states that "inclusion moves like two tectonic plates that, when they meet, shake the earth, causing natural disasters" (p. 69). This is the reality of many educational institutions in Mexico

Culture of peace and inclusion

Regarding the culture of peace, in 1999, the United Nations General Assembly approved the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, recognizing that peace is not the absence of conflict, but rather the result of dynamic participation through dialogue aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination and intolerance toward diversity. It also expresses deep concern about global violence and conflicts, where governments, international organizations, and civil society must direct their efforts to promote a culture of peace and inclusion. The articles of this Declaration establish that a culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, traditions, behaviors, and lifestyles based on respect for life, the environment, and the sovereignty of States, adhering to the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, solidarity, cooperation, tolerance, and diversity, seeking to foster an environment conducive to peace. It proposes leading a lifestyle with values and attitudes that foster peace among people and nations, moving toward the practice of a culture of peace and inclusion. This is achieved through the curriculum of the various educational levels offered by the State (UN, 1999).

Thus, education plays a crucial role in the integral development of the individual, promoting a culture of peace and inclusion; it is undoubtedly a significant task for social transformation. Some scholars on the subject of culture of peace (Valdés-Morales et al., 2019; Rojas-Bonilla, 2018; Vallejos-Aranda & Oviedo-Sotelo, 2022; among others) contend that education is linked to the culture of peace because it responds to the need to promote humanity through a transcendental process for the construction of intercultural and inclusive thinking. These authors agree in their studies that the culture of peace is a process based on the recognition, respect, and experience of human rights, where we are all protagonists and builders of social change, both personally and within our communities. Therefore, it is a critical and emancipatory approach in the face of unjust realities, as Cerdas-Agüero (2015) states.

> Autonomy enables the person to reaffirm their capacity to act in the face of violence, indifference, injustice, and the violation of rights, leading to the assumption of personal responsibility for social situations that affect groups and individuals (p. 148).

Criminal violence from a regional and social perspective

Contrary to the culture of peace and inclusion, some expressions can be identified that involve violence, conflict, and a lack of respect for the rights and dignity of people; such actions are manifested in physical and verbal violence, discrimination and exclusion, intolerance and prejudice, lack of dialogue and communication, promotion of hatred or revenge, corruption or abuse of power, social and economic inequality, among others. Lately, criminal violence has been one of the greatest problems in the national and local context. From national policy and through mechanisms specific to each government in the states of the Mexican Republic, attempts have been made to eradicate this major problem that afflicts society.

Criminal violence can be understood as the harm caused to society through various manifestations that compromise its security and stability. The concept of violence, in analytical terms, is complex and broad, as its study requires a thorough analysis from sociological, political, historical, and psychological perspectives. Likewise, its diverse manifestations make its conceptualization more complex.

Neira (1990) identified various types of violence, including urban, linked to common crime, on highways, revolutionary, counterrevolutionary, armed, state-sponsored, anti-indigenous, and intra-family violence. Without a doubt, the conceptual variety and typology imply an exhaustive analysis and differentiation of what is understood by the term 'violence'. For his part, Moreno-Valdivia points out that, given the diversity of violence or types of violence, there is a tendency to link violence mainly with The criminality in its dimension and, at the same time, there is a tendency to place it in a primarily urban context, that is, it is related to the criminal violence that anonymously and daily affects urban life (Moreno-Valdivia, 2014, p.85). This perspective is perhaps the most common conceptualization assumed among the population, especially those who have been affected by acts of criminality by organized crime.

From the perspective of this study, it is appropriate to understand the context in which the concept of criminal violence has been shaped by society. Therefore, we begin with the context of violence experienced in Latin America, where Mexico has been one of the countries with the most violent implications in the region, and, consequently, Colima, the state with the highest rate of insecurity in the country.

Some relevant data in Latin America that reinforce the recurrent situation of criminal violence are: in 2014, Honduras was considered the most violent country in the world (world record of homicides of 85.5 per ten thousand inhabitants). Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile recorded a high rate of street violence, crime, and kidnapping. In El Salvador and Guatemala, the rise in violence and citizen insecurity was linked to the actions of youth gangs (Moreno-Valdivia, 2014).

In the past decade, the panorama has not been different; in 2021, at least 4,473 women were victims of femicide in 29 countries and territories in the region (ECLAC, 2022). Likewise, according to the Latin American Political Risk Index, prepared by the UC Center for International Studies (Sahd et al., 2023), in 2023, the region recorded more than 30% of global homicides; Jamaica, Venezuela, and Honduras ranked first, second, and third, respectively, in the homicide rate (49.4, 40.9, and 38.6 per 100,000 inhabitants) in 2021; Colombia and Mexico maintain high figures related to organized crime and drug trafficking.

For its part, Chile, which had been considered one of the safest countries in the region, has faced foreign organizations that "have tried to establish themselves in the country and establish networks from their countries of origin, such as factions of the Tren Aragua, the Sinaloa Cartel and Jalisco Nueva Generación" (Sahd et al., 2023, p. 10). It is regrettable how Latin America is characterized as a region with major conflicts related to violence, where Mexico is seen as one of the countries with the greatest involvement of organized crime.

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), preliminary statistics on homicides recorded in Mexico in 2022 reveal that "from January to December 2022, 32,223 homicides were recorded in Mexico; that is, a ratio of 25 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants nationwide. The rate is lower than that recorded for the same period in 2021, which was 28" (INEGI, 2023a, p. 1). Likewise, INEGI indicates that, in 2022, "of the registered homicide deaths, 67.6% were committed by firearm; 9.7% by knife; and 7.4% by hanging or strangulation, and suffocation" (p. 1)

As shown in Figure 1, the country's homicide landscape, while it varied less between 2021 and 2022, shows a steady increase in homicide deaths from 1990 to 2021. This demonstrates that the situation in Mexico continues with acts of violence, evident in homicides.

Figure 1
Homicides nationwide (1990 – 2022)
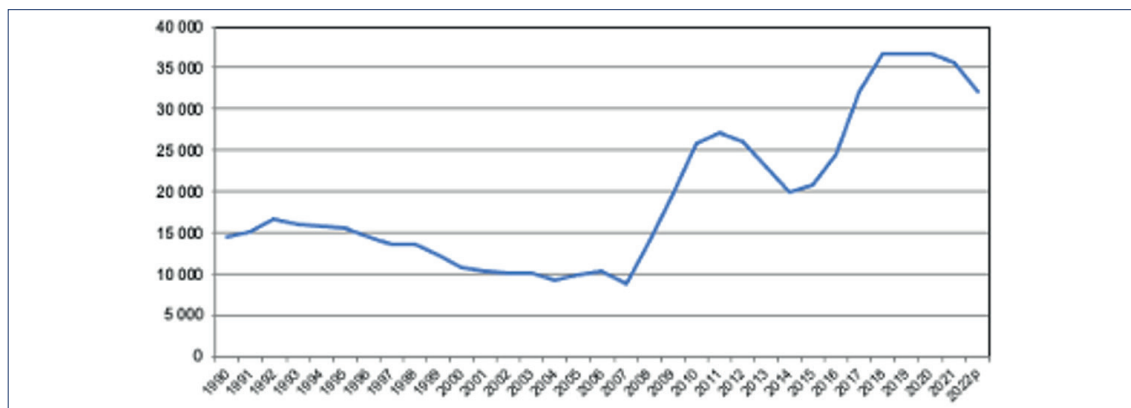
Source: INEGIa. Vital Statistics. Registered Death Statistics (RDS). Preliminary figures (January to December 2022), as of July 17, 2023, due to the ongoing nature of the generation of registered death statistics..

Another interesting fact related to violence is the perception of insecurity among Mexicans. The percentage rises to 62.3% in the second quarter of 2023 (Forbes, 2023), with greater insecurity reported among women (68.6%) compared to men (54.8%). Although the percentage points are not extremely different, it can be seen that gender is a growing gap (INEGI, 2023).

On the other hand, given Mexicans' perception of insecurity caused by acts of violence, society has taken action to reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime. The National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Security (ENVIPE) (INEGI, 2022) highlighted some of these actions that the population over 18 years of age stopped doing. The five with the highest percentage are: 62.3% allowing their minor children to go out, 47.5% wearing jewelry, 45.9% going out at night, 43.5% carrying cash, and 32.9% taking taxis. This suggests that the population is aware of the violence prevalent in the country, which impacts daily activities.

In the case of the state of Colima, where this study is based, the figures are no different. Although it is the second smallest state in the republic in terms of territory, the security conditions are alarming. Twenty years ago, Colima was considered one of the states with the best quality of life in the country. Acts of violence were minimal, and the security felt by its residents exceeded 80%. However, according to data from the 2022 National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Safety (ENVIPE) (INEGI, 2022), 72.1% of the population aged 18 and over considers insecurity to be the most pressing problem currently affecting their state. Likewise, 85.8% consider living in their immediate surroundings, such as neighborhoods or towns, to be unsafe.

The same survey identified the top four areas where people felt most unsafe: ATMs in public spaces (79.8%), the street (73.5%), banks (71.1%), and public transportation (64.3%). The top four criminal behaviors identified by society were: alcohol consumption on the street (51.3%), drug use (44.9%), robbery or assault (36.7%), and frequent gunshots (33.5%).

The situation of violence in the state of Colima has also been documented by international media, as demonstrated by the publication of the newspaper El País (Alonso-Viña, 2023), stating that, according to the ranking of the 50 most violent cities in the world carried out by the Council for Public Security and Criminal Justice, Colima is positioned as the most violent city in the world in 2022, with a homicide rate of 181.94 per 100,000 inhabitants. Likewise, the INEGI report (2024) on the perception of insecurity among the population over 18 years of age indicates that Colima is among the states with the highest percentage of insecurity in the population.

Colima is currently a state facing significant challenges in terms of public security. It is believed that reversing the current situation requires not only political and economic action, but also a restructuring of social attitudes toward violence, which could be shaped by advocacy for a culture of peace.

In this regard, the University of Colima, one of the most important educational institutions in the area and aware of the violence suffered by the region, the country, and the state, has taken similar steps by implementing guidelines to incorporate topics related to a culture of peace into the curriculum. Likewise, one of the lines of research cultivated in the institution focuses on violence, from which projects and research related to gender-based violence, political violence, and psychological violence, among others, emerge.

On the other hand, in risky circumstances, the institution has had to implement actions that safeguard the academic and student community. A specific case occurred in February 2023, when events were recorded in the state capital, including threats, gunshots in different places, and acts of violence in general. The university had to suspend classes for a day, reduce departure times for the afternoon shifts, and extend the start time for the morning shift.

In this social context marked by criminal violence, the university serves not only as a space for academic training but also as a crucial environment for fostering social cohesion, respect for diversity, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Analyzing student perceptions provides valuable insights into identifying strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement in educational strategies, thereby contributing to the development of a university environment that counteracts violence and promotes inclusion as a basis for social peace. Furthermore, understanding how students perceive these institutional actions provides key information about their scope and impact, enabling university authorities to design and adjust intervention strategies more effectively.

In this sense, the present study aimed to identify how students at the University of Colima perceive and represent violence, as well as the culture of peace and inclusion. The results obtained provide valuable insights for reflecting on possible ways from the educational field to counteract the culture of violence that affects the state, promoting instead a culture of peace and inclusion.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed an exploratory qualitative approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), utilizing a questionnaire composed of eleven multiple-choice questions and seven open-ended questions. Prior to administration, the instrument was validated by three experts in the field. It was then administered to 200 higher education students from 20 undergraduate programs, selected through simple random sampling.

The questionnaire was designed in accordance with the research objective. It was therefore structured around three axes: 1) students' perception of violence in their environment, 2) students' perception of university actions to promote a culture of peace and inclusion, and 3) students' perception of their own contribution to promoting a culture of peace and inclusion in the school community and society.

The questions related to each axis are listed as themes in Table 1, where the intentionality towards the proposed research objective can be observed.

To select participants, two campuses of the University of Colima were chosen: the central campus, located in the state capital, and the Villa de Álvarez campus, a municipality near the capital. Twenty undergraduate programs in the humanities and social sciences were chosen. From these, using the criterion of selecting the student population from the previous academic year, simple random sampling was employed to determine a representative sample of 10 students per program. A total of 200 students participated.

Table 1

Axes of analysis of the questionnaire

Axis of analysis	Orientation of the questions in the questionnaire
Students' perception of violence in their environment	• Perception of criminal violence in the state • Position towards violence • Perception of security in public places • Perception of security with the support of friends • Effectiveness of strategies implemented in the state to safeguard the safety of the population
Students' perceptions of university actions to promote a culture of peace and inclusion	• Effectiveness of strategies implemented at the university to safeguard the safety of the student community • Culture of peace and inclusion in the curriculum • Perception of the culture of peace and inclusion in extracurricular activities • Teaching actions to promote a culture of peace and inclusion
Students' perception of their own contribution to fostering a culture of peace and inclusion in the school community and society	• Actions that students can take to promote a culture of peace and inclusion in the university and society.

Source: Authors.

To ensure the scientific rigor of this study, the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1986) for qualitative research were followed, ensuring the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. Credibility was strengthened through the development of a questionnaire that combined multiple-choice and open-ended ques-

tions, allowing for the collection of both structured data and narratives that reflected students' perceptions. The instrument was subjected to expert review to validate the relevance and clarity of the items, which helped ensure its consistency with the study's objectives.

Transferability was addressed by providing a detailed description of the social and educational context in which the research was conducted, characterized by high rates of criminal violence, which allows us to understand the relevance of the findings in similar contexts. Reliability was ensured through a systematic and documented process of administering and analyzing questionnaires. Finally, confirmability was reinforced through careful comparison and categorization of open-ended responses. We sought to minimize research bias and interpret the data from the participants' own perspective. Ethical principles were also ensured through informed consent, safeguarding participant anonymity, and treating them with dignity.

Analysis procedure

Data processing was carried out in two phases. Initially, the data obtained were captured in an Excel database to prepare the information for analysis. Subsequently, the database captured in Excel was transferred to SPSS software, and graphs were created by item. The descriptive process was then carried out using frequency tables and cross-tabulation. Additionally, a text analysis program for surveys (*Text Analytics for Surveys)* was used to analyze the open questions, classifying the information into the proposed axes of analysis.

Once the inputs for the analysis were obtained (tables, graphs, and charts), the second phase began, in which the information was analyzed according to the analysis axes structured in the questionnaire. The information obtained was classified into seven categories, which were classified into three large spheres: 1) the social context, 2) the university context, and 3) the student community. In each, a set of categories is grouped that make up the perception of the students according to their responses. Table 2 presents the organization of the results that emerged.

The social context refers to students' perceptions of criminal violence in the state; therefore, three categories emerged: perceptions of criminal activity, self-care in the face of criminal activity, and security measures for the population.

In the university context, the questions were oriented towards the institution's attention and security measures, so the answers were oriented towards the perception formed in three categories: institutional strategies to safeguard the university community, the culture of peace as a transversal content in the university curriculum and the teacher as a promoter of the culture of peace.

Finally, in the student context, the students' perception of their own participation in the culture of peace was investigated, and the responses led to the categorization of the social contribution of students to the formation of a social culture.

Table 2

Categories of analysis on the perception of the culture of peace and inclusion of students

Context	Categoríes
Social	Perception of Criminal Delinquency
	Self-care in the face of criminal delinquency
	Security actions for the population
University	Institutional strategies to safeguard the university community
	The culture of peace as a transversal content in the university curriculum
	The teacher as a promoter of the culture of peace
Student	Social contribution of the student to the configuration of a social culture

Source: Authors.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Social context

As mentioned in previous paragraphs, one of the state's primary concerns is organized crime, which in turn leads to an increase in criminal activity. In this context, national statistics reflect a similar perception among students: 74.9% consider crime in the state to be high, while 22.3% perceive it as moderate, and only 2.8% rate it as low.

In addition to the perception of the level of criminal delinquency in the state, it is observed that students perceive this to be mainly due to government administration, with 45.3% agreeing with this. In comparison, 18.4% indicate that it is due to the low educational level of the population, 16.8% to the high percentage of drug users, 14.5% to the low socioeconomic level of the population, and 5% indicate that it is due to other factors.

On the other hand, one of the questions that reflects students' exposure to acts of criminal violence asks whether they have witnessed such events. Sixty-four-point six percent responded affirmatively, demonstrating how common these events have become in the region and among university students. Faced with this reality, positions on the issue are diverse: 58.7% state they only get information by checking the news, 20.1% prefer to avoid any contact with the topic, 15.6% express interest in deepening their knowledge on the subject, and the rest are indifferent.

This information suggests the need to implement educational and emotional support strategies that allow students to better understand the problem and confront its effects constructively. Furthermore, fostering safe spaces for dialogue could contribute to generating greater awareness and resilience in the face of this reality.

Regarding young people's actions related to self-care and safety in the spaces they frequent and in their interactions with friends, it was identified that 39.7% choose malls and cinemas as their main places of coexistence and recreation, while 26.3% prefer bars and restaurants, 23.5% meet at friends' houses, and the rest opt for other spaces. Regarding the perception of safety, 67.6% consider themselves moderately safe or safe in the places they frequent, 20.7% express feeling very safe, 8.9% feel somewhat safe, and 2.8% say they do not feel safe at all.

These data suggest that most young people choose public spaces such as malls and movie theaters to socialize, which could be linked to the perception of safety these environments offer. However, the significant proportion of those who feel only moderately safe or safe (67.6%) reveals that, although these spaces are frequented, concerns about their safety persist. Furthermore, it is important to investigate the reasons behind the low perception of safety in certain environments in order to design strategies tailored to address their concerns.

In short, these data corroborate what Colima society experiences on the fringes of criminal violence. University students know what it means to live in a society where manifestations of criminal violence impact education. Class suspensions, schedule modifications, and lectures in classrooms and auditoriums about self-care and common protection measures are becoming commonplace and normalized in educational settings.

University context

Immersed in the context of the current situation of criminal violence in Colima society, the University of Colima has had to participate in strategies and actions to safeguard the security of the academic and student community, as mentioned in previous paragraphs, some of the actions that have been carried out are the promotion of a culture of peace through the transversality of the curriculum, informing the community through talks, conferences, courses and workshops for students and teachers on topics of culture of peace and inclusion and in extreme cases such as the one experienced last February 2023, canceling work and academic days at the institution, changing shifts and establishing protocols in cases of criminal events in the institution.

In this context, most university students (78.2%) consider that the actions implemented by the institution have been sufficient to safeguard the safety of the student community. Regarding their perception of safety at the university, 43% expressed feeling very safe, 29% felt safe, 24% felt moderately safe, 3.4% did not feel very safe, and 0.6% stated that they did not feel safe. On the other hand, when asked where they feel safest, 92.7% indicated that it was their home, 4.5% mentioned the university, and the rest indicated their neighborhood or other spaces.

Although most students perceive institutional actions as adequate, the levels of security reported within the university show significant variations, with 27.4% feeling only moderately or slightly safe. This suggests the need to continue strengthening security strategies on campus, promoting more visible measures and prevention programs that reinforce student confidence. Furthermore, the fact that almost all students feel safer at home (92.7%) reflects the importance of this space as a refuge from external concerns, which could indicate a perception of vulnerability in public or collective spaces, including universities. A deeper understanding of these dynamics could help identify specific areas for improvement in institutional security.

In the educational sphere, specifically within the academic curriculum, 55.9% of students believe that certain actions promote a culture of peace and inclusion in their degree courses, while 44.1% believe the opposite. This suggests that a significant portion

of students may not be identifying these actions or that current initiatives are insufficient and fail to be visible within the institution. Regarding extracurricular activities aimed at promoting a culture of peace and inclusion, 45.3% of students stated that they do exist, while 54.7% indicated that they do not.

These results reflect a divided perception regarding institutional actions to promote a culture of peace and inclusion, both in the curriculum and in extracurricular activities. The lack of identification by a significant percentage of students could be due to ineffective communication about these initiatives or the absence of relevant and visible strategies that connect with their needs and expectations. This highlights the importance of strengthening and diversifying institutional actions, ensuring that they are clearly integrated into the curricula and that they are accessible and attractive to the entire student community. This point takes on greater relevance when considering that 92.7% of students believe it is necessary to promote a culture of peace and inclusion in both subjects and extracurricular activities. Furthermore, creating mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies could be key to improving their reach and visibility.

On the other hand, students perceive that teachers promote actions, values, and behaviors related to a culture of peace and inclusion. According to the results, 77.7% of respondents stated that they recognized these initiatives, while 22.3% indicated that they did not identify them. The data reflect a largely positive perception of teachers' role in promoting the values of peace and inclusion. However, 22.3% of those who did not identify these actions could indicate a gap in communication, implementation, or visibility of these initiatives, which again suggests the need for clearer and more effective strategies to reach the entire student community.

Student context

To conclude the analysis, the students' general perception of the actions required to promote a culture of peace and inclusion in their schools was highlighted, as well as their contributions to creating a culture of peace and inclusive environments within their schools, families, and among friends.

Regarding the first aspect, 70% of students indicated the need to implement more courses, conferences, talks, activities, and information in classes on a culture of peace and inclusion. This result again demonstrates that most students fail to clearly identify the institutional actions taken in this area. On the other hand, 20% mentioned the importance of promoting respect in classrooms and educational spaces. The remaining students proposed measures such as creating specific regulations, creating safe spaces in facilities, and raising awareness through content taught by teachers.

The data suggest that, although there is partial recognition of institutional initiatives, a significant gap remains in their visibility and perceived effectiveness. The demand for more explicit and frequent activities highlights the need for more comprehensive and accessible pedagogical strategies. Furthermore, the focus on respect, the creation of regulations, and safety in educational spaces underscores key areas where work can be done to consolidate an environment that fosters a culture of peace and inclusion.

Regarding students' perceptions of their contribution to generating a culture of peace and inclusive environments, the most frequent responses were grouped according to the three main areas as follows: in the school setting, they highlighted actions such as promoting values of respect, tolerance, and camaraderie; in the family setting, they emphasized the importance of communication, avoiding conflicts with parents, and promoting respect among family members; and in the area of friendships, they identified shared values such as respect, tolerance, camaraderie, and the ability to debate without disturbing the order.

This analysis demonstrates that students recognize the importance of core values in creating inclusive environments across various contexts of their daily lives. However, the responses also suggest that these values may not be fully internalized or supported by concrete strategies that facilitate their daily practice. It is important to reinforce these principles through comprehensive activities that connect theory with practical experience, promoting greater coherence between different areas of social interaction.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study on higher education students' perceptions of inclusion and a culture of peace, while first and foremost exposing one of the country's most significant social problems—violence in all its forms- also raise the need to address inclusion and a culture of peace through curriculum and institutional actions as a further challenge in the educational field.

Research confirms that in contexts marked by criminal violence, the role of educational institutions becomes even more relevant. According to Rojas-Paredes (2023), higher education must assume an active commitment to ethical training, responsible citizenship, and the promotion of democratic values. This requires not only curricular reforms that transversally integrate inclusion and peace approaches, but also the strengthening of teachers' roles as mediators of cultures and promoters of safe and participatory environments (Vázquez-Gutiérrez, 2021).

On the other hand, students have a critical perception regarding the effectiveness of institutional actions aimed at promoting these values. Although higher education institutions have adopted discourses that promote inclusion and a culture of peace, students perceive a weak practical implementation, often limited to fragmented or merely symbolic initiatives. This gap between institutional discourse and student experience reinforces what Fraser (2008) points out, warning that social justice requires both recognition and redistribution, and that institutional frameworks must be sensitive to both the subjective and structural experiences of exclusion.

Students also place a high value on practices that foster dialogue, empathy, respect for diversity, and peaceful conflict resolution, which aligns with Freire's (1970) proposal for dialogic and transformative education. From this perspective, a culture of peace cannot be taught as an isolated subject; rather, it must be built collectively in everyday education through horizontal relationships and processes of critical reflection.

Therefore, this study contributes to the reflection on the urgent need to consolidate a higher education system that not only teaches academic content but also constitutes a transformative space capable of resisting and countering the logic of exclusion and violence through critical, sensitive, and committed educational action.

CONCLUSIONS

The study emphasizes the importance of maintaining a culture of peace and inclusion within higher education institutions. Given the social contexts in states like Colima and other parts of Mexico, where a high rate of criminal violence is prevalent, educational institutions must strive to foster a culture of peace and inclusion among the new generations.

This study emphasizes the need to move beyond merely declarative approaches and toward a committed educational practice that acknowledges diversity, respects human rights, and actively promotes peaceful coexistence. To achieve this, it is essential to consider the student voice as a key input for the development of relevant, contextualized, and sustainable educational policies and practices.

Finally, strengthening an institutional culture based on inclusion and peace not only contributes to improving the quality of education but also positions the university as a transformative agent capable of positively impacting the construction of more just, equitable, and resilient societies in the face of violence.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE AUTHORS

Briseda-Noemí Ramos-Ramírez: Project administration; Formal analysis; Conceptualization; Data curation; Writing - original draft; Writing - review and editing; Research; Methodology; Resources; Supervision; Validation; Visualization; Funding acquisition.

Norma-Guadalupe Márquez-Cabellos Formal analysis; Conceptualization; Data curation; Writing - review and editing; Research; Methodology; Resources; Software; Supervision; Validation; Visualization; Funding acquisition.

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