Systematic Review

Childhood, Education, and Citizen Participation: A Systematic Review

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Abstract: Citizen participation among children and adolescents is key for the development of society. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the legal and ethical recognition of public, education, and social policies for children is vital for ensuring an active and critical society. The aim of this research paper is to analyse the characteristics and challenges of citizen participation during childhood as an educational process. The methodology employed was a systematic review carried out using the WOS, SCOPUS, and ERIC databases, taking into account the PRISMAS 2020 protocol. The results show that the incorporation of a culture of participation in children and adolescents will guarantee the persistence of democratic systems, although there are still challenges to overcome. The conclusions suggest that it is crucial that educational institutions, families, and society as a whole commit to promoting the philosophy of citizen participation at an early age in formal and non-formal educational contexts.

Keywords: citizen participation; childhood; education

1. Introduction

Childhood is a crucial stage in the development of individuals in all spheres of life, yet it is essential that individuals are able to participate actively in society from an early age. Education plays a crucial role in incorporating the philosophy of participation through different educational actions, not only by imparting knowledge, but also by fostering skills for citizen participation. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter referred to as the CRC), an international human rights treaty established on 20 November 1989, ethically and normatively recognises children's rights. This treaty has provided a legal framework for public, education, and social policies aimed at children.

This article explores the intersection between childhood, education, and citizen participation, highlights the importance of the right to participation of children and adolescents (hereinafter referred to as C&A) within the framework of this Convention, and explores the importance of cultivating the necessary competencies for the exercise of active and responsible citizenship from an early age. The human rights paradigm requires a new citizenship and an active subject that is involved in public, social, and cultural life, so that participation is both a means and an end in itself, as well as a channel leading to the development of a new political and social model (Romero Pérez et al. 2021).

Childhood is more than a period of physical growth, it is a time when the foundations of critical thinking, empathy, and social awareness are laid. According to UNICEF (2022), investing in children is not only a moral duty, but also a strategic decision for the sustainable development of any society. This affirmation highlights that C&A are future citizens, the preparation of whom will determine the quality of our democracy. In this sense, education must go beyond the transmission of academic knowledge and advocate

for the development of social and civic skills. Dewey argued that school is, above all, a social institution and that its primary function is to be a space for the practice of democratic life.

Child participation is based on the principle that children and adolescents should have the opportunity to form their own judgement and freely express their views on matters that affect them, considering their opinions based on their age and maturity. Roger Hart, a prominent scholar in this field, developed the 'Hart Ladder of Children's Participation', which is a model for understanding levels of child participation. This model describes eight rungs, from non-participation to full and active participation. The first three rungs represent non-genuine forms of participation, such as manipulation or decoration, where children are present but do not understand or play an active role. The top five rungs represent levels of genuine participation, where children really have a voice and can influence decisions. Genuine participation involves supporting children as they build an informed opinion and promoting partnership as a representative space. Furthermore, participation is seen as both a right and a responsibility, as it involves sharing decisions that affect both individual and community life. Child participation is dynamic and should be flexible and adaptable to the context and circumstances of each child and community. It is a gradual process that prepares children to be responsible and participatory citizens in society (Hart 1992).

According to Nussbaum (2012), citizenship education involves cultivating in young people the ability to think critically, act ethically, and participate actively in democratic life. The promotion of inclusive education that fosters respect for diversity, solidarity, and commitment to the common good is key to providing C&A with the necessary tools to exercise their citizenship in an informed and responsible manner. Hence, the importance of highlighting the necessity of educational programmes that integrate topics such as human rights, ethics, and social responsibility, which contribute to educating students who are aware of their role in society (Torres 2019). Active methodologies allow C&A to apply their knowledge in real contexts, thus promoting their civic participation (Battistoni 2002). These pedagogical strategies connect the school curriculum with community needs, encouraging students to get involved in social initiatives from an early age.

Children's civic involvement not only strengthens democracy, but also empowers children as agents of change in their communities. According to Laygo-Saguil (2021), children's effective participation in public affairs contributes to ensuring a more just and inclusive society. It is essential to create safe and accessible spaces where children can express their views, be heard, and make decisions that affect their lives. However, there are significant challenges, such as the lack of teacher training, unawareness of children's rights, and socio-economic inequalities that limit opportunities for equal participation (Zhao and Watterston 2021).

It is imperative that education policies address these barriers, to ensure that all children have equal opportunities to become active citizens. In this context, it is vital that educational institutions, families, and society as a whole commit to promoting a culture of citizen participation from an early age. The implementation of educational programmes that foster intergenerational dialogue, democratic debate, and collective action will help to shape future generations of citizens committed to building a more just and equitable society. As Giroux (2022) argues, education is a political act, and as such, it should be oriented towards strengthening the democratic fabric through the empowerment and formation of civic citizens from childhood.

Mateos-Blanco et al. (2022) carried out a scoping review of empirical studies on child-led participation, showing the need for further research in this field and the importance of updating ways of thinking about participation, putting them into practice in different contexts with children and adolescents from methodologies more related to popular and community education than from more institutional logics. The authors conclude that it is important to continue exploring aspects such as the influence of different ages on participation, the possible bias of adult-centrism, the evaluation of participatory experiences

showing final results, the influence of the context and institutions, and the training of all the agents involved.

The aim of this research is to analyse the characteristics and challenges of citizen participation during childhood as an educational process. The aim is to answer the following questions:

- What are the trends and methodological characteristics of studies focused on the education and citizen participation of children and adolescents?
- What are the main topics analysed and the reference frameworks in scientific studies in this field?
- What teaching–learning processes and participatory actions are promoted in educational settings?
- What perceptions, needs, and actions do the different agents and institutions contribute to children and adolescents' civic participation?
- What knowledge of citizenship and participation do children and adolescents have?
- What are the political discourses on children and adolescents' participation and citizenship?

In order to answer these questions, the methodologies, reflections, and results of selected studies are analysed, examining the advances and challenges of future research and actions in the educational sphere.

2. Materials and Methods

This systematic review explicitly uses systematic methods to collect and synthesise the findings of individual studies that address a clearly formulated question. In doing so, it follows the PRISMAS 2020 statement (Page et al. 2021). This protocol is a proposal to improve the publication of systematic reviews and meta-analyses in such a way that, by following the systematised steps of the protocol, the review information is presented in a structured and reliable way. The protocol has been registered in Open Science Framework https://osf.io/hwq3s (accessed on 24 May 2024).

2.1. Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria are a fundamental aspect of obtaining the results of the systematic review. The first inclusion criterion was that the studies included were scientific articles. The second criterion was that the articles were published in the last 5 years, i.e., from 2019 to 2024. The third criterion for inclusion was that the documents were published in English or Spanish. The fourth criterion applied to this review was that the documents were open access. The fifth and final criterion applied to this review was that the publication belonged to the field of education.

As for the exclusion criteria, any documents that were not scientific articles, such as dissertations, theses, etc., were excluded from this systematic review. Furthermore, documents that were published prior to the year 2019, or that were written in a language other than English or Spanish, were not taken into account. Documents with restricted access or belonging to a field other than education were not taken into account. Inclusion and exclusion criteria are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
Type of document	Scientific papers	Papers not published in scientific journals	To guarantee the quality, reliability, and relevance of the results analysed.
Year of publication	Between 2019 and 2024	Before 2019	To provide a vision of the current context due to rapid social changes.

Language	English or Spanish	Other languages	
Access	Open access	Unavailable via open access	To include documents with greater visibility and dissemination in the scientific community.
Field of knowledge	Education	Other fields	To ensure that the findings are relevant to the educational setting.

Source: own elaboration.

2.2. Sources of Information

The search for information was carried out in the Web of Science (WOS), SCOPUS, and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) databases. The first database used, Web of Science (WOS), is an online platform that is the property of Clarivate Analytics. It provides access to a large number of bibliographic information databases. It is also one of the most important databases worldwide, as it provides quality scientific data from any field of knowledge. The second scientific database used, SCOPUS, is a database that belongs to Elsevier. After WOS, SCOPUS is the next most important due to the large number of sources it provides, as well as the large number of areas it covers. The third scientific database used in this systematic review, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), is an international online bibliographic database. It includes a variety of resources, including educational resources, making it essential for educational researchers. These databases were visited in January 2024, with the last search carried out on 1 February 2024.

2.3. Search Strategies

The same key words or sentences were used for the search in all scientific databases used in this systematic review. The keywords used were "EDUCATION", "CHILDHOOD", and "CITIZEN PARTICIPATION". Taking advantage of the filters used in the different databases, the five inclusion criteria were applied in a second selection phase.

2.4. Data Extraction Procedure

The procedure carried out can be seen in the flow chart of the PRISMAS 2020 protocol (Page et al. 2021) (Figure 1).
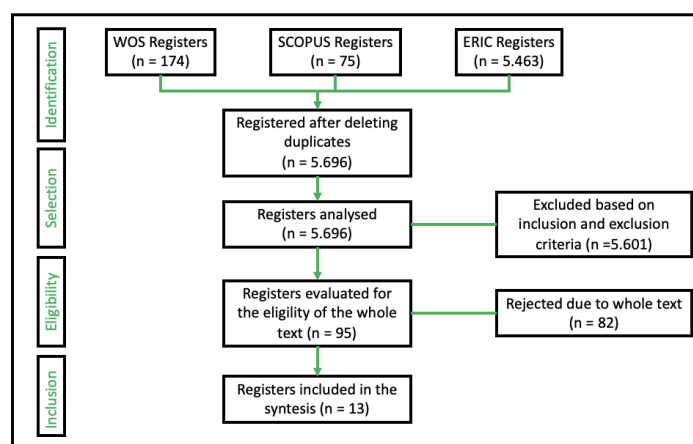
Figure 1. Flow chart. PRISMAS 2020 Protocol. Source: adaptation of the PRISMAS 2020 Protocol Model.

In the first phase of the procedure followed in this study, the Identification Phase, a total of 174 documents were extracted from the WOS database; a total of 75 documents from the SCOPUS database; and a total of 5463 documents from the ERIC database, hence, a total of 5712 documents were retrieved. After removing duplicates, a total of 5696 documents were obtained. In the second phase, the Selection Phase, the inclusion and exclusion criteria established in this study were applied to the 5696 documents and, after reading the title and abstract, a total of 5601 documents were eliminated, thus ending the second phase with a total of 95 papers. In the third phase, the Eligibility Phase, the full texts of the 95 articles were analysed, after which 82 articles were eliminated since they were unrelated to the citizen participation of the population under study (children and adolescents), and/or because they were not contextualised in educational environments. In the fourth and final phase, the Inclusion Phase, a total of 13 final papers were obtained as the final result of the entire systematic review process.

To ensure the quality of the selected studies, the articles were reviewed by two authors independently in order to reduce selection bias. In cases of disagreement, a third reviewer was consulted in order to reach consensus. The baseline characteristics of each article were recorded and the following information was extracted: author, year, type of design, sample, and conclusion of the study. In order to analyse the results, the main thematic categories addressed by the analysed articles were established inductively on the basis of the objectives set out.

3. Results

For this systematic review, following the PRISMAS 2020 protocol, a total of thirteen final articles were obtained (Table 2). The papers are mostly qualitative—specifically, eight are qualitative, two are mixed, two are theoretical, and one is a case study. The samples analysed are diverse, including teachers, papers, adolescents, and children or social agents.

Table 2. Final results of the systematic review. PRISMAS 2020 Protocol (Page et al. 2021).

AUTHOR	YEAR	SAMPLE	METHOD	CONCLUSIONS
Body et al.	2024	Primary ed., qualitative: 309, quantitative: 1906 teachers, England, United Kingdom	Mixed (quantitative and qualitative)	Children from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to be prepared for active civic participation, oriented around ideas of social justice, than those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
Esteban et al.	2022	210 adolescents from 5 cities: Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Madrid, and Sao Paulo	Qualitative	Youths in these five cities are aware of their rights and recognise that family, school, and social media enhance their recognition as subjects of rights and responsibilities. It also reveals that age is a limiting element and a fundamental factor for the development of substantive citizenship.
Gajardo and Torrego	2022	1 teacher, 46 children, pre-school ed., Spain	Case studies	It is possible to promote actions that focus on pupils and their citizen participation from the perspective of democratic education and from a very early age (2 to 5 years old). The commitment of teachers is essential.
Heikka et al.	2022	10 centres, 43 teachers, Finland	Qualitative	The leaders of the future are being shaped by the knowledge acquired in the present. Research recommends filling the gaps in the literature and encouraging the construction of a more positive teaching–learning process.

Lay-Lisboa et al.	2022	4 teachers, 15 children, pre-school ed., Chile	Qualitative	(1) They convey to university students the relevance of building their teaching identity in order to tackle the inequalities of today's society, insisting on the urgency of consolidating their profession as an agent of social transformation, based on practice and research into it. (2) They confirm the positive effects of teaching social sciences in early childhood education, as they contribute to the development of all children's capacities. (3) It emphasises the need for students to become teachers who can intervene in the social structures and problems that are reflected in geographical spaces.
Laygo-Saguil	2021	10 teachers, pre-school ed., The Philippines	Qualitative	Understanding the prerequisites and dimensions of children's participation is essential for planning and implementing participatory pedagogy in settings involving groups of children.
López	2021	245 students studying a degree in Preschool Education, Spain	Qualitative	It promotes more open and democratic practices, which allow teachers to generate a collaborative, constructed, and situated project in order to promote the autonomy of girls and boys.
Martínez et al.	2023	9 monographic articles on participation and citizenship, Spain	Theoretical	It analyses arguments that question the current democracy, proposing alternative citizenships with a transition towards radical democracy and participation. It raises the need for new learning from pedagogy, updating and renewing the relationship between participation and citizenship.
Novella and Llena	2024	NA, Spain	Theoretical	Certain key methods to integrate children into the leadership of participation are proposed and analysed, as well as five practices that involve them in a collaborative way, encouraging them to take part in the educational centre, recognising them, and giving rise to their status as citizens of the present with rights and responsibilities.
Padayachee et al.	2023	3 schools in Umbumbulu on the South Coast of Durban, preschool ed.	Qualitative	Participation in personal transformative practices to cultivate the integration of mind, body, emotion, and spirit is fundamental to the training of professionals in this approach.
Pardo-Beneyto et al.	2023	35 participants, Network of Child-Friendly Cities, Spain	Mixed	Highlights the proliferation of multi-stakeholder experiences and the average development of participatory experiences. In addition, it should be mentioned that there is a bias towards instruments that exclusively promote participation over other values such as education, training, or empowerment.
Riádigos and Gradaílle	2023	4 C&A, 1 social educator, Galicia (Spain)	Qualitative	In this text, participation is perceived as a right to be exercised, while at the same time,, a positive valuation of the Forum is made in terms of benefits (personal, social, and educational). The right to

				participation is reinforced by the creation of local childcare facilities.
Sabariego et al.	2023	30 C&A, 9 municipalities in Andalusia, Catalonia, and Galicia (Spain)	Qualitative	They reveal the value given to C&A's participation and how it is visualised in the framework of participation policies, without forgetting the reference frameworks based on which local governments shape children's citizenship in the territories analysed.

Source: own elaboration.

The first research question addresses the trends and methodological characteristics of studies on the citizen participation and education of children and adolescents. The articles found were eight qualitative, two mixed, two theoretical, and one case study. The samples are diverse, including teachers, adolescents, children, and social agents. All the articles reviewed in this research are recent, being published between 2021 and 2024.

The second research question refers to the main aspects and frameworks addressed. The thematic categories analysed address different issues previously raised in the research questions. They focus mainly on the teaching–learning processes of participation and democratic values; knowledge of citizenship and participation in children and adolescents; teacher variables that may influence citizen participation; analysis of educational experiences; and political discourse.

In the referential participation frameworks, the concept of substantive citizenship of children and adolescents is established on the basis of their right to participation and the recognition of their agency, as well as the promotion of and respect for the principle of progressive autonomy (Esteban et al. 2022). Novella and Llena (2024), in their article entitled 'Conceptual twists on social participation of adolescents', consider the active and meaningful participation of children and adolescents in civic and political life for their personal development and the construction of local and global citizenship, emphasising the importance of self-empowerment and giving them a voice, allowing them to increase their opportunities to influence decision-making that affects them and to take action. This is a major conceptual shift in children's social participation. This theoretical paper defends the importance of the legal recognition of the rights and participation of children and adolescents in society as political subjects. It stresses that educational centres should consider that students, in addition to being in education, are subjects with rights and active citizens who should be recognised and treated as such. It is also committed to promoting meaningful, defined, and led participation of children and adolescents, giving them the opportunity to influence decisions that affect them and to take action. However, it is noted that there are still challenges in ensuring that their participation is genuine and high-intensity. Education and, consequently, schools play a crucial role in the formation of responsible and engaged citizenship. There is a need to re-imagine practices that make it possible to advance the conceptual shifts of childhood social participation.

The third research question is based on the teaching–learning processes and participatory actions that are promoted in educational settings. The results show that democratic education is considered essential for the construction of fairer and more equitable societies; according to a 2-year case study by Gajardo and Torrego (2022), it is possible to promote actions focused on pupils and their civic participation from a very early age (from 2 to 5 years old). The essential variables for the promotion of participation in educational environments have been the teacher's commitment to children's rights, the use of dialogue as the backbone, the drive to care for oneself and others, the promotion of coexistence and cooperation among peers, the denunciation of injustice, the promotion of equality, and the diverse development of relationships with the environment, which are essential in educational contexts (Gajardo and Torrego 2022).

Regarding the participation actions promoted in educational environments, Martínez et al. (2023) noted that in the educational community, the participation of families in school life strengthens involvement and school coexistence, and that the existence of regulations governing participation acts as an impetus. Service-learning projects are seen as a form of training in this area. In the community sphere, Martínez et al. (2023) have shown that the promotion of spaces, the participation in educational leisure activities, and the socio-cultural actions of children and adolescents stimulate participatory practices, their protagonism, and the construction of citizenship and social cohesion. Another participatory action analysed was participatory budgets. Pardo-Beneyto and Abellán-López (2023), in the paper entitled '*Metodologías de participación ciudadana con niños, niñas y adolescentes. Un estudio exploratorio sobre presupuestos participativos en España*' (Citizen participation methodologies with children and adolescents. An exploratory study on participation budgets in Spain), state that with the emergence of participatory budgets such as those of Porto Alegre, public institutions have implemented similar dynamics for different themes and audiences, including children and adolescents. The authors analysed a series of participatory experiences implemented in Spanish municipalities in a diverse timeframe (2015–2021). For data collection, a questionnaire with open-ended questions was designed and distributed by UNICEF Spain to participants and stakeholders in the Child-Friendly Cities initiative during July–September 2021. In the end, a total of 35 valid responses were obtained and processed through the CAQDAS MAXQDA 2022 programme, using a mixed research methodology. Specifically, this study focused on the following variables for its characterisation: editions, objectives, strategy, phases, and participants. Among the findings, the proliferation of experiences with multiple participants and the average development of participatory experiences stand out. In addition, it should be mentioned that there is a bias towards instruments that exclusively promote participation over other values such as education, training, or empowerment. This is also evident in the importance given by the informants to the role of technicians and politicians in the process. The results of this research can be useful in providing further evidence beyond what is already available in this field of study and can generate understanding of the phenomenon of children's participatory budgeting.

Laygo-Saguil (2021) conducted a descriptive study of child participation plans in educational settings (ECE) in Finland. The study adopted a multi-dimensional approach to find and understand how child participation practices were conceived in the pedagogical plans developed by ECE staff, which represents a rare approach in the existing body of research. The results of the analysis conclude that there were comprehensive notions of prerequisites for participation in the early childhood education plans. However, the study indicates that the level of participation varied between plans for different activities; it was highest in play, and limited in terms of time and effect in other pedagogical and care activities. Highlighting the differences in actions found according to social contexts poses significant challenges for educational policy and practice. Children from more affluent backgrounds are more likely to be prepared for civic and active participation than those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Body et al. 2024).

The fourth question focuses on the perceptions, needs, and actions of different agents and institutions related to children's civic participation. The analysed articles focus primarily on teachers. Heikka et al. (2022) explored early childhood teachers' attitudes towards and perceptions of children's leadership, analysing these teachers' skills in implementing strategies to improve and develop children's leadership potential, which is crucial for participation. From the list of child leadership characteristics, the top five themes that emerged were as follows: (1) sought after by peers; (2) problem solver/responsive; (3) empathetic/sensitive to the feelings of others; (4) communicates well verbally; and (5) cooperative/collaborative. Leaders of the future are being shaped by the formation of learning in the now. Lay-Lisboa et al. (2022) proposed the improvement of the initial training of future new teachers from an alternative geographical thinking method to the traditional one, so that it results in the comprehensive training of children's

citizenship. The starting point is the idea that the public school fosters a critical and transformative reading of geographical space in order to promote a real intervention of children's citizenship in their social environment. One of the educational aims of universities must be oriented towards achieving greater levels of equality in the geographical space, taking into account how children experience the city and the power relations between them and the adult planners of public spaces. Regarding the teaching function, cultural and political steps must be taken to strengthen real democracy in an intermediary scene where teachers must be present, performing critical readings of the space and taking into account the different scales of linkage between geographical, school, and professional knowledge and the daily or experiential knowledge of their students.

Among the needs of the different agents, the training of educational agents and teachers is an essential element. Padayachee et al. (2023) wrote an article entitled 'Integral Education and Ubuntu: A participatory action research project in South Africa', based on a comprehensive study that applied a community-based participatory research approach through close involvement with all stakeholders, supervisors, practitioners, families, and community members. It was carried out in three schools in Umbumbulu on the South Coast of Durban (3–4 year old pupils). At the heart of the method is an approach to achieving change through collaborative action. The results show that the practitioners identified violence and deviant behaviour. The change envisaged was to develop children's values, skills, and knowledge, to create a socially responsible and civic society as a new generation for participatory democracy in Southern Africa. But this change was not achieved. Therefore, changing the current teacher training method to one that includes this approach would foster the equal and synchronous development of all human beings. The holistic education paradigm is essential for children if they are to become emotionally healthy and morally confident individuals and democratically inclined citizens. Consequently, participation in personally transformative practices to cultivate the integration of mind, body, emotion, and spirit is fundamental to the training of the practitioner in this approach.

Regarding the perceptions and actions of agents in relation to the processes of participation and their interactions, adult-centrism has had a special relevance due to its influence on participation. López (2021), in their article entitled 'Ciudadanía y lectura del espacio geográfico en la formación docente de Educación Infantil' (Citizenship and reading of geographical space in Early Childhood Education teacher training), set out the objective of analysing how the interactions between adult-centrism and the exercise of children's protagonism in school contexts are expressed. The starting point is the idea that school is one of the main institutions in charge of promoting participation, protagonism, and the exercise of citizenship; it is a space for acquiring knowledge, promoting the transition of social values, and the formation of the identities of the subjects. This study uses a qualitative methodology involving an action research methodology. Participatory dialogic strategies for the production of information were implemented with the children. The dimensions of analysis were as follows: talking maps, social theatre, and group discussion. The results emphasise the relationship between adult-centrism and protagonism, which is expressed in five sub-categories: power relationship; organisation and decision-making; diversity, dealings, and affection; technology in dispute; and gender perspective and stereotypes.

The fifth research question focuses on children's knowledge of citizenship and participation. This knowledge has been analysed by Esteban et al. (2022) from three dimensions: knowing oneself as a subject of rights; the importance of intergenerationality in the recognition of progressive autonomy, and the incidence of age in the development of autonomy; finding that young people know their rights and value, and that their family, school, and social media favour their recognition as subjects with rights and responsibilities. On the other hand, Riádigos and Gradaílle (2023), in their article entitled 'The Forum for the participation of children and teenagers in Teo: A socio-educational context that enables children's right to participation', state that children are citizens of the

present and are active subjects who must be educated to exercise and enjoy civil, social, political, and cultural rights in conditions of equity. Based on this premise, in a democratic society, the education of children and their right to participation must be guaranteed by public administrations and those who govern them. For this reason, this paper aims to clarify the perceptions that children, adolescents, and social educators have of children's right to participate, as well as their assessments of the Forum for Child and Adolescent Participation of the Teo City Council (A Coruña, Galicia, Spain). To achieve this, qualitative research was performed that focused on the case study, based on data collection through instruments such as document analysis, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. The results show that participation was perceived as a right to be exercised, while a positive assessment was made of the Forum in terms of benefits (personal, social, and educational). However, the participants revealed a number of challenges and limitations that hinder the exercise of the right to participate in an authentic, full, and protagonistic life: (1) the adult-centric view that prevails in part of the adult community; (2) a strong dependence on the decision-making process in matters that concern them; (3) a lack of spaces to participate in the community; (4) difficulties in establishing contacts with other socio-community actors (families, schools, associations, etc.). It is concluded that the right to participation can be reinforced with the creation of local childcare bodies, but it is a priority to create more spaces for or experiences of participation in Teo, to give children a leading role in participatory processes, as well as to commit to strategies that make their sense of belonging to the community visible.

The sixth research question focuses on the political discourses on the participation and citizenship of children and adolescents. In this sense, Martínez et al. (2023), in their article entitled 'Educación, esferas de participación y ciudadanía' (Education, spheres of participation and citizenship), talk about the questions that have arisen about democracy and its institutions, as well as the changes in political parties, their multiplication, and their weakening. It shows how the perception of the current liberal democracy is being replaced by the defence of the ideal of full participation, the emergence of new forms of participation, and a political interest that continues to exist, but with changes. On the other hand, Sabariego et al. (2023), in their article entitled 'La participación de la infancia y la adolescencia en la municipalidad. Discursos y estrategias políticas en Andalucía, Catalunya y Galicia' (The participation of children and adolescents in the municipality. Discourses and political strategies in Andalusia, Catalonia and Galicia), state that behind the political agenda for the promotion of child participation in the municipality lie the political discourses and socio-educational experiences developed for the projection of the citizenship of children and adolescents in the territory. Beyond the referential frameworks from which the local government configures this exercise, its role as an educational agency is considered key to training citizens in participation and consolidating a model of governance and democratic quality service in each territory. The objective of this article was to identify the political discourses on the participation and citizenship of children and adolescents in nine municipalities in the autonomous communities of Andalusia, Catalonia, and Galicia, as well as the strategies developed in this area by the different areas of the Administration. The research followed a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with 30 elected municipal officials and technical figures responsible for the social participation of children and adolescents in the contexts analysed. The findings describe the contextualisation of the municipalities with regard to the projection of children's citizenship and its evolution up to the present. They also reveal the value given to children's participation and how it is visualised in the framework of participation policies, without forgetting the referential frameworks from which the local government shapes children's citizenship in the territories analysed.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This systematic review has identified a number of studies that address the citizen participation of C&A in an educational context. These studies highlight the importance of

promoting equity in civic education, to ensure that all children have the same opportunities to actively participate in their society (Body et al. 2024; Gajardo and Torrego 2022). Likewise, the relevance of recognising the right to participation from a perspective that acknowledges children's agency is highlighted, in line with the postulates of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Esteban et al. 2022). International bodies and non-governmental organisations, such as UNICEF or the Council of Europe, are also fundamental in the materialisation and defence of this participation. In spite of the relevance described in the articles reviewed, the present study highlights the scarcity of studies and reviews in this field, in addition to the diversity of the themes and methodologies of the existing scientific works, and it is necessary to continue to deepen and homogenise, as far as possible, the instruments and methodological processes used in this field.

The analysed referential frameworks of participation emphasise the right to active participation, progressive autonomy, and personal development, as well as the importance of education and school to foster participation and the knowledge and skills needed for it. This implies, as Novella and Llena (2024) state, an educational challenge that requires re-analysing what we are doing and inventing new methods.

Regarding the teaching and learning processes, the results provided by Gajardo and Torrego (2022) show that these can start from very early ages, from 2 to 5 years old, corroborating the possibilities that can be offered by educational environments that foster this learning. To this end, it is necessary to take into account the importance of designing intervention strategies focused on the essential variables described that can foster the learning needed to participate in educational environments: teacher commitment; the use of dialogue; personal care and care for others; coexistence and cooperation; the promotion of equality; family participation; the promotion of spaces; socio-cultural and educational leisure activities, or participatory budgets (Gajardo and Torrego 2022; Martínez et al. 2023); central variables in the training processes of children and adolescents for responsible, democratic, and participatory citizenship. In the design of strategies for children and adolescents' participation, it is essential to take into account the influence of social contexts and the type of participation activities described by Body et al. in order to establish learning objectives for children—the ladder proposed by Hart (1992), which establishes the different levels of involvement, is a step forward and a tool that can facilitate the design of procedures and competences to be developed in this population.

Among the needs and perceptions of the agents involved in the civic participation of children and adolescents, overcoming adult-centrism in the educational space and promoting critical teacher training are fundamental aspects of promoting the true implementation of children's citizenship in their social environment (Lay-Lisboa et al. 2022). Furthermore, it is crucial to understand the prerequisites and dimensions of child participation in order to implement effective participatory pedagogies (Laygo-Saguil 2021; López 2021).

In the case of children and adolescents and their knowledge of participation, Esteban et al. (2022) noted that children know and value their rights from an early age, which represents progress in this area, an opportunity to improve existing practices, and a clear responsibility for public institutions and political agents.

In the political sphere, there are changes in the current perception of democracy, which, in the area of participation, focuses on broader and more innovative forms of participation. These changes, described by Martínez et al. (2023), pose a challenge for education, as it is necessary to train children and adolescents with the competencies and motivation to exercise this participation.

Despite the progress made regarding public policies and educational initiatives aimed at promoting citizen participation from childhood, there are still significant challenges related to socio-economic inequalities, adequate teacher training, and effective recognition of child protagonism (Martínez et al. 2023; Novella and Llena 2024). A sustained commitment by educational institutions, families, communities, and local governments is needed to address these systemic barriers and ensure true equity in civic

development opportunities for all children (Padayachee et al. 2023; Pardo-Beneyto and Abellán-López 2023).

It is important to take into account the limitations of the present study when interpreting its findings. Despite our efforts to provide a comprehensive and rigorous analysis, the limited number of studies and their methodological and content variability make it difficult to draw conclusions, compare them, and generalise the results. Moreover, the studies reviewed span different geographical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts. This diversity, although enriching, also introduces variability in the results that may be more related to contextual particularities. These limitations highlight the need to develop future research and actions in this field, with common criteria and variables that give rise to the construction of a theoretical and procedural framework from which to analyse and systematise the different findings in the field of citizen participation and, specifically, in childhood citizen participation.

To this end, it is essential to continue researching and innovating pedagogical methodologies that promote an inclusive democratic culture from an early age. A democratic future depends not only on the normative recognition of the right to participation, but also on everyday practices that empower all C&A as active agents within their communities (Riádigos and Gradaílle 2023; Sabariego et al. 2023).

In short, this research underlines the importance of continuing to work towards genuine and intense citizen participation among children, recognising their role as active agents in the construction of a fairer and more equitable society.

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