

# EDUCATING FOR EQUALITY FROM A DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION EXPERIENCE WITH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STUDENTS IN LAMU, KENYA

## EDUCANDO PARA LA IGUALDAD DESDE UNA PERSPECTIVA DECOLONIAL: UNA EXPERIENCIA DE ACCIÓN PARTICIPACIÓN CON ESTUDIANTES DE EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL EN LAMU, KENIA

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### Abstract

The elimination of violence against women is one of the Sustainable Development Goals. Strategies to combat violence against women focus not only on its punitive correction, but also on promoting preventive measures. For this reason, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals recognise the need to include gender education at all levels of education. Similarly, this study, supported by other recent research, considers the inclusion of a gender approach in education as a strategy to prevent violence against women to be essential. In this study, we examined the level of gender equality knowledge in the final year of early childhood education in a school integrated into a non-governmental organisation on the island of Lamu, Kenya. The study was carried out using a participatory action methodology through the design and implementation of a course on «Human Rights and Gender Equality» in the 2019 academic year through twenty formative and participatory workshops. The decision to carry out this

intervention stems from having become aware of a sexual aggression by several pupils of the entity's nursery school against a five-year-old girl. Among the results, we observed the existing differences between the conception of equality in childhood, where there is an egalitarian community upbringing, and adulthood, where gender stereotypes are very evident. We also perceived how violence was intrinsic to children's lives in public and private spaces, which could influence the possibility of justifying violence towards women as a form of correction from a very early age. In the conclusions, the possibility of working on gender equality issues to give children a space of trust where they can be listened to and respected is positively valued.

**Keywords:** Equality; Education; Childhood; Violence against Women; Participatory Action Research; Girls; Empowerment; Kenya.

### Resumen

La eliminación de la violencia contra las mujeres es uno de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible. Las estrategias para combatir la violencia contra las mujeres se deben centrar no sólo en su corrección punitiva, sino también en la promoción de medidas preventivas. Por este motivo, los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible de las Naciones Unidas reconocen la necesidad de incluir la educación de género en todos los niveles educativos. Del mismo modo, este estudio, apoyado por otras investigaciones recientes, considera esencial la inclusión del enfoque de género en la educación como estrategia para prevenir la violencia contra las mujeres. En esta investigación examinamos el nivel de conocimientos sobre igualdad de género en el último curso de educación infantil en una escuela integrada en una organización no gubernamental en la isla de Lamu (Kenia). El estudio se llevó a cabo mediante una metodología de acción participativa, en la que se diseña e implementa un curso sobre Derechos humanos e igualdad de género en el año académico 2019 a través de veinte talleres formativos y participativos. La decisión se inició cuando se tuvo conocimiento de una agresión sexual por parte de varios alumnos de la escuela infantil a una niña de cinco años. Entre los resultados, observamos diferencias entre la concepción de igualdad en la infancia, donde existe una crianza comunitaria igualitaria, y la edad adulta, donde los estereotipos de género son muy evidentes. También percibimos cómo la violencia era intrínseca a la vida de los niños y las niñas en los espacios públicos y privados, lo que podría influir en la posibilidad de justificar la violencia hacia las mujeres como una forma de corrección desde edades muy tempranas. En las conclusiones se valora positivamente la posibilidad de trabajar en temas de igualdad de género para dar a las infancias un espacio de confianza donde puedan ser escuchados/as y respetados/as.

**Palabras clave:** Igualdad; Educación; Infancia; Violencia contra las Mujeres; Investigación Acción Participativa; Niñas; Empoderamiento; Kenia.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This research aims to contribute knowledge to the fight against violence directed at women and girls. United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5, in its second section, identifies it as a goal to «eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other forms of exploitation» (UN, 2021). However, there are different approaches to the construction of struggles against women's violence.

In this sense, we share the non-punitive approach in the fight against this problem. Authors such as Abreu (2007), Bodelón (2012) and Copello (2015) point out how criminal law ends up simplifying the problem of violence against women by reducing it to individual conflicts, which are resolved on a case-by-case basis. It also reinforces the concept of the woman victim, a homogenous passive subject, who does not even have control over the criminal process itself. In Kenya, where the study was carried out, we found an example of this in the protection orders contained in the Protection Against Domestic Violence Act, in force since 2015, which can be applied even without the woman's consent (The National Council for Law Reporting, 2015).

In contrast to the punitivist approach, there are other voices that call for the need to address these forms of violence from a global perspective. Segato (2003) argues that patriarchal structures cannot be changed at the stroke of a pen but only through social change. Bodelón (2012) points out the importance of understanding violence as manifestations of social discrimination against women. In light of such ideas, Moraga-Contreras y Pinto-Cortez (2018) calls on us to promote preventive work in the health and educational spheres rather than the judicialisation of the problem. It is important that this preventive work begins at an early age since, as various studies have shown, a comprehensive sexual education programme has the potential to prevent the emergence of risk factors associated with sexual violence perpetration by initiating prevention early in the life course (Benavent et al., 2019; Schneider & Hirsch, 2020). After all, adolescence is a crucial period for the onset of sexual violence, with sexual and gender minority youth reporting elevated levels of victimisation (MacAulay et al., 2022, p. 2).

In this vein, Sustainable Development Goal 4, in Indicator 4.7, states the following as a goal from a wide-ranger perspective in the fight for equality through prevention:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to promote sustainable development, including through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and the contribution of culture to sustainable development. (UN, 2021, p. 13)

In relation to education in Kenya, since the enactment of the Constitution in 2010 and the Basic Education Act in 2012, efforts have been made to enshrine compulsory and free basic education (OECD, 2019; The National Council for Law Reporting, 2010). However, current indicators continue to show inequality in children's participation at the highest levels of education, reaching a gap of four points at the university level (WEF, 2022, p. 215). The intergenerational change that authors such as Moriana (2017) and Moraga et al. (1988) discuss can be observed. In the current generation, according to the latest data of 2022, the ratio of girls attending primary school exceeds that of boys, standing at 83.7% (WEF, 2022).

However, it is important not only to guarantee access to education but also to review its content. In line with Sustainable Development Goal 4.7, it is important to promote education for equality (Degue et al., 2014; Heredero de Pedro, 2019; Moriana, 2017). This was key for our study location, for example, as there are still very serious problems. Physical and sexual violence against young women is at very high levels. Based on national data, it is estimated that 31% of women in Kenya have been slapped by their partner in the last 12 months (The National Bureau of Statistics, 2015, p. 289). Forced marriages also continue to occur. A report published in 2018 by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) stated that 23% of women in Kenya are still married before the age of 18, and 4% before the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2017, p. 3). Female genital mutilation continues to be practised, as despite its ban in 2011, an estimated 21% of women aged 15-49 were circumcised in 2015 (The National Bureau of Statistics, 2015, pp. 331-343; The National Council for Law Reporting, 2011). In addition, an estimated 66% of young women drop out of school because of pregnancy (Walgwe et al., 2016). Recent

studies, such as Ringwald et al. (2022), recommend that «Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) prevention interventions in areas with such IPV prevalence... would be beneficial for women and men and future generations» (Ringwald et al., 2022, p. 424).

We cannot lose sight of the fact that Kenya has been a colonised country and is currently home to more than 40 tribal ethnicities, as well as different religions and cultures (UNESCO, 2020). Therefore, manifestations of violence as well as inequality in educational content must be assessed from an intersectional perspective (Collins and Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 2017). Key to this effort are decolonial authors, such as Makau (2016) and Quijano (2007), who denounce the coloniality of knowledge and the imposition of concepts and structures alien to the culture of tribal ethnic groups. In the same vein, decolonial feminists, such as Mohanty (2008) and Lugones (2011), fight against the construction of «Third World Women» and claim their own capacity for resistance in the face of discrimination. Moreover, we relied on African studies to avoid the Western gaze that silences indigenous voices (Edwards et al., 2022; Nkenkana, 2015; Zulu et al., 2002).

This study took place within a non-governmental organization (NGO), where I carried out coordination work from May 2018 to July 2019. The NGO is called Afrikable and its objective is the social and economic empowerment of indigenous women on the island of Lamu. It started with 10 women and their 15 children as beneficiaries of the project. Currently, the project offers training, literacy, work and support to 38 women in extreme poverty and at risk of social exclusion and to more than 100 children who benefit from a free school up to the age of six, a free canteen, after-school workshops, and primary and secondary school scholarships, with preference given to girls as an affirmative action measure (Afrikable, 2022).

The objective was to evaluate the degree of knowledge and acceptance of gender equality and violence against women in a school on the island of Lamu, Kenya; this assessment was carried out through the inclusion of a course called Human Rights and Gender Equality in the third year of the nursery school. It was built and taught during the first semester of the 2019 academic year through twenty workshops. The results of the implementation of this course were collected by means of a field notebook that was analysed manually and triangulated with the other information collected. The results

are striking with regard to the strength of patriarchal structures in such young children. This emphasises the importance of education about equality from the first educational levels.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Participatory action research

We share the approach of feminist epistemology as exemplified in Harding (1994), Rich (2001) or Sandoval (as cited in Hooks et al., 2004), who express the need to abandon the definition of the researcher's position from a neutral point of view and a look «from above». In this case, this shift was made based on total involvement in the field. It is important to understand that the intervention was carried out at the NGO where a doctoral thesis was developed on the strategies of resistance of indigenous women facing gender-based violence (Quiroga, 2021).

Due to the characteristics of the research and the interventional approach, the methodology is qualitative, and the tool used is participatory action research, since as Rahman and Borda (1988) state:

A major task for Participatory Action Research, now and in the future, is to increase not only the power of ordinary people and the duly enlightened subordinate classes, but also their control over the process of knowledge production, storage and use. (pp. 213-214)

As Colmenares (2012) suggests, we can identify four elements of this methodology: qualitative, because it focuses on content and language; participatory, because the people involved are both researchers and beneficiaries of the findings; recursive or cyclical, because it tends to be repeated in a sequential manner; and reflective, because a critical reflection on the process and the results is essential in each cycle.

In this sense, this instrument was applied from an intersectional feminist perspective, where the goal was to educate young women on the island of Lamu with respect to rates of violence against women (Fine & Torre, 2019; Keahey, 2021; Lee et al., 2020).

## 2.2. Designing the human rights course as a form of participatory action

Following Rahman and Borda (1988) and Colmenares (2012), we can distinguish different phases of the research. First, there is the phase marked by the choice of the subject matter and the design of the action plan—in this case, the construction of the course called Human Rights and Gender Equality. The impetus for its construction emerged in October 2018, following an incident of sexual violence among the children who attend the NGO's canteen. The consequences of this act of violence highlighted the need to start implementing prevention programmes at a younger age (DeGue et al., 2014; Ringwald et al., 2022).

### 2.2.1. *Group configuration*

Regarding the sample, we differentiated two main groups for the development of the intervention:

#### a. Design and implementation group

To choose the topics and establish the instruments, a working group was constructed consisting of the three female teachers at the NGO nursery school, the director and sub-director of the NGO, two Spanish NGO volunteers who are teachers of primary education in Spain and myself as a coordinator and researcher in gender issues.

It was an all-female group, as most of the NGO's staff are women. However, there was diversity in the group: we were three Spanish women and five women from Lamu, Kenya. In the latter group, the Pokomo, Swahili, Guiriana and Orma ethnic groups were represented. The age difference ranged from 22 to 44 years old. Although they were all involved in the project, each organiser was in a different position, which allowed them to participate based on their own experiences and points of view.

The group met weekly while the course was being designed, from October to December 2018. Subsequently, from February to May 2019, one of the teachers implemented the subject with support from the researcher and the two volunteers. During this time, the group held monthly meetings to review the implementation of the subject. The meetings were recorded in handwritten minutes.

## b. Subject reception group

The sample selected for the implementation of this intervention was limited first by the location where the research was conducted. In this case, it was carried out at an NGO that has a school for children to attend before they enter primary school (Afrikable, 2022). This school is divided into three classes according to age and level. For the implementation of the Human Rights and Gender Equality course, the design group selected the third grade of this nursery school.

When the school year started in 2019 and the group was set up, a meeting was held with the mothers, fathers or persons with guardianship of the pupils, and they were informed of the intention to carry out this intervention and the goal of collecting the results and disseminating them for academic purposes. In this case, all adults gave their written informed consent in accordance with the corresponding code of ethics so that the whole class was able to participate. The class consisted of 20 children, 12 girls and 8 boys. The Orma, Pokomo, Giriama and Swahili tribes were represented. They ranged in age from 5 to 7 years old, with 15 students being 6 years old. Of the children, 14 were the sons or daughters of NGO workers.

To protect the anonymity of the people in the group, it was decided not to include any direct quotations from or images of the activities carried out.

### *2.2.2. Choice of topics based on the context*

It was essential that the group that constructed the subject had worked in the field with the pupils on a daily basis so that they had an in-depth knowledge of the social situation of the pupils. Therefore, the theoretical and methodological decisions were influenced at all times by the particularities of the island of Lamu (UNESCO, 2020).

We started from the premise that the students came from families living in villages, where they did not usually have a specific place of study or a private space. Therefore, it was important not to ask for written homework to be brought from home. It was also crucial that it did not involve any cost for them. On the other hand, as they were not in the habit of watching television on a daily basis, it was known that any audio-visual resource would capture their attention, so films and short videos were shown in some workshops.



The knowledge of the context also limited the subjects to be covered and caused debates in the construction group. On the one hand, people in Lamu refuse to speak negatively about religion at any time due to the strength of the Islamic religion on the island, which is a place of worship for people professing the Muslim religion (Quiroga, 2021). On the other hand, it was decided to only indirectly address sexual orientation and identity since homosexuality is currently punishable by imprisonment in Kenya (Edwards et al., 2022). There was therefore a fear of any repercussions for children on this issue.

The subject was divided into four courses, also influenced by the Sustainable Development Goals, especially the fourth and fifth, previously mentioned (UN, 2021). Each subject had a final evaluation and discussion class for each block, making a total of 20 workshops that took place weekly from February to June 2019. The main features of the subjects were as follows:

- Human rights: It was decided to start with this subject as an introduction through four workshops. Several rights related to children were chosen to work on. In particular, the right to health, the right to education, the right to housing, the right to be free from violence and the right to participation were to be promoted. The latter was chosen to promote the right of children to be heard in the public and private spheres.
- Gender equality: This was the main subject to be addressed, and six workshops were devoted to it. It began with work on self-esteem and self-care. Equality and gender stereotypes between children and adults were discussed in depth. Finally, two workshops were dedicated to the right to be free from violence.
- Peaceful conflict resolution: Four workshops were included in which dynamics for conflict resolution through the non-use of violence were worked on. The aim was to encourage dialogue, listening and mediation skills.
- Functional diversity: Finally, two workshops were included to promote awareness of functional diversity. This was included because one pupil suffered from hearing impairment.

### 2.2.3. *Analysis and dissemination of results; limitations of the research*

To collect the results, different instruments were used, such as a «toolbox», which made it possible to integrate as much data as possible that was relevant to the research (Tinto, 2013).

First, all the minutes of the meetings of the standard design and implementation group were compiled. Secondly, direct observation was carried out by participating in the 20 workshops that were held to implement the subject. Due to the impossibility of collecting field notes immediately, after each workshop, the observations made on the activity were recorded in a field diary. Together with this information, we had the results of the evaluations of the different blocks, which gave us have direct knowledge of the degree of absorption or acceptance of the subjects covered.

All this information was systematised manually from July to October 2019 following the method developed in Denzin and Lincoln (2012):

The writer-as-interpretor moves from this text to a research text: notes and interpretations based on the field text. This text is then re-created as a working interpretive document containing the writer's initial attempts to make sense of what he or she has learned. Finally, the writer produces a public text that reaches the reader. (p. 25)

The results were also applied cyclically because the improvements and limitations that were detected served to help us revise the implementation of the subject in Course 2020, and so on in a cycle of improvement (Fine & Torre, 2019; Keahey, 2021; Lee et al., 2020). This process is essential because the experience of the study itself, listening to the voices of the students and facing the limitations of the activities, entails a revision and transformation of the initial views of the people who construct the subject.

When analysing the results, we detected that there were different limitations in the implementation of the subject. One of these was the ages of the participating students, which made it difficult to deal with certain complex concepts. Another was part of the process of transformation of the researchers, since, on learning about the context was the search for material that respected existing diversities and did not impose a single way of understanding equality, such as a Eurocentric view (Collins and Bilge, 2016; Lugones, 2011; Quijano, 2007). In this sense, the contents were also limited

by the real resources of the island because there has been no attempt to enforce consistency between the rights recognised in the legal texts and the resources that the students actually have in Lamu (Segato, 2003).

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. From the problem to the search for solutions

In the section on methodology, it was stated that this research was carried out in accordance with the feminist conviction that it is necessary to express the point of view from which the research is conducted (Harding, 1994). In this sense, it is relevant to understand that in October 2018, a five-year-old girl was sexually assaulted by three nine-year-old boys. These children went to the canteen at the NGO where the research was carried out. The aggression occurred later, on the way back from the canteen, as the children were returning to their homes.

These events, in addition to causing a series of judicial and institutional proceedings, had important consequences at the level of the organisation. It was decided to expel the aggressors from the programmes in which they participated, and different meetings were held with the mothers, as well as with the children in the nursery school and the school canteen.

This case had serious consequences because the child's mother punished her daughter for having «allowed» the sexual abuse and physically assaulted her, which led to a judicial process that ended with a twenty-year prison sentence for the child's mother and the loss of custody of the child, who went to a childcare centre on the island called ANIDAN (Quiroga, 2021).

However, internally, after these events and the different meetings, it was detected that sexual practices are carried out among minors in the area from a very early age and that the mothers, instead of intervening to educate the minors in sexual education, try to silence the facts by punishing them, especially the girls. This called for the need to include comprehensive sex education in the project's nursery schools to address the needs of the children and protect them from reliving situations such as those experienced on those dates.

That is why, at the end of October 2018, it was decided to implement the course on Human Rights and Gender Equality in the following school

year with the aim of improving the comprehensive gender education of the children, as well as the knowledge of their rights.

### **3.2. Lack of connection with human rights**

The implementation of the first block was difficult, especially the first two classes in which the selected human rights were listed. Due to the ages of the students and their lack of knowledge of these abstract concepts, it was difficult to hold their attention. The content was translated into the different tribal languages and examples of each right were sought on the island, but this was particularly difficult. However, specific workshops were then held on two rights, the first of which was the right to participation.

The workshop on the right to participation showed that many children felt a lack of control within their families. It became clear that these family structures were not affected by the wills of the children, as we can observe in other Western families. In one activity, each student had to draw on the blackboard what they would bring to school if they could choose. In general, when they came out to speak and say what they wanted, it was difficult to understand them because they spoke very softly, without projecting their voices and hiding their eyes. In particular, most of the girls exhibited this behaviour in the first workshops.

Despite what one might think at first, only two pupils asked for a football pitch, and one drew some slides. However, one child drew a hospital, and this was copied by ten pupils. This is explicable by the fact that the nearest hospital is far from the villages—about an hour and a half away on foot. In addition, there is a shortage of material resources, and the care is not entirely adequate.

Another of the contributions that received the most support, was an apple. The apple is an imported fruit that is very expensive compared to local fruits, so for many families, it is a privilege. Overall, they finally enjoyed being able to imagine, choose and contribute. This activity ended up giving them the right to choose by voting what to play in the two free hours scheduled for Fridays. This allowed them to exercise their right to participation. The other right that we particularly emphasised was the right to be free from violence, but this will be dealt with in section 3.4 below.

### 3.3. Equality as a goal and as a path of deconstruction

The second block was the priority in terms of the subjects taught, with six workshops. The self-esteem workshops were an example of cultural assimilation and the problems that this entails. The activities were introduced by the two Spanish volunteers who participated in the group. These are very common activities in the West. The first was to pass around a mirror and have each student say something positive about themselves. The second was to pass a ball to someone and tell that person something positive.

However, it was very difficult for the students to understand the background of the activity. Embarrassment took over the group, and it was very difficult for them to say something positive about themselves. In particular, the girls were not able to look at themselves in the mirror in front of their classmates.

Another relevant factor was the lack of a habit of looking in a mirror. In other contexts, babies are used to looking in mirrors and interacting with their reflections. However, in the village context, there are usually no mirrors or a few small ones for very specific cases. Because of this, the impression of looking at oneself and saying something positive to oneself is empowering.

Regarding the second dynamic, which was aimed at saying something positive about the classmates, participation was higher, but there was no depth in this participation. The teachers tried to make the game more dynamic by saying two or three examples, and these were repeated throughout the game. Although the game did not work in practice, the possibility of thinking about oneself and looking for something positive was positively valued. It was a few minutes in which the children worked on their self-esteem, even if they were not aware of it.

After the first block focused on self-esteem and self-care, we moved on to the workshops focused on sex-gender differences in childhood and adulthood. In the first workshop, to avoid the mistake of adopting more European dynamics, we wanted to start from a neutral point of view, without explaining anything. Therefore, we simply drew a picture of a girl and a boy on a piece of cardboard and asked the students to write down things that boys do and things that girls do.

Surprisingly, for the students, there was only one difference, and that was that girls could dance. This is strange because it is also common to see boys dancing, but they expressed themselves that way. This was the only difference they found. Otherwise, they understood that everything a girl could do, a boy could do. This activity was very positive because a Western view of reality seeks to find the construction of the girl-princess and the boy-warrior. However, in Lamu's village upbringing, away from the media and social networks, children are raised in greater equality. They are used to being raised as equals in terms of care and playing together as boys and girls. Therefore, they do not have toys that only boys or girls play with. This activity was very positive in terms of participation and the debates that were created among the students, where the children defended their rights.

A completely opposite scenario was found when, in the next class, we repeated the same activity, but drawing a man and a woman. In this case, both girls and boys went out and constructed an idea of a woman who cooks, cleans, takes care of the children and washes clothes; and, in turn, an idea of a man who works, drinks and smokes. In this case, the female teachers themselves expressed that they were discomfited because most of the students were the sons and daughters of NGO workers. Therefore, these were not the examples to which the children had been exposed. Their mothers usually did all the care work, but at the same time, they were in paid work, with a working day from 8 AM to 5 PM. They were therefore shocked that no one mentioned that women work in paid activities other than care work.

This was indicative of how gender stereotypes are already ingrained in children between five and seven years old. It was also very telling to learn how children are aware of their parents' drug-taking behaviours, since it is true that the consumption of alcohol and other substances, such as mirra, is widespread among the island's indigenous populations, especially males.

The results of this activity served to reorganize the program, based on the detected needs, and hold a workshop focused on raising awareness about gender equality between women and men. Three female workers from different sectors of the organisation were invited to tell the class about their day-to-day work. The aim of this activity was to make them aware of the value of their mothers' work as the driving force behind care work, but also as the economic engine of their families.

### 3.4. Violence in children's lives

In general, violence still permeates many areas of children's lives on the island of Lamu. Violent punishment is still common in many schools, whether religious or public. Children as young as three years old attend Quranic schools, where they learn the Quran. Violence is also witnessed in these schools. The organisation has had to treat some children's wounds caused by punishments in these schools.

At the same time, it is also common for parents to resort to violence as a form of education. It has been a major struggle to explain that the organisation where the research was carried out has a zero-tolerance policy about child violence, even costing the expulsion of two women who literally beat up their children. The police also use violence often. Violence appears in many areas of the children's lives, and not only gender violence.

That is why violence was dealt with in the course in a multi-stage way. It began in the first block in relation to rights, and the right to be treated with dignity was incorporated. In the different languages, it was expressed that this includes the right not to be hit, shouted at or insulted. However, all the pupils recognised that this right was not respected. Even in the development of the programme, the teachers expressed their concern about the consequences the children might encounter from the parents of the students if they came home saying that they could not be hit as a punishment. Despite this reality, it was included as one of the rights because the importance of children knowing their rights was prioritised.

In the second block, we addressed violence against women. In this case, we tried to work from a particularly sensitive point of view, as all the pupils expressed that they were aware that their fathers did not speak considerately to their mothers.

For this reason, we wanted to put the children in touch with the existing resources on the island. Three relevant people were invited: the person in charge of the children's office, the first practicing lawyer on the island, who specialised in family violence, and the social worker at the public hospital. These three individuals told the students about their work, how they worked with children and what they did to combat domestic violence and violence against women. With their presentations, they broadened the children's

knowledge about the different types of violence, as well as about the existing resources on the island.

These visits were very positively valued because the visitors were very well informed about the subject, integrating specific knowledge about the practices of the island and the conflicts that could arise in its normative, cultural and religious coexistence. The visits were also replicated by the students' mothers, who took advantage of the visits to ask questions about the right to divorce, alimony and problems with child marriages. This practice is forbidden on the island, but it is still a recurrent case that is tried in the island's courts.

In relation to violence, we ended with a third block on the peaceful resolution of conflicts. This began with the viewing of a film that was understood to contain these elements. Subsequently, small theatrical representations were performed which had in common the existence of a problem in the family or educational sphere and which ended up seeking a peaceful solution.

One of the examples chosen by the teachers was a conflict regarding the use of the playground by the boys to play football, which excludes the girls from the space because the game put them in danger because of the violence with which the boys play. Another example was a case of family violence in which the husband wants to beat his wife for not cleaning up, but finally understands that he also has to help out at home. Despite their young age, the students participated well in these representations, and they worked very positively.

## 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Gender inequalities in looking to the future

The Sustainable Development Goals include, in their fourth section, the need to address gender equality education (UN, 2021). Authors such as Heredero de Pedro (2019) and Moriana (2017) have identified its strength as a way to transform the structures of social inequality. In this case, we encountered two completely different scenarios.

A first scenario is the present in which boys and girls are described as practically equal. Intergenerational change and the importance of increasing



the proportion of females in schools are evident (Moraga et al., 1988; WEF, 2022). An intersectional view of childhood allows for differences between the sample and other cultures of childhoods to be taken into account (Collins and Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 2017). The experience of growing up in a community and the non-existence of specific places for boys or girls in the villages, the lack of toys and access to audio-visual material that may foster inequalities, made the children take an egalitarian perspective on childhood. This calls for the need to review the concept of gender in childhood, taking into account the differences established by diverse contexts (Mwollolo, 2015; Nkenkana, 2015).

The second scenario is the projection towards the future of pupils; for children, the differences between the public and private space are very clear with respect to their mothers and fathers, which confirms the need to work on these concepts from the first educational levels (Benavent et al., 2019; DeGue et al., 2014). This does not mean that they underestimate or undervalue their mothers, or that they consider that these tasks are not necessary. We should remember that an estimated 60% of girls who drop out of school do so because they become pregnant (Walgue et al., 2016). In Lamu, women perform most of the household chores, which are very different from Western chores, including carrying wood, washing clothes by hand, fetching water, etc. (MacAulay et al., 2022; Quiroga, 2021). All these tasks are performed by women and children are born seeing this, from the time they are carried on their backs until they are old enough to help them.

Based on the pupils' own assessments, the participation in the course of women who shared their paid jobs with them – both the NGO workers and the experts in children's affairs who visited the children – was considered very positive. The presence of close female leaders who carry out productive and reproductive tasks could begin to make the children revise their conceptions of the sexual division of labour (DeGue et al., 2014; Heredero de Pedro, 2019; Schneider & Hirsch, 2020). The inclusion of other male leaders who are also involved in caregiving tasks, broadening the biased view of childhood, is one proposal for improving this situation.

#### 4.2. Violence as a form of correction

Children's conceptions of gender-based violence are closely related to how they are subject to violence from other agents. We have narrated how many minors experience violence at school, from their parents or from the police, and therefore, from a very young age, they are made to understand violence as a form of correction. This violence is part of the patriarchal power structure and goes beyond intimate partner violence (Bodelón, 2012).

Due to the intrinsic nature of the conception of violence as a form of correction, the trend that calls for gender-based violence not to be reduced to criminal or punitive treatment seems to us to be very relevant (Abreu, 2007; Copello, 2015). Educational intervention is necessary from a very early age so that they children are accompanied in understanding the right not to suffer violence and the obligation not to exercise violence (Edwards et al., 2022).

It has been considered highly desirable to increase knowledge about types of violence and to explain related concepts, such as psychological, economic or sexual violence. This, added to the knowledge of existing resources provided by the people who visited the children, gave young women tools for the construction of their own strategies of resistance (Mohanty, 2008; Moriana, 2017; Schneider & Hirsch, 2020).

#### 4.3. Complexity in the choice of terms and materials

Despite constructing the subject matter with a mixed group in which some people were from outside the field and others were employed at the site, there were some difficulties in transferring certain terms to the students. We assumed that there are many resources on gender equality in English, but few specific to the context in which they were taught. We assumed that Kenya was colonised by the British Empire and that there is still a clear influence of what Quijano (2007) calls the coloniality of knowledge.

This happened with many concepts, such as empowerment, human rights and self-esteem. These concepts may not exist in children's native languages or may be expressed differently, which is why children are not familiar with them until they reach school (Makau, 2016; Oyewumi, 2010). Therefore, as we were in the third year of early childhood education and the level of English in the class was not yet native, all the materials were

translated into Swahili and, in some cases, into the tribal languages that were represented in the classes.

Despite the translation of the terms and the inclusion of our own referents, we feel that the work on these concepts needs much more deconstruction. It is essential to approach the concept of gender equality from an intersectional perspective and to deconstruct the term «Third World Woman» (Lugones, 2011; Mohanty, 2008). It is essential to start from avoid a Eurocentric perspective and to assume that inequalities are more than gender inequalities. It is also essential not to reduce violence to the couple, when violence is intrinsic to public and private spheres.

Likewise, it would be very interesting to continue to make progress with regard to the forms of expression in the different languages, as well as in the institutions and processes of the different ethnic groups, towards the end of protecting children and women.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In a context strongly affected by violence, gender-based violence manifests itself explicitly from an early age. This is why the construction and implementation of this course was very enriching, as we could get to know the views of the students.

First, it is difficult to find context-specific materials and concepts that do not have a Western bias. Therefore, in some of the workshops, it was possible to identify this disconnect between the proposal and the reality. This shows that studies must express the parameters by which they are measuring inequality or violence, because it can greatly influence the results. It is also necessary for educational interventions in equality to have an intersectional and decolonial perspective, which includes different ways of expressing gender and gender equality (Oyewumi, 2010).

Second, concerning equality, we find very different scenarios in childhood and inequality in adulthood—not only with regard to the inequalities themselves but also with regard to perception. We found debates around inequalities in childhood, when it was debated whether girls could dance or play football. Girls resisted being discriminated against in any game and

did not allow anything to be said suggesting that they could not do what a boy could do.

However, in adulthood, the whole class was aware that caring tasks were taken over by their mothers. This is their reality; it is not necessary to fall into revictimisation and portray it from a negative point of view, and the image of the passive third world woman must be deconstructed (Lugones, 2011; Mohanty, 2008). The fact that they know that their mothers carry out caregiving tasks does not imply that they value them less than their fathers or that they feel their mothers contribute less to the family.

Third, it is important to be realistic about the violence that can be reported and the resources that actually exist on the island. The Sustainable Development Goal expresses the need to eradicate violence against women, but this cannot be done with 'a stroke of ink', as Segato (2003, p. 34) puts it. It is important that awareness-raising work take into account the strategies of resistance that young women can actually develop – what options they have in the place they live in case they suffer violence from their partners.

Finally, it is very useful to have carried out this intervention. It was possible to create listening spaces for the students, which are essential as a preventive measure against violence. They were able to learn about concepts and resources that they were previously unaware of, such as economic violence or the function of a social worker. And it was very useful how the teachers actively participated in the whole process and were fully involved in it.

In one hand, in relation to the study program, further progress should be made in improving the course programme, eliminating concepts that have been found to be alien to the reality of the context and including concepts specific to the different ethnic groups. Thus, it is suggested as a proposal for the future to include positive masculinity profiles and to promote awareness of gender equality in adulthood and the right to be free from violence.

On the other hand, due to the limited age range of the sample, some subjects have not been addressed and the sample has been focused on the NGO. It would be very interesting to carry out the experience in primary schools in the area in order to broaden the subjects and compare the results, so as to verify the influence of the organisation's activity on the opinions and behaviour of its children.

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