



## **Evaluation Criteria for Gender Equity in Secondary Education: A Pluralistic Approach from Education Policy in Córdoba, Colombia**

**Tania Inés Martínez Medrano**

Magister en Derecho Procesal

Universidad de Sucre, Colombia

[tania.martinez@unisucre.edu.co](mailto:tania.martinez@unisucre.edu.co)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1722-6577>

**León Julio Arango Buevas**

Doctor en Ciencias Económicas

Universidad de Sucre

[leon.arango@unisucre.edu.co](mailto:leon.arango@unisucre.edu.co)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8198-1872>

**María Claudia Pacheco Barros**

Magister en Ciencias Contables

Universidad de Sucre

[maria.pacheco@unisucre.edu.co](mailto:maria.pacheco@unisucre.edu.co)

ORCID:0000-0003-2034-3820

Publication date: June 12, 2024

### **Summary**

This study examines the persistent challenges around gender equity and equality in the secondary education system in the department of Córdoba, Colombia, based on the design of an evaluation model based on the pluralist perspective. The research is based on the recognition that gender inequalities in educational institutions are expressed both in regulatory structures and in daily practices, reproducing conditions of exclusion and discrimination that limit the full exercise of the right to education. From a qualitative approach with an evaluative orientation and through documentary analysis, the national and regional regulatory frameworks, including the Public Policy of Gender Equity, are studied in relation to the sociocultural dynamics of the Córdoba context. As a result, an evaluative design is proposed made up of dimensions, variables and indicators that allow assessing the implementation and impact of institutional actions aimed at eliminating gender gaps in school

spaces. Among the main findings, limitations in the equitable use of educational space, the low representation of women in school leadership positions, the persistence of the hidden sexist curriculum and the tensions in the recognition of diverse sexual identities are identified. The study concludes that an evaluation from a pluralistic approach, which integrates the voice of educational and social actors, can become a critical tool for institutional transformation. It is highlighted that achieving conditions of gender equality and equity requires a sustained commitment from multiple actors, including the State, educational institutions, families and the community, in a collective commitment to social justice and school coexistence free of violence and discrimination.

**Keywords:** gender equity, gender equality, educational evaluation, public policy, secondary education, pluralistic perspective, Córdoba.

### **1. Introduction**

In recent years, discussions on gender equality and equity have gained relevance in Latin American education systems, especially in regions where structural inequalities persist that affect women, girls, and people with diverse sexual and gender identities in a differentiated way. In the department of Córdoba, Colombia, these problems acquire particular characteristics that need to be addressed from analytical and evaluative frameworks sensitive to the social, cultural and educational conditions of the region. The Córdoba education system, like others in the Colombian Caribbean, faces historical challenges associated with gender exclusion, symbolic violence in the classroom, the reproduction of stereotypes from the hidden curriculum, as well as the limited participation of women in school decision-making spaces. These tensions, far from being anecdotal or punctual, configure a pattern of structural inequality that requires evaluation tools beyond conventional indicators of academic coverage and performance.

From this perspective, educational evaluation cannot be limited to validating technical results or measuring the fulfillment of institutional objectives, but must interrogate the ideological and normative referents that sustain pedagogical practices, forms of school coexistence and educational public policies. As Escudero (2010) warns, any meaningful evaluation requires recognizing the social, political, and cultural conditioning that structures educational processes. This implies adopting an approach that not only documents existing conditions, but critically

assesses how normative frameworks, institutional practices, and pedagogical discourses shape spaces that can reproduce or counteract gender inequality.

The Cordoba context presents a series of tensions that justify the development of a study with an evaluative emphasis on gender equity in secondary education. Among these tensions are, on the one hand, the feminization of the teaching profession at basic levels without a correlative representation in managerial positions; on the other hand, the scarce incorporation of the gender approach in initial and continuing teacher training programs. Added to this is a weak articulation between national public policies, such as the Ten-Year Education Plan and the Public Policy on Gender Equity, and the concrete actions developed by secondary education institutions in the region.

Likewise, phenomena such as adolescent pregnancy, female school dropout for maternity reasons, bullying based on sexual orientation and limitations on the equal use of physical space in secondary schools, make up a complex panorama that must be addressed from a broad evaluative perspective. In this sense, this study is based on the need to build an educational evaluation design that allows assessing the extent to which institutional policies and actions are responding to these challenges. The starting hypothesis suggests that existing normative devices do not automatically translate into cultural transformations within school environments, and that, therefore, an evaluation from a pluralistic approach is key to identifying gaps and guiding improvement processes.

Understanding gender inequalities in education requires a theoretical framework that articulates elements from feminist theory, the sociology of education, and critical evaluation studies. From this perspective, gender is conceived as a historically constructed social category, which crosses all areas of life in society, including school. This category is not reduced to the binary distinction between men and women, but allows us to analyze the power relations that sustain hierarchies, privileges and forms of exclusion based on assigned sex, gender identity and sexual orientation. As various authors in the field of gender studies have pointed out, gender not only structures social expectations of subjects, but also operates as an organizing principle of institutions, including educational institutions (Araya, 2003; Carosio, 2017).

In the case of the Colombian education system, the gender approach has been incorporated in a partial and inconsistent way. Although there are normative documents that promote equity, such as Law 1257 of 2008, the General Education Law and the curricular guidelines of the Ministry of National Education, these do not always translate into transformative pedagogical practices. In addition, traditional educational evaluation has tended to omit the analysis of gender inequalities, limiting itself to formal aspects such as access, permanence or academic performance. This omission has contributed to making invisible structural phenomena such as institutional sexism, gender violence in the school environment or the exclusion of non-normative identities.

To counteract this gap, this study is inscribed in the perspective of pluralistic evaluation, which recognizes the diversity of interests, experiences and values present in educational processes. This perspective rejects the idea of a supposedly objective and impartial evaluation, and instead proposes a situated, context-sensitive, and participatory evaluation, which legitimizes the voice of the actors involved (Izquierdo, 2008). This theoretical orientation makes it possible to overcome merely quantitative and standardized approaches, betting on evaluative devices that investigate the power dynamics, discourses and practices that reproduce inequalities within school spaces.

Likewise, an intersectional vision of gender is assumed, understood as a category that interacts with other axes of inequality such as social class, race, rurality and ethnicity. In the particular case of Córdoba, where Afro-descendant, peasant and indigenous populations converge, it is essential to consider how these intersections configure differentiated experiences of school exclusion. In this sense, the analysis of the hidden curriculum – that is, of the implicit messages transmitted by the educational system on gender roles, sexuality and power – constitutes an essential component of the theoretical approach adopted. It is thus recognized that pedagogical discourses, interpersonal relationships, the use of school space and institutional norms can reinforce or challenge existing gender hierarchies.

In this way, the proposed evaluation design is not only based on the need to assess the formal compliance with public policy, but also seeks to offer theoretical and methodological tools to interpret the complexity of the educational phenomenon from a critical and transformative perspective.

This study is based on a qualitative evaluative approach, with emphasis on documentary analysis and the construction of a methodological design aimed at assessing the implementation of gender equity policies at the secondary education level. The choice of the qualitative approach responds to the need to understand the complex dynamics that shape power relations in school environments, as well as the discourses, practices and social representations that legitimize or resist gender inequalities. From this perspective, evaluation is conceived not as a technical process of verifying results, but as an interpretative practice that, through the problematization of the objects evaluated, allows the generation of socially useful knowledge for educational transformation (Gurdián, 2007; Nirenberg, Brawerman, & Ruiz, 2003).

The methodological procedure is based on the elaboration of an evaluative design composed of dimensions, variables and indicators, built from an exhaustive documentary review of national regulations, sectoral policies, specialized academic literature and official sources of the Ministry of National Education of Colombia. This design is structured around four substantive dimensions: sociocultural context, school climate, pedagogical dimension and institutional management. Each of these dimensions includes sub-dimensions, guiding questions, variables, and qualitative and quantitative indicators that make it possible to assess aspects such as gender gaps, appropriation of school space, the presence of sexist language in the classroom, representation in management positions, and the regulatory application of inclusive policies.

The proposed methodology includes the evaluation matrix as its main instrument, which will be susceptible to be applied in subsequent case studies, focused on educational institutions in the department of Córdoba. Although this initial phase does not include fieldwork, it is expected that the design will function as an input for future empirical research that integrates techniques such as interviews, focus groups, structured observations, and analysis of institutional documents. Based on this, it will be possible to apply the model in a participatory way, involving teachers, principals, students, and families, in line with the pluralist principle that guides this evaluative approach (Cardarelli, 2018).

Among the expected results, it is expected to obtain an evaluation tool that will allow for the identification with greater precision of the structural and symbolic

conditions that hinder gender equity in the educational context of Córdoba. Likewise, it is anticipated that the evaluative model will contribute to making visible the tensions between the formal regulatory framework and institutional practices, making it possible to distinguish between declarative advances and effective transformations. Similarly, it is expected that the application of the evaluation design will contribute to the improvement of institutional and pedagogical management, through the formulation of concrete recommendations to strengthen the mainstreaming of the gender approach in school policies and practices.

Ultimately, the study aspires to provide a critical perspective that expands the traditional boundaries of educational assessment, reaffirming its potential as a tool for social justice. In this sense, the results of the design will not only be useful for management teams or public policy makers, but also for teachers and students committed to a more equitable, diverse and transformative education.

## **2. Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative approach, of an evaluative nature, aimed at the design of a methodological tool that allows assessing the implementation of equity and gender equality policies in secondary education in the department of Córdoba, Colombia. The selection of this approach is based on the need to understand the social, symbolic and normative dynamics that shape gender relations in educational spaces, as well as to build evaluation devices sensitive to the territorial and cultural context of the region. In this sense, the research is framed in the tradition of pluralistic evaluation, which privileges the inclusion of multiple voices and perspectives in the evaluation process, and recognizes the importance of the values, interests, and experiences of the actors involved (Izquierdo, 2008).

In terms of methodological design, it is a documentary and constructive research. The analysis phase focused on the review of national and regional policies on gender equality, official documents of the Ministry of National Education of Colombia, regulatory frameworks such as Law 1257 of 2008 and the General Law on Education, as well as national and international scientific literature on educational evaluation with a gender approach. From this documentary corpus, an evaluative design structured in dimensions, subdimensions, variables and indicators was developed, which constitutes the main methodological product of the research.

The target population of this design is made up of secondary education institutions located in the department of Córdoba, particularly those that have implemented actions related to the promotion of gender equity, the prevention of gender-based violence and the incorporation of sexual diversity in the school environment. Although this study does not include fieldwork, it is estimated that the design can be applied in non-probabilistic samples, through case studies that consider criteria of territorial diversity (urban and rural areas), type of institution (official or private) and sociodemographic characteristics of the students.

The proposed methodological instruments include evaluation matrices built based on the four substantive dimensions identified: sociocultural context, school climate, pedagogical dimension and institutional management. These matrices allow the variables and indicators to be organized in such a way as to facilitate their subsequent analysis through qualitative techniques (content analysis, thematic coding) and quantitative techniques (frequencies, descriptive analysis), in case mixed methods are integrated in future research. The operationalization of the dimensions considers both direct and indirect indicators, as well as various sources of verification, such as school regulations, institutional minutes, pedagogical materials, official circulars and coexistence records.

Finally, the analysis of the data will be guided by a comprehensive and interpretative logic. It is expected that future applications of the evaluation model will allow systematizing the information collected from a critical reading of school contexts, privileging the meaning that actors attribute to their experiences with respect to gender equality in their educational environments. This perspective makes it possible to overcome traditional evaluation frameworks focused on quantifiable goals, in favor of a comprehensive approach that articulates empirical data with processes of critical reflection on the meaning and limits of educational policies in contexts marked by profound social inequalities.

### **3. Results**

The results of this study are concretized in the construction of an evaluative design aimed at assessing gender equity in secondary education in the department of Córdoba, Colombia. Based on the documentary analysis and the pluralistic approach adopted, four substantive dimensions were defined: **sociocultural context, school climate, pedagogical dimension** and **institutional management**. These

dimensions allow for the systematic organization of a set of variables and indicators that can be used as input for the evaluation of practices, discourses, regulations, and social relations in school environments. The development of this design constitutes a relevant methodological advance, as it integrates qualitative and quantitative criteria that allow capturing the complexities of gender inequalities in the educational context of Cordoba.

In the dimension of **sociocultural context**, variables associated with gender gaps in school participation, representation in management positions, adolescent motherhood and institutional attitudes towards sexual diversity are identified. Proposed indicators include the proportion of women in school decision-making bodies, the existence of measures to prevent female dropouts due to pregnancy, and the documentation of gender-discriminatory events. These indicators provide a basis for assessing whether educational institutions recognize and address structural inequalities that affect students.

The school **climate** dimension addresses the appropriation of physical and symbolic space in institutions, considering the existence of segregationist practices, the differentiated use of recreation and food spaces, and the perception of the school environment as inclusive or exclusive according to gender or sexual orientation. The proposed indicators include the free use of spaces by students without distinction of gender, the existence of sexist or exclusionary signs, and the reporting of situations of symbolic violence associated with gender identity.

Regarding the **pedagogical dimension**, variables related to the formal and hidden curriculum, the use of inclusive language in teaching practice, and the institutional management of sexual diversity are identified. It is proposed to evaluate, for example, the presence of discriminatory content in teaching materials, the existence of sexist discourses or practices in the classroom, and the way in which non-normative experiences and expressions of sexuality are addressed. This dimension is fundamental to understanding how the school reproduces or questions social gender norms from its daily pedagogical practices.

Finally, the **institutional management dimension** allows us to assess the existence of internal regulations that promote equality, as well as official pronouncements that support an inclusive organizational culture. Indicators include the updating of coexistence manuals with a gender approach, the issuance of institutional circulars

on diversity and respect, and the creation of school committees or commissions for equity. The absence or weakness of these elements is an indicator of institutional inertia in the face of the challenges of gender equity.

This set of dimensions, variables, and indicators constitutes a methodological input that can be used by educational institutions, researchers, and decision-makers to identify gaps, generate processes of institutional self-reflection, and build more inclusive, democratic, and gender-based violence-free school environments.

#### **4. Discussion**

The construction of an evaluative design to assess gender equity in secondary education in the department of Córdoba represents a significant advance in the incorporation of the gender approach in educational evaluation processes. Unlike traditional models focused on the fulfillment of standardized goals, this proposal recognizes that gender inequalities are not only expressed in terms of coverage and performance, but also cross interpersonal relationships, pedagogical practices, institutional organization, and normative discourses that shape school life. In this sense, evaluation becomes a critical device to make visible the tensions between public policies and everyday practices that are reproduced in schools.

By contrasting the results obtained with the theoretical framework, the usefulness of the pluralistic perspective of evaluation to address complex social phenomena such as gender inequality is reaffirmed. As Izquierdo (2008) and Nirenberg, Brawerman, and Ruiz (2003) point out, evaluation models that integrate multiple voices and recognize the heterogeneity of interests allow for a broader understanding of the object being evaluated, while promoting processes of collective reflection. In the case of this study, this perspective allowed us to build a design sensitive to the sociocultural context of Córdoba, where historical inequalities of gender, ethnicity and social class converge that directly affect the school experience of girls, adolescents and people with non-normative sexual identities.

Likewise, the findings of the proposed design dialogue with previous studies on the reproduction of stereotypes in the classroom, the exclusion of women in management positions, and symbolic violence in school environments (Guevara & García, 2010; Araya, 2008). Similarly, UNESCO's (2018) report on gender equality in education points out that equity policies are often limited to general

recommendations without effective monitoring mechanisms or clear evaluation indicators. This lack is replicated in the Colombian context, where, despite regulatory advances, there are no systematic instruments to assess the real impact of gender policies in the school environment.

A salient aspect of the discussion is the relevance of incorporating the analysis of the hidden curriculum and the power dynamics that are expressed in interpersonal and organizational relationships within schools. The pedagogical dimension of the proposed design allows us to identify more precisely how patriarchal norms are reproduced or resisted from the teaching-learning processes, the use of language, the management of diversity and the recognition of the subjectivities of the students. In this sense, design transcends the merely descriptive function to offer tools that guide institutional transformation processes.

However, the study also acknowledges its limitations. As it is a methodological exercise without direct empirical application, the results should be considered as a preliminary input for future research that validates the design in specific school contexts. Added to this is the need to articulate the evaluation model with training processes aimed at teachers, principals and administrative staff, so that its implementation is not limited to measurement, but also promotes the cultural change necessary to guarantee conditions of equity in the education system.

## **5. Conclusions**

The development of an evaluation design with a pluralistic approach to assess gender equity in secondary education in the department of Córdoba, Colombia, allows us to identify the limits of traditional approaches to educational evaluation and proposes a methodological alternative committed to institutional and social transformation. This proposal recognizes that the school, far from being a neutral space, reproduces configurations of power that can reinforce or challenge gender inequalities, depending on the way in which pedagogical practices, normative discourses, and daily coexistence are managed.

One of the main contributions of the study is the identification of substantive dimensions that must be considered when evaluating gender equity policies in school contexts. These dimensions – sociocultural context, school climate, pedagogical dimension and institutional management – allow for a comprehensive and situated approach to the educational phenomenon, encompassing both

structural and symbolic aspects. The articulation of qualitative and quantitative variables and indicators offers viable methodological tools for educational institutions to diagnose their current situation, plan improvement actions and monitor their progress towards more inclusive school environments.

The study also highlights that evaluation, when based on a pluralistic perspective, acquires a formative and dialogical character, which privileges the participation of the actors involved and stimulates processes of collective reflection. This characteristic is essential to address an issue as complex as gender equality, whose manifestations are not always visible or easily measurable through conventional instruments. Pluralistic evaluation, by incorporating multiple voices and perspectives, contributes to denaturalizing discriminatory practices that are usually normalized in school environments.

Among the practical projections of this study, the possibility of applying the evaluative design in educational institutions in Córdoba through case studies that actively involve teachers, directors, students and families is raised. This application would allow validating the proposed indicators, adjusting the instruments to local realities and generating specific recommendations for each institution. In addition, the model could be adapted by territorial entities, civil society organizations and research teams working on education with a gender focus in other departments of the country.

Finally, the study stresses that advancing gender equality in education requires more than regulations or good intentions. It involves transforming institutional practices, promoting continuous training processes, and guaranteeing evaluation mechanisms that make it possible to clearly identify the structural barriers faced by girls, adolescents, and people with diverse gender identities. The design proposed here constitutes a step in this direction, by offering a methodological tool that contributes to the strengthening of a fairer, more democratic education free of discrimination.

## **6. References**

Araya, S. (2003). *Sexist relationships in education*. Revista Educación, 27(1), 41-52.  
<https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/440/44027105.pdf>

- Araya, S. (2008). *Contents and scope of gender equity in educational policies*. Institute for Research in Education, University of Costa Rica. <http://repositorio.inie.ucr.ac.cr/handle/123456789/304>
- Becerra, I., & Molina, R. (2014). *Policy for gender equality and equity of the National University*. National University.
- Cardarelli, G. (2018). *Evaluative approaches for different objects in the educational field. The evaluation of policies and programs*. IIEP-UNESCO.
- Carosio, A. (2017). *Feminist perspectives to broaden horizons of Latin American critical thought*. In M. Sagot (Coord.), *Feminisms, critical thinking and alternative proposals in Latin America* (pp. 1–22). CLACSO.
- Cordero, T. (2017). *A brief account of the actions for gender equity at the University of Costa Rica*. Cuadernos Pagu, (49), e174909. <https://www.scielo.br/j/cpa/a/XwQjTnkpfnQYnL7fCvZBQBm/>
- Escudero, J. M. (2010). *Evaluation of education policies: perennial issues and current challenges*. Revista Fuentes, 10, 8–31. <https://revistascientificas.us.es/index.php/fuentes/article/view/2585>
- Guevara, E., & García, A. (2010). *Order of gender and school trajectory in women students of exact and natural sciences*. Research and Science, 18(46), 10–17. <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/674/67413508003.pdf>
- Gurdián, A. (2007). *The qualitative paradigm in socio-educational research*. AECI. National Institute of Women [INAMU]. (2018). *National Policy for Effective Equality between Women and Men 2018-2030*. INAMU.
- Izquierdo, B. (2008). *From classical evaluation to pluralistic evaluation*. EMPIRIA. Journal of Social Science Methodology, (16), 115–134.
- Kisilevsky, M. (2009). *The evaluation of policies and programs: challenges for management in education*. In E. Martín & F. Martínez (Coords.), *Advances and challenges in educational evaluation* (pp. 81–104). OEI.
- Lagarde, M. (1996). *Gender and feminism: human development and democracy*. Hours and Hours.
- Law 1257 of 2008. (2008). *By which standards are issued for awareness, prevention and punishment of forms of violence and discrimination against women in Colombia*. Official Gazette No. 47.193.

- Ministry of National Education of Colombia [MEN]. (2022). *Guide to guidelines for the mainstreaming of the gender approach in educational establishments*. <https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/>
- Ministry of Public Education [MEP]. (2017). *Gender equity and equality policy and its action plan*. San José, Costa Rica. <http://repositorio.ciem.ucr.ac.cr/bitstream/123456789/238/1/RCIEM215.pdf>
- Nirenberg, O., Brawerman, J., & Ruiz, V. (2003). *Programming and evaluation of social projects: contributions to rationality and transparency*. Paidós.
- UNESCO. (2016). *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Realization of SDG 4*. <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Santiago/pdf/ESP-Marco-de-Accion-E2030-aprobado.pdf>
- UNESCO. (2018). *Fulfilling our commitments to gender equality in education*. [https://es.unesco.org/gem-report/2018\\_gender\\_review](https://es.unesco.org/gem-report/2018_gender_review)
- Vargas, Y. (2018). *Evaluative research on public secondary education: the criteria of equity and permanence*. Institute for Research in Education. <http://repositorio.inie.ucr.ac.cr/handle/123456789/34>
- Vargas-Sandoval, Y. (2021). *Gender equality and equity in Costa Rican secondary education: criteria for an evaluation design*. *Journal of Investigative News in Education*, 21(3), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.15517/aie.v21i3.48154>