

Critical analysis and guidelines for improving models for assessing ethical and civic competence in service-learning

Análisis crítico y líneas para la mejora de los modelos de evaluación de la competencia ética y cívica en el aprendizaje-servicio

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Abstract:

INTRODUCTION. In recent years, development of the ethical and civic competence (ECC) that service-learning promotes has aroused the interest of educational communities around the world, in line with the pursuit of a holistic humanist education that prepares students for the challenges of living and coexisting in society. However, research into the impact of the implementation of service-learning seems to show that assessment of this competence is not well developed. Therefore, the aim of this study is to provide a critical analysis of the most significant ECC assessment methods and instruments in order to develop lines for improvement to promote assessment in educational action and scientific knowledge of this essential aspect in service-learning projects. **METHOD.** To achieve this objective, we developed an assessment tool, the content of which was validated through expert judgement. This tool made it possible to analyse the ECC assessment methods selected owing to their importance in the area studied based on formal and content-related identifying criteria. **RESULTS.** In this analysis, we found methods mainly from Spain and the USA, generally designed for summative assessment in questionnaire format. These methods essentially focus on civic assessment of ECC, centring on assessing the development of social responsibility and interpersonal skills. Study of the developing reflexivity is dominant in the assessment of the ethical dimension. **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.** A number of areas for improvement are presented, which are aimed at creating a mixed multifocal assessment method that makes it possible to assess the dimensions of ECC in all of their complexity. Thus, we hope to contribute to the consolidation of service-learning to promote a holistic education that is committed to society and to people's well-being.

Keywords: service-learning, assessment, competence, ethics, civics, moral education, character education, education for citizenship, community education, social justice, common good, expert judgement.

Resumen:

INTRODUCCIÓN. El desarrollo de la competencia ética y cívica (CEC) que promueve el aprendizaje-servicio ha suscitado el interés de comunidades educativas de todo el mundo en los últimos años, en consonancia con la búsqueda de una educación integral humanista que prepare a los educandos para los retos de vivir y convivir en sociedad. No obstante, la evaluación de esta competencia parece desarrollada en un grado menor a la luz de las investigaciones relacionadas con el impacto de la aplicación del aprendizaje-servicio. Por ello, este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar, de forma crítica, los métodos e instrumentos de evaluación más relevantes. El fin es elaborar unas líneas de mejora que impulsen dicha evaluación hacia la acción educativa y el conocimiento científico sobre este aspecto central en proyectos de aprendizaje-servicio. **MÉTODO.** Para la consecución de este objetivo, se construyó una herramienta evaluativa cuyo contenido fue validado por expertos. Con ella, se analizaron los métodos de evaluación de la CEC seleccionados por su relevancia en el área estudiada de acuerdo con criterios identificativos, de forma y de contenido. **RESULTADOS.** En este análisis, encontramos métodos provenientes, en su mayoría, del contexto español y norteamericano, y concebidos en general para la evaluación sumativa en formato de cuestionario. Estos métodos se enfocan, sobre todo, en la evaluación cívica de la CEC; en concreto, en la evaluación del desarrollo de responsabilidad social y de habilidades inter-

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personales. En la evaluación de la dimensión ética, prevalece el estudio del desarrollo de la reflexividad. DISCUSIÓN Y CONCLUSIONES. Se presentan unas líneas de mejora orientadas hacia la creación de un método evaluativo mixto y multifocal que permita evaluar las dimensiones de la CEC en toda su complejidad. Con ello, se espera contribuir a la consolidación del aprendizaje-servicio para la promoción de

una educación integral comprometida con la sociedad y el bienestar de las personas.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje-servicio, evaluación, competencia, ética, civismo, educación moral, educación del carácter, educación para la ciudadanía, educación comunitaria, justicia social, bien común, juicio de expertos.

1. Introduction

Since the late 20th-century, pedagogical approaches aimed at a holistic educational model that goes beyond the solely intellectual aspect have gained momentum in educational research and actions in the USA and have spread around the world. One of the proposals that make up this current is character education, which from its beginnings has taken on a multifaceted definition, with different disciplinary approaches from education, philosophy, and psychology, principally (Bernal, 2020). Character education has spread in the field of pedagogy, albeit not without various issues; for instance, the concern about its potential risk of indoctrination (Smith, 2022) or the challenge of reaching a consensus about the content of this teaching (Arthur, 2005) in a diverse and plural social context. And it has done as a form of moral education, with a neo-Aristotelian perspective in most cases, that is aimed at progress in the acquisition of virtues (not only moral, but also intellectual, and instrumental) that guide the individual towards a full and flourishing life (Kristjánsson, 2015; Harrison et al., 2016; Fuentes, 2018). This necessarily involves the development of ethical, civic, and emotional aspects (Esteban, 2015). It is at this point where moral education, in close relationship with character education, relates to citizenship education as the acquisition of ethical virtues is connected to the development of civic virtues, and these feed back into one another and need one another to flourish (Camps, 2005). Nonetheless, although moral education per se involves shaping citizens (Arthur, 2005), education for citizenship is necessary for the explicit learning of content and civic virtues. Such learning will be acquired through experiences that provide spaces for reflection and critical analysis of reality in relation to the social functioning of our micro- and macro-communities (McLaughlin, 2006).

This trend has aroused interest in the search for new forms of educational action that contribute to

the acquisition of these virtues, with service-learning (SL) standing out in this context. Service-learning has grown and expanded exponentially in recent years all over the world. It stands out among the different innovative methodologies for its ability to have a positive impact in not just academic and cognitive, vocational and professional, personal and social areas, but also, and especially, in integrating this impact with the development of ethical and civic competence (ECC) among its participants (Furco, 2004). The implementation of SL contributes to the balance between pedagogical individualism and communitarianism identified by Quintana (1988) as one of the contradictions of education. In other words, to the symbiosis between individual and moral development, and social productivity as a citizen who collaborates to benefit his or her community and the common good (Etzioni, 2001; Redondo-Corcobado & Fuentes, 2022). So, development of the ethical dimension and development of citizenship are presented as interrelated in academic literature about SL, as elements that form part of the very essence of education contained in SL projects.

A number of studies refer to civic development driven by participation in SL projects, raising questions about the development of an active, democratic, and participatory citizenship through social action in the community that promotes civic commitment and social responsibility (Martínez-Odría, 2007; Tapia, 2010; Martínez, 2010; Bringle & Clayton, 2021). All of this helps the individual to comprehend and become aware of political problems, to develop social skills in the space shared with others, as well as to construct its own identity in relation to its community (Puig et al., 2011; Salam et al., 2019; Fuentes et al., 2022).

This civic dimension is driven by a development of ethics with which it feeds back and which is unavoidable in SL (Opazo et al., 2015; González-Geraldo et al., 2017). Such development of ethics adopts an inductive

process for acquiring virtues through which, starting with the experiential situation facilitated by participation in this type of project, individuals develop abstract arguments and their own cognitive processes (Zayas et al., 2019). These relate to questions such as social justice (Stith et al., 2021), judgement and deliberation for decision making (Puig et al., 2011; Chiva et al., 2018) based on the axiological system itself, or critical and self-critical reflection, understood as a form of critical thinking (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2018) and which is one of the intrinsic and central elements of SL (Deeley, 2016).

This reciprocal development involving the ethical and civic dimensions makes it possible to move towards a balance between them. This must be the objective of SL, which Zayas et al. (2019) define as a civic ethics. That is, as the combination of the ethical development of individuality and connection with the community, which avoids the dissolution of the individual in the collectivity and prevents development of the personality that is disconnected from problems relating to the common good.

However, while the development of ECC has been one of the principal objects of interest of SL for many academics and professionals from the field of education, and assessment of the different impacts of the application of SL has been a focus of attention for all of the educational community since it started to be practised in the USA (Moely et al., 2002), assessment of the development of ECC in SL has not undergone a similar evolution. In this sense, the trend has essentially been to assess the learning of content more than community-related learning, in line with what Pollack (2015) called the “pedagogicalization of SL”. By this, he refers to its reduction to a teaching method that only or primarily perfects acquisition of theoretical knowledge by students, thus displacing any attention to its capacity to transform them as people and citizens and, ultimately, to transform the community.

This trend could result from the difficulties associated with the comprehension and assessment of the ethical and civic learnings that relate to its particular nature (García-Gutiérrez et al., 2018). For example, to the fact that development of these virtues is not dichotomous (Curren & Kotzee, 2014) and cannot be assessed as suitable or unsuitable, but rather is gradual; that is to say, that individuals cannot be assessed on the basis of whether they have acquired one of a number of virtues, but for their own progress

in the process of this acquisition. Another important challenge for assessing ECC in SL is that it is an object that is hard to measure, as it involves different ideas, skills, and attitudes, and so requires a general and specific, quantitative and qualitative assessment. It is what Alexander (2016, p. 316), returning to the words of Ryle (1971), calls a thick and thin description. In other words, a complex and multifocal assessment method that combines various techniques with quantitative and qualitative focuses to embrace all of the elements to assess. To do this, some authors such as Pérez (2016) present a series of different techniques for assessing moral and non-moral virtues including questionnaires, rubrics, field diaries, discussions, observation, and interviews among others.

Furthermore, if assessment of ECC is not undertaken with sufficient breadth and depth or is done in a piecemeal way focussing on a single dimension of learning, it is possible that the assessment will be reduced and simplified to predetermined patterns of behaviour. From them, erroneous inferences can be drawn, or they can even result in some forms of indoctrination that do not consider the reflexive dimension of the individual and the necessary link with the behavioural and affective dimensions (Ibáñez-Martín, 2021). This would correspond with the non-expansive model of Alexander (2016), which refers to ethical and moral indoctrination, through the reproduction of “prefabricated” traits or behaviours and which implies virtually no personal and/or social growth by the individual, but rather the simple learning of irreflexive behaviours that are liable to turn students into “moral automata” (Puig et al., 2017, p. 125, own translation).

Furthermore, the participatory and democratic nature of SL means that this assessment has to include all actors involved in the project, both academic and social, from inside and outside the classroom, considering the individuals and other people who comprise the school, family, and social community where ethical-civic learning occurs (Bringle, 2021). If to this we add the need to perform the assessment in sufficient depth and by constructing, applying, and analysing a complex method of assessment in the short time scale these projects often have, or the in the short-, medium-, or long-term transformational intent of SL projects, assessing ECC can involve a very high level of difficulty to be confronted by already overloaded teachers (Palape et al., 2022).

This imbalance between the interest in ECC that SL promotes and its assessment is the motivation behind

this study. So, the aim of this article is to analyse critically the methods and instruments for assessing ethical-civic competence in SL, as well as developing lines to improve the promotion of this assessment in educational action and scientific knowledge of this fundamental aspect in this type of projects.

2. Method

We developed an ad hoc assessment tool that includes the criteria for carrying out the analysis based on a theoretical review of the most relevant elements and subdimensions of ECC associated with SL. This tool was subjected to a process of content validation by means of the judgement of a panel of experts. Escobar-Pérez and Cuervo-Martínez (2008) define this as “an informed opinion by people with a track record in the field, who are recognised by others as qualified experts on it, and who can give information, evidence, judgements, and valuations” (p. 29, own translation). Fifteen specialists in the field, eight male and seven female, participated in this judgement, following the selection criteria proposed by Skjong and Wentworht (2001) for this type of process: all of the participants had experience in providing judgements and evidence-based or experience-based decision-making and they had a good reputation in the field of academic research into SL, ethics, and citizenship. They also had a mean of eight years’ experience of SL-related teaching, research, and/or management of institutional bodies, such as coordinating offices for this type of initiative in faculties or universities. The choice of experts also aimed to ensure the presence of higher education institutions from across Spain, with experts from nine universities involved: Universidad de Castilla La Mancha, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, Universidad de Barcelona, Universidad de Valencia, CES Don Bosco, Universidad de Murcia, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, and Universidad Católica de Valencia.

These experts qualitatively and quantitatively assessed the items presented with regards to their pertinence, relevance, and clarity in the study of ethical-civic assessment in SL. Aiken’s V content validity coefficient (Aiken, 1980; Penfield & Giacobbi, 2004) was calculated for all of their responses, and this was considered satisfactory from a minimum value of 0.8 (Merino & Livia, 2009), giving a positive result in the three dimensions analysed (0.9, 0.87, and 0.83).

The qualitative responses helped improve the delineation, classification, and structure of the elements to be analysed with this tool, which was finally structured into three categories of analysis criteria: firstly, identification criteria, relating to the provenance of the tool, such as the year of publication, the authors, and its provenance; secondly, formal criteria, relating to the type of assessment, assessor, recipients, and instrument analysed; and, finally, content criteria. In this last category, which forms the most extensive part of the study, assessment instruments were analysed on the basis of how much they explore the elements that comprise the ECC subdimensions of SL. So, after the contributions by the experts in the validation process, the presence and depth of the following elements in the methods analysed was examined: for the ethical competence, reflexive capacity, the sense of social justice, the capacity for judgement-deliberation and self-knowledge; and for the civic competence, democratic citizenship, social responsibility, the sense of belonging to the community, and interpersonal skills (Table 1). It should be noted that the categorisation of the different dimensions and subdimensions connected to ECC that is described above and represented in Table 1 is not intended to be a simplification based on a global anthropological conception of the ethical and the civic, but is the result of reflection on the link between this competence and its different elements with the specific proposals of SL.

TABLE 1. Dimensions and subdimensions of ethical and civic competence in service-learning.

Ethical and civic competence (ECC)	
Ethical dimension	Civic dimension
Reflexive capacity	Democratic citizenship
Sense of social justice	Social responsibility
Capacity for judgement-deliberation	Sense of belonging to the community
Self-knowledge	Interpersonal skills

The instruments analysed were selected by a process of triangulation with the participation of two experts. After carrying out an exhaustive review of the literature about existing methods for assessing SL, the experts selected and independently examined high-impact publications in English and Spanish that focused on ethical and/or civic assessment, whether they were fully dedicated to the specific assessment of these dimensions or included it as part of a general assessment. Consequent-

ly, fourteen instruments were valued by both experts as pertinent for the study and eventually selected. They had been published between 1997 and 2020 (Table 2), a period that coincides with the start of the expansion of the relevant literature on SL in Spain (Redondo-Corbado & Fuentes, 2020). All of them stood out, either for the variety of elements assessed relating to the ethical-civic dimension and/or for the depth with which some of these elements were tackled.

TABLE 2. Publications that include the instruments selected for analysis in the study.

Year of publication	Author(s) of the publication	Title of the publication
1997	Eyler et al.	The impact of service-learning on college students
2002	Moely et al.	Psychometric properties and correlates of the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ): A measure of students' attitudes related to service-learning
2010	Prentice & Robinson	Improving student learning outcomes with service learning
2011	Steinberg et al.	Civic-minded graduate: A north star (assessment tools)
2015	Campo	Una rúbrica para evaluar y mejorar los proyectos de aprendizaje servicio en la universidad [A rubric for assessing and improving service-learning projects at university]
2015	Batlle	Avaluació dels aprenentatges en els projectes d'aprenentatge servei [Assessment of learning in service-learning projects]
2015	Hébert & Hauf	Student learning through service learning: effects on academic development, civic responsibility, interpersonal skills and practical skills
2016	Gregorová et al.	The impact of service-learning on students' key competences
2017	Puig et al.	¿Cómo evaluar proyectos de aprendizaje servicio? [How can service-learning projects be assessed?]
2019	López-de-Arana et al.	Diseño y validación de un cuestionario para la autoevaluación de experiencias de aprendizaje-servicio universitario [Design and validation of a questionnaire for self-assessment of university service-learning experiences]
2019	Rodríguez-Izquierdo	Validación de una escala de medida del impacto del aprendizaje-servicio en el desarrollo de las competencias profesionales de los estudiantes en formación docente [Validation of a scale to measure the impact of service-learning on the development of the professional competences of teacher training students]
2020	León-Carrascosa et al.	Diseño y validación de un cuestionario para evaluar la metodología aprendizaje-servicio [Design and validation of a questionnaire to assess the service-learning methodology]
2020	Santos-Rego et al.	El aprendizaje-servicio y la educación universitaria [Service-learning and university education]
2023	Furco et al.	Service-Learning Quality Assessment Tool (SLQAT)

3. Results

The results of the analysis provide data that are very instructive for assessment of ECC. Half of the results are from Spain and the other half are from other countries, mainly the USA. These methods, with three exceptions (Eyler et al., 1997; Moely et al., 2002; Steinberg et al., 2011), are not specifically directed at assessing aspects of ECC but rather include these aspects as part of a more general assessment along with other types of dimensions, such as academic performance or the logistics of the project. Ten of them opt for a questionnaire format with multiple-choice answers or a Likert-type scale. Three choose the rubric format. Only the civic-minded graduate scale (Steinberg et al., 2011), which is one of the exceptions mentioned, uses a complex mixed assessment method combining various assessment techniques of different types, thus adding a rubric, a narrative analysis, and an interview to the CASQ instrument (Moely et al., 2002). The great majority of these methods are proposed as a summative assessment by the person leading an SL project of students participating in it, generally from higher education, without including the perspective of other agents such as the coordinators or participants from collaborating entities. In some cases, their use is also intended as an initial assessment, or both are combined as a pre-test/post-test.

Regarding the analysis of content relating to the ethical dimension, the most widely assessed skill is “reflexive capacity”, which relates to critical thinking and the capacity to analyse the immediate environment in search of needs and their possible causes and solutions and self-analysis of one’s own experiences, learnings, and training. On the other hand, there is little explicit coverage of the “sense of social justice”, although it is included in the instruments of Eyler et al. (1997), Moely et al. (2002), and Herrera et al. (2011), as well as in the SLQAT questionnaire (Furco et al., 2023). In all of them, this subdimension centres on pro-equality attitudes, attitudes towards diversity, and the defence of human dignity. For its part, “capacity for judgement-deliberation” is considered in almost none of the instruments analysed and the only references found to this subdimension (Gregorová et al., 2016; León-Carrascosa et al., 2020) relate it to decision making skills. As for “self-knowledge”, which only five instruments analyse (Campo, 2015; Hébert & Hauf, 2015; Gregorová et al., 2016; López-de-Arana et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2019), this focusses on questioning and comprehension of one’s own skills for managing and development of the personality, as well as one’s own cultural biases, stereotypes, and prejudices.

So, with regards to these subdimensions, we can identify some ethical aspects assessed to a lesser extent, such as the assessment of situations based on a system of values and virtues for taking decisions, self-criticism, identifying one’s own cognitive processes and behaviour patterns, and the capacity for self-transformation starting from resignification and reidentification. Nonetheless, it is worth emphasising the proposal for assessment made by Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2019), which is directed at assessing future education professionals’ development of professional competences using SL. This creates a scale whose elements are almost completely identified with ECC, and in most cases with the specific elements of the ethics subdimension.

If we compare this development of ethical assessment with the development of the civic dimension, an approach to assessment that largely focusses on the latter is apparent. In fact, although the three tools identified as being explicitly and exclusively dedicated to aspects relating to ECC include essential questions in ethical assessment such as “sense of social justice” or “critical and reflexive analysis” of the surrounding reality, they are actually conceived and centred principally on the exploration of skills and civic attitudes. In the case of Spain, the CUCOCSA questionnaire (Santos-Rego et al., 2020), the questionnaire developed by León-Carrascosa et al. (2020), and the rubric of Puig et al. (2017) are notable for the depth of their study of the civic dimension. The last of these stands out for dedicating two of the three categories of dynamisms of SL to questions relating to reflection, analysis of surroundings, social participation and awareness, and interpersonal relations. In the case of CUCOCSA, for the development of two of its four scales based on the aforementioned CASQ questionnaire and the CMG scale, thus providing a valuable adaptation for the assessment of civic-social and participatory competences in our context. For its part, the questionnaire by León-Carrascosa et al. (2020) investigates both the learning dimension and the service dimension, aspects related to reflection, decision making, participation, responsibility, and social awareness and communication.

Nonetheless, although, in a general sense, a greater weight is observed in civic assessment, there is something of an imbalance in the subdimensions analysed within this dimension. The majority of the instruments centre on performing a broad assessment of “interpersonal skills”, including elements such as pro-sociality, collaborative work, the expression and listening communicative capacity, the dialogic capacity for negotiation, the search

for common goals, and the acceptance of different points of view, leadership, and empathetic capacity. The other pillar that supports assessment in this dimension is “social responsibility”. In different cases analysed (Prentice & Robinson, 2010; Hébert & Hauf, 2015; Gregorová et al., 2016; Puig et al., 2017; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2019; León-Carrascosa et al., 2020), this is associated with increased awareness and sensitisation of the importance and influence of action and commitment of the individual as part of society, at a micro and macro level, on the causes of and improvements to social problems, on political events, and on care for the environment. On the contrary, aspects relating to “democratic citizenship” barely appear, associated almost solely with participation in matters from public life, which, for the most part, only affect the project developed. For its part, only one of the instruments analysed takes into account the “sense of belonging to the community” (Eyler et al., 1997). In this way, the civic aspects that are assessed less in the analysis relate to the civic matters of linking identity to one’s own community, the perception of one’s own space in it, active participation in public life, and the search for actions aimed at the common good.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis carried out in this study has found gaps in the scientific-pedagogical literature relating to the lack of consensus and depth in ethical-civic assessment in SL. Also, some important approaches to take into account for future research in this sense, mainly focused on questions that are considered essential in the civic dimension of SL. The preference for assessment in this dimension could be because its principal subdimensions are often translated into observable behaviours by the individual in the community, since development in these dimensions only makes sense when we conceive of the subject in society, necessarily linked to others (Camps, 2005), unlike those related to the ethical dimension. Another hypothesis is that SL initiatives focus more on civics than ethics, in which case the development in this latter dimension would be more of an indirect consequence owing to the aforementioned joint development of both dimensions (given their interrelated nature) than the result of a specific and deliberate planning of learning outcomes for this purpose. It is also necessary to consider the fact that some authors might view civic assessment as an indirect measure of ethical development in SL, given that certain theoretical positions, such as those proposed by Arthur (2005), regard a degree of prior acquisition of ethical virtues as a prerequisite for the very existence of citizen development.

The results of this study are significant and enable progress from the instruments already developed to be able to move forwards in knowledge of and practice in this field and so strengthen the development of ECC in SL. Starting from these works, it is apparent that constructing a method that makes it possible to consider all of the subdimensions identified in this study in the areas of ethics and civics is necessary, especially in those that are developed to a lesser extent. Regarding the aspects that are represented less in the analysis performed, there is a striking contrast between their limited development in the assessment of SL and their large significance in theoretical literature on this topic, as in the case of the development of democratic citizenship, with SL being seen in this literature as one of the principal current proposals for citizenship education itself (Puig et al., 2011). Another example in the field of ethics would be self-knowledge, which starts to establish itself as one of the central elements of SL, especially in studies from Asia (Snell & Lau, 2020). Nonetheless, it is necessary to note that, while these two aspects are not included in standardised instruments like the ones analysed, they are sometimes assessed in parallel using other qualitative techniques developed on an ad hoc basis for each specific project, such as field diaries, discussion groups, interviews, or informal conversations.

Accordingly, this study concludes that the academic production of the last two decades shows that the assessment methods available for civic-ethic assessment of SL are insufficient, and so a new assessment method is needed. A method that can address this complex construct with precision by systematising the practice of assessment of this aspect to drive its progress in the scientific and social plane. All of this from a mixed methodological model that combines techniques for gathering and analysing information from different focuses and a multifocal character, making it possible to assess these dimensions from the joint perspective of all of the participating agents. In short, a method that, in line with Aramburuzabala et al. (2019), combines participatory and joint assessment with the complementary application of quantitative and qualitative tools. This new focus would permit a thick and thin description like the one Ryle (1971) described, which would be very valuable for revealing more about the effects of using SL on the development of ECC, both in the moment of its application and in its impact over time. Besides, it would enable the necessary realisation of longitudinal studies (Blanco-Cano & García-Martín, 2021) due to the consistency in the method.

It is important to consider a variety of difficulties that can arise when developing this method to assess ECC.

Firstly, there could be a difficulty in proposing an assessment method that standardises this assessment practice but can be adapted to the circumstantial characteristics of each project (such as, for example, the type of participants and contexts), making it possible to cover all of the socio-educational reality of the projects. Furthermore, standardisation itself would entail a difficult conceptual consensus around the elements that are encompassed in ECC that is not without controversy. Secondly, such an extensive assessment could result in a method that works poorly and so is unlikely to be put into practice because of lack of time and the different stresses that people who try to carry out a project of these characteristics often encounter (Palape et al., 2022). Finally, it would be necessary to increase the methodological training of the people who will coordinate this assessment (Aramburuzabala et al., 2019), both to apply information-gathering and analysis techniques and to integrate all of the data that derive from the different focuses applied and their interpretation with regard to the degree of development of the object studied.

Concerning the limitations of this study, we should note that although it selected tools published in high-impact journals mainly used in this sphere by other types of research, these might not fully reflect all of the tools existing for this purpose. There may be others that have been published outside the search criteria applied or that are used in educational practice but have not been collected in academic publications. Furthermore, the wide variety of formats, contexts, and aspects analysed in these tools means that it is hard to make comparisons between instruments that might be similar or equivalent in some aspects and complementary in other cases.

Ultimately, the ECC developed in SL is a highly complex construct and there is a lack of consensus around its conceptualisation and assessment caused by the challenges of diagnosing and measuring the characteristics that are inherent to the particular nature of this dimension of SL. All of this produces a dissonance with the significant and rapid expansion of this methodology and its practices in educational institutions all over the world. Despite these difficulties, development of the civic and ethical dimensions in the people who comprise our society creates a holistic educational pathway focused on full development of the individual, the common good, and social change (Bernal & Naval, 2023). This is why this research highlights the motivation and the need to develop a global assessment method that makes it possible to consider the immediate and long-term ethical-civic impact of SL projects in depth and with scientific rigour. This will enable an education that is more humane, en-

gaged and connected to the social fabric and its needs, and to people's happiness and well-being.

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