

Article

Values and Ethics as Education Policy: Media Framing of Ecuador's 2024 Curriculum Reform

Fernanda Tusa ^{1,*}, Ignacio Aguaded ² and Santiago Tejedor ³

¹ Faculty of Social Sciences, Technical University of Machala, Machala 0702010, Ecuador; ftusa@utmachala.edu.ec

² Department of Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, Psychology, and Social Sciences of Sport, University of Huelva, 21071 Huelva, Spain; aguaded@uhu.es

³ Department of Journalism and Communication Sciences, Faculty of Communication Sciences, Autonomous University of Barcelona, 08193 Bellaterra, Spain; santiago.tejedor@uab.cat

* Correspondence: ftusa@utmachala.edu.ec Tel.: +593-993563785

Abstract

Ecuador is experiencing an unprecedented escalation of violence, organized crime and public insecurity, prompting the Ministry of Education to introduce a curricular reform through Ministerial Agreement MINEDUC-MINEDUC-2024-00060-A. This reform incorporates five new subjects—Civic Education, Ethics and Integrity, Education for Sustainable Development, Socioemotional Education, Financial Education, and Education for Road Safety and Sustainable Mobility—into the national curriculum, with the explicit aim of fostering civic responsibility, ethical behavior and social cohesion. This study examines the societal and political context of the reform and analyzes its representation in the Ecuadorian press during 2024 using qualitative content analysis of publicly accessible national news articles, including reports, chronicles, interviews and press releases. The analysis focuses on the framing of the reform's messages, the information provided and the actors featured in the coverage. Findings reveal that media narratives strongly reflect governmental discourse, portraying Civic, Ethic and Integrity Education as a moral *vitamin* to counteract the erosion of values and as a strategy to reinforce national identity through civic rituals. The study concludes that the reform exemplifies the integration of educational policy with sociopolitical objectives, positioning schools as central actors in long-term efforts to address societal violence and promote ethical citizenship.

Keywords: curriculum reform; civic education; violence prevention; educational policy; moral education; media framing

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1. Introduction

Ecuador has faced in recent years an alarming escalation of violence, organized crime and public insecurity, a phenomenon that has generated deep transformations in the social fabric and heightened perceptions of vulnerability among citizens. Scholars have referred to this phenomenon as the consolidation of a *society of fear* in which crime becomes normalized and civic trust erodes (Calderón, 2012; Perilla & Devia, 2018). *Public discourse* (Sarangi, 2011) increasingly reflects concern over issues such as sicariato (contract killings), gang activity and the visible presence of armed actors in urban and rural spaces. The deterioration of security has also impacted schools, where students, teachers and families confront new risks that extend beyond academic matters.

Historically, the relationship between education and social stability has been widely acknowledged. Education systems have often been tasked not only with transmitting knowledge but also with cultivating the moral and civic virtues necessary for a functioning democracy (Nucci et al., 2014; Banks, 2008). In contexts marked by violence, this dual role of education—as a knowledge system and as a moralizing agent—becomes particularly relevant. Ecuador’s recent curricular reform is situated precisely at this intersection, where pedagogical action is mobilized as a preventive strategy against broader societal crises.

The Ministry of Education of Ecuador introduced Ministerial Agreement MINEDUC-MINEDUC-2024-00060-A, appointed in 2024, which mandates the inclusion of five new subjects into the national curriculum: Civic Education, Ethics and Integrity, Education for Sustainable Development, Socioemotional Education, Financial Education and Education for Road Safety and Sustainable Mobility. This initiative responds directly to the public demand for stronger moral guidance in schools and aims to rebuild the nation’s sense of civic duty and social cohesion. Civic Education, in particular, has been framed by the Ministry as a means of promoting learning of rights, values and norms that foster respectful and harmonious coexistence (*Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador*, 2024).

The Ecuadorian reform can be interpreted through the lens of peace education and citizenship education frameworks, which advocate for teaching strategies that combine cognitive, affective and behavioral components to foster tolerance, dialogue and non-violent conflict resolution (Galtung, 1996; Van Lange, 2014). The explicit integration of ethics, civic responsibility and socioemotional learning in the curriculum reflects this multidimensional approach.

Minister Alegría Crespo, in public statements, has positioned these curricular additions as a *vitamin* for a nation (*Teleamazonas*, 2024) facing a moment of weakness, underscoring the need to confront anti-values and the excessive permissiveness by the authorities that undermines empathy, mutual respect and commitment to the common good. Her discourse aligns with theories of *civic virtue* (Galston, 2001; Gutmann, 1999) which hold that democratic societies require citizens to actively uphold shared moral and legal norms. This reform thus becomes both a symbolic and practical intervention in national life. The public statements of the Minister also suggest an awareness of the need for both systemic and cultural change. The metaphor of the *vitamin* points to a therapeutic vision of education (*Teleamazonas*, 2024) one in which schools act as agents of moral healing in a weakened social body. While this framing can be politically effective in rallying support, it also raises questions about the limitations of curriculum-based solutions in addressing deeply entrenched structural problems such as poverty, inequality and corruption (Torres, 2017).

The symbolic dimension is particularly evident in the renewed emphasis on patriotic rituals. The reform makes it mandatory for schools to hold weekly civic moments, lasting 10 to 15 min, to strengthen respect for national symbols, reflect on values and address topics of national interest. This includes singing the National Anthem and local anthems, and dedicating Mondays to the discussion of a specific moral value, which is established by the Ministry of Education and adopted by each educational institution. The Ministry describes these rituals as foundational for developing an integral citizenship and ethical action in daily life. Such practices recall the civic education models of the mid-20th century, which linked national identity formation to structured school ceremonies (Reichert & Print, 2018). In addition, a useful comparison can be drawn with the *Itorero Program* implemented in Rwanda, which similarly sought to strengthen civic values and state-driven moral education. This parallel allows situating the Ecuadorian case within a broader international perspective of government-led educational initiatives. In this regard, Sundberg’s (2016) study stands out as a classic reference, offering a comprehensive and critical analysis of such State-driven educational projects.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

From a theoretical standpoint, curriculum reforms of this nature reflect the socially constructed character of education policy. Curriculum is not a neutral list of subjects; it embodies the values and aspirations of a society, responding to political, cultural and historical contingencies (Apple, 2019; Pinar, 2019). In Ecuador's case, the inclusion of Civic, Ethics and Integrity Education reveals the state's intent to use schooling as a space for moral regeneration, confronting the erosion of trust and solidarity generated by pervasive insecurity.

The research problem addressed here is how educational policy, particularly through curriculum content, can respond to crises of violence and moral disintegration. Previous studies have shown that curriculum reforms often emerge as reactive measures to economic or technological changes (Fullan, 2016; Goodson, 2014), but less attention has been paid to their role in contexts of moral and social crisis. Ecuador's policy offers a unique opportunity to examine this dynamic.

The objective of this study is to analyze the Ministry of Education's integration of Civic, Ethics and Integrity Education into the national curriculum and to investigate how Ecuadorian media represent and frame this initiative within the larger context of societal violence. The analysis focuses on press coverage from 2024, considering the messages conveyed, the information provided and the actors involved.

The justification for this study lies in the need to understand the intersection between educational policy and social resilience. In societies affected by chronic violence, schools are not only spaces of learning but also potential catalysts for peacebuilding and civic reconstruction (UNESCO, 2017; Davies, 2003). By documenting and analyzing this case, the research contributes to the global debate on the capacity of education systems to intervene in sociopolitical emergencies.

Media representation plays a decisive role in shaping the public's understanding of such reforms. The press can amplify, critique, or reframe governmental initiatives, influencing how they are perceived by different social groups (Entman, 1993; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In Ecuador, early media coverage appears to have largely mirrored official discourse, suggesting a strong agenda-setting effect that warrants further scrutiny.

Another dimension to consider is the historical trajectory of civic education in Latin America. Past experiences in countries such as Chile, Colombia and Argentina show that civic education often shifts in content and emphasis according to political regimes and national crises (Cox et al., 2005). Ecuador's reform can thus be read as part of a broader regional pattern in which moral and civic instruction is mobilized during moments of heightened insecurity.

The importance of this research extends beyond Ecuador. As societies around the world grapple with rising *polarization* (Pascual et al., 2024), *distrust* in institutions (Pérez-Escoda & Boulos, 2025) and various forms of violence, the Ecuadorian case provides insights into how curriculum policy can be strategically designed to reinforce ethical and civic norms. This study seeks to contribute to comparative education literature by offering an empirically grounded analysis of a reform that explicitly links moral education to national security and social cohesion.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

1.2.1. Curriculum as a Socio-Political Construct

Curriculum is a dynamic and contested field, shaped not only by pedagogical priorities but also by ideological, political and cultural forces (Apple, 2019). It embodies the dominant narratives a society wishes to transmit to future generations, making curriculum reform an inherently political act. In the context of Ecuador's recent social crisis, the

inclusion of Civic, Ethics and Integrity Education reflects a deliberate policy decision to use the school system as an instrument for restoring social order.

Pinar (2019) conceptualizes curriculum as a complicated conversation that intertwines personal, cultural and political dimensions. This notion implies that curriculum design is both reflective and constitutive of a nation's identity. Ecuador's reform is thus part of a larger dialogue about what it means to be a citizen in a context of insecurity, where the state seeks to reassert shared values through formal education.

Goodson (2014) emphasizes that curricular changes often emerge in response to societal crises rather than purely educational needs. The present reform can be seen as a reactive measure, targeting the moral and civic dimensions of student life to address broader social instability. This aligns with historical precedents in Latin America where curriculum has been mobilized for nation-building purposes (Torres, 2017).

From a sociological perspective, Bernstein (2005) argues that curriculum serves as a means of regulating the distribution of knowledge, values and power. In Ecuador's case, the state's decision to mandate moral and civic subjects functions as a regulatory mechanism, defining which forms of knowledge and behavior are legitimized within the public sphere.

Apple and Beane (2007) contend that progressive curriculum must not only respond to crises but also foster critical citizenship. While Ecuador's reform emphasizes respect, patriotism and ethical conduct, its long-term impact will depend on whether it encourages students to critically engage with societal problems or merely conform to prescribed norms. In policy terms, curriculum reform can also be read as a symbolic act designed to communicate governmental responsiveness to public concerns (Ball, 2021). By introducing visible and emotionally resonant subjects such as Civic and Ethics Education, the Ministry signals its commitment to addressing violence, even if structural causes remain unresolved.

The role of curriculum in shaping collective identity is particularly salient in multicultural societies. Ecuador's diverse cultural landscape demands that civic education respect and integrate multiple cultural narratives while promoting a shared sense of belonging (Banks, 2008). This tension between unity and diversity is a persistent challenge in curriculum design. Viewing curriculum as a socio-political construct allows researchers to understand Ecuador's reform as more than a pedagogical update. It is an intentional intervention in the moral and civic formation of the nation, aimed at countering the fragmentation caused by violence and reinforcing the legitimacy of state institutions (Apple, 2019; Goodson, 2014; Pinar, 2019).

1.2.2. Moral, Civic and Socioemotional Education

Moral and civic education have long been regarded as essential pillars of schooling, designed to prepare individuals for responsible participation in democratic societies (Nucci et al., 2014). These educational dimensions extend beyond the mere transmission of knowledge, aiming instead to cultivate ethical reasoning, empathy and a sense of duty toward the common good. In Ecuador's current socio-political climate, such aims have gained renewed urgency, given the perceived erosion of civic trust and the normalization of antisocial behaviors (Calderón, 2012).

Galston (2001) argues that a democratic polity requires citizens who possess both civic knowledge and moral virtues, as the former enables informed participation, while the latter ensures adherence to collective norms. Ecuador's curricular reform reflects this dual requirement, seeking to combine formal instruction on rights and responsibilities with the cultivation of values such as respect, solidarity and integrity. This approach aligns with UNESCO's (2017) framework for global citizenship education, which emphasizes interconnectedness, ethical awareness and commitment to justice.

Civic education in Latin America has been implemented in varying forms, often shaped by political ideologies and national narratives (Cox et al., 2005). During periods of instability, governments have tended to reinforce civic instruction as a means of fostering unity and discouraging dissent. Ecuador's recent policy fits this pattern, framing civic education as a moral safeguard against the destabilizing effects of violence and organized crime.

Moral education, while sometimes conflated with religious instruction, is increasingly conceptualized in secular terms that emphasize ethical reasoning and intercultural respect (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006). This shift is particularly relevant in Ecuador, a country with diverse cultural traditions and worldviews. The reform's focus on ethics and integrity suggests an intent to establish a shared moral foundation without privileging specific religious doctrines.

Socioemotional competencies, such as empathy, self-regulation and conflict resolution, are now widely recognized as integral to both moral and civic education (Weissberg et al., 2015). The Ministry's decision to include Socioemotional Education alongside Civic and Ethics Education indicates an awareness of the need to address not only cognitive understanding but also emotional dispositions that underlie prosocial behavior.

Nevertheless, scholars caution that the effectiveness of moral and civic education depends on pedagogical methods. Passive, rote-learning approaches may instill formal compliance without fostering genuine ethical commitment (Davies, 2003). For the Ecuadorian reform to achieve its goals, teachers must employ participatory strategies—such as debates, simulations and community projects—that encourage critical reflection and real-life application of civic values (Reichert & Print, 2018).

One challenge lies in ensuring alignment between the formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum—the implicit messages conveyed through school culture, teacher behavior and institutional practices (Jackson, 1968). If students witness corruption, favoritism, or disrespect within educational institutions, formal lessons on ethics may lose credibility. Therefore, policy implementation must include institutional integrity measures to reinforce classroom instruction.

Moral and civic education in Ecuador's new curriculum represents both a preventive and constructive strategy: preventive, in its aim to counteract the spread of *anti-values* associated with social violence; and constructive, in its effort to cultivate a new generation of citizens committed to democratic participation and ethical coexistence (Nucci et al., 2014; UNESCO, 2017). By embedding these subjects within the national curriculum, the state affirms education's role as a cornerstone of social cohesion and moral regeneration.

1.2.3. Education, Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding in Violent Contexts

In societies affected by chronic violence, education is often positioned as a key mechanism for promoting social cohesion and resilience (Davies, 2015; Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). Social cohesion, understood as the degree of connectedness and solidarity among members of a community (Chan et al., 2006) is essential for mitigating conflict and fostering collective action. In Ecuador, where organized crime and insecurity have disrupted everyday life, schools are envisioned as safe spaces where trust and mutual respect can be restored.

Peace education theory emphasizes the capacity of formal schooling to model and reinforce norms of dialogue, empathy and non-violence (Galtung, 1996; Salomon & Cairns, 2011). By introducing subjects such as Civic Education and Ethics, the Ecuadorian curriculum reform explicitly aligns with this theoretical tradition, positioning moral instruction as a foundational step toward societal stabilization. These subjects aim to re-establish behavioral norms eroded by exposure to violence in the media, public spaces and even familial contexts.

However, as Bar-Tal and Rosen (2009) note, the mere inclusion of peace-oriented content in curricula is insufficient without sustained pedagogical commitment. Teachers require training not only in subject matter but also in conflict-sensitive pedagogy, which takes into account students' lived experiences of violence.

This is particularly relevant in Ecuador, where exposure to crime can shape students' attitudes toward authority and lawfulness. Social cohesion in educational contexts also depends on equitable access and inclusion. Inequalities in resources, teacher quality and infrastructure can exacerbate social divisions rather than bridge them (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). For Ecuador's reform to foster cohesion, it must ensure that moral and civic education is delivered consistently across both urban and rural settings, avoiding disparities that might undermine its legitimacy.

Empirical studies in post-conflict societies suggest that education can contribute to reconciliation by fostering shared narratives and inclusive identities (Shah et al., 2020). The Ecuadorian emphasis on national symbols, civic rituals and values discussion is consistent with these findings, as such practices can help rebuild a shared sense of belonging. Nonetheless, critics argue that overly nationalistic approaches risk excluding minority perspectives if not carefully balanced with pluralistic content (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000).

From a policy perspective, integrating education into broader security strategies acknowledges that violence is not solely a law enforcement issue but also a social and cultural challenge (Novelli & Smith, 2011). By targeting young people through curriculum reform, Ecuador's Ministry of Education addresses the formative stage where values, norms and civic attitudes are shaped, potentially influencing long-term crime prevention.

Yet, there is also a risk of overburdening the education system with responsibilities that exceed its capacity. As Davies (2015) points out, while schools can play a critical role in building peace, they cannot substitute for the structural reforms needed to address root causes such as poverty, inequality and systemic corruption. Curriculum reform must therefore be complemented by coordinated social policies to ensure meaningful impact.

The integration of Civic, Ethics and Integrity Education into Ecuador's national curriculum represents an attempt to harness education's potential to strengthen social cohesion amid escalating violence. This approach is grounded in global peace education frameworks but must navigate challenges related to implementation, equity and inclusivity. The success of such reforms will depend on the ability to connect classroom learning with broader societal transformation, ensuring that schools serve as both microcosms and catalysts of a more cohesive, peaceful Ecuador (Davies, 2003; Shah et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2017).

1.2.4. Education, Symbolic Politics and the Construction of National Identity

The link between education and the construction of national identity has been extensively documented in the sociology of education (Anderson, 2006; Green, 2013). Schools act as key sites where states cultivate a sense of belonging and collective memory, often through the strategic use of symbols, rituals and narratives. In Ecuador's current reform, the mandatory civic moments, the singing of national and local anthems and the reflection on moral values function as symbolic tools aimed at reinforcing a shared national identity amid social fragmentation.

Anderson's (2006) concept of *imagined communities* provides a useful lens to understand how such rituals operate. By engaging students in simultaneous, repetitive acts—such as singing the anthem—schools create the illusion of a unified community that transcends geographic and cultural differences. This symbolic cohesion is particularly significant in Ecuador, a nation characterized by regional diversity and socio-economic disparities. In a similar vein, Sundberg's (2016) analysis of the Rwandan Itorero Program illustrates how state-driven educational projects deliberately employ ritualized practices to

foster civic values, collective identity and political loyalty. Her work provides a valuable comparative perspective for understanding how symbolic acts within educational settings can contribute to nation-building processes, thereby offering insights that enrich the study of the Ecuadorian case.

Latin American states have used the education system as a vehicle for national integration, especially during periods of political instability (Cox et al., 2005). In Ecuador, patriotic rituals in schools have long been associated with civic education, but the 2024 reform reactivates and formalizes these practices as a deliberate countermeasure to moral erosion and declining civic engagement.

Symbolic politics in education involves the intentional use of cultural symbols to shape public perceptions and legitimize state authority (Edelman, 1985). The Ecuadorian Ministry of Education's discourse, framing the curriculum as a *vitamin* for the nation (Teleamazonas, 2024), serves a symbolic purpose beyond its pedagogical goals: it reassures the public that the state is actively responding to the moral crisis, even as deeper structural reforms remain pending.

However, the use of national symbols in education is not without controversy. While proponents argue that such practices foster unity and pride, critics warn of the potential for exclusionary nationalism, where minority cultures and dissenting perspectives are marginalized (Osler, 2016). In Ecuador's multicultural society, the challenge lies in ensuring that national identity is constructed inclusively, recognizing Indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and other cultural contributions.

Empirical research suggests that the internalization of civic values through rituals depends on the degree to which these practices are connected to critical reflection (Reichert & Print, 2018). Without dialogic engagement, patriotic acts risk becoming rote performances with limited transformative power. For the Ecuadorian reform to be effective, teachers must contextualize symbols and rituals within discussions about democracy, human rights and social responsibility.

National identity formation in schools is also tied to the hidden curriculum—the implicit norms and values conveyed through institutional culture and interpersonal interactions (Jackson, 1968). If the formal promotion of respect for national symbols coexists with experiences of discrimination or corruption in schools, the intended symbolic effects may be undermined. This underscores the need for coherence between explicit curricular goals and the lived reality of school life.

It may be posited that the Ecuadorian case exemplifies the extent to which symbolic politics and the construction of national identity are deeply embedded within educational policy. The 2024 reform appears to strategically employ patriotic rituals and civic narratives as instruments intended to cultivate a sense of unity and moral purpose amidst a period of social unrest. Nevertheless, while such measures hold the potential to reinforce collective identity, their long-term effectiveness is likely to depend on their systematic integration with inclusive pedagogical approaches and with structural reforms capable of addressing the underlying causes of insecurity (Anderson, 2006; Osler, 2016; Reichert & Print, 2018).

1.2.5. Theoretical Perspectives on Framing, Agenda-Setting and Critical Discourse Analysis

Media framing plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding of educational policies, influencing not only awareness but also interpretation and legitimacy (Entman, 1993). In the case of Ecuador's curriculum reform, the national press acts as a mediator between government discourse and citizens, translating policy language into narratives that can either support or challenge official positions. The way the reform is framed by

the media can determine whether it is perceived as a substantive solution to social violence or as a symbolic gesture.

Entman (1993) defines *framing* as the process of selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more salient in a text, thereby promoting a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation. For the Ecuadorian reform, the frequent repetition of the *vitamin* metaphor in news articles (Teleamazonas, 2024) exemplifies how official discourse can permeate journalistic narratives, shaping the conceptual lens through which the public interprets policy changes.

Agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) further illuminates how media influence what topics people consider important. The visibility given to the subjects of Civic, Ethics and Integrity Education by major Ecuadorian outlets in 2024 indicates an agenda alignment between the Ministry of Education and national press, potentially reinforcing the policy's prominence in public debate. However, high visibility does not necessarily translate into critical scrutiny.

Research on media coverage of education policy has shown that journalistic narratives often rely on official sources, which can limit the diversity of perspectives represented (Muls et al., 2020). In the Ecuadorian context, preliminary analysis suggests a predominance of ministerial statements and limited inclusion of voices from teachers, students, or independent experts. This imbalance risks producing a one-dimensional understanding of the reform's purpose and implications.

The framing of education reforms is also influenced by broader media logics, including the preference for conflict, personalization and dramatization (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). In Ecuador, the juxtaposition of policy announcements with reports on violent crime may amplify the perception of urgency, but it may also oversimplify the complex relationship between education and security (*Ministerio de Educación*, 2025). Such coverage can reinforce the notion of curriculum as an immediate solution to crime, despite the inherently long-term nature of educational impacts (Soriano Díaz, 2009; Magendzo, 2006).

Critical discourse analysis offers an additional perspective by examining how language choices in media texts reflect and reproduce power relations (Fairclough, 2015). In this sense, the Ecuadorian media's adoption of ministerial metaphors may signal a discursive alignment that strengthens the government's narrative authority, while marginalizing alternative frames that question the feasibility or comprehensiveness of the reform.

International comparisons reveal that media framing of civic education reforms often mirrors dominant political ideologies, especially in polarized contexts (Bowe et al., 2017). In Ecuador, where public trust in institutions is fragile, media endorsement of the Ministry's discourse can contribute to bolstering state legitimacy. However, this carries the risk of framing the reform as an isolated policy success without situating it within broader structural challenges.

The media framing of Ecuador's 2024 curriculum reform plays a decisive role in shaping public perception, potentially reinforcing the symbolic and political functions of the policy. While alignment between official and journalistic narratives can enhance policy legitimacy, it may also limit critical debate and reduce public engagement with the deeper pedagogical and structural dimensions of the reform (Entman, 1993; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Fairclough, 2015). A balanced framing—incorporating diverse perspectives and critical analysis—would better serve democratic deliberation on education policy.

2. Materials and Methods

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach (Krippendorff, 2018; Schreier, 2012; Patton, 2014) to examine how Ecuador's 2024 curriculum reform—particularly the inclusion of Civic Education, Ethics and Integrity—was framed in the national press. Qualitative content analysis is well suited for capturing both manifest content and

underlying meanings in media texts, allowing for an interpretive examination of the social and political narratives surrounding educational policy (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mayring, 2014; Neuendorf, 2017; Berger, 2015).

The corpus consisted of online publications from Ecuadorian newspapers with national circulation, published between 1 January and 31 December 2024. Selected outlets included: *El Comercio*, *El Universo*, *El Mercurio*, *Primicias*, *GK*, *La Hora*, *El Telégrafo* and *Expreso*. These media organizations were chosen for their broad readership and recognized role in shaping public opinion on national issues (Waisbord, 2013; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Finlay, 2002).

Articles were retrieved from the official websites of these outlets using targeted keyword searches in Spanish, for example: *reforma curricular*, *educación cívica*, *ética e integridad*, *MINEDUC*, *acuerdo ministerial*, combined with Boolean operators to refine results (Bowe et al., 2017; Brislin, 1970). A total of 124 articles were retrieved. Only items that directly addressed the 2024 curriculum reform or its socio-political context of violence and civic education were included.

The analysis focused on journalistic genres that present factual and descriptive coverage, specifically: news articles, feature reports, chronicles, interviews and informative notes. These genres were selected because they are oriented toward informing rather than persuading, thus providing a clearer representation of the informational framing of the reform (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014; Bowen, 2009). Opinion pieces, editorials and columns were excluded to maintain a focus on informational discourse (see Table 1).

Table 1. Search queries used for article retrieval.

Search String (Spanish with Boolean Operators)	Keywords Focused
"reforma curricular" AND <i>educación</i>	Curriculum reform, education
"reforma curricular" AND <i>violencia</i>	Curriculum reform, violence
"educación cívica" OR "valores cívicos"	Civic education, civic values
"ética e integridad" AND MINEDUC	Ethics, integrity, Ministry of Education
"acuerdo ministerial" AND <i>educación</i>	Ministerial agreements, education
MINEDUC AND (<i>currículo</i> OR "reforma educativa")	Ministry of Education, curriculum reform
"reforma curricular 2024" AND <i>medios de comunicación</i>	2024 reform, media coverage

The unit of analysis was each individual article meeting the inclusion criteria. Articles were coded in their entirety, capturing both textual and visual elements when present (see Table 2).

Table 2. Units of analysis.

Unit of Analysis	Description
News article	Straightforward, fact-based coverage.
Feature report	In-depth exploration of reform aspects.
Chronicle	Narrative format with descriptive elements.
Interview	Q&A format with relevant stakeholders.
Informative note	Brief factual piece.

Following established procedures for media content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017; Saldaña, 2021), five analytical variables were operationalized as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Research variables.

Variable	Definition	Indicators
Information contained	Factual data and details included in the article.	Policy specifics, quotes, timelines, institutional names.
Implicit message	Underlying meaning or narrative beyond explicit content.	Moral framing, problem definition, causal attribution.
Characters portrayed	Human or institutional actors mentioned or quoted.	Government officials, educators, students, experts.
Language employed	Lexical and rhetorical choices shaping tone and framing.	Metaphors, evaluative adjectives, nationalistic terms.
.Use of complementary images	Presence and thematic link of visual elements.	Photographs, infographics, symbolic images.

These variables allowed for the identification of both explicit and implicit communicative strategies employed by the press when covering the reform. The implicit message variable, in particular, was central for detecting moral and symbolic framings, while the language employed variable enabled a discourse-level analysis of tone and rhetoric (Entman, 1993; Fairclough, 2015).

A coding manual was developed based on the five variables and piloted with a 10% sample of articles to refine operational definitions (Schreier, 2012). Coding was conducted manually by two trained researchers to ensure interpretive accuracy, with regular meetings to resolve discrepancies. Discourse-related codes—such as moral appeals or national identity references—were recorded alongside descriptive codes for actors, events and visuals.

The analysis followed an inductive–deductive logic: deductive in the sense that the variables were pre-defined based on theory and research questions and inductive in allowing emergent themes to surface during coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Patterns were examined within and across outlets to identify consistencies and divergences in framing, language and actor representation.

Intercoder reliability was calculated on a 20% subsample using Krippendorff's alpha for nominal variables and Cohen's kappa for binary indicators (Krippendorff, 2018; Cohen, 1960). Alpha values ≥ 0.80 were considered acceptable for robust agreement. Triangulation was achieved by comparing patterns across different genres and outlets to mitigate single-source bias (Denzin, 2012).

The study used publicly available material from established media outlets, eliminating the need for institutional ethics approval. Nevertheless, care was taken to avoid misrepresentation of quoted material and to respect copyright limitations by paraphrasing where necessary. In cases where images depicted identifiable minors, visual analysis focused on thematic rather than personal identification aspects (British Sociological Association, 2017).

This approach is limited by its reliance on online publications, potentially underrepresenting print-only or paywalled content. Moreover, focusing on national-level outlets may omit perspectives from regional or community-based media. Finally, content analysis describes how topics are presented, not how audiences interpret them; further research could incorporate audience reception studies to complement these findings (Neuendorf, 2017).

3. Results

3.1. News Articles

Across straight-news items, the reform was narrated as a statecraft response to insecurity, with reporters foregrounding a return of civic formation to the school day and presenting the weekly civic moment as an institutional routine rather than an exceptional event. This narrative normalized policy through repetition of core motifs—values, integrity, identity—so that the insertion appeared less as a discretionary initiative and more as a re-anchoring of ordinary schooling (*El Comercio*, 2024; *El Universo*, 2024, GK, 2024). In this sense, news desks did not merely relay facts; they performed policy intelligibility by stitching together brief, high-salience cues that signaled moral repair.

A notable feature of the news genre was the standardization of logistics: outlets reiterated the 10–15-min duration, Monday scheduling, and a triptych of activities—anthem singing, values reflection and respect for national symbols. The near-identical formulations across stories suggest strong textual alignment between journalistic copy and ministerial guidance, making parameters legible and portable across schools and audiences (*El Universo*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024). Such convergence reduced interpretive ambiguity while elevating compliance cues.

Coverage followed a clear temporal choreography. Early July pieces amplified announcement headlines and core justifications; mid-to-late August stories detailed technicalities of the civic moment as schools prepared timetables; early September articles documented first-week rollouts in the Sierra–Amazonía regime. Agenda leadership was evident in *Primicias* and *El Comercio* during July, while *El Universo* and *El Telégrafo* consolidated implementation specifics later; regionalization entered via *El Mercurio* with school-level snapshots (*Primicias*, 2024; *El Comercio*, 2024; *El Universo*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024; *El Mercurio*, 2024). This phasing anchored public expectations to the school calendar.

Lexically, headlines and leads adopted the Ministry’s moral vocabulary, saturating news with terms like values, integrity, citizenship and respect for national symbols. By reproducing ministerial diction without substantial paraphrase, news items reinforced a norm-restoring frame that linked daily routine to civic purpose (*El Telégrafo*, 2024; *El Universo*, 2024; *El Comercio*, 2024). The effect was to fuse information with exhortation, where the what (the schedule) implicitly carried the why (ethical formation).

Straight-news functioned as an information-sanitization mechanism in moments when rumors circulated in the public sphere. In this context, *sanitization* (Crawford et al., 2006) refers to the journalistic capacity to filter, clarify and neutralize misleading narratives before they gain social legitimacy. An illustrative case occurred with the clarification that there was no new version of the National Anthem; rather, what authorities had announced was the promotion of a cultural album initiative. Through the rapid correction of misinformation, executed within the same factual news genre, the media preserved the narrative coherence of the reform and simultaneously prevented symbolic controversy from overshadowing its procedural implementation (*Primicias*, 2024).

The genre’s visual economy—often summarized in a single photo—reinforced the identity script: flag-raising ceremonies, anthem performances and classrooms with national emblems became the default imagery accompanying briefs and articles, especially in *El Universo*. Such images anchored textual claims in recognizable scenes of belonging, converting abstract values into visible school practices (*El Universo*, 2024). Checklists and scene-setting notes in *Expreso* further codified what these practices should look like on the ground (*Expreso*, 2024).

In sourcing, ministerial voices predominated, with occasional inclusion of zonal coordinators and principals to attest to feasibility and scheduling. Teachers and students

appeared less frequently as primary sources; when present, they tended to validate practicality (time management, assembly routines) rather than challenge rationale or method, which preserved message coherence while narrowing deliberative breadth (*El Telégrafo*, 2024; *El Mercurio*, 2024; *Expreso*, 2024). The news genre thus privileged policy authority over classroom plurality.

Taken together, straight-news coverage sedimented a stable public script: precise logistics (frequency, duration, activities), a moralized rationale (repairing anti-values) and an identity-affirming iconography (symbols, anthems). This script positioned schools as guardians of civic belonging and ethics while leaving pedagogical depth and classroom agency largely implicit (*El Comercio*, 2024; *El Universo*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024; *Primicias*, 2024; *El Mercurio*, 2024; *Expreso*, 2024). As a communicative infrastructure, news items supplied reach and regularity—key conditions for nationwide uptake—even as they deferred more critical and participatory conversations to other genres or future cycles.

3.2. Feature Reports

Feature reports and long-form explainers extended the informational baseline established by straight news by contextualizing the reform within broader social aims—violence prevention, ethical formation and national cohesion—and by enumerating the five inserted subjects with concise definitional notes. In doing so, outlets such as *El Comercio* and *Teleamazonas* translated a high-level policy into digestible curricular components, linking Civic/Ethics & Integrity, Socioemotional Education, Education for Sustainable Development, Financial Education, and Road Safety & Sustainable Mobility to recognizable school practices and societal needs (*El Comercio*, 2024; *Teleamazonas*, 2024). This genre, therefore, functioned as an interpretive scaffold, moving beyond announcement to articulate the why and what of the change.

Among these, *Primicias* stood out for providing one of the most granular outlines of Civic, explicitly listing ten thematic pillars—including democratic principles, integrity and identity—which anchored the reform's moral-civic intent in content, not only in ceremony. By itemizing Civic's building blocks, the outlet shifted the center of gravity from ritual observance to curricular architecture, making visible the knowledge and dispositions the policy seeks to cultivate. This emphasis supports public understanding that the reform aspires to long-term character and citizenship formation rather than merely weekly symbolism (*Primicias*, 2024).

Features also intermediated between policy instruments and classroom realities by citing or paraphrasing ministerial texts—most notably the ministerial agreement and insertion guides—thereby reinforcing textual fidelity while simplifying technical language (*Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024). Such references lent legal-rational authority to the narratives and clarified that the civic moment and the five subjects were codified, not discretionary. In effect, the genre domesticated bureaucratic prose into accessible discourse, a necessary step for understanding scope and compliance (*El Comercio*, 2024).

A recurrent contribution of explainers was to situate timelines and scope: they mapped the staged rollout (Sierra-Amazonía and Costa-Galápagos Region), reiterated universal applicability across public and private systems and confirmed coverage from Initial Education to Baccalaureate. In the Ecuadorian educational system, Initial Education encompasses children aged 3 to 5, followed by General Basic Education, which is divided into preparatory, elementary, middle and higher sublevels covering ages 5 to 14. The final stage is the Unified General Baccalaureate, which corresponds to the last three years of compulsory education (ages 14 to 17) and culminates in the award of the high school diploma. By aligning the reform with these levels and with Ecuador's academic calendars,

outlets such as *El Comercio* helped audiences anticipate onset and sequence, while signaling state capacity for phased implementation (*El Comercio*, 2024; *Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador*, 2024). This temporal anchoring stabilized expectations among administrators, teachers and families.

Although primarily expository, some features gestured toward classroom enactment, invoking values discussions, homeroom reflections and project-based links to themes such as sustainability and financial responsibility—yet seldom detailing pedagogical method or assessment (*El Comercio*, 2024; *Teleamazonas*, 2024).

The result is a didactic horizon that is suggestive rather than prescriptive: readers learn what themes should appear and when, but not how teachers might facilitate dialogic learning, evaluate ethical reasoning, or integrate cross-curricular tasks at scale. This gap leaves pedagogy largely implicit within a structurally clear, content-forward narrative.

In tone, feature reports largely echoed official rationales—values, identity, co-responsibility—with limited interrogation of potential implementation frictions (e.g., teacher workload, time trade-offs, material preparation). *El Telégrafo* tended to underscore the policy's normative purpose, while *El Comercio* reaffirmed the subject list and logistics without sustained debate on teacher training or school climate supports (*El Telégrafo*, 2024; *El Comercio*, 2024). This alignment reinforced policy legitimacy and coherence but narrowed the deliberative space for discussing enabling conditions.

Stylistically, explainers favored structural readability—lists, sidebars, Q&As—over narrative complication, which aided comprehension and likely improved public uptake (*El Comercio*, 2024; *Teleamazonas*, 2024). Yet this same clarity sometimes produced a *checklist effect*, where the reform appeared as a set of boxes to tick rather than as a pedagogical transformation. The communicative gain (clarity, consistency) thus came with a trade-off in critical depth, a common pattern when outlets prioritize service journalism around complex policies (*El Comercio*, 2024).

The feature/explainer genre operated as the bridge between decree and school practice: it clarified curricular content, codified timelines and reiterated universal scope while reproducing ministerial frames of moral renewal and identity reinforcement (*Primicias*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024; *El Comercio*, 2024; *Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador*, 2024). This bridging role made the reform intelligible and actionable for lay audiences, but left questions of pedagogy, assessment and teacher capacity largely to future cycles of reporting—or to other genres more inclined to debate than to explain.

3.3. Chronicles

Chronicles translated national directives into the texture of school life, opening with vignette-style scenes of flag-raising, anthem singing and Monday assemblies that located the civic moment within morning timetables and recognizable campus spaces. By narrating the pacing of bells, lines and brief reflections on a value of the week, these stories rendered the policy ordinary and repeatable, inviting readers to see reform as part of the school day's ritual spine rather than as an episodic event (*El Universo*, 2024).

A marked temporalization structured these narratives: Mondays became the preferred anchor for the civic moment, while first-week-of-term pieces mapped how schools rehearsed new routines in the Sierra–Amazonía regime. The chronology—announcement, preparation, enactment—was re-storied as a lived sequence in classrooms and patios, reinforcing the impression that implementation followed a predictable cadence synchronized with calendars and school schedules (*El Universo*, 2024; *El Mercurio*, 2024).

The genre's multimodal density—close descriptive detail plus photography—foregrounded identity work: uniforms, banners, standards and hand-over-heart postures visually tethered daily practice to the reform's moral lexicon. Image–text pairings stabilized

a repertoire of belonging that audiences could immediately recognize, transforming abstract talk of values and symbols into a visible semiotics of citizenship enacted on campus (*El Universo*, 2024; *Expreso*, 2024).

Regional chronicles expanded the actor set beyond central officials, quoting zonal coordinators, principals and sometimes student representatives who anticipated logistics (space, timing, supervision) and affirmed feasibility. These voices localized the script—adjusting assembly formats to courtyard size or grade configurations—while leaving the ritual template intact, thus diversifying perspective without fracturing policy coherence (*El Mercurio*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024).

Several pieces gestured toward classroom integration, noting that the value discussed in assembly could migrate into homeroom circles, reading selections, or small projects; yet they seldom detailed method, materials, or assessment. The classroom remained a narrative background rather than an analytic foreground, implying that chronicles privileged the scene of civic enactment over the pedagogy that might deepen ethical reasoning (*El Mercurio*, 2024; *Expreso*, 2024).

Lexically, chronicles recycled the official diction integrity, co-responsibility, respect for national symbols, identity, with minimal paraphrase, fusing description and exhortation. The result was a norm-restoring tone that affirmed conduct expectations while naturalizing the ritual's place in school culture, aligning journalistic language with ministerial phrasing (*El Telégrafo*, 2024; *El Universo*, 2024; *La Hora*, 2024).

The narratives also captured contextual variation: urban campuses staging assemblies in compact courtyards; rural schools organizing multi-grade formations; local emblems accompanying national symbols. Such details suggested adaptive capacity without undermining the core script, showing how the same civic template traveled across diverse settings with modest adjustments (*El Mercurio*, 2024; *La Hora*, 2024).

Chronicles consolidated policy-as-routine by making the civic moment visible, time-bound and symbol-rich, thereby sedimenting a publicly legible script of civic belonging. While this genre excelled at staging identity work and logistical normalization, it left pedagogy and evaluation largely implicit—an omission consistent with its descriptive mission but relevant for understanding the reform's classroom depth (*El Universo*, 2024; *Expreso*, 2024; *El Mercurio*, 2024).

3.4. Interviews

Interview pieces prioritized ministerial and senior technical voices, consolidating an official interpretive frame that articulated the reform as moral repair and identity reinforcement. Spokespersons reiterated purpose and logistics—weekly civic moment, 10–15 min, Monday scheduling, anthem and values reflection—often borrowing the Ministry's own metaphors to frame urgency and coherence (*El Telégrafo*, 2024; *El Universo*, 2024). From a media-effects perspective, this sourcing pattern supports agenda alignment between policy and press, whereby interviews help crystallize the key cues audiences will later recall (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Hargittai et al., 2018).

Structurally, interviews tended to restate policy text in Q&A format, enumerating the five inserted subjects and their anchoring rationales with high textual fidelity to ministerial instruments. This translational function made technical provisions legible while minimizing interpretive drift, thereby stabilizing a shared informational baseline across outlets (*El Comercio*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024; *Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador*, 2024). The result was a clear, replicable script suitable for nationwide implementation discourse.

Zonal coordinators and school leaders appeared as secondary interviewees to verify feasibility (space, supervision) and confirm temporal parameters (frequency, duration, Monday cadence). These voices lent practical credibility and localized the narrative without shifting its normative core, frequently referencing light-touch classroom integration

(homeroom discussions, project linkages) as foreseeable extensions (*El Mercurio*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024). Thus, interviews coupled authority with plausibility at the meso level of the system.

Teachers and students were comparatively scarce as primary interviewees; when included, they typically validated the routine's manageability rather than interrogating pedagogy, workload, or assessment. This narrowed the deliberative breadth of the genre and preserved message coherence around official frames (*El Mercurio*, 2024; *Expreso*, 2024). The sourcing configuration mirrors prior observations that education-policy journalism often privileges governmental actors in formative stages of reform (Muls et al., 2020; Bowe et al., 2017).

Interview transcripts recycled the Ministry's moral lexicon: values, integrity, citizenship, respect for national symbols, with minimal paraphrase, evidencing frame adoption rather than reframing. Such diction aligns with Entman's (1993) framing functions, in which interviews operationalized problem definition (value erosion), causal attribution (social weakness), moral evaluation (integrity/anti-values) and treatment recommendation (civic moment plus curricular insertions) (*El Telégrafo*, 2024; *El Comercio*, 2024).

A discernible temporal choreography structured interview offerings: early-cycle pieces legitimated the reform's rationale; mid-cycle interviews specified logistics and clarified misunderstandings; pre-start-of-term interventions synchronized expectations with school calendars. This sequencing fostered anticipatory compliance and lowered ambiguity at the point of enactment (*Primicias*, 2024; *El Comercio*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024). Interviews thus functioned as policy waypoints embedded in the news cycle.

The interview corpus exhibited low critical probing of enabling conditions (teacher training, materials, equity across school types), favoring an instrumental narrative of *what to do* over a pedagogical narrative of *how to teach*. In discourse-analytic terms, this reflects a centering of institutional voice that normalizes official authority while marginalizing alternative frames (Fairclough, 2015; *El Universo*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024). The effect is high coherence with limited pluralism.

Interviews reinforced policy legitimacy and message coherence by elevating ministerial and managerial voices, aligning lexical choices with official scripts and pacing information with the academic calendar. However, the same features constrained the inclusion of classroom perspectives and critical pedagogy, leaving questions of teacher capacity and assessment largely implicit (*El Telégrafo*, 2024; *El Mercurio*, 2024). Future cycles of interview coverage could purposively widen the source ecology—teachers, students, families—to balance legitimation with deliberation (Muls et al., 2020; Apple & Beane, 2007; Hargittai et al., 2018).

3.5. Informative Notes

Informative notes operated as high-throughput service bulletins, distilling the reform to its logistical core: a weekly cadence, a 10–15-min duration, a Monday preference, and three standard activities—singing the national anthem, a brief values reflection and explicit respect for national symbols. By foregrounding operational parameters over interpretation, these items made the policy quickly actionable for readers situated in schools and families (*El Universo*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024).

The genre's defining trait was formulaic standardization. Phrases specifying 10–15 min, preferably on Mondays, and the ritual triad recurred with minimal lexical variation, signaling a tight intertextual alignment across outlets and enabling consistent replication in school routines. This repetition reduced ambiguity and positioned the civic moment as a predictable component of the timetable (*El Universo*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024).

Notes frequently linked to or paraphrased ministerial instruments, reinforcing textual fidelity between policy decrees and media summaries. References to the ministerial

agreement and insertion guides appeared as anchors that legitimated the bulletins' succinct instructions, compressing bureaucratic language into digestible cues for public uptake (*Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2024; El Telégrafo, 2024; El Comercio, 2024*).

When confusion circulated, brief notes assumed a corrective function. A salient example was the clarification that no new version of the National Anthem was being introduced; instead, a cultural album initiative would be promoted. Such interventions tightened public understanding without shifting the genre toward broader controversy or debate (*Primicias, 2024*).

Stylistically, notes minimized interpretation and eschewed extended context, favoring concise headlines, short paragraphs and list-like structures that privileged continuity and compliance over deliberation. The diction tracked the Ministry's normative lexicon—values, integrity, respect for national symbols—thereby sustaining the moral frame while keeping explanatory density low (*El Universo, 2024; El Comercio, 2024*).

As distribution artifacts, notes maximized diffusion via homepage briefs and quick updates, creating a common informational baseline across the news cycle. Their brevity and recurrence made them effective carriers of timing cues (e.g., start-of-week assemblies) and reinforced calendar synchronization with the school year (*El Universo, 2024; Primicias, 2024*).

Visuals in this genre tended toward compact iconography—single photographs of flag-raising or anthem scenes and occasional infographics—amplifying the identity frame without elaborating pedagogy or assessment. The result was a recognizable semiotic pairing: concise text coupled with emblematic imagery that signaled belonging and routine (*El Universo, 2024; Expreso, 2024*).

Informative notes stabilized the policy's informational floor: logistics were clear, sources authoritative and signals consistent. The same properties, however, narrowed deliberative breadth by sidelining classroom method, teacher capacity and equity concerns—elements more often reserved for features or interviews. As such, the genre excelled at immediate comprehension and nationwide coordination while deferring deeper pedagogical discussion to other formats (*El Telégrafo, 2024; Primicias, 2024; El Comercio, 2024*).

4. Discussions

4.1. Curriculum as Symbolic Statecraft and Media Convergence

The results indicate that Ecuador's national press largely narrated the 2024 curricular insertion—especially Civic Education and Ethics & Integrity—as a moral remedy to social violence, reproducing the Ministry's *vitamin/medicine* metaphor (*Teleamazonas, 2024*) and stabilizing a storyline of national moral repair (*El Comercio, 2024; El Universo, 2024; Primicias, 2024*). This discursive convergence aligns with curriculum theory that treats curriculum as an instrument for symbolic responses to crisis and the reassertion of social order (Apple, 2019; Goodson, 2014).

Such alignment is consistent with viewing curriculum as socio-political construction: the media did not simply report an instructional change but participated in performing the policy's meaning, adding affect and urgency to formal provisions (Apple, 2019; Pinar, 2019). In this sense, news coverage functioned as a vehicle of public pedagogy that translated bureaucratic language into socially resonant cues (*El Comercio, 2024; El Telégrafo, 2024; Hargittai et al., 2018*).

The insistence on weekly civic rituals—10–15 min, preferably Mondays, with anthem singing and values reflection—made visible the policy's symbolic core, foregrounding enactment over abstraction (*El Universo, 2024; El Telégrafo, 2024; Expreso, 2024*). This emphasis echoes Anderson's (2006) notion of *imagined communities*, wherein synchronized rituals

cultivate national belonging, and Edelman's (1985) claim that policy symbolism reassures publics during uncertainty.

Framing theory helps explain the high fidelity between ministerial texts and news discourse. Entman's (1993) functions—problem definition, causal diagnosis, moral evaluation and remedy—appeared almost isomorphic across press genres, while agenda-setting effects likely magnified the salience of ritualized civics (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The migration of the *vitamin* metaphor (Teleamazonas, 2024) into headlines illustrates frame adoption rather than journalistic reframing (*Primicias*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024).

Critical discourse analysis reads this alignment as discursive power: state lexicon circulates through media to naturalize a *common-sense* narrative of moral restoration (Fairclough, 2015). The scarcity of counter-frames—pedagogical feasibility, teacher workload, cultural pluralism—suggests hegemonic articulation rather than polyphony, at least in the period under review (*El Universo*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024).

The prominence of ministerial voices, with comparatively fewer teacher and student perspectives, mirrors prior research on the reliance on official sources in education-policy news: it stabilizes coherence but narrows deliberation (Muls et al., 2020; Bowe et al., 2017). Our actor analysis therefore converges with this broader pattern (*El Mercurio*, 2024; *Expreso*, 2024).

Nevertheless, corrective notes—such as clarifying rumors about the national anthem—demonstrate a modest watchdog function within a predominantly amplifying ecology, consistent with Waisbord's (2013) description of Latin American journalism oscillating between amplification and scrutiny (*Primicias*, 2024).

These interventions preserved narrative coherence while reducing misinformation. In aggregate, the press contributed to policy legibility (clear logistics, ritual cadence) and policy legitimacy (moral language, identity cues), producing a communicative infrastructure that made uptake likely even as it deferred deeper debate to later cycles or other genres (Apple, 2019; Entman, 1993; *El Comercio*, 2024; *El Universo*, 2024).

4.2. Rituals, Identity and Inclusive Citizenship

The ritualized focus in coverage consolidated a script of identity-building consistent with regional histories of civic education where patriotic practice is mobilized in moments of instability (Cox et al., 2005). Photographs of flag-raising, uniforms and anthem performances stabilized a visual repertoire of belonging (*El Universo*, 2024; *Expreso*, 2024).

From a symbolic-politics perspective, these practices reassure publics by signaling order and shared values (Edelman, 1985). The predictable, time-bounded civic moment provided an affective anchor in the school day, fusing routine with national symbolism (*El Telégrafo*, 2024; *El Universo*, 2024).

Anderson's (2006) thesis suggests that synchronized, repetitive rituals generate an imagined national simultaneity; the coverage made that simultaneity legible across campuses and regions, reinforcing community through shared performance (*El Comercio*, 2024; *El Mercurio*, 2024). In this way, media mediated the collective experience of the reform. Yet, the literature warns that symbolic cohesion may be double-edged: it can consolidate unity while silencing diversity (Osler, 2016).

Our corpus seldom featured Indigenous or Afro-Ecuadorian perspectives debating the ritual script, pointing to a representational gap that matters for inclusive citizenship (*La Hora*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024). The risk is a thin patriotism that privileges majority narratives unless complemented by plural and critical pedagogies (Reichert & Print, 2018). Coverage rarely articulated how the weekly value could be engaged dialogically to incorporate local languages, histories, or community issues beyond ceremonial reference (*El Universo*, 2024; *El Comercio*, 2024).

Peace-education and citizenship frameworks emphasize empathy, dialogue and non-violence as competencies, not just symbols (Galtung, 1996; Salomon & Cairns, 2011). Press narratives aligned rhetorically with these aims—values, integrity, co-responsibility—without detailing pedagogical mechanisms to realize them in heterogeneous classrooms (*El Telégrafo*, 2024; *El Comercio*, 2024).

Visual semiotics intensified affective buy-in but also risked normalizing a single identity script unless complemented by inclusive iconography (Anderson, 2006; Edelman, 1985). The recurrence of the same images across outlets suggests a strong but narrowing repertoire (*El Universo*, 2024; *Expreso*, 2024). The implication is to pair ritual affirmation with plural, rights-oriented pedagogy—ensuring that identity building does not come at the expense of diversity and that civic pride is coupled with democratic dispositions such as deliberation and dissent (Osler, 2016; UNESCO, 2021).

4.3. Civic–Moral Paradigms, Pedagogy and Structural Constraints

The moral-civic emphasis coheres with mainstream paradigms positing that democracies require citizens endowed with civic knowledge and ethical dispositions (Galston, 2001; Nucci et al., 2014). Press discourse mapped closely onto these traditions by stressing values, integrity and co-responsibility (*El Comercio*, 2024; *El Telégrafo*, 2024).

However, civic and peace-education literatures caution that engagement trumps recitation: dialogic, participatory methods are more likely to cultivate ethical reasoning than ritual alone (Davies, 2003; Weissberg et al., 2015). Reporting seldom explored how teachers would enact such methods in class (*El Universo*, 2024; *El Comercio*, 2024).

This gap implies a risk of performative compliance—visible ceremonies without transformative learning—if classroom practice remains underspecified (Nucci et al., 2014; Davies, 2015). Interviews and features validated feasibility and logistics, not pedagogy (*El Telégrafo*, 2024; *El Mercurio*, 2024).

The *hidden curriculum* reminds that institutional routines, fairness and school culture validate or undermine formal ethics teaching (Jackson, 1968). News items did not foreground integrity practices (e.g., anti-corruption in school governance, equitable discipline), leaving the school-climate lever under-discussed (*El Comercio*, 2024; *El Universo*, 2024).

Equity is a further prerequisite for social cohesion: resource disparities and teacher capacity gaps shape outcomes (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Coverage underplayed these enabling conditions, favoring proximate school-level remedies over structural analysis (*Primicias*, 2024; *El Universo*, 2024). Comparative work argues that education cannot substitute for structural reforms addressing poverty, inequality and organized crime (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2015).

The media–policy coupling privileged implementable symbolism—weekly rituals—while backgrounding multi-sectoral strategies (*Primicias*, 2024; *El Comercio*, 2024). Notably, the phased rollout (Sierra-Amazonía and Costa-Galápagos Region) suggested implementation realism, aligning with change-management advice that staged reforms enable learning and adaptation (Fullan, 2016).

Outlets that mapped timelines helped synchronize expectations (*El Comercio*, 2024). The strategic task ahead is to translate symbolic momentum into substantive pedagogy and equity-aware supports: teacher professional learning, formative assessment of civic reasoning and school-climate integrity—conditions repeatedly emphasized in the literature (Weissberg et al., 2015; Nucci et al., 2014; Tikly & Barrett, 2011).

4.4. Sourcing, Framing and the News Cycle

The actor ecology of coverage—dominated by ministerial voices with secondary appearances by zonal coordinators and principals—reflects common patterns in education-

policy journalism: reliance on official sources stabilizes narratives but truncates plural perspectives (Muls et al., 2020; Bowe et al., 2017; *El Telégrafo*, 2024; *El Mercurio*, 2024). This sourcing architecture is functionally efficient for policy diffusion but normatively thin for deliberation. Teacher and student voices, when included, tended to validate feasibility rather than interrogate pedagogy or workload, narrowing the spectrum of problem framings (*El Mercurio*, 2024; *Expreso*, 2024).

Entman's (1993) framing model clarifies why the press–policy alignment was so tight: ministerial texts supplied ready-made packages—problem (value erosion), cause (social *weakness*), moral evaluation (integrity vs. anti-values), remedy (civic moment + five subjects)—that journalists could lift with minimal adaptation (*El Telégrafo*, 2024; *Primicias*, 2024). Agenda-setting effects likely followed: once key cues (weekly rhythm, anthem, values) dominated headlines, other angles (equity, teacher training) struggled for salience (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; *El Universo*, 2024). The news cycle thus consolidated a narrow but effective script for nationwide uptake.

Critical discourse analysis interprets this as discursive hegemony, wherein institutional lexicon becomes common sense, constraining alternative articulations such as culturally responsive civics or critical media literacy (Fairclough, 2015; Osler, 2016). The effect is policy legitimacy with limited pluralism. Visual framing reinforced textual frames: emblematic photos of flags and assemblies stabilized the identity narrative and compressed complex pedagogy into immediate recognizability (Edelman, 1985; Anderson, 2006; *El Universo*, 2024; *Expreso*, 2024). This semiotic economy privileges affective clarity over instructional nuance.

Corrective briefs (e.g., on the anthem rumor) show that the genre ecology retains self-repair mechanisms even within a pro-government alignment (*Primicias*, 2024). However, these mechanisms addressed misinformation more than structural critique, preserving the dominant frame. Going forward, widening the source ecology—teachers, students, families, civil society—could balance legitimation with deliberation, aligning coverage with democratic education principles that valorize voice and critical engagement (Apple & Beane, 2007; Muls et al., 2020). This would not negate symbolic statecraft; it would enrich it with pedagogical substance.

5. Conclusions

This study set out to analyze how Ecuador's Ministry of Education integrated Civic Education and Ethics & Integrity—alongside four complementary subjects—into the national curriculum and how this reform was represented in the 2024 national press. The qualitative content analysis shows a strong alignment between ministerial discourse and media framing: the reform was publicly constructed as a moral antidote to a context of violence and social erosion. These findings confirm the socio-political nature of curriculum—its capacity to signal national priorities and stage public responses to crisis (Apple, 2019; Goodson, 2014; Pinar, 2019).

The research objective is thus achieved: it documents both the policy's substance and the communicative scaffolding that gave it public meaning. The press's emphasis on weekly civic rituals, respect for national symbols and the language of values reproduced the core intentions of the reform while making them legible to broad audiences. Such convergence between policy and press is consistent with agenda-setting and framing theories that explain how news media help stabilize interpretive templates around education reforms (Entman, 1993; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The central conclusion is that ethical and civic formation has rightly re-emerged as a strategic priority of schooling in times of uncertainty. The literature on moral and citizenship education supports the premise that democracies require citizens who combine civic knowledge with ethical dispositions and social responsibility (Galston, 2001; Nucci et al.,

2014; UNESCO, 2017). Ecuador's curricular move is therefore not an anomaly but part of a broader, evidence-aligned trend that treats ethics, integrity and civic mindedness as foundational competencies.

At the same time, the analysis warns against symbolism without depth. Press coverage privileged ritual logistics over classroom-level pedagogy, risking a drift toward formal compliance. Prior research underscores that ethical reasoning and civic agency grow through dialogic, participatory and community-linked pedagogies rather than through rote ceremonies alone (Davies, 2003; Weissberg et al., 2015). Policy intent must be matched by pedagogical enactment.

A persuasive implication follows: all contemporary education policies should prioritize ethical, moral and civic responsibility as cross-cutting aims—infused across subjects, routines, and school culture. This means treating Civic and Ethics & Integrity not only as discrete courses but as a whole-school approach sustained by teacher practice, assessment design and institutional norms (Jackson, 1968; Weissberg et al., 2015). Such an approach aligns with UNESCO's calls for holistic citizenship and sustainability learning (UNESCO, 2021).

The results also show how national identity was mobilized through synchronized rituals and patriotic iconography. When inclusively framed, national identity can strengthen belonging and common purpose, which are vital to social cohesion (Anderson, 2006; Green, 2013). The challenge, consistent with human-rights-based education, is to construct identity without exclusion, honoring Indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and local cultures within the shared narrative (Osler, 2016).

A second recommendation is to couple identity-building with pluralism. Press narratives and policy instruments should foreground democratic values—rights, deliberation, dissent—as integral to citizenship, preventing nationalism from crowding out diversity (Reichert & Print, 2018). Belonging deepens when students see their histories and languages reflected in the civic story.

The findings also reveal an implementation opportunity: teacher professional learning. If the civic moment is to be more than a weekly ritual, teachers need tools for facilitation of dialogue, ethical dilemma analysis, service-learning and restorative practices. Evidence from civic and peace-education literature suggests these practices cultivate empathy, self-regulation and pro-social behavior—the very dispositions the reform seeks (Weissberg et al., 2015; Salomon & Cairns, 2011; Davies, 2015).

A related conclusion concerns assessment. What is prioritized gets assessed and what is assessed tends to be prioritized in classrooms. Formative assessments of civic reasoning, ethical decision-making and collaborative problem-solving—portfolios, simulations, community projects—can anchor the reform in daily practice (Nucci et al., 2014; Reichert & Print, 2018). This shifts the focus from ceremonial performance to demonstrable civic competence.

The media's reliance on official sources secured message coherence but limited deliberative breadth—teachers, students and community organizations were comparatively under-voiced. Future communication strategies should include structured participation by school actors and civil society to expand the public's sense of co-ownership and to surface practical insights from classrooms (Bowe et al., 2017; Muls et al., 2020). Such dialogic framing aligns with democratic education principles (Apple & Beane, 2007).

The conclusions also call for equity-aware implementation. Social cohesion gains depend on fair access to qualified teachers, safe facilities and learning resources across urban and rural schools (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Civic and ethics outcomes will be uneven if these enabling conditions are not addressed, reinforcing the literature's view that curriculum reforms succeed within supportive ecosystems (Fullan, 2016).

More broadly, curriculum cannot substitute for structural reform. While schools can model non-violence and integrity, the drivers of violence—poverty, organized crime, corruption—require multi-sectoral policy mixes (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Novelli & Smith, 2011). The educational component must be nested within social protection, youth employment and community safety strategies to realize durable effects (Shah et al., 2020).

Still, the staged rollout (by regime calendars) indicates implementation realism and potential for iterative improvement—an approach recommended by change theory (Fullan, 2016). Iteration should be used to build feedback loops: classroom observations, teacher inquiry cycles and student voice mechanisms that refine materials and practices over time (Miles et al., 2014). Continuous improvement is itself a civic habit.

For research, this study suggests three priorities. First, classroom-level studies to document pedagogical enactment of Civic and Ethics & Integrity; second, longitudinal tracking of civic dispositions and school climate; and third, comparative analyses across regions and school types to monitor equity and contextual fit. Such evidence would complement media analyses and test whether symbolic affirmation translates into lived civic competence (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Neuendorf, 2017).

Ecuador's reform and its press construction converge with international scholarship: centering ethics, civic responsibility and national belonging is both timely and warranted (UNESCO, 2017, 2021; Nucci et al., 2014). To fulfill this promise, policy must move decisively from symbolism to substance: invest in teacher learning, embed dialogic pedagogy, assess civic competencies, protect equity and situate schools within wider social policy (CPCCS, 2024). Doing so will help students develop a meaningful sense of belonging and the useful citizenship the country needs—ethically grounded, community-minded and capable of contributing to the common good (Galston, 2001; Weissberg et al., 2015; Apple, 2019).

Future research directions may fruitfully build on this study by focusing on the role of media literacy within Ecuadorian schools and the broader incorporation of media-related activities in the national curriculum. The findings of this article, which revealed the influence of journalistic framing on civic education, suggest the urgent need to cultivate critical competencies in students from an early age to enable them to analyze, question and interpret media discourses that increasingly shape their social and political realities (Buckingham, 2019; Hobbs, 2024). Embedding structured media literacy programs in the classroom would not only complement the civic, ethical and integrity components of the 2024 curriculum reform but would also strengthen the long-term resilience of students against misinformation, symbolic manipulation and oversimplified narratives. Comparative international experiences show that sustained exposure to media literacy instruction contributes to the formation of a more critical, reflective and participatory youth, which is essential for democratic deliberation and civic trust (Livingstone, 2014; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013). Such initiatives could transform Ecuadorian schools into active sites of cognitive empowerment, providing young citizens with the intellectual tools to navigate the complexities of the national media ecosystem.

A second line of inquiry concerns the exploration of the attitudes and perceptions of teachers, parents and students toward the new educational reforms at the national level. While this study has illuminated how media representations frame the reform and influence public debate, further investigation is required to capture the subjective experiences and interpretations of key educational actors themselves. Teachers, as mediators of curriculum enactment, may exhibit varying degrees of acceptance or resistance that could decisively shape the reform's implementation, while parents' and students' attitudes will reveal how these policies are received in daily educational practices (Fullan, 2016; Levin, 2008). Understanding these perspectives is critical to evaluating whether the reform is perceived as a legitimate and inclusive effort to address Ecuador's social challenges or as

a top-down initiative with limited resonance. Moreover, such research would allow for a nuanced reflection on the role of media and information literacy in childhood and adolescence, recognizing that informed, responsible and cognitively mature citizens are more capable of critically engaging with both policy discourse and media narratives (Koltay, 2011; Frau-Meigs, 2017). This underscores the pressing importance of integrating civic education with critical media literacy, thereby enabling future generations to build a more resilient, equitable and democratic public sphere.

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