Study of citizen competences among students of a private university in Mexico

Eloisa Heredia Escorza
Tecnologico de Monterrey

Yolanda Heredia Escorza
Tecnológico de Monterrey

Graciela Medina-Aguilar
Tecnológico de Monterrey

Mary Ana Cordero-Diaz
Tecnológico de Monterrey

Roman Martinez Martinez
Tecnológico de Monterrey

Sergio Alberto Lopez Leon
Tecnológico de Monterrey

ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the narratives of a group of college students in so-called "Citizen Experience Reports" (REC). These reports provide an account of experiences carried out by students during their social service. The objective was to analyze these narratives and identify the level of development of related skills concerning citizenship, using for this purpose the institutional definition of citizenship and the operative model created by Cantu, García and Ochman (2008). It was found that some of the components of the competences related to the citizen construction such as tolerance, respect, analysis, judgment, responsibility, and identity are the most common references in the student's narratives and that some variables such as gender may establish differences in these reports.

Keywords: Citizen Competences, Citizen Education, Social responsibility, Political Citizenship, Gender, Study Disciplines

INTRODUCTION

The Higher Education Institute, in which this investigation was conducted, aims to strengthen the civic education with a civic, ethical and political component in their students as part of their educational model; therefore, different programs were generated, initially unconnected, but currently governed by the Civic Education Model Civic Education Model which has been consolidated overtime. The current model focuses on actions and articulated plans to encourage students to construct a concept of participative citizenship in a complex social context (Weinert, 2001). However, not only do definition and implementation of organized actions suffice but also an evaluation of this education's impact on both students and graduates.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The development of competences linked to the construction of a civic identity and praxis on children and young adults, has acquired in recent years a marked relevance for all the educational system in different countries around the world, falling on schools and universities this imperative need.

The individuals as social subjects that assume themselves as citizens or as any other ascription that involves rationality and participation are result of a learning process in permanent construction by which learning, and with it, the experiences are re-signified. The context in which the subject is involved provides live processes in his own biographical trajectory in each one of the social spaces that participates.

The concepts of authority and democracy's values are confronted in a dialectic way on social sectors in which the social subject in training is involved, especially family and school. The social media, groups of friends, and other socialization groups provide permanent areas, in which the contents of civic education, ethics, and politics are confronted in a continuous, dialectic, and permanent process. This process, according to the subject's age, the context, and the historic moment, is generated and recreated permanently.

However, according to the most recent state of knowledge (2012) promoted by the Mexican Council of Educative Research (COMIE), studies that gives account of formative processes involved in citizenship construction, have focused with more emphasis on the basic levels of education whereas the higher education has been less strengthen on educational research of citizen construction and politic ethics (Heredia & Molina, 2012).

Therefore, research on the processes that generates a civic ethic and a civil identity in which the subject (adult, young, student), gives a particular meaning to the fact of being a citizen, becomes necessary.

A variety of stereotypes, rejections, and attractions develop inside the breeding ground the university provides. On both the identity and citizenship take part of this construction in the margin of a certain culture and space of knowledge and meanings.

On the other side, in a didactic perspective, the learning and mastery of different competences to face complex situations that rise in a social field, requires the identification of different elements of the competence, and then design appropriate teaching strategies for their improvement according to the student's age in their cognitive, affective, and moral development (Perrenoud, 2004).

Nowadays, we can assume that four theoretical approaches exist, on which the promotion and development of citizen competences are based. The first retakes the approaches of the Frankfurt School, which emphasizes the development of critical thinking in people to be able to

carry out reflection, discussion and review of the ideology's impact and power relations over human rights.

This position or orientation proclaims a teaching model that looks for educational environments transformation towards the emancipation of the subjects, the construction of minimal conditions that guarantee human coexistence, excluding even from public language, any expression that refers to subjugation, segregation, brutality, sexism, etcetera. It's not only suggested the education of the citizens, but changing the entire social reality (Giroux, 1993).

On this perspective it's proposed the critical and dialogical education on values (Hoyos; et al, 1998) that impacts on the ethical argument of civil society towards deliberative policy and overcoming the mere representative democracy.

In this same school, Padhila (2003) starts from the conception of Paulo Freire that pretends a critic and liberating pedagogy, which aims to train emancipated political subjects and provided with critical judgment that know how to appreciate a person, respect their rights and be aware of the recognition of the other.

A second orientation is usually embodied in the precepts of education ministries or education secretaries, which are designed from the competency standards compliance and oriented to comprehensive development. Including cognitive skills (knowledge of civil concepts), communication skills (required for dialogues), affective skills (the ability to recognize another as an equal), all this so that subjects would be able to create a more righteous and peaceful society. The didactic approach is reflected in the transversality of the development of these competences across the curriculum.

The third orientation emphasizes the relation between culture-politics-civic education and, recognizes the importance of socialization in the formation of concepts, representations and practices. Hence, the subject is inserted into social and political contexts that transmit their values, attitudes and civil practices. (Alvarado & Ospina, 1999). From this perspective, the school must influence the socialization of political culture from teaching as well as other forms of individual initiation in political practices.

The fourth orientation places civil education in a moral-ethical reflection and, recognizes that strengthening the pluralistic and democratic societies is a global need that must be addressed by education. Therefore, moral education should be met from school, both in the institutional and political field as in interpersonal relationships. This perspective encompasses the values education.

Over recent years, many universities have incorporated into their professional education, curriculum and training efforts to promote citizen competences development, relying on any of the orientations described above and incorporating elements of its own institutional culture.

On this formative elements incorporation, the general scheme that colleges follow can be stated as:

- Explicit formative model and long range objectives or imperatives of civic formation
- Clarification of the concept and components of the civic education
- Conceptual clarification of citizenship and citizen competences.
- Definition of citizen competences that are expected to develop or strengthen in the students.
- Learning spaces for the development of citizen competences.
- Research and analysis of appropriate pedagogies for civic education.

- In any case, each institution can clarify the meaning and components of civic education to develop in students the curriculum and extra-curriculum areas that will be involved in training.

Virtually and with varying degrees of development, a citizen training model is posed for all alumni to be followed.

For the matter of this investigation, the Civic Education Model that is implemented by the Private College in Mexico conceives civic education 'as an intentional choice, deliberately taken to establish civic-ethical, personal and social criteria, of the individuals that make up society. The competency-based approach identified for this purpose, builds a formative process and places the Institution with the required ideological neutrality' (Benavides, 2010).

Derived from this definition, civic education integrates two key components: a cognitive one, because it involves a rational process linked to the construction of a critic judgment; and another linked to the action and launching of those decisions which objective is the activation of the exercise of citizenship. This is the basis to declare the following citizen competences:

- Know and be sensitive to the social, economic, and political reality.
- Act with civic solidarity and responsibility to improve the life quality of their community and specially, of the most needed communities. (Plan para el Mejoramiento de la Calidad del Aprendizaje, 2010).

In their theoretical foundations, this competences consider, according to Ochman (2006), that the concept of citizenship is controversial, complex, and polisemic, and also its conception integrates traits of three sociopolitical models (republican, liberal, communist) that allow to show analysis' key points of each one, and their implications in the imaginary of contemporary political philosophy, under the context of postmodern society.

Noteworthy, for the foundation of civic education, the Civic Education Model provides an analysis platform from which the professor can support her teaching in any strategy generated in her didactic design and analyze their impact in the light of these models, whatever the ideological platform on which the professor is subscribed.

Mentioned below are some of these traits, without going into them, with the purpose of showing the dimensions that these models have and their impact on every act and project designed with the objective of civic education. Worth clarifying that teacher's job is to investigate and deepen into the educational impact of the projects that were built and formulated from their courses:

- Republican Model of Citizenship: Relative emphasis on obligations, search for common good, active and direct participation in politics by any means possible. Economic rights are seen as the foundation and the base that defines civic and political rights. Greater emphasis is given to the public over the private. In this model, political participation is essential for self-realization of the individual.
- Liberal Model of Citizenship: Individual rights acquire central importance, even greater than that of the social rights. The emphasis is placed on the rights if they do not infringe on individual freedoms. The model's support is constructed by the conception of an orderly society in which justice is understood as a reasoned and voluntary political agreement of its members. Within the practices of this model is the organization and capacity for the election of representatives, tax contribution as a practice of distributive justice, inequalities are morally unrighteous when are the result of conditions and not of their own choices; individual happiness is the most important objective.

- Communitarian Model of Citizenship: questions the universality of rights, given the existence of groups "minorities" that systematically are left out of that universality, therefore the requirement of categorical right is posed. There is an emphasis on obligations to the immediate community above the national. The reference in the imaginary is the welfare of the local community, and the sense of justice originates in the local roots and traditions of the communities and its values take precedence over the global. It seeks to recover the value of the person as an end in itself and not as a mere instrument. Emphasizes links with family and friends, the core values of friendship, affection, mutual commitment, loyalty and care to the others form guiding principles that strengthen the social tissue and give way to the education of civil society.

Besides the general citizen competences just explained, another model was also considered, developed by García, Ochman & Cantú (2008) which uses, among other sources, the issues raised by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCDE, 2004) about the project Development and Competences Selection (DeSeCo). These approaches, in turn, match with the stipulated by Weinert (2001), who explains it as 'the necessary prerequisites of which an individual or group can have to successfully accomplish complex tasks' (p.127).

García, Ochman & Cantú (2008) conclude with a citizen competences definition: 'knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values essential for effective governance'. Their proposal includes eight elements, each one integrates aspects of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The following are the competences and their elements.

(1) Referred to the common good/justice
   a. Social perspective and search for the common good/justice.
   b. Authority's democratic exercise and power control by the citizens.
(2) Referred to democracy as a way of life:
   a. Respect for diversity.
   b. Handling and resolving conflicts.
   c. Understanding of democracy as a way of life.
(3) Referred to democracy as a government system:
   a. Democratic participation.
   b. Respect and appreciation of the law.
   c. Understanding democracy as a system of government.

The model of Cantú, García, and Ochman, (2008) was selected as the starting point of this research to address the issue of citizen competences, as it provides the approach from the empiric point of view and distinguishes the cognitive and attitudinal components involved in the same competences. These features allowed the construction of the strategy analysis of the present report.

While the theoretical foundation of the Civic Education Model is transcendental, the definition of procedures and operation of specific programs are also crucial to the educational intentions become realized. Realizing this, the Private University of Mexico, through this model, distinguishes four learning spaces, two curricular, and one co-curricular for the citizen competences development. As to the first two are integrated in the base of General Education subjects in all their careers: Ethics, Self and Society (EPS) and Ethics, Profession and Citizenship (EPC). These subjects are mandatory and are designed so those are entered serially. It also offers optional subjects such as: Business Social and Environmental Responsibility; Microenterprises Planning for Social Development; Operation of Microenterprises for Social Development; Belief

Systems and Globalization; Practical, Political and Social Citizenship; Citizen Formation and Social Commitment; Social Responsibility and Citizenship, and Mexico Society, Development and Citizenship.

In addition, these courses also implement teaching strategies and methodologies in accordance, and explicitly address the theoretical content and application concerning these competences.

The first two curricular subjects are mandatory and are designed to be entered serially. EPS is taken in the career's first terms of all curricular programs and seeks to help students understand the importance and fundamentals of ethics in the contemporary world as a basis for responsible decision making in the achieving of their personal life project and constructive interaction with their social environment. EPC is taken in the lasts terms, with the objective that students reflect on their sense of personal and social responsibility in professional practice, so that through this thinking the students strengthen their commitment to contribute to build a just and sustainable society.

The other learning space is for Ethics and Citizenship across the Curriculum, which seeks to link the professional practice with civic engagement, making use of career specific subjects that allow students to analyze specific cases from an ethical and civic perspective, essential to build a wider political culture.

Aware that citizen competences development is complex, the Private University of Mexico decided to strengthen co-curricular activities, which forms the third learning space. Among them are the Social Service, Social Incubators, and Student Groups activities. These training options provide opportunities for students to become aware of the current situation of the country, and assume the role of actors in creating changes in areas identified as priorities. The purpose of these activities, also mandatory because in Mexico all undergraduate students must complete a service to the community of 480 hours in two years, in any program or social organization assign by the university. This is to raise awareness among students of the Mexican social reality, through their participation in projects and programs that generates social, economic, and educational development in low-income communities and social welfare institutions most needed. (Plan para el Mejoramiento de la Calidad del Aprendizaje, 2010).

Regarding pedagogies for citizen education, it is stated that 'are assumed as techniques and methods to analyze, evaluate, promote and give structure to the development of citizen competences through a training program using different teaching and learning spaces' (Benavides, 2010).

Pedagogy establishes Service-Learning as one of the main strategies for its development, as well as Problem Based Learning, Case Analysis and Collaborative Learning. All of them are oriented to develop a civic culture in students, such as argumentation, debate and citizen dilemma analysis, to name a few.

Finally, as an institution, the responsibility to measure the accomplished effects due to the implementation of the Civic Education Model is held. To acquire its purpose, it uses the evidence presented by students related to their personal experience during their Social Service. The Citizen Experience Reports (REC for its initials in Spanish), consists of a written reflection delivered by students who have finished their Community Social Service. They are evaluated using guidelines specifically designed for this purpose.

METHODOLOGY

The questions on which this study was based are:

(1) Are there significant differences in citizen competence development levels, evaluated according to the students' **studying discipline**?
(2) Are there significant differences in citizen competence development levels, evaluated according to the **students' precedence**?
(3) Are there significant differences in citizen competence development levels, evaluated according to the **students' gender**?
(4) What other citizen competences that are not assessed through the rubric, are identified in the Citizen Experiences Report?
(5) What citizen competences **predominate** according to the Social Service's own project type?

As the main source of information to perform this study, the Citizen Experience Reports delivered by the students who finished their Social Service during 2009 were used. The evaluation results through the established guideline were considered as well.

The global result of the guideline to evaluate REC is considered, in this case, an indicator of citizen competence development in these students.

Also, the content analysis of a 120 REC sample picked by convenience through the ATLAS program was carried out. These belong to students of various professional careers and campus who worked during their Social Service amidst project diversity and redacted such report by the end of this time period.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the students sample's demographic data that were used in this research, which answered the Citizen Experience Report (REC) and were rated by the institutional rubric.

As observed on Table 1(Appendix) the demographic data of students participating in the development of REC shows a variety in percentages pertaining to discipline and rectory. These values were enough to generalize the results of this analysis.

The complete statistical analysis is described as follows: First, an average score of the REC guideline was collected by gender. Second, interferential statistical analysis was obtained in order to identify significant statistical differences between the medium values on each instrument by gender.

Average scores presented on Table 2 (Appendix) show an intermediate level of citizen competence development; given that the evaluation scale varies from 1 to 4, being 4 the highest level on all measurement instruments. Since there's no data to compare this to, any interpretation in this sense would be relative.

The scores presented almost no difference between them, which is why it was decided to proceed and validate on each case the statistical information. This was made in order to determine the most appropriate test to prove if the differences in citizen competence development are related to gender.

In the REC evaluation scores, given that information is obtained from two independent samples, with equal variance but in which normality supposed value is not met, the most adequate option to compare medium values was the non-parametric U Mann Whitney test. In this test, since the value of p-value=0.003 obtained was lesser than $\alpha=0.05$, the null hypothesis of equality of medium values is rejected. In other words, with a confidence up to 95%, it can be established that significant statistical differences exist between the average levels of citizen competence development, evaluated by student gender.

What should be noticed is how results indicate that citizen competence development reaches a greater score for women than for men. These results are not yet definitive, and it is suggested to perform specific studies to study in depth gender impact.

Table 3 (Appendix) shows the results of data analysis by discipline; average scores as well as significant differences.

Continuing with the analysis, to determine if significant differences by Discipline and Rectory exist, since there are more than two categories to compare, the ANOVA variance analysis was applied. Given that the level of p-value=0.10 obtained is greater than α=0.05, there are no statistically significant differences.

It is suggested, as in the case of gender influence, to perform specific studies to identify some of the factors related to disciplinary formation, which facilitate the development of citizen competences. In this way, the study indicates there are statistical differences; however, the cause is beyond this investigation's reach.

Table 4 (Appendix) shows results of Rectory Analysis, Average Scores and Significant Differences.

It is noted that the REC assessment with a confidence interval of 95%, reveals that there are statistically significant differences between the development average level of citizen competences evaluated on their origin campus and therefore the Rectory of which they belong. According to Figure1 (Appendix):

- By region, the highest level of citizen competences development was obtained by RMX-N and the lowest by RZC (Center Regional Unit).
- By gender, it is observed that the citizen competences' development level is greater in women than in men.
- By discipline, the citizen competences' level of development results are similar, but the highest levels in HCS (Humanities and Social Science School) and SAL (Health School) can be highlighted. Moreover the lowest level was obtained in the TIE (Information Technology and Electronic School) discipline.

To answer question 4: What other citizen competences that are not assessed through the rubric, are identified in the Citizen Experiences Report? The model of Ochman y García (2008) was used to identify, using the REC's content analysis, other competences.

Finding evidence of some components development of the competences such as: a different social and cultural reality discovery; taking care of others; respect for diversity; and tool management for conflict resolution.

The results are shown in Tables 5 and 6 (Appendix). The results demonstrate that the most related competences with the citizenship's political aspects expression were not evident in the REC narrative, in part because of the Social Service projects in which students participate, not lend themselves to develop these competences.

Next, some of the coded citations in which competence evidence is shown are enlisted. Table 7 (Appendix).

An observation made at the time of reading the reports as seen in Table 7 (Appendix), made it clear that Medical students (Health School) had better redacting skills, as well as an ability to transmit emotions faced in chaotic situations wherever their professional practice took place. Meanwhile, students of other disciplines showed lesser redactions and expression skills.

Table 8 (Appendix) shows the amount and proportion of Social Service projects present in the analyzed sample. It is observed how educational projects are the most frequent, followed by health and community infrastructure.

Table 9 (Appendix) portrays the five competence components that most frequently appeared on RECs, showing also each project type.

On Table 9, competence component distribution is shown according to Project Type. With what's been noted at this time, it is relevant to point out the need for an offer in order to incorporate projects facilitating citizen competence expression, related to political aspects as in electoral, legislative and judicial organisms.

Accounting all of what has been mentioned until now, the proposed research questions: What other citizen competences that are not assessed through the rubric, are identified in the Citizen Experiences Report? and What citizen competences predominate according to the Social Service's own project type? Have been widely answered.

Another finding that seems to be mentioned is that in the definitions of citizen competences research, it was observed that in the context of the Private College of Mexico's Civic Education Model coexist several approaches to such definitions as well as the various tools that are currently measured. Hence the need to establish, for this research purpose, the equivalence between the competences set out by the different instruments.

DISCUSSION

The obtained results analysis highlights the following findings:

- In general, the results of women are higher than those of men, and these differences are statistically significant. But this results are not definitive because more research must to be conducted to get more information about of gender differences in develop citizen competences.

- Regarding the results by discipline, stands the fact that there are no significant differences. Without generalizing, can be interpreted according to this result that the profession does not influence the development of citizen competences analyzed here. The belief that health or humanities careers, favor more the citizen competences development, it is not consistent with our results.

- Regarding the results by Rectory, significant differences were found. This may indicate that the context of each campus and each geo-political zone may be influencing different citizen competences development in their respective students.

- There is a direct relationship between citizen competences that are evident in the student's narrative, and the type of project, so if a particular competence was encouraged, the associated project could be promoted.

- Based on the REC analysis, the eight citizen competences defined in the Cantú, García and Ochman´s model in Table 5 were identified as being present. Some of these are not directly assessed by the REC's rubric.

- It was not possible to identify the competences that are shown in Table 5. One possible explanation for this fact is that the vast majority of Social Service Projects are aimed at projects that facilitate the expression and development of these competences. If these competences are wanted to be strengthened, another type of Social Service projects should be promoted.

- In general, the qualitatively evaluated REC, components of knowledge and to a lesser extent, skills and attitudes predominated. This suggests an opportunity to strengthen the skills and attitudes associated with citizen competences.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the three research questions, the most relevant conclusions are: there is a statistically significant difference by gender assessment, a relationship between the type of Social Service project with the development of specific citizen competences, and the REC's evaluation and analysis could be enriched by identifying eight competences and not just the two considered in the evaluation rubric.

It is considered that the analysis model in this study can be used to apply the same type of study, but with the obtained data by the students of other generations, and comparing the results to confirm or reject hypothesis to improve the citizen competences strategy in the student's education.

In particular, it is displayed the importance of continuing this work with a research that deepen the factors that may be related to the citizen competences development by gender, type of project and Rectory.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Demographic data of the student sample.

	REC
N	2593
Gender	
% Men	55
% Women	45
Discipline	
% Engineering	41
% Business	42
% Humanities and SC	8
% Health	1
% Technology	8
Rectory	
% Monterrey (RZMM)	32
% Mexico City (RMX)	15
% Occident (RZO)	17
% North (RZN)	14
% Center (RZC)	14
% South (RZS)	8

Table 2. Average scores by gender

Instrument	Average score Men	Average score Women	Significant Differences
REC Evaluation	1.79	1.87	If (p = 0.003)

Table 3. Analysis results by Discipline

Instrument	Average score Engineering	Average score Business	Average score Humanities and SC	Average score Health	Average score Technology	Significant Differences
REC Evaluation	1.80	1.85	1.87	1.88	1.75	No (p= 0.100)

Table 4 Analysis Result by Rectory (regional organizations unit)

Instrument	Average score RZMM	Average score RMX	Average score RZO	Average score RZN	Average score RZC	Average score RZS	Significant Differences
REC Evaluation	1.91	1.80	1.85	1.76	1.64	1.94	If (p= 0.O00)

Table 5. Citizen competences identified in reports.

Competence	Component	Num. of quotes	% of students who had at least one quote
2	Tolerance (Knowledge)	160	68
3	Critical Analysis (Knowledge)	149	60
1	Critical Judgment (Skill)	119	44
1	Responsibility (Attitude)	108	50
2	Respect (Attitude)	104	53
2	Respect (Knowledge)	86	48
1	Responsibility (Skill)	85	38
1	Identity (Attitude)	82	41
2	Respect (Skill)	62	33
3	Critical Analysis (Skill)	47	31

(1) Social Perspective and search for the common good.
(2) Respect for diversity.
(3) Conflict Management and Resolution.

Table 6. Citizen competences not identified in Reports

Competence	Components
4	Electoral participation (Knowledge)
5	Law enforcement (Knowledge)
6	Democratic values (Knowledge, Skill and Attitude)
6	Democratic Institutions (Knowledge and Attitude)
8	Democratic Authority (Knowledge, Skill and Attitude)
8	Citizenship control (Skill and Attitude)

Table 7. Exemplifying quotes that demonstrate the competences

Code: [1.1 Identity A] [1.1 Identity S]
'I learned how to listen to others' opinions and to be open-minded. I learned to foresee other people's needs and not only my own. Also, I made many good friends. Finally, I'm glad to mention this is a service experience that can make an individual learn about citizen development, even more than what is learned in the academic milieu. Theories work as support, but living the experience transforms' (sic.)

Code: [1.2 Responsibility A] [3.2 Critical Analysis S]
'The social issue dealt with during this experience was youth irresponsibility. This population group is naïve to the dangers it's exposed to. The goal was to create a conscious responsibility' (sic).

Code: [1.2 Responsibility S] [1.3 Critical Judgement S]
'During breaks, we tried to discuss and play with them. We got to know their worries and fears. By the end we had known most of the children and their stories. This experience made me value what I have, the education I'm receiving because of my parents' effort, it made me be more studious, but most of all, it made me a better citizen. Now, my concern goes to these children and their futures, trying to stay up to speed in school, even when my Social Service is finished' (sic).

Code: [1.3 Critical Judgement A] [1.3 Critical Judgement S]
'This happened because in this commitment I had much more contact with the day to day situation of each family living in the state's poorer regions. I got to witness up close the social poverty problems, economic shortage, inadequate nutrition, healthcare and education convey. All these issues stand in between the population and a worthy quality of life, as well as realistic aspirations. The lack of resources previously mentioned is tightly related to the national territory, constantly and significantly affecting many people. These have not yet resolved due to lack of effective government action and the influence of the population's ignorance or nonchalance' (sic).

Table 8. Amount and proportion by Project Type.

Project Type	Num. of Projects	Percentage
Educational	75	52
Entrepreneurism	6	4
Health	26	18
Community infrastructure	8	6
Organizational Strengthening	21	15
Professional Guidance	8	6
Total	144	100

Table 9. Predominant competence components by Project Type

Project Type	Tolerance: Knowledge (%)	Critical Analysis: Knowledge (%)	Critical Judgement: Skill (%)	Responsibility: Attitude (%)	Respect: Attitude (%)
Educational	71	55	40	48	55
Entrepreneurism	50	33	67	67	50
Health	69	81	54	50	65
Community Infrastructure	75	38	38	63	13
Organizational	71	62	52	52	57

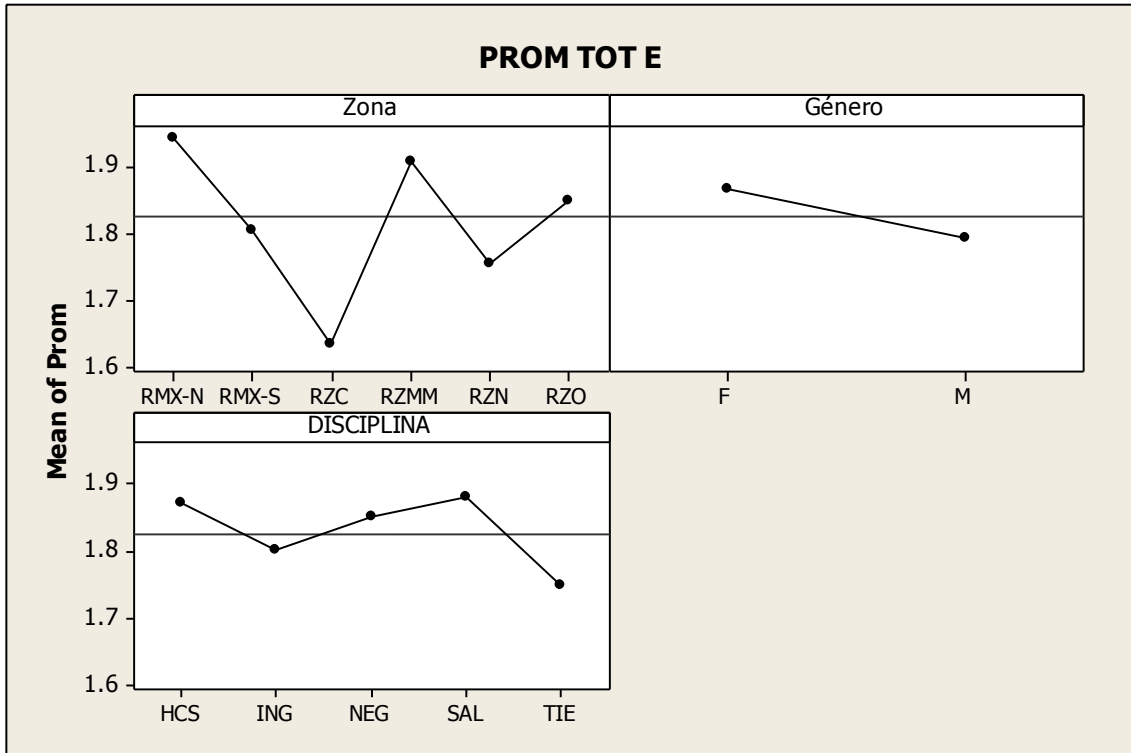|					
Strengthening Professional Guidance	63	50	38	50	25
Total	69	58	45	51	53

Figure 1. REC means comparison by gender, discipline and rectory.