

## Article

# Representations of Social Justice and Digital Civic Engagement: The Influence of Psychosocial Variables in Teacher Training

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**Abstract:** Teacher training programs usually contain specific psychoeducational aspects, but these should also promote citizenship competences based on social justice in order to encourage a more sustainable world. The three dimensions of Social Justice, the Belief in a Just World (BJW) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) are psychosocial variables linked to the construction of civic engagement and participation, including in digital frameworks. The aim of the study was to analyze these variables in students seeking teaching training degrees that have begun their program and students who are finishing their studies. The sample was composed of 420 teachers enrolled in a Teacher Training Degree for Elementary Education with an age range between 17 to 44 ( $M = 21.10$ ;  $DT = 3.26$ ), among which a subgroup was in their first year of study ( $n = 217$ ) and another group was in the fourth year ( $n = 203$ ). The results shows that there were significant differences in social justice representations, and in levels of SDO and BJW, with a better psychosocial index at the end of training. The changes in social justice representations of future teachers are not uniform for the three dimensions and some gender differences were maintained, showing no significant differences in the variables evaluated in both stages of training. Finally, linear regression analyses showed that BJW and SDO predicted social justice representations and the Digital Civic Engagement of future teachers. The implications of the psychosocial variables studied are discussed as possible factors to consider in educational psychology to promote innovative developments from teacher training programs.

**Keywords:** education; teacher training; social justice; psychosocial variables

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## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the concept of Social Justice has been analyzed from different perspectives [1], becoming a recurrent problem of study in the social sciences and in education in particular. The growing interest in this subject could stem from different phenomena that are currently affecting the functioning of modern democratic societies, such as: globalization and its effects, the numerous migratory and refugee crises worldwide, the existence of economic models that do not guarantee equity, the rise of authoritarian political movements, the existence of intolerant prejudices towards certain social groups, as well as other possibilities. From this perspective, the term *Social Justice* has generated an intense debate, generally relapsing over the main problem that the concept has no singular meaning and has a highly political content [2].

The concept of social justice and its relevance within the present and near future context require a more detailed analysis. In order to consider the great diversity of existing injustices, it is necessary to begin with a wide, multidimensional perspective of social justice.

According to Fraser [3,4], currently there are at least three interconnected spheres related to Social Justice. First, drawing on a classic perspective of the concept, there is Redistribution or Economic Justice [5–7], which suggests the need for a just distribution of goods and material resources, as well as distribution in the cultural plane. Thus, the principle of equality of opportunity—deeply rooted in western democracy—has been infringed upon [8]. Secondly, the notion of Recognition or Cultural Justice [9] demonstrates a need for sociocultural respect towards all people, and for placing value on human diversity and promoting just relationships. This perspective encourages an absence of social and cultural domination, giving visibility and recognition to minorities that have been historically excluded for different reasons, such as their sex, gender, sexual orientation, origin, race, culture, or socioeconomic status [3]. Lastly, Representation or Political Justice, [10], attempts to make sure that people have the ability to participate in society actively and equally, with the hope of securing decision-making ability in any aspect of their lives [11]. Nowadays, although most of the western world claims to be democratic, the citizens of Western countries suffer widespread limitations and the principle of democratic participation has been only partially fulfilled [12].

### *1.1. Representations of Social Justice and Digital Civic Engagement in Teacher Training*

From an educational perspective, in order to guarantee a focus on Social Justice, it is not only necessary to include pedagogical and methodological strategies, but also to know the teachers' thoughts and beliefs. In this sense, transformation and improvement of Social Justice-centered education requires time and effort [13]. To accomplish this, it is necessary to identify and consider the system of beliefs and representations that educators have. Therefore, teachers' representations or beliefs were set as a goal to achieve during training in order to facilitate the analysis of students' engagement to take actions [14]. Moscovici's Social Representations [15] make up a system of beliefs rooted in the experiences of people and developments, created through their social actions. Furthermore, these representations have an evolving component that makes them fit perceptions that are formed on an on-going basis by lived psychosocial experience, which is further influenced by social and educational context [16]. According to other authors [17], representations of social justice in schools are mediated by a set of interrelations between different agents of the school, the most noteworthy being that which occurs between teachers and students. The representations of teachers serve as a guide for the behavior and attitude of students and other educational agents and can be used to predict a multitude of variables stemming from these representations [18], with the empirical value that this implies for teachers still in training. In this way, the study of the representations of Social Justice of teachers-in-training reveals key information related to the attitudes and practices of working teachers. The study of social justice representations has changed throughout the last decades, widening beyond a mere economic perspective. Consequently, the perspective on social justice that had prevailed for a good part of the 20th century has broadened to be studied based on a need for the recognition of diversity and democratic participation in sociopolitical matters. Many authors still see a possibility to mitigate various injustices with this reinterpretation of the term, such as redistributive injustice, cultural injustice and injustice related to the rights and liberties of citizens. From this perspective—one that begins with a three-dimensional conception of social justice (Redistribution, Recognition and Representation)—the representations and attitudes associated with these concepts found in teacher training has changed [19]. In this sense, knowledge and lived experience are diverse up to the point that teachers start working at school. Thus, the beginning of teacher training could transform ignorance about sociopolitical aspects into an educational vision based on social justice [20].

First, teachers' representations and education are oriented towards the recognition of inequality in the distribution of educational opportunities, as well as resources, achievements and favorable results for minority groups and low-income students [21]. Nevertheless, in order to guarantee an equitable approach, it is critical to include the Redistribution dimension in teachers' conceptions of Social Justice. Thus, it is important to develop an equitable teaching conception based not only on the distribution of resources, but also considering the diverse needs and capacities present in a classroom [19]. This dimension seeks the goal of every teacher: to individualize needs and not to assume the same outcomes for every student. Second, regarding the dimension of Recognition, representations of teachers in education consider minority groups or traditionally excluded or marginalized groups to require a curriculum and some processes of teaching and learning that recognize and value the particulars of their culture and history, lifestyles and pedagogic texts [22]. According to Fraser [9], Redistribution and Recognition are related to injustices whose approach from education would be articulated through solutions of affirmation and transformation. From this perspective, affirmative solutions are those that only intend to alleviate an educational injustice without trying to understand and address the cause of the problems. As for transformative solutions, these are the most effective in solving educational inequalities, since they try to build new ways of approaching the real cause of the problems and providing new socially transformative approaches in the long-term educational environment. Finally, in the Participation dimension, the establishment of a socially just education agenda is important for teachers, particularly in matters related to the educational community, such as: what type of curriculum is taught in schools, what type of knowledge is valuable and what degree of participation different social actors have in decision making. Participation is presented as a transversal instrument to the other two dimensions described [3], aimed to increase the role of educational agents by solving the problems and injustices that affect them. Therefore, teacher training that seeks to achieve focus on social justice must evaluate representations that possess the three aforementioned dimensions throughout the training process. Additionally, in contemporary globalized societies characterized by continuous interaction between people of diverse cultures, all teachers should aspire to promote communication styles and interpersonal relationships based on prosociality [23]. Therefore, empirical studies during teacher training are necessary in order to improve training programs, including a more critical focus on the injustices present also outside the classroom. Thus, in the future, teachers will be able to work with a greater civic engagement, and have representations and attitudes that are more favorable to Social Justice at their disposal.

Citizenship is the collection of rights and responsibilities that define members of a community, including educational field and, as mentioned by [24], it is possible to differentiate citizenship rights and citizenship practices. Citizenship rights are the entitlements and freedoms that enable people to take public roles and to influence public decisions. According to the 12th article of the Children's Rights Declaration [25], States (including their educational institutions) shall guarantee to the child the development of the critical capacity and the right to express their opinion freely in all matters, and taking these opinions into consideration. In addition, it is highlighted that citizenship practice is the active exercise of rights through democratic action and civic responsibility. Regarding citizenship youth practices, nowadays the exercise of civic engagement is increasingly linked to the digital environment [26]. In addition, a huge part of the injustices and forms of oppression (cyberbullying, hate speech or blackmail) among the youngest take place in the digital sphere. This makes it imperative that teachers have civic engagement, not only in community and educational environments, but also in the digital environment. Therefore, Digital Civic Engagement (DCE) is defined as [27]: individual or collective actions, involving digital media, in which people participate to improve the well-being of communities or society in general. Based on the scope of the digital environment, schools and teachers should not only pay attention to digital civic engagement, but also ensure equitable access

to technology and digital skills. For this reason, it is considered relevant to study the relationships that DCE has with Social Justice dimensions, in order to better understand the vision of teachers in training.

Regarding the ramifications of the injustices and problems that affect different persons and social groups for democratic society, taking on the Social Justice representations in Education is critical. These representations may promote a more elaborate and systematic description of Social Justice that encompasses its different meanings and uses in various political and social contexts [26]. From this perspective, democratic (now increasingly digital) frameworks are the best means for increasing Social Justice, since they provide personal and social well-being for its citizens [28]. In recent years, many different curricular ideas have been formulated to help developing citizens to learn about their rights, get involved and rebel against situations of injustice. In this process, teachers play one of the most important roles, beyond, even, changes in curriculum. Thus, the stances of critically and civically minded teachers include the development of intellectual solidarity with students and members of socio-educational communities [29], including in digital contexts. If social justice is achieved in education, then schools are more inclusive and attentive to diversity, maximizing the opportunities and abilities of each student [30]. In this process, which begins at the teachers' initial training, there are different psychosocial variables that have been shown to be negatively related to the development of representations of social justice in three dimensions, among them: Belief in a Just World and Social Dominance Orientation.

### *1.2. Belief in a Just World, Social Dominance Orientation and Their Relationship with the Teachers' Representation of Social Justice and Civic Engagement*

The notion of Social Justice can be represented in various ways as a function of numerous factors—after all, it is a dynamic concept that is influenced by the society in which it is inserted [31]. According to theoretical models such as planned action [32], these representations and attitudes concerning the Social Justice concept are related to other psychosocial variables, as, for example, how intentions and concrete actions that can benefit or disadvantage other people. While there are studies that have shown that teachers-in-training have different representations and beliefs concerning Social Justice based on sociodemographic variables [33], the inclusion of other psychosocial variables that allow the establishment of wider sets of variables based on different forms of prosocial thinking is still necessary.

In this way, there are diverse factors related to the maintenance of beliefs and prejudices about those who find themselves in unjust situations. Belief in a Just World contributes to the perception that people in situations of injustice are threatening, due to the belief that one always gets what they deserve in life [34]. Otherwise, subjects would feel vulnerable to the situations observed in others, imagining that it could be them that are the ones affected. The unease generated from the threat of being able to fall into the same unjust situations that others suffer causes subjects to blame the victims of these injustices [35]. For this reason, it is likely that people with this belief blame disadvantaged people through being less altruistic and more prejudiced against them [36]. Diverse studies have demonstrated negative relationships between teachers' representations of social justice and their belief in a just world [37], as well as with other psycho-political variables [38,39]. Critical thinking and empathy for people experiencing any injustice are encouraged across the three dimensions of Social Justice [40], by not putting the focus on personal or individual characteristics, but instead on structural, sustainable [41] and contextual ones. Across the three dimensions, Social Justice Representations encourage critical thinking and empathy for people who suffer injustice. Presented with certain injustices that arise from a lack of Redistribution, Recognition and/or Representation [3], Fraser focuses on the structural and contextual causes that can be changed, instead of on the personal or individual characteristics of the people suffering the unfavorable situation. Thereupon, the three dimensions of social justice representation are combined to analyze injustices from

a multidimensional perspective, removed from partial analyses which might begin with prejudiced perspectives (such as Belief in a Just World). In particular, regarding the Redistribution dimension, different authors [42] found that individuals with low levels of this belief could analyze the origin and cause of poverty more broadly and with less prejudice. Furthermore, in general terms, a relationship between Belief in a Just World and the tendency to justify or reject inequality has been found [8].

Additionally, it is necessary to highlight the diverse forms of thinking related to the existence and maintenance of hierarchies and inequalities such as Social Dominance Orientation. The current organization of society is often based on the existence of diverse groups differentiated by certain characteristics. However, the opportunities and relationships of these groups are not particularly marked by a focus based on social justice. The theory of social dominance is based on analysis of hierarchies in society structured by age, gender and a set of arbitrary intergroup relationships [43,44]. Though in many societies hierarchies have been established based on socioeconomic status, the three-dimensional framework of social justice has brought about the necessity of giving recognition to all social groups, even if they are minorities [8]. Additionally, the representation dimension claims that all social groups are able to participate in decisions that affect their own lives and are not subordinate to the interests of majority groups.

Therefore, the two sub-dimensions that compose Social Dominance Orientation are incompatible with the quest for social justice: opposition to equality and group dominance [45,46]. The Recognition dimension stands in opposition to the establishment of social hierarchies, since it encourages respect between individuals and groups and the establishment of just relationships [3–47]. Additionally, the other two dimensions of social justice are also positioned as theoretically opposed to social dominance: redistribution promotes the eradication of social injustice derived from economic motives and participation foment participative parity of social groups and individuals [48]. Based on these observations, the aforementioned psychosocial variables have principles that are unfavorably related to representations of the three dimensions of Social Justice. The Redistribution, Recognition and Participation dimensions are inspired by an educational focus that seeks equity, respect and the establishment of relationships based on respect and recognition between different groups, such as parity of participation. These factors stand in opposition to the different ways of conceiving and interpreting socio-educational operations based on the Belief in a Just World and Group Dominance Orientation. Thus, the development of Social Justice representations and their implications for teachers beginning their training are key factors to understand [49,50]. All this is in line with showing greater civic engagement and participation in the exercise of citizenship, taking into account the increasingly influential digital context [51]. Therefore, social justice in education is necessary [52] not only to work on the development of digital skills to help take advantage of citizenship competences in this framework, but also to develop a critical sense in order to choose a more sustainable future and fair world [53].

The aim of the study was to analyze the representations and attitudes concerning Social Justice and Civic Engagement in teachers-in-training and to inquire into the relationships between these factors and other psychosocial variables. Firstly, different representations of each dimension of Social Justice of the teachers-in-training are analyzed as a function of their gender and years of study. Secondly, the relationships between these representations with the belief in a just world, political identification and civic engagement of the teachers-in-training are analyzed.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 420 training teachers from the *Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*, between the ages of 17 and 44 years old ( $M = 21,10$ ;  $DT = 3269$ ), 74.3% of them being women ( $n = 343$ ) and 25.7% being

men ( $n = 73$ ). They were divided into two groups based on their training: 36.5% ( $n = 217$ ) were in the first year of study in a Teacher Training Degree in Elementary Education and 34.8% were in the fourth year of study in the same degree. Regarding the size of the teachers-in-training population, according to the Autonomous University of Madrid [54], in the 2020 academic year, there were 551 future teachers who were studying an Educational Degree. The total distribution according to gender was 81.48% women ( $n = 449$ ) and 18.52% men ( $n = 102$ ).

## 2.2. Instruments

*Representations of Social Justice.* The Three-Dimensional Scale of Social Justice (3DSSJ) [46] is an instrument composed of 18 items grouped into three sub-scales that evaluate different aspects of the social and educational context based on three dimensions: Redistribution (e.g., “More resources should be devoted to students with special educational needs”), Recognition (e.g., “Immigrant students should be granted the same rights as people who have the nationality of a country”) and Representation (e.g., “It is essential that the students participate in the elaboration of the norms of coexistence of their schools”). The answer format was a Likert-type scale with 5 levels of response: 1 = “Totally Disagree” to 5 = “Totally Agree”. The reliability for the sub-scales and global scale were adequate (Recognition:  $\alpha = 0.74$ ; Representation:  $\alpha = 0.70$ ; Redistribution:  $\alpha = 0.66$ ; Global Social Justice:  $\alpha = 0.82$ ), and similar to the original version of the scale (Redistribution:  $\alpha = 0.73$ ; Recognition:  $\alpha = 0.76$ ; and Representation:  $\alpha = 0.65$ ).

*Belief in a Just World.* To evaluate Belief in a Just World (BJW), an adapted Spanish-translated version of the original 1991 Lipkus scale was used [55], since it has been shown to have adequate reliability ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ;  $\alpha = 0.84$  in the original version) and validity. This scale is comprised of seven items that refer to belief in a just world (e.g., “I believe that people get what they deserve”; “I believe that people have earned the rewards and punishments that they receive”). The answer format is a Likert-type scale with 5 levels based on how participants agree with different statements: 1 = “Totally disagree” and 5 = “Totally agree”. High ratings on the scale indicate greater levels of belief in a just world.

*Social Dominance Orientation.* A version of the Social Dominance Orientation Scale [45], comprising 10 items, adapted to and validated in the Spanish language, was used. The scale is composed of two correlated dimensions (opposition to equality: OE; and group dominance: GD). OE comprised the even items of the scale and GD, the odd items. The answer format is a Likert scale with 5 levels based on the degree of agreement of the participants with different statements: 1 = “Completely disagree” to 5 = “Completely agree”. In the case of the OE sub-dimension (e.g., “Equality between groups of people should be our ideal”), the indication of the items was inverted since the answers to these items are inverse to the scale in Social Dominance Orientation (e.g., “The higher groups should dominate the lower groups”) ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ;  $\alpha = 0.82$  in the original version). Higher scores on the scale indicate greater levels of Social Dominance Orientation.

*Digital Civic Engagement.* An adapted version of the Civic Engagement Scale [56] was used. It includes five items that evaluate possible behaviors to be carried out by citizens, so that the participants value the importance of a more sustainable and equitable world through the exercise of digital citizenship. These items are Likert-type with 5 levels based on the degree of agreement of the participants with different statements: 1 = “Completely disagree” to 5 = “Completely agree”. The answers are situated from the normative level, and the participants are not asked to declare their propensity to implement the behaviors included, but rather if “a good citizen” should assume said engagements and exercise a behavior that includes them (e.g., “Choose consumer items that, even if they are bought online, do not harm the environment”; “Participate in a political forum or discussion group on the Internet”; “Send and share messages on political issues via mobile or social media (call for acts of protest, some political acts, express opinions on political issues...)”). In relation to the reliability of the scale, for the present study, a Cronbach’s Alpha index was obtained:  $\alpha = 0.70$  ( $\alpha = 0.75$  in the original version).

*Demographic Data.* Different sociodemographic variables of the participants were recorded and considered, such as: age, academic qualification and gender.

### 2.3. Procedure

The participants that formed part of this study did so voluntarily and anonymously. The administration of instruments was done face-to-face, with different groups of students distributed among the two different academic years of the teachers being evaluated. Additionally, the participants were informed that the data and findings would be used exclusively for academic and scientific purposes. Signed participant consent was registered. Only participants who accepted written consent were allowed to start the survey. Based on the characteristics of the study, a favorable review was carried out by the corresponding ethics committee.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was performed with the statistical program SPSS 26. First, the reliability of the scales and sub-scales were calculated using Cronbach's alpha, while having the option of eliminating an element ( $\alpha_{-x}$ ). Next, descriptive statistics were calculated (Media, Standard Deviation, Symmetry and Kurtosis) for the 3DSSJ, as well as the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test to analyze the normality of the data ( $p > 0.05$  in all cases). Besides, we performed a Student's *t*-test to analyze the differences of gender and academic qualifications of the future teachers. Furthermore, a bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between the variables of this study. Finally, a linear regression analysis was carried out in order to study the association and possible level of prediction between the variables investigated (previously, we tested the Variance inflation Factor (VIF) to detect multicollinearity ( $>10$ ) in both cases).

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Relationship between Social Justice Representation, the Belief in a Just World, Social Dominance Orientation and Digital Civic Engagement

First, relationships between global social justice representation (redistribution, recognition and representation), their three dimensions, the belief in a just world and social dominance orientation were analyzed (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Relationships between levels of Global Social Justice Representation and its three dimensions, Belief in a Just World, Social Dominance Orientation and Digital Civic Engagement.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. RJS Global	0.82	0.768 **	0.808 **	0.737 **	−0.378 **	−0.468 **	0.545 **
2. Redistribution		0.70	0.412 **	0.410 **	−0.237 **	−0.318 **	0.380 **
3. Recognition			0.76	0.366 **	−0.327 **	−0.400 **	0.494 **
4. Representation				0.80	−0.291 **	−0.335 **	0.449 **
5. BJW					0.83	0.486 **	−0.323 **
6. SDO						0.81	−0.495 **
7. DCE							0.70

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Note. Cronbach's Alpha along the diagonal. Global SJR: Global Social Justice Representation; BJW: Belief in a just world; SDO: Social Dominance Orientation; DCE: Digital Civic Engagement.

In this sense, moderate positive correlations were found between the RJS Global and the three dimensions of social justice: Recognition ( $r = 0.808$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), Redistribution ( $r = 0.768$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and Representation ( $r = 0.737$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).  $p < 0.001$ , as well as with Digital

Civic Engagement ( $r = 0.545$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). In contrast, negative correlations were found between the social justice representations (in all its dimensions) and Digital Civic Engagement with respect to the contrasted psychosocial variables: Belief in a Just World and Social Dominance Orientation.

### 3.2. Global Social Justice Representation, the Belief in a Just World, Social Dominance Orientation, Digital Civic Engagement and the Academic Year of the Future Teachers

Afterward, differences in the Global SJR levels and their dimensions, the belief in a just world and social dominance were analyzed according to the academic year of the future teachers (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Comparison between the beginning of the end of the education teaching degree.

	Beginning of the Degree M (DT)	End of the Degree M (DT)	<i>t</i>	Cohen's d
RJS Global	91.03 (9.32)	93.30 (9.04)	$t_{(398)} = -2.469$ $p < 0.01$	−0.24
Redistribution	28.90 (3.73)	29.34 (3.71)	$t_{(413)} = -1.204$ $p = 0.229$	−0.12
Recognition	28.50 (4.80)	28.82 (4.35)	$t_{(412)} = -0.709$ $p = 0.478$	−0.07
Representation	33.77 (3.58)	35.25 (3.42)	$t_{(406)} = -4.266$ $p < 0.001$	−0.48
BJW	14.68 (5.29)	12.99 (4.67)	$t_{(412)} = 3.454$ $p < 0.001$	0.34
SDO	10.41 (3.50)	8.80 (3.21)	$t_{(415)} = 4.879$ $p < 0.001$	0.48
DCE	24.96 (2.68)	26,28 (2.96)	$t_{(417)} = 2.876$ $p < 0.005$	−0.47

As can be seen in Table 2, there are significant differences in levels of global social justice ( $t_{(398)} = -2.469$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) among the teachers who are beginning their studies and those who are finishing the degree. However, upon analyzing each dimension of the construct, only differences in the Representation dimension ( $t_{(406)} = -4.266$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were observed, and not in Redistribution ( $t_{(413)} = -1.204$ ,  $p = 0.229$ ) or Recognition ( $t_{(412)} = -0.709$ ,  $p = 0.478$ ). Besides, future teachers who are at the end of the training showed higher levels of Digital Civic Engagement ( $t_{(417)} = 2.876$ ;  $p < 0.005$ ) in comparison with those who were beginning the Degree. Additionally, differences in the Belief in a Just World ( $t_{(412)} = 3.454$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and in Social Dominance Orientation ( $t_{(415)} = 4.879$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were observed. Thus, the differences with a larger effect size were: representation (Cohen's  $d = 0.48$ ), social dominance orientation (Cohen's  $d = 0.48$ ) and belief in a just world (Cohen's  $d = 0.34$ ). In all cases, the levels in the variables studied (significantly related to each other) are more suitable (higher in the representations of social justice and lower in the psychosocial variables BJW and SDO) for teachers who are finishing their training.

### 3.3. Differences between Social Justice Representations, Belief in a Just World, Social Dominance Orientation, Digital Civic Engagement and Participants' Gender

Subsequently, a group comparison was tested between the gender of the participants and levels of Social Justice Representations, Belief in a Just World, and Social Dominance (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Comparison of the variables studied based on gender.

	Feminine M (DT)	Masculine M (DT)	<i>t</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
RJS Global	92.92 (8.66)	88.75 (11.01)	$t_{(394)} = 3.474$ $p < 0.001$	0.42
Redistribution	29.27 (3.57)	28.52 (4.26)	$t_{(409)} = 1.554$ $p = 0.121$	0.19
Recognition	28.98 (4.45)	27.19 (5.03)	$t_{(408)} = 3.046$ $p < 0.001$	0.38
Representation	34.78 (3.43)	33.24 (3.99)	$t_{(402)} = 3.312$ $p < 0.001$	0.41
BJW	13.59 (4.79)	15.05 (6.01)	$t_{(409)} = -2.237$ $p < 0.05$	-0.26
SDO	9.28 (3.12)	11.19 (4.41)	$t_{(412)} = -4.358$ $p < 0.001$	-0.50
DCE	25.73 (3.54)	25.23 (4.35)	$t_{(412)} = 1.047$ $p = 0.296$	0.12

As can be seen in Table 3, there are significant differences according to the gender of the participants in all of the variables studied, with the exception of Redistribution. As shown in the Table 3, there are significant differences in levels of global social justice ( $t_{(394)} = 3.474$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), representation ( $t_{(402)} = 3.312$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Recognition ( $t_{(408)} = 3.046$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In addition, we observed differences in the Belief in a Just World ( $t_{(409)} = -2.237$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and in Social Dominance Orientation ( $t_{(412)} = 4.358$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The differences with a larger effect size were social dominance orientation (Cohen's  $d = -0.50$ ), global social justice representation (Cohen's  $d = 0.42$ ) and representation (Cohen's  $d = 0.41$ ). In relation to social justice representations, female training teachers scored more suitable in comparison to male training teachers. Accordingly, in variables such as Belief in a Just World and Social Dominance Orientation, women scored lower than men did. In all cases, the psychosocial indices are more adequate among women, with significant differences compared to men. In this case, no significant differences were found in Digital Civic Engagement of the future teachers ( $t_{(417)} = 1.047$ ;  $p = 0.296$ ) according to their gender.

### 3.4. Belief in a Just World and Social Dominance Orientation as Psychosocial Variables Predicting Social Justice Representations and Digital Civic Engagement of Future Teachers

Finally, as shown in Table 4, in order to analyze the relationships and the degree of prediction between the variables studied and Social Justice and Digital Civic Engagement, a linear regression analysis was performed (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Regression model between the social justice representations and digital civic engagement (DCE) in relation to the psychosocial variables BJW and SDO.

Independent <i>t</i> Variables	Dependent Variables	$R^2$	N. Stand. Coef.		Stand. Coef.		Sig.
			$B$ (95% CI)	Stand. Error	$\beta$	$t$	
BJW	RJS global	0.176	-0.198	0.032	-0.276	-6.934	0.000
	Redistribution	0.156	-0.175	0.035	-0.237	-4.923	0.000
	Recognition	0.190	-0.219	0.035	-0.299	-6.320	0.000
	Representation	0.284	-0.207	0.034	-0.291	-6.034	0.000
	DCE	0.205	-0.237	0.034	-0.323	-6.911	0.000
	RJS global	0.213	-0.601	0.078	-0.478	-9.318	0.000

SDO	Redistribution	0.174	−0.589	0.063	−0.417	−9.298	0.000
	Recognition	0.151	−0.544	0.064	−0.389	−8.551	0.000
	Representation	0.157	−0.532	0.061	−0.397	−8.683	0.000
	DCE	0.208	−0.636	0.061	−0.456	−10.422	0.000

As shown, the influence of BJW explains to different degrees the variance of the social justice construct and its dimensions: 17.6% of the variance in the RJS global ( $R^2 = 0.176$ ), 15.6% in Redistribution ( $R^2 = 0.156$ ), 19% in Recognition ( $R^2 = 0.190$ ) and 28.4% in Representation ( $R^2 = 0.284$ ). Likewise, SDO explains to different degrees the variance of the social justice construct and its dimensions: 21.3% of the variance of RJS global ( $R^2 = 0.213$ ), 17.4% in Redistribution ( $R^2 = 0.174$ ), 15.1% in Recognition ( $R^2 = 0.151$ ) and 15.7% in Representation ( $R^2 = 0.157$ ). Regarding Digital Civic Engagement (DCE), 20.5% of the variance was explained based on BJW ( $R^2 = 0.205$ ) and 20.8% based on SDO ( $R^2 = 0.208$ ). In addition, BJW is significantly associated with RJS global ( $\beta = -276$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and its different sub-dimensions, having a greater strength with Recognition ( $\beta = -0.299$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). In the same way, SDO was evidenced to associate with RJS global ( $\beta = 0.213$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and its sub-dimensions, highlighting Redistribution ( $\beta = -0.478$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Finally, BJW ( $\beta = -0.323$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and SDO ( $\beta = -0.456$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) were significantly associated with Digital Civic Engagement (DCE).

#### 4. Discussion

Through numerous studies that have analyzed teachers' social justice attitudes [57], a general conclusion has emerged: these attitudes are greatly impacted by their training [39]. In addition, their training process is related to civic engagement outside and inside the classroom, in order to build more sustainable and equitable societies through education [26]. Aside from their training, other variables such as gender are also related to the importance given to education by the teacher. One of the great challenges currently facing education is the study of the diverse psychosocial variables that might also be related to the representations of social justice in education. This study was proposed in response to these challenges, showing the positive changes and weaknesses of Educational Degrees [56]. First, in line with earlier [36] and actual studies [48], negative relationships have been found between three-dimensional representations of social justice and the variables BJW and SDO, which are positively related to each other. This study has found evidence that the training process for the Teacher Training Degree in Elementary Education [25,58] is positive for the development of social justice representations. Related to the previously described results, teachers at the end of the training process also show lower levels of variables that are related negatively with representations towards social justice (BJW and SDO). Comparing these results permits making favorable conclusions about changes in the studied variables, when comparing teachers at the outset of their training versus at the end of their training. In this sense, the representations and attitudes towards social justice are significantly superior in those who were finishing their training, along with a consistent decrease in levels of BJW and SDO. The clear connection between social justice representations and DCE is also manifested through a clear negative relationship with BJW and SDO, variables contrary to civic development outside and within the digital sphere [27]. Thus, a greater orientation towards the quest for social well-being and sustainability through the training process of teachers was observed [48,49], which includes some changes in the variables that were studied: being more inclined towards sustainable consumption, exercise of civic engagement through the digital framework and alternative forms to develop future societies. In addition, responsible global citizenship is the outcome of sustainability learning [59], which should be recognized as the main aim of educational institutions. This approach implies a radical democratization of current social relations. Sustainability in education should be considered by teachers as a multidimen-

sional framework of development. Therefore, teachers-in-training should consider multiple aspects related to social justice: economic, social, cultural and personal sustainability. From this perspective, sustainability is related to the development of social and civic skills, promoting (through education) future societies with greater well-being and that oppose inequality. The development of social justice representations in its three dimensions and a civic commitment are necessary conditions to be able to develop a more sustainable world in the future. Sustainability in teacher training should be associated with teaching with a greater engagement to economic equality, tolerance of socio-cultural diversity and participation as a source of social and community well-being [59]. Thus, the social justice dimensions are linked to sustainability teaching and the development of critical thinking and empathy towards people who experience injustice [40], in contrast to the SDO and BJW variables [50].

Second, unlike previous studies of a similar nature [51], the evaluation of social justice attitudes was done through three dimensions, thereby finding a better statistical fit for the three-dimensional analysis of the construct. This made it possible to see that—unlike the global representation of social justice and the representation dimension—significant increases in the redistribution and recognition dimensions were not seen amongst future professors who were in the final stages of their training. On one hand, the redistribution dimension is critical for developing teachers' attitudes and actions in favor of diversity and educational inclusivity of students [52], independent of their abilities, requirements and sociodemographics. On the other hand, recognition is a key dimension for orientation and practices that teachers exercise towards sociocultural diversity [53], which is more and more present in classrooms. It is possible to conclude that the development of more contents oriented towards redistribution and recognition dimensions is necessary in teacher training. These representations are fundamental if teacher training is to be more focused on prosociality in environments where these dimensions are important, having a great impact for taking on different socioeconomic contexts and cultures. However, there is a positive conclusion that we evidenced about the three-dimensional analysis of social justice: more developed levels of the representation dimension were found in future teachers that were finishing their training, in comparison with those who had just begun. It was found that the representation dimension is linked to the teachers' encouragement of democratic and digital civic attitudes and actions in their students in the educational environment [27], providing better psychosocial well-being in the classroom. The improvement of this dimension is considered to be widespread across the rest of the social justice construct by some authors [54,57], which could be understood as a more favorable interpretation. In any case, continued study of social justice as a three-dimensional construct is recommended, since this allows the extraction of information that global analysis had not permitted in previous studies.

Finally, it was concluded that future teachers possess significantly more prosocial representations and attitudes by the end of their training in all the variables studied, with the exception of the redistribution dimension. Thus, in global representations of social justice, as well as in recognition and representation, there are still significant differences between teachers, with no reduction of the existing gap between men and women. The SDO and BJW variables also maintained gender differences, with the female training teachers showing lower levels of these variables and greater orientation towards social justice in comparison with male training teachers [49]. Based on this current study, it can be concluded that the Teacher Training Degree in Elementary Education has not contributed sufficiently to reducing the gap between men and women in these variables. It would be worthwhile to continue reflecting on the importance of previous training and experience upon entering the teaching program, as well as other psychosocial variables that might be linked to these gender differences [27]. Nonetheless, our findings are consistent with many similar studies [40–55,57,60] that found more developed levels of social justice in education, and lower levels in variables that were negatively linked to it and its three dimensions, in teachers-in-training, as well as in trained teachers. If we aspire to achieve

an educational system with greater social justice, one of the great future challenges will be to continue improving and transforming teacher training. In this sense, even though teacher training programs are continually more focused on inclusive education, attention to diversity and education for social justice, there continues to be much room for improvement [17]. As can be seen in the evidence presented, future teachers begin their training with heterogeneous attitudes towards teaching for social justice. Furthermore, as the association findings suggest, there are certain psychosocial variables related to pre-service teachers' attitudes regarding a more just Redistribution, Recognition and Representation, as well as Digital Civic Engagement. In comparing groups that were evaluated at the beginning and end of their training, there also appears to be a reduction in orientation towards maintaining hierarchies and inequalities (SDO), as well as towards treating the world as a fair place in which each person always gets what they deserve (BJW). Both BJW and SDO are shown as predictor variables (to different intensities) of the social justice representations and DCE of future teachers during their training. This makes it essential to incorporate this type of psychosocial variables into the educational field, in order to more solidly investigate the effectiveness of teacher training programs.

In future studies, we suggest continuing to research other psychosocial variables and contexts that may be initially related to less developed representations of social justice in education, in order to evaluate possible changes through the training period. In addition, it is necessary to consider that the results are not generalizable to all teachers-in-training at other universities, so it would be convenient to carry out future research with this population to see if similar results are repeated. Likewise, is considered necessary to continue analyzing these variables outside the selected university, as well as directly in schools and other socio-educational spaces. Thus, future research should be related to the study of teacher training at other universities (with different perspectives in the teacher plans) in the same area and other regions of Spain (including public and private universities). However, the results obtained should make universities (with similar or different training plans to the evaluated university) reflect on improvements in the representations and competences towards teaching based on social justice. In the same way, it is imperative that training be improved to reduce the differences between male and female teachers-in-training, in order to create professionals with less heterogeneous involvement with social justice. In general, we also recommend maintaining and potentially bettering improvements in the development of representations of social justice and in the reduction of SDO and BJW. In the same way, we recommend paying attention to positive and negative aspects of the development of global social justice representations in teacher training, in order to improve the capacity of this period to reduce gender-based inequality, such as through the development of the redistribution and recognition dimensions that male and female teachers have when they finish the program. In this sense, various earlier studies showed that there are specific contents (personal, pedagogical and psychosocial in nature) that oriented them towards the quest for equity, social justice and inclusivity in the classroom [61]. Therefore, this and previous studies have permitted us to observe some positive aspects in the teacher training process, as well as some aspects that could be improved. Teacher training is a period where it is possible to transform and improve a great number of abilities and attitudes [41] which extend beyond the strictly academic or didactic. However, this training is not without need of improvement in diverse psychosocial variables that impact teachers' performance. In the future, it will be necessary to continue developing training plans that are more intensely oriented towards social justice, without abandoning the development of descriptive and experimental research investigations that can evaluate the impact of these plans.

## 5. Limitations

As stated above, the research shows relevant findings, although it also has some limitations to consider for future similar studies. On the one hand, it is suggested that future

studies consider a more extensive sample of participants, focusing on aspects that differentiate teacher training plans according to the type of center. In addition, it would be interesting to include not only teachers in training of the degrees of infant and elementary education, but also in secondary education. Therefore, a greater heterogeneity in the sample may provide information about other possible influential training factors in future teachers in relation to the variables studied.

On the other hand, another limitation is related to the impossibility of including a greater number of psychosocial and educational variables in the study. It would have been positive to analyze not only the current training stage of future teachers, but also other aspects, such as: other specific trainings, developed sociopolitical participation, knowledge and performance in the digital field or qualitative conception of what citizenship represents. It is suggested that future studies incorporate more indicators related to the development of more sustainable societies that aspire to higher levels of well-being in the future.

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