

Ethnic Identification of 10- to 12-Year-Old Schoolchildren With Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Videos

Ana Lucía Pacurucu^a, María Eduarda Pesántez^a

^a Universidad del Azuay

Editor: Dr. Jose A Rodas

Submitted: 16/Mar/2026; Accepted: 02/Sep/2026; Published: 05/Oct/2026

**All correspondence should be addressed to Ana Lucía Pacurucu. Email: apacurucu@uazuay.edu.ec*

Abstract: Child sexual abuse is a public health problem in Ecuador, where more than 52,000 cases were recorded between 2018 and 2023, highlighting the urgent need for more effective preventive strategies. This study analysed how the ethnic representation of characters in educational videos on child sexual abuse prevention influences identification levels among 10- to 12-year-old schoolchildren. The purpose was to investigate whether perceived ethnic similarity between schoolchildren and the main character influences emotional connection and comprehension of the preventive message. A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design was used, involving a sample of 137 students (59 girls, 78 boys) from a state school. Participants were evaluated using an ad hoc questionnaire measuring ethnic perception, character identification, and message comprehension. The findings revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between perceived ethnic similarity to the character and identification level. Ethnic representation in educational materials serves as a relevant psychological mechanism that enhances the effectiveness of child sexual abuse prevention strategies, particularly within multicultural child populations.

Keywords: child sexual abuse, ethnic identification, educational videos, prevention, cultural diversity

Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) represents one of the most devastating forms of violence affecting children globally. The World Health Organization (2017) defines this issue as any sexual act imposed on a child through manipulation, coercion, or abuse of power, leading to physical, emotional, and psychological consequences that can persist into adulthood. In Ecuador, the figures are alarming: the Defensoría del Pueblo de Ecuador (2023) reported 52,051 cases of sexual violence against children and adolescents registered between January 2018 and June 2023, of which only 4.15% resulted in a conviction. Data from the Ministerio de Educación (2023) indicate that schoolchildren aged 8 to 14 years account for 49.06% of female victims and 62.75% of male victims, representing the most vulnerable age group. Particularly concerning is that 65% of

perpetrators are family members or close acquaintances, underscoring the urgent need to develop culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate preventive strategies.

Despite advances in the development of educational campaigns and preventive audiovisual materials, a significant gap remains regarding the influence of sociocultural factors—specifically ethnicity—on the reception and effectiveness of these messages. Most studies have focused on overarching evaluations of interventions without considering the heterogeneity of children's responses according to ethnocultural characteristics (Hormazábal et al., 2020). This issue is particularly acute in Ecuador given its extensive ethnic and cultural diversity, where Indigenous, Afro-descendant, Mestizo, and White children coexist, each group with distinct cultural, linguistic, and social specificities. Nevertheless, educational videos frequently

feature characters with European phenotypic traits, limiting opportunities for identification and consequently attenuating the effectiveness of preventive messaging (Consejo de Comunicación, 2020).

Scientific evidence suggests that character identification constitutes a fundamental psychological mechanism for the effectiveness of preventive messaging. When children establish emotional connections with video protagonists, their comprehension of information improves, and meaningful changes in attitudes, emotions, and behaviours are facilitated (Bandura, 2002; Cohen, 2001). Conversely, when characters fail to reflect children's physical, cultural, or linguistic characteristics, educational impact is substantially reduced, hindering the acquisition of self-protection strategies (Barreiro-Yero & García-Torrell, 2023). This issue is especially relevant for 10- to 12-year-old schoolchildren, who are undergoing a critical stage of identity development during which they begin to consolidate self-concept and recognise ethnic and cultural differences more clearly (Phinney, 1992; Quintana, 1998).

Eduainment, defined as the integration of educational content into entertainment formats, has emerged as an innovative approach combining learning with narrative, playful, and emotional resources designed to engage children (Singhal & Rogers, 2002). This methodology relies on narrative transportation, in which immersion in a story reduces resistance to messages (Green & Brock, 2000); character identification, which facilitates the adoption of character perspectives and behaviours (Cohen, 2001); and the mitigation of psychological reactance, enabling sensitive topics to be addressed constructively (Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

In the context of child sexual abuse prevention, edutainment presents narratives grounded in children's everyday experiences, delivering messages regarding bodily autonomy, protective behaviours, and help-seeking strategies in an accessible manner (Villegas-Ramírez et al., 2023). Recent studies indicate that the efficacy of edutainment depends on story credibility, cultural proximity of content, and the ethnic and cultural representation of characters (Russo-Ruggiero & Wilson-Buchanan, 2019). When materials do not reflect this diversity, children encounter greater difficulty identifying with characters, limiting engagement with the preventive message.

In Ecuador, the inclusion of elements reflective of children's lived reality is essential. Campoverde Haro (2022) highlights that audiovisual resources are substantially more effective when incorporating local vernacular, recognisable settings, regional customs, and characters that authentically represent the country's ethnic diversity. Failing to do so risks symbolic exclusion and compromises the efficacy of preventive initiatives.

Ethnic identity develops progressively from early childhood. As children mature, they begin to perceive interpersonal differences such as skin tone, physical features, speech patterns, and family customs. These observations gradually evolve into components of a child's self-concept and sense of group membership (Phinney, 1992). Quintana (1998) demonstrated that children recognise physical differences from age 3, though without full comprehension of social implications. By approximately age 6, children begin classifying others by these characteristics and subsequently self-identify with an ethnic group. By ages 10 to 12, their conceptualisation deepens: they not only distinguish groups, but also associate ethnic distinctions with social evaluations and status dynamics.

As Phinney (1992) noted, the consolidation of a secure ethnic identity supports self-confidence, self-esteem, social adjustment, and academic achievement. Conversely, an absence of positive representation in the media, educational resources, or broader society can lead children to internalise negative stereotypes. Contemporary research in Ecuador by Ocaña Arroyo (2023) documented that many Afro-descendant children continue to display preferences for European phenotypic features, reflecting the enduring influence of sociocultural and media environments that privilege these aesthetic standards. Furthermore, Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2020) highlighted that when an ethnic group is marginalised or depicted stereotypically, it undermines the self-esteem of children within that group and reinforces prejudice across society.

Accordingly, the objective of this study was to examine ethnic identification levels among 10- to 12-year-old schoolchildren in relation to characters portrayed in child sexual abuse prevention videos.

Methods

A quantitative study was conducted using a quasi-experimental, posttest-only control group design. The sample comprised 137 schoolchildren from a state school in Cuenca, Ecuador, aged 10 to 12 years ($M = [\text{insert mean}]$, $SD = [\text{insert standard deviation}]$). A preliminary selection of educational videos addressing child sexual abuse prevention was carried out for this population.

Inclusion criteria were being 10 to 12 years of age, attending school on the day of the activity, and obtaining both informed consent from legal guardians and informed assent from the children. Exclusion criteria were falling outside the targeted age range, lacking signed consent or assent, or being absent on the day of data collection.

Two hypotheses were formulated: first, that 10- to 12-year-old schoolchildren identify more strongly with characters of the same ethnicity; and second, that the level of char-

acter identification differs significantly according to the portrayed character's ethnicity.

Data were gathered using an ad hoc questionnaire developed specifically for this investigation to assess character identification and evaluate differences based on character and narrator ethnicity. The instrument comprised four sections: sociodemographic characteristics, character perception and identification, comprehension of the preventive message, and emotional and aesthetic evaluations of the video. Items were scored using 5-point and 7-point Likert-type scales. Prior to main data collection, the questionnaire was piloted to examine internal consistency; Cronbach's alpha coefficients reached or exceeded .80 across dimensions. The instrument was informed by assessment frameworks used in prevention research, including work by Russo-Ruggiero and Wilson-Buchanan (2019) and Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2020).

Results

The sample showed a higher proportion of male participants (56.9%, $n = [\text{insert value}]$) than female participants (43.1%, $n = [\text{insert value}]$). Regarding household structure, 51.1% of participants resided with both parents, whereas 39.4% lived exclusively with their mother. For ethnic self-identification, most participants identified as Mestizo (79.6%), followed by White (7.3%), Indigenous (4.4%), Afro-descendant (4.4%), and other (4.4%).

Regarding the perceived skin colour of the protagonist (Esthela), 52.2% of participants categorised her as Mestizo and 47.8% as White (see Table 1). No statistically significant association emerged between participants' ethnic self-identification and their perception of the character's skin colour ($p = [\text{insert value}]$).

An analysis of the relationship between perceived similarity to the character and ethnic identification revealed a statistically significant, medium-magnitude positive correlation ($r = [\text{insert value}]$, $p = [\text{insert value}]$). This finding indicates that higher perceived similarity to the character corresponds to greater identification reported by the schoolchildren.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that participants identified with Esthela, supporting the premise that authentic ethnic representation of characters in educational materials fosters emotional connection with child audiences, even though no statistically significant differences were observed regarding skin colour perception. These findings align with those reported by Quintanilla et al. (2022), who emphasised that identifying with similar characters facilitates emotional development and empathy in children.

Similarly, Dore (2022) experimentally demonstrated that children aged 6 to 8 years identify more strongly with characters who share similar racial traits, explaining this pattern through the identification hypothesis, whereby ethnic similarity between character and audience leads to greater identification and emotional connection. Furthermore, Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) observed that racial similarity significantly influences identification processes across both male and female participants, strengthening connections with television characters when shared characteristics are perceived.

Correlational analyses revealed a significant positive relationship between the similarity index with Esthela and ethnic self-perception. This confirms the findings of Yero and Torrello (2023), who concluded that children display greater empathy towards culturally similar characters, establishing deeper and more enduring emotional bonds with those who reflect their ethnic traits.

Zerebecki et al. (2024) observed that adolescents actively seek media content featuring characters from similar in-groups, likely because such portrayals validate and represent their own cultural experiences. Despite advances in audiovisual production aimed at children, few investigations directly link character race or ethnicity to the comprehension and reception of preventive messages. This absence of empirical evidence represents a substantial gap in the literature, particularly within multicultural contexts such as Ecuador (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020).

Several limitations of the present study should be noted. The sample size and representativeness posed constraints during segmented analyses; whilst the initial sample com-

Table 1: Perceived Skin Colour of the Character Esthela

Perceived skin colour	<i>n</i>	%
Mestizo	71	52.2
White	65	47.8
Valid total	136	100.0

Note. One missing case was recorded (0.7%). Percentages reported correspond to valid cases.

prised 137 participants, subdividing by groups or specific videos substantially reduced cell sizes. In addition, participant gender was not evaluated as an explanatory factor in character identification. Finally, data collection was restricted to a single educational institution, which limits the ecological validity and generalisability of the findings to broader child populations.

References

- Bandura, A. (2002). Social cognitive theory of mass communication. *Media Psychology*, 3(3), 265–299.
- Barreiro-Yero, J., & García-Torrell, I. (2023). Eficacia de la comunicación entre los títeres y los niños de la edad preescolar. Criterios de María Antonia Fariñas [Efficacy of communication between puppets and preschool children: Criteria of María Antonia Fariñas]. *Maestro y Sociedad*, 20(1), 237–242.
- Campoverde-Haro, M. (2022). *Representación cultural en materiales educativos ecuatorianos* [Cultural representation in Ecuadorian educational materials]. Editorial Universitaria.
- Cohen, J. (2001). Defining identification: A theoretical look at the identification of audiences with media characters. *Mass Communication and Society*, 4(3), 245–264.
- Consejo de Comunicación del Ecuador. (2020). *Manual para identificar contenidos discriminatorios en medios de comunicación* [Manual for identifying discriminatory content in communication media]. <https://www.consejodecomunicacion.gob.ec/>
- Defensoría del Pueblo de Ecuador. (2023). *Informe sobre violencia sexual contra niñas, niños y adolescentes en Ecuador* [Report on sexual violence against girls, boys, and adolescents in Ecuador].
- Derman-Sparks, L., & Ramsey, P. G. (2020). *What if all the kids are White?: Anti-bias multicultural education with young children and families* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Dore, R. A. (2022). The effect of character similarity on children's learning from fictional stories: The roles of race and gender. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 214, Article 105310.
- Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(5), 701–721.
- Hoffner, C., & Buchanan, M. (2005). Young adults' wishful identification with television characters: The role of perceived similarity and character attributes. *Media Psychology*, 7(4), 325–351.
- Hormazábal, P. P., Mabán, E. M. Á., & Dájer, C. M. C. (2022). Títeres online para promover la salud familiar en pandemia: Alcance global de una innovación en enfermería [Online puppets to promote family health during the pandemic: Global reach of a nursing innovation]. *Horizontes de Enfermería*, 23(2), 176–190.
- Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador. (2023). *Estadísticas de violencia escolar* [School violence statistics]. Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador.
- Ministerio de Salud Pública del Ecuador. (2021). *Protocolo de atención integral a víctimas de violencia sexual* [Comprehensive care protocol for victims of sexual violence]. Ministerio de Salud Pública del Ecuador.
- Moyer-Gusé, E. (2008). Toward a theory of entertainment persuasion: Explaining the persuasive effects of entertainment-education messages. *Communication Theory*, 18(3), 407–425.
- Ocaña-Arroyo, K. A. (2023). *Influencia de estereotipos étnicos y desarrollo de la conciencia racial en niños/niñas afrodescendientes de una institución educativa del cantón Quinindé en el período 2022-2023* [Influence of ethnic stereotypes and development of racial consciousness in Afro-descendant children of an educational institution in Quinindé canton during the 2022–2023 period] [Bachelor's thesis, Universidad Central del Ecuador]. Repositorio Digital UCE.
- Organización Mundial de la Salud. (2017). *Prevención de la violencia sexual contra los niños* [Preventing sexual violence against children].
- Organización Panamericana de la Salud. (2017). *El problema de la violencia contra los niños y niñas* [The problem of violence against children].
- Phinney, J. S. (1992). The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 7(2), 156–176.
- Quintana, S. M. (1998). Children's developmental understanding of ethnicity. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, 7(1), 27–45.
- Quintanilla, L., Giménez-Dasí, M., Sarmento-Henrique, R., & Lucas-Molina, B. (2022). La comprensión asincrónica de emociones básicas [Asynchronous understanding of basic emotions]. *Psicología Educativa*, 28(1), 71–79.
- Russo-Ruggiero, K., & Wilson-Buchanan, S. (2019). Preventing child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse Review*, 28(3), 1–15.
- Singhal, A., & Rogers, E. M. (2002). A theoretical agenda for entertainment-education. *Communication Theory*, 12(2), 117–135.

- UNICEF. (2019). *Estado mundial de la infancia 2019: Niños, alimentos y nutrición* [The state of the world's children 2019: Children, food and nutrition].
- UNICEF. (2021). *Informe anual 2021* [Annual report 2021].
- Villarroel, M. A., & Sánchez, C. V. (2021). La representación de la identidad en la televisión infantil [Representation of identity in children's television]. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 79, 1–18.
- Zerebecki, B. G., Oprea, S. J., & Hofhuis, J. (2024). Recognizing similarities. *Psychology of Popular Media*, 13(2), 145–157.