

Ethnic and cultural discrimination in school choice processes in sociocultural minorities in Chile

Discriminación étnica y cultural en procesos de elección de escuela en minorías socioculturales en Chile

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Received: November 1, 2021

Accepted: March 07, 2022

Background

In Chile there is a complex history regarding socio-cultural minorities, where aspects of racism and exclusion also affect school dynamics. The academic literature on Mapuche and migrant education in the last decade has eloquently shown the various institutional, curricular and socio-educational obstacles and disadvantages that both socio-cultural minorities have had in Chilean classrooms. But the study of a specific area, and focus of this study, regarding both groups is still incipient: school choice as a sociologically situated process. Regarding research on school choice in families and students, studies have applied a sociological approach to analyze the role of the social class and the families' different capitals to explain the existing inequalities in the processes of school choice. However, less attention has been paid to the study of other variables such as origin, ethnicity or gender. As educational context, indigenous intercultural education is still a pending challenge, as it still is in an initial phase of development within the Chilean educational system; while education aimed at migrant children and young people has even less institutional support in the Chilean educational policy.

Aims

This article aims to account for the criteria, definitions, expectations and concerns that both migrant and Mapuche families give to their processes of choosing schools for their pupils. Thus, the research aims to deepen the sociological understanding of the experiences of school choice of both sociocultural minorities.

Method & Procedures

To respond to our objective, we use some theoretical references of the so-called Critical Race Theory, which has denounced and theoretically problematized the dynamics of racism and racialization in societies, as well as the intersections that intensify the vital and institutional experiences of racial minorities. The qualitative study was based on in-depth interviews with representatives of two socio-cultural minorities: rural Mapuche population and migrant population. The sample includes a total of 21 interviews, which are organized in two subsamples for each group: 10 Latin American immigrant fathers and / or mothers residing in the city of Valparaíso and surroundings; and 11 Mapuche families from two communities located in rural territories of La Araucanía region. As for the research instruments, these were designed with the support of researchers close to or directly from the socio-cultural minorities studied, and representatives of NGOs that work with these groups, with the aim of incorporating educational, cultural and social issues, relevant to the lives of the families studied. The interviews commonly incorporated dimensions such as the biographical aspects of the parents and children, their social profile (in terms of class, gender, ethnicity), the previous educational experiences of their pupils, their narratives about their current processes of school choice, and their perspectives on recent educational reforms. Alongside these dimensions, specific dimensions of each particular socio-cultural minority were also explored. The narrative analysis followed an iterative process from which, from the dimensions predefined in the study and applied in the interviews, and in conjunction with the emerging codes of the analysis of each body of data, different categories of analysis by sociocultural minority were established, which are part of the results found.

Results

Based on the analysis of the experiences of school choice of both minorities, the article shows that Chilean society and the school environment in particular, manifest active features of racism and cultural racism, which in intersection with the widely studied socioeconomic segregation of our classrooms, generate a context often hostile to families from sociocultural minorities such as those here studied. The practice and criteria for choosing schools in the families present previous cultural and institutional experiences that affect the process studied. Such antecedents give an account of particular historicities, individual and collective perspectives built from an often-hostile journey through Chilean society, its institutions, and, above all, its educational field. When analyzing the criteria of school choice of families, we observe experiences and instances in which ethnicity, culture and social class manifest themselves with different forms and intensities, accounting for the barriers and sociocultural challenges existing in Chilean education and society. This analysis indicates that in both groups of families' apprehensions are manifested around eventual mistreatment towards their pupils, by peers and other actors from the school to be chosen. Mapuche families express concern about the reception that their pupils may receive based on their Mapuche ethnicity, in relation to the social and political place that the Mapuche people have in the country, a place often relegated and discriminated. In this, social, cultural and political factors are involved, but also ethnic and racial. In the case of migrant families, apprehensions regarding mistreatment at school have a history of lower historical density, but no less profound, explicit and violent. An intersectional analysis also allows us to observe that, in the case of Mapuche families, a social aspiration emerges, linked to higher education and the world of work. In the case of migrant families, this is much more attenuated, aspiration has a secondary place, since adaptation and the search for protection comes first. There is not a defined desire for projection in Chile, which places their aspirations in a less delineated time horizon.

Conclusion

The assimilation and intolerance to skin and culture different from that imposed by the racial and cultural norm, challenge this study on the experiences of choice of two minorities, where ethnicities and cultures, different in their historical journeys, navigate an educational system and sociocultural contexts, in cases complex and hostile. Ethnic, racial, cultural and social class dimensions intersect to account for situated experiences, which in turn, we claim, reflect part of the profound challenges of Chilean education and society, in terms of inclusion and recognition of sociocultural diversity in the classrooms of our schools and beyond.

Keywords: ethnic discrimination, school choice, sociocultural minorities, racialization

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Financiamiento: Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo (ANID), Chile, ANID PIA Project CIE160007. Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación, Gobierno de España: FJC2020-045847-I/MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033/"NextGenerationEU"/PRTR.

How to cite: Oyarzún, J., Parcerisa, L., & Carrasco, A. (2022). Discriminación étnica y cultural en procesos de elección de escuela en minorías socioculturales en Chile. *Psicoperspectivas*, 21(1). <https://dx.doi.org/10.5027/psicoperspectivas-vol21-issue1-fulltext-2537>



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