

Xenophobia in public schools: The High School students' perspective

Xenofobia na escola pública: A perspectiva dos estudantes do Ensino Médio

Lineu Norio Kohatsu, Gabriel Katsumi Saito

Instituto de Psicologia, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, Brasil

* lineu@usp.br; gabriel.saito@usp.br

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Background

In Brazil, Bolivian immigration has become quite expressive, reflecting on the increase in enrollment of Bolivians in the public education system in São Paulo. Explicitly or covertly, the discriminatory, xenophobic and racist practices daily suffered by immigrant background indicate human rights violations. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how these practices occur in schools, how they are experienced by their victims and what are the resources to resist violence. In order to collaborate with the problematization of xenophobia, we initially present a brief review of research on xenophobia, racism, prejudice and bullying, followed by a theoretical discussion based on the studies of G. Alport, T. W. Adorno and J. L. Crochik. Subsequently, we present an excerpt of research with high school students, with a qualitative-quantitative approach, carried out in a public school in the city of São Paulo, Brazil.

Aims

To analyze the reports of high school students with an immigrant background on xenophobic discrimination suffered throughout their school life in Brazil; and to investigate the agreement/disagreement of Brazilian and immigrant background students on issues related to immigration and immigrants.

Method & procedure

The research was carried out in an elementary and high school public institution, chosen for having one of the highest concentrations of immigrant students in São Paulo. Two instruments were used: interview with semi-structured script and questionnaire. Twenty students from the 3rd grade of High School and one student from Youth and Adult Education participated in the interviews, being 14 of Bolivian nationality and seven of Brazilian nationality, with parents from Bolivia, of both sexes, aged between 16 and 24 years. Participated in the application of the questionnaire, 150 students from the 3rd. grade of High School, 117 Brazilians (65 male, 51 female, one unidentified), 33 with immigrant background from Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay, Peru e Angola (20 female and 13 male). Ages ranged between 16 and 54 years. The average age was 18.9 years, median of 17. Through the questionnaire, we verified the differences of opinions between Brazilian and immigrant background students, on the subject of immigration and immigrants. The anonymous questionnaire helped to detect violent tendencies, which would not be expressed in an interview. The questionnaire was similar to a Likert scale, with 26 items, had excerpts extracted from journalistic articles, comments from readers, articles on current and repealed laws. Statistical tests: Shapiro-Wilk p -value < 0.05 , Levene test $p < 0.05$; Independent t -test: the "immigrants" group had a lower score than the "Brazilians" group ($t(148) = -4,212$; $p < 0.05$). Cronbach's alpha: 0.792. Guttman test for two halves: 0.746. The Spearman-Brown Coefficient: 0.75. The project was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Psychology of the University of São Paulo and all ethical procedures were followed.

Results & discussion

Of the 14 Bolivian students interviewed, three did not report experiences of discrimination. Of the seven Brazilians, with parents from Bolivia, four also did not report situations of discrimination. Four interviewees recalled that in the early years of elementary school, there was no discrimination. There were also positive

reports about the relationship with Brazilians. Regarding the violence reported, there were: 1) Verbal aggression: a) insults based on stereotypes, with recurrence of stereotypes usually associated with Bolivians. In three reports made by Brazilians, with parents from Bolivia, indicated that the stereotype is not only related to nationality, but also to appearance and to indigenous phenotypic traits. b) xenophobic insults: it was notable how the insults directed reproduce common-sense arguments about immigrants as a harmful presence to Brazilians. 2) Physical aggression: the aggressions suffered indicate that they were recurrent, carried out by a stronger group or someone against a weaker target, which can be characterized as bullying. For the questionnaire, the means were below the scale's midpoint (3), considered neither contrary nor in agreement with xenophobia. The lowest average of responses was for immigrant women at 2.29, close to the point of partial disagreement with xenophobic statements; the highest was for Brazilian men 2.84, close to the midpoint. The two-way ANOVA test, origin and gender, [$F(1, 145) = 15,485; p < 0.001$], the origin variable brought a statistically significant difference in the responses. The item-by-item analysis, by ANOVA, effect size and with post hoc Bonferroni, selected five items in which the questions presented differences in the answers between immigrants and Brazilians. In these items, the Brazilian population and its country were often represented as impoverished, vulnerable and as victims of the immigrant threat.

Conclusion

Most of the respondents of Bolivian origin reported experiences of xenophobia, in the form of verbal insults and/or physical aggression, suffered throughout their school life. The quantitative analysis of the questionnaire items pointed out discrepancies in the responses between Brazilians and students of immigrant origin, with the former showing more agreement responses on some items with xenophobic statements, in contrast to the number of disagreement responses of students of immigrant origin. Although the results are not conclusive, they point to a necessary reflection on the structure of schools, due to the presence of competition and school hierarchies; an education through sensitivity with appreciation of the curricular content; an inclusive education that prepares students to live with diversity and the importance of more research on xenophobia in schools.

Keywords: Bolivian immigrants, High School, public school, xenophobia

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