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Emotional experiences of immigrant students in Physical Education and Health classes in a Chilean school

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the negative emotions that affect the subjective well-being of immigrant students in their curricular experiences in Physical Education and Health. A qualitative methodology was used, with an interpretative-phenomenological perspective and a case study design. Ten female and male students participated, with an average age of 13.5 years. The students attended a Chilean public school in the Central Station district of the Metropolitan Region of Chile, which is known for admitting immigrant students. The data were collected through a semi-structured interview and subjected to inductive content analysis using ATLAS.ti 22. The results present three categories that allude to boredom, fear, shame, and anger. These categories include meanings about motor skills, corporeality, social interactions, and pedagogical dissatisfaction with physical exercise. The results do not directly allude to xenophobia but include indirect meanings that can be associated with implicit and structural discrimination due to migrant status. It is concluded that negative emotions are not only related to immigrant status, but also to interaction with gender stereotypes and lack of empathy. Chilean Physical Education would have the challenge of continuing to strengthen ethical training and inclusive practices in teacher training.

KEYWORDS: education; negative emotions; subjective well-being; moral values; curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum studies in education, and specifically in school education, can be oriented towards different dimensions, one of them being the lived curriculum (Cervera Delgado & Martí Reyes, 2018; Clark et al., 2020; Johnson, 2023; Pinar, 2022). According to Johnson (2023), the lived curriculum refers to the experiences of students when they participate in learning processes. He explains it, in part, as follows:

'The lived curriculum, or the lived dimension of the curriculum if one prefers, is the curriculum from the point of view of the student. It is not the imagined student that we read about in policy documents, academic projects, or the one that parents wish for; but the student in the flesh and blood, the student in all his or her humanity' (Johnson, 2023, p. 47).

Pinar (2022) and Johnson (2023) explain that the perspective of the lived curriculum is not reduced to the intellectual sphere of the human being but is oriented to an integral interpretation. In this perspective, the emotional sphere would have an important place, since it participates in the subjective and existential configuration of learning. It has also been pointed out, with a focus on primary education, that the curriculum is a stage of life that must be subjectively traversed; therefore, it is necessary to understand it as an existential journey (Contreras Domingo, & Manrique Ruiz, 2021). Current approaches to the study of curriculum recognise that its object of study is a phenomenon that is influenced by sociocultural, biographical, philosophical, political, and historical factors in each context (Clark et al., 2020; Johnson, 2023; Knox, 2023; Mora-Olate, 2023; Pinar, 2022). In relation to the cultural imprint of the curriculum, this has been studied from an immigration perspective (Mora-Olate, 2023). In Latin America, curricular studies have also been carried out

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from an immigration perspective, including in Chile, where this country has not been able to provide satisfactory educational responses to this new intercultural scenario (Campos-Bustos, 2022; Mora-Olate, 2023).

The subject of Physical Education, both in Chile and abroad, has also been problematised from curricular (Cavalcante & Lazzarotti Filho, 2021; Mujica Johnson et al., 2022) and immigrant perspectives (Médor et al., 2022; Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2021). It has been pointed out that Physical Education is a favourable context for the social inclusion of migrant students, highlighting the role of teachers and their openness to diversity (Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2021). However, there is the possibility that there are unfavourable sociocultural contexts for inclusion in the Physical Education class. This is what is described by a study conducted in Chile that addressed immigration in the school's Physical Education class, where some migrant families recognise that their experiences in this country have not been inclusive, which they associate with a racist culture (Médor et al., 2022).

In recent years, there has been interest in studying emotions around the curriculum and cultural phenomena associated with Physical Education (Gómez-Carmona et al., 2019; Leisterer & Jekauc, 2019; Monforte & Pérez-Samaniego, 2017; Mujica Johnson, 2019, 2021; Mujica Johnson & Jiménez Sánchez, 2021; Salgado López & Sánchez Molina, 2021; Silva et al., 2017). In these studies, positive and negative emotions related to subjective well-being are linked to gender stereotypes, sport culture, each student's motor history, peer socialisation, the role of the teacher, motor learning outcomes, and the applied didactics. One emotion that has stood out in studies is fear, which is often considered a negative emotion for subjective well-being (Mujica Johnson, 2021). Studies have indicated that fear in Physical Education is aroused by the lack of empathy on the part of the teacher (Monforte & Pérez-Samaniego, 2017); by the lack of experience in a given sport and the chances of failure (Monforte & Pérez-Samaniego, 2017; Mujica Johnson, 2021; Silva et al., 2017); in the face of the chances of having an accident (Mujica Johnson, 2021; Salgado López & Sánchez Molina, 2021); in the face of low self-efficacy or perceived motor competence (Figueiredo et al., 2018; Mujica Johnson, 2021); and in the face of social exposure (Figueiredo et al., 2018; Monforte & Pérez-Samaniego, 2017; Mujica Johnson, 2019).

Other negative emotions for subjective well-being identified in the school Physical Education class are anger and shame (Azzarito et al., 2006; Devís-Devís et al., 2018; López-Cañada et al., 2022; McCaughtry et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2015). Among the meanings associated with these negative emotions are girls' problems due to excessive competitiveness and selfishness in basketball practice by boys, including a perception of unfairness (Azzarito et al., 2006; McCaughtry et al., 2006); interpersonal relationship problems due to exclusion in the face of gender discrimination, specifically, of students who are part of gender diversity (Devís-Devís et al., 2018; López-Cañada et al., 2022); and in the face of boys' lack of empathy and respect for girls' body image in swimming class (Mitchell et al., 2015). As can be appreciated, Physical Education curricular experiences that include diverse contexts and learning approaches have been linked to emotions in some empirical research.

In relation to the above, this study aims to understand the negative emotions that affect the subjective well-being of immigrant students in their curricular experiences in Physical Education and Health.

METHOD

This study was developed with a qualitative research methodology (Liamputtong, 2019) and an interpretive-phenomenological perspective (Ainsworth et al., 2022). This perspective was selected because it allows for an approach to the quality of emotion and the subjective meanings that compose it (Mujica Johnson, 2021). Also, within the study design, it is a case study, specifically a single community-type case (Bautista, 2021). Said single case would be that of a school group that has the condition of having immigrated to Chile. The main dimensions of the study are the following three: a) negative emotions for the subjective well-being (BS) of school students: fear, boredom, sadness, shame, and anger; b) school immigration; and c) Physical Education.

The informants are a total of 10 students, six girls and four boys, with an average age of 13.5 years (*SD* = 0.6). These students were in their seventh and eighth grades, which would represent the final stage of the basic education cycle. The students belonged to a public school in the Central Station district of the Metropolitan Region of Chile, which is characterised by receiving immigrant students. The school was selected because it has a high rate of immigrant students, which allows in-depth observation of emotional phenomena in multicultural contexts.

Table 1 presents, for characterisation purposes, the gender, country of origin of each student, and the time they have been living in Chile.

Within the framework of the ethical considerations of the British Education Research Association (2024), each student signed an informed consent form in which he/she declared voluntary participation, accepting the anonymous and confidential treatment of the data, as well as the possibility of excluding him/herself from the study at any time and without giving

Table 1. General characterization of the participating school students.

Participants	Gender	Country of origen	Time of residence in Chile (years)
Student 1	Girl	Venezuela	5
Student 2	Boy	Colombia	1.8
Student 3	Girl	Venezuela	2
Student 4	Girl	Ecuador	1
Student 5	Girl	Peru	10
Student 6	Boy	Venezuela	1.6
Student 7	Boy	Venezuela	1
Student 8	Girl	Venezuela	1
Student 9	Girl	Venezuela	4
Student 10	Girl	Venezuela	3.6

Source: Prepared by the authors.

explanations. In addition, their guardians signed a consent form authorising their legal representatives to participate in the study under the conditions indicated.

The data were collected using a semi-structured interview technique in face-to-face mode (Aguila et al., 2020), comprising five open-ended questions on the negative emotions dimension for BS. Each question asked about a different emotion and its basic structure; for example, with the emotion of fear, the question was: "At what times do you feel fear in Physical Education and Health classes?" These questions were accompanied by others that inquired into the reasons for the answers, to deepen the meanings each student provided. In addition, spontaneous questions arose during the interviews as a result of the dialogue. Before each interview, it was verified that the students understood the meaning of each of the five emotions used in the interview.

In some cases, students asked questions to clarify the meanings of each emotion, but all of them claimed they knew the meaning of each emotion. In any case, if a student had doubts and did not declare them, it was pointed out that he/she could answer that he/she did not know the answer or preferred not to answer. To contribute to methodological rigor, this interview was validated by experts in the field, with the participation of two specialists with master's degrees and another with a doctorate. The three evaluators had studied and researched education, affectivity, and Physical Education.

For the data analysis, an inductive content analysis (Mujica Johnson & Orellana Arduiz, 2022) was conducted in the qualitative data analysis program ATLAS.ti 22. This analysis followed the following phases: a) transcription of the interviews; b) reading and selection of quotes with relevant content; c) writing comments and memos about the selected quotes; d) creation of representative codes of the previously selected quotes; e) conceptual relationship of the codes. Within the framework of methodological rigor, data triangulation at the personal level, categorical validity agreed upon by four researchers, and the inclusion of quotations representative of the emerging codes in the results were also applied.

The limitation of this study is that data were collected using only one research technique. For this reason, future research should include triangulation through classroom observations and teacher interviews to enhance ecological validity.

RESULTS

The results will be presented in three categories that emerged from the inductive content analysis. The meaning of each code and its associated emotions are presented in Table 2. Among the contents of the table is the personal frequency, which refers to the number of people who contributed to each code. Despite their low frequency, some codes reveal significant experiences that deserve pedagogical attention.

Representative quotes from each category will be presented below. The category *Body and motor difficulties* includes health problems that were expressed in this way: "Interviewer: When do you feel afraid in physical education and health class? Student: When I feel very bad, that is, I do a lot of physical education and there comes a moment when my legs shake because of the same arrhythmia" (Student 3). This category also included the meaning of motor errors, which was mentioned as follows: "Interviewer: At what moment do you feel anger in physical education and health class? Student: When we lose to my team" (Student 4). Finally, the meaning of this category that refers to the risk of bodily harm is represented by this quote: "Interviewer: At what moment do you feel, or have you felt fear in physical education and health class? Student: When I think I'm going to get a ball in the face" (Student 5).

Table 2. Emerging categories on student emotions.

Categories	Meanings	Frequency personal	Emotions
Body and motor difficulties	This code refers to students' motor errors, their health problems and their chances of bodily harm	6	Shame, anger and fear
Interpersonal conflicts	This code refers to intersubjective problems caused by lack of empathy, lack of respect, distrust, gender stereotypes and rebellion.	5	Shame and anger
Pedagogical dissatisfaction with physical exercises	Disliking activities that develop physical fitness.	4	Boredom

Source: The authors.

The category *Interpersonal conflicts* includes in its meaning different themes that will be exposed with their respective representative quotes. The first thematic content is distrust among students, which was exposed in the following quote: "Interviewer: When do you feel embarrassed in physical education and health class? Student: Sometimes, when it is my turn with my classmates, I don't talk much, but I still feel embarrassed. Interviewer: Can you tell me about a specific activity? Student: When the teacher divides us into groups. Interviewer: And what did you have to do in that activity? Student: Sometimes it's like playing games and it's kind of embarrassing to be with another group, but when you feel more confident. Interviewer: Are you embarrassed when you work with classmates you don't know very well? Student: Yes" (Student 5).

The second thematic content of the *Interpersonal Conflicts* category is that of gender stereotypes among students, which is represented by this quote: "Interviewer: When do you feel angry in physical education and health class? Student: Sometimes, when playing soccer, because men think they are better than women because they know how to play soccer. Interviewer: And what do they do, they don't let the women play? Student: They have mixed games, but the men are very showman like. Interviewer: What do they do? Can you explain something that bothers you about what they do? Student: That sometimes they don't let us play because we are women" (Student 8). The third thematic content of the *Interpersonal Conflicts* category refers to the lack of empathy, which was expressed in this way: "Interviewer: When do you feel embarrassed in physical education class? Student: When you fall. Interviewer: When you have an accident? Student: Yes, because all the people look at you with a face like "I'm going to laugh at you" (Student 1).

The fourth thematic content of the *Interpersonal conflicts* category addresses disrespect among students and is expressed as follows: "Interviewer: When do you feel angry in physical education and health class? Student: I have only felt anger once, and it was because a classmate did something I didn't like. Interviewer: Can you explain a little more? Student: It was because a classmate picked on me verbally. Interviewer: Did he call you names? Student: Maybe. Interviewer: In what context did he insult you? Student: The truth is that I don't remember because it was a long time ago" (Student 7). The last thematic content of the *Interpersonal conflicts* category refers to rebellion with the structure of the class and the faculty, which is represented in this way: "Interviewer: When do you feel angry in the physical education and health class? Student: When I don't like something, but I still must do it, because that's the way it is. I feel anger, rage. Interviewer: Give me an example. Student: When I do something that should not be done and that is why I am challenged, but I take it badly, because I feel that the action I did is right. I take it with anger, but then I reflect on it and apologise to the teacher" (Student 6).

The third category, *Pedagogical dissatisfaction with physical exercises,* was linked to the emotion of boredom and expresses the meaning of dissatisfaction with the experiences of developing physical fitness in training mode and not in a playful way. This category is represented by the following quote: "Interviewer: When do you feel boredom in physical education and health class? Student: When it's just exercise classes. Interviewer: Let's see if you explain that more. Student: I mean, when it's just running. I like the game classes better. Interviewer: Oh yeah, when the classes are just about physical fitness, I mean, you like to play more. Student: Yes" (Student 3).

As can be seen, the students contributed with different narratives about their negative emotions related to subjective well-being in the Physical Education and Health class. These curricular experiences allowed the generation of conceptual constructs that approach the emotional meaning in this Chilean educational context associated with immigration and multiculturalism.

DISCUSSION

Physical exercises were related to boredom on the part of the students, which could be explained by the characteristics

of these activities. Among them would be the monotony and bodily suffering that they can generate. Precisely, tasks or actions that lack variety, dynamism, and decision making have often been linked to boredom in the lived Physical Education curriculum (Mujica Johnson, 2021; Mujica Johnson et al., 2016). It should be noted that only female students attributed boredom to this meaning, suggesting that this emotion may be linked to gender stereotypes that culturally discourage physical-sports activity among females. In this sense, other studies have also recognised that boredom in Physical Education may be influenced by sociocultural factors related to gender (Díaz Vásquez et al., 2023; Guijarro-Romero et al., 2019; Mujica Johnson, 2021). In this regard, a female student reports feeling angry about the patriarchal behaviour of her peers during soccer practice. The same has been recognised in other studies, in which female and male students have reported negative emotions affecting subjective well-being due to explicit gender stereotypes in Physical Education classes (Gerdin & Larsson, 2018; Monforte & Pérez-Samaniego, 2017; Timken et al., 2017). These differences are not homologous across all contexts, as some Physical Education studies have not recognised gender-based emotional differences (Duran Delgado et al., 2014; Vélaz-Lorente et al., 2024).

The results show that the moral factor is relevant at the emotional level in the experience of the Physical Education curriculum, since students mention meanings associated with the absence of respect, empathy, trust, and humility. The link between ethics and the emotional dimension has been recognised across the fields of philosophy, the social sciences, and pedagogy (Prieto Egido, 2018; Steinfath, 2014). This relationship on ethics has also been recognised in physical education studies (Gil-Madrona et al., 2016, 2020; Mujica Johnson, 2021; Mujica Johnson & Orellana Arduiz, 2022). It was possible to recognise other meanings that have been more common around negative emotions for BS in Physical Education, such as the lack of motor experience and the possibilities of failure (Monforte & Pérez-Samaniego, 2017; Silva et al., 2017); as well as accidents and bodily harm that can happen when experiencing the curriculum of such pedagogical subject (Salgado López & Sánchez Molina, 2021).

The results of this study must be interpreted from a sociocultural perspective of Physical Education and motor skills, where studies focused on the Chilean educational reality have pointed out that there are usually few epistemological connections of Physical Education contents with historical, critical and culturally inclusive visions (Moreno Doña, 2018; Mujica Johnson et al., 2022; Peña Troncoso et al., 2021; Toro Arévalo & Moreno Doña, 2021). This could be related to the dislike of physical fitness development, which is a common content in Chilean Physical Education and is often approached in a not very playful or pedagogical way (Moreno Doña, 2018; Mujica Johnson et al., 2022). Although students did not directly verbalise exclusion for being immigrants, experiences such as mistrust, stigma, and exclusion in games reveal implicit sociocultural markers related to migration and gender (Azzarito et al., 2006; Devís-Devís et al., 2018; López-Cañada et al., 2022; McCaughtry et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2015).

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (McLennan & Thompson, 2015) has also noted that quality Physical Education should incorporate an inclusive approach to minority groups, such as migrant students, recognising that this school discipline can support these communities in their social inclusion. For this reason, it is a challenge for Physical Education teacher education and training in Chile to assume an epistemology consistent with a critical, inclusive, historical, and sociocultural vision of Physical Education (Aguila et al., 2020; González-Calvo et al., 2022; Kirk, 2009; Valencia-Peris et al., 2020). To do so, it is necessary to address the hidden curriculum that reproduces sociocultural senses and meanings associated with perspectives contrary to inclusion (Johnson, 2023; Jung et al., 2018; Valencia-Peris et al., 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

In relation to the objective of the study, it is concluded that immigrant school students experienced negative emotions during their curricular experiences in Physical Education and Health, as a function of multiple meanings for their subjective well-being. These were associated in two categories: shame and anger, and in one category: fear and boredom. The students, in their curricular experiences, presented an emotional link to bodily and motor difficulties, to didactic dissatisfaction with the development of physical condition, and to conflictive social interactions.

There is an absence of explicit narratives with xenophobia, but there is a presence of indirect exclusions, mistreatment, and ethical disregard that can be linked to silent and structural discrimination. It is evident that there are problems in personal relationships that affect student inclusion, as well as curricular and didactic orientations that require consideration of active methodologies and innovative pedagogical models.

These new educational scenarios pose pedagogical challenges that are manifested in the results of this research. Among these challenges is the need to intentionally incorporate training in ethical values and inclusive pedagogical

practices in the training of Physical Education teachers. In this way, it is possible to promote moral and social values oriented to equality, collaboration, diversity, and social justice in Physical Education classes in Chile, where immigrant students participate. The above is consistent with Chile's new international and national educational policies to promote inclusive, high-quality Physical Education. It is necessary to consider that historically, Physical Education in Chile has been influenced by contexts hostile to diversity, including dimensions related to gender, social class, and multiculturalism. This reflects the importance of addressing, in an intersectional way, the immigrant condition of the student body.

Among the limitations of the study is that only one data collection technique was used, and in a public school accustomed to receiving immigrant students. The absence of direct classroom observation prevented understanding how teachers' practices affect students' emotions. In addition, the exclusive use of interviews may limit access to more implicit dimensions of emotional experience. Future studies could use more data collection techniques and vary the school context investigated, as well as broadly incorporate other dimensions of study, such as gender, socioeconomic background, and each student's motor history.

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