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Shall we receive more refugees or not? A comparative analysis and assessment of Portuguese adolescents' arguments, views, and concerns

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ABSTRACT

Fifty adolescents (7th and 10th grades) participated in a ten-session argumentation programme as part of which they produced dialogues and written texts on the topic of whether or not Portugal should receive more refugees. Applying social identity and intergroup threat theories as frameworks, causes for flight and seeking asylum were felt to be the most important reasons, expressed by 80% of adolescent students, for welcoming refugees. While students' concern regarding the ascribed characteristics of refugees was of minor importance, both age groups reported a significant concern with the decline of the host group's socio-economic conditions. Also, despite the fact that all students were exposed to information and facts that could inform their views, their discourse still contained argumentative reasoning fallacies such as hasty generalisation and appeal to fear. Based on these findings, we recommend explicit work in education on engaging students in cultural literacy practices.



KEYWORDS

Argumentation; refugees; classroom discourse; cultural literacy; intergroup threat

Introduction

Recent wars in the Middle East have provoked what is known as the 'Syrian exodus', leading to the largest global humanitarian crisis of our time (Amnesty International [n.d.](#)). Although a great majority of the Syrian refugees seeks placement in neighbouring countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, the poverty and low-quality health and safety conditions in those regions has forced a great number of them to flee towards Europe (King's College London [2015](#)). Between 2015 and the end of 2018, the 28 member states of the European Union granted protection to almost 2 million asylum seekers, most of whom originated in Syria (EUROSTAT [n.d.](#)). However, Syria is not the only country of origin of refugees entering Europe over the last 5 years; other countries of origin include Libya, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Somalia (UNCHR [n.d.](#)).

In contrast to immigrants, whose main motives for leaving their countries are financial – they are seeking a better life, refugees are people who have been forced to flee because of persecution, war or violence. Although the difference between the two populations is not always easy to trace, especially in relation to the asylum-seeking process since any immigrant can apply for 'refugee status', the host country's residents' perceptions

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towards refugees tends to be more positive than towards immigrants. For example, Holmes and Castañeda (2016) point to a distinction made that demarcates the 'deserving' refugee from the 'undeserving' immigrant. However, this compassionate attitude towards the former has not manifested in a positive change in Europeans' receptivity towards refugees. On the contrary; the increase in numbers of immigrants, including refugees, entering Europe has led to an increase in anti-immigration policies and negative representations of immigrants in the media (Hatton 2016).

In schools, the arrival of refugees could be seen as beneficial in terms of global awareness and multicultural peer contact (Hodes et al. 2018). However, this is not always the case, as racism deriving from different groups within host countries, including host country's students' parents, is a common phenomenon. This is especially the case in the countries which receive most refugees, such as Greece (Skarlatos 2017). A recent Eurydice report (European Commission 2019) on the integration of students with migrant backgrounds in schools in Europe states that intercultural education is at least partially integrated in the national curricula of most European countries; however, the approach and strategies adopted vary significantly between countries. For example, most policies and measures tend to focus on academic aspects, rather than students' social and emotional needs ('whole-child approach'). According to the Eurydice report, Portugal together with Spain and Slovenia are reported as being successful in applying this whole-child approach. This finding is in accordance with previous reports (e.g., The UN Human Development Report 2009, the 2010 World Migration Report, or the Migrant Policy Index III, as cited in Ribeiro, Malafaya, Neves, and Menezes 2016), which all confirm the positive progress of Portugal in regard to implementing policies that promote the inclusion of young immigrants. In light of the above, the issue of exploring the multicultural awareness of Portuguese students emerges as highly relevant.

Thus far, such multicultural awareness has been primarily studied in terms of students' attitudes towards their peers with different ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Dimakos and Tasiopoulou 2003; Williams and Johnson 2011). This focus, although useful in terms of understanding perceptions and underlying stereotypes, usually non-adaptive within a multicultural society, promotes an obsolete view of cultural literacy as something that people *know about* other cultures (see Hirsch 1988 for a representative example of this perspective). A recent European Horizon 2020 Project, 'Dialogue and Argumentation for cultural Literacy Learning in Schools' (DIALLS n.d.), proposes a new, more adaptive conceptualisation of cultural literacy as a desirable social disposition, embracing a diversity of knowledge, skills, and competences. This new framework for cultural literacy implies being able to engage in productive and constructive dialogue with the world, and the different concepts and meanings available within it. It also re-situates intercultural dialogue from a dialogue with the Other, to a dialogue in which otherness is continuously negotiated within and through oneself (see also Wegerif 2010, for a similar position).

This paper forms part of a pilot study within the DIALLS project implementation in Portugal. It seeks to understand adolescents' concerns, perceptions and arguments in relation to the relevant dilemma of whether or not Portugal should receive more refugees. Our aim is to look at students' views on this topic and to reveal any existing relations between the social constructs hidden behind those views and the level of reasoning assessed by the quality of students' written and oral arguments. Doing this, we hope to understand how cultural literacy values and dispositions may be better approached in middle-grades classrooms.

Literature review

The literature review section is structured as follows. First, a connection between classroom argumentation and the emergence of cultural literacy among students is made. Second, an overview of the Portuguese context as one where migration is, and has always been, a topic of great relevance will be given.

Classroom argumentation and cultural literacy

Classroom argumentation is a dialogic activity in which students negotiate meanings until they arrive at a better, more elaborate and/or sophisticated state, either as a result of reaching consensus in a small-group deliberation context, or as a result of trying to persuade each other of a position in the context of a whole-class or peer-to-peer debate. The implementation of argumentation as a pedagogical method has been shown to be beneficial for both the acquisition of argumentation skills, also known as ‘learning to argue’, as well as for the increase in content knowledge, also known as ‘arguing to learn’ (Muller-Mirza and Perret-Clermont 2009). Within the first tendency (learning to argue), previous studies have shown that implementing dialogic argumentation in the classroom results in an improvement not only of students’ oral argumentation skills but also their writing skills (Kuhn, Hemberger, and Khait 2016; Hemberger et al. 2017) thereby confirming the value of dialogue as a path from interpersonal to intrapersonal thought levels (Zavala and Kuhn 2017).

Regarding topics discussed in studies situated within the ‘learning to argue’ trend, the majority are either socio-scientific or general interest topics, as they allow for personal opinions and positions to emerge and therefore increase students’ motivation to argue about them (for a list of such topics see Kuhn 2018). Although socio-scientific and general interest topics are different in nature – the former demanding scientific evidence in order to be solved whereas for the latter scientific evidence is optional – both share the following criteria for being chosen as argumentation issues: (a) they are open-ended, meaning that more than one answer is possible; (b) they are relevant to the students’ lives; and (c) they allow reasoned debate about solutions using available data (Jiménez-Aleixandre 2002). Moreover, the problems to which the selected topics for argumentation refer may not be ‘real’ but the issues must be ‘authentic’, in the sense of allowing for reasoned discourse to emerge. In our case, the topic selected, i.e., whether Portugal should receive more refugees or not, is not ‘real’, in the sense that any solutions proposed cannot actually inform a real-life decision as this is usually decided by higher authorities, such as the European Commission; however, the topic contains an authentic issue, because it allows the expression of pro- or anti- opinions and arguments. The reference to Portugal is justified by the fact that the study took place in Portugal, therefore the place reference makes the topic more familiar, i.e., relevant, to the students. Moreover, the selection of the topic is in accordance with similar topics used for other studies on argumentation about immigrants’ and refugees’ rights and responsibilities (Van Dijk 1992; Kuhn, Cummings, and Youmans 2019). However, the use of this topic in classroom argumentation studies is scarce (Dingler 2017).

In light of the current European landscape, characterised by an increasing plurality of voices, cultures, and identities, the need for education to create informed and culturally literate citizens emerges as one of the main challenges within the European Union. In

response to this need, a call for multi-country research projects on ways to promote cultural literacy through formal and informal education initiatives was launched under the HORIZON 2020 funding opportunities (H2020-CULT-COOP-3-2017). One of the winning projects for the 2016–2017 call was DIALLS. As anticipated above, one of DIALLS' major contributions at a theoretical level is its definition of cultural literacy not as a 'knowledge package' about other people's cultures and identities, but as a dynamic process of engaging in constructive dialogue and argumentation with others (Maine, Cook, and Lähdesmäki [forthcoming](#)). As part of this process, negotiating one's own identity and viewpoints as a result of co-constructing meanings with others is a value in itself, afforded by cultural literacy. Under this perspective, the topic of immigration is a relevant one, and one worthy to be worked dialogically within the classroom.

Migration in Portugal

Due to its colonising past in different parts of the world, including America, Africa, and Asia, Portugal has a long history with migration. However, the landscape of migration has changed significantly during the last five decades for Portugal, mainly regarding immigrants' country of origin, as well as their motives for migration. While in the 1960's the majority of immigrants to Portugal were of African descent, especially Cape Verdeans in search of a better labour conditions, towards the end of 1970's the flow continued predominantly from the ex-colonies (Cape Verde, Brazil, Angola, Guinea, etc.) but the motives became more political than economic (Peixoto 2002). Later, in the 1980's and 1990's, a significant flow of Eastern European immigrants, especially Ukrainians, was also evident, due to 'push and pull' factors (Peixoto 2002). During the first decade of the new millennium, the percentage of South Americans, especially Brazilians, increased, exceeding the number of African immigrants. Asian immigration also increased, with the Chinese population a growing presence in Portugal (Oliveira and Gomes 2014). From 2010 onwards, because of the economic crisis, levels of immigration decreased as did the rate of births, creating a serious demographic problem for Portugal (*ibid*). Since the refugee crisis of 2015, Portugal received 1700 refugees and it is calculated that 1100 more are expected to be re-located from other EU countries in 2019 (Público 2018).

The history of Portuguese colonisation and its impact on the country's post-colonial 'openness' towards other cultures holds for both positive and negative interpretations. On one hand, it formed the basis of luso-tropicalism, a concept proposed by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre to describe the idea that Portuguese were 'better colonisers' than other Europeans. This idea that Portuguese colonisation and expansion were exceptionally tolerant is inherent in the popular view that Portugal is a non-racist society. On the other hand, this same idea was used as an argument by the country's dictator António de Oliveira Salazar to support his pro-colonisation policy; independence was not granted to the colonies still held by the Portuguese State until the 'Carnation Revolution' of 1974. The paradox still exists today and is evident in the views of post-colonial Portuguese society towards immigration. As De Almeida (2008) remarks, 'cultural competence, especially linguistic, is the idiom through which grievances against immigration are expressed and in which racial remarks are hidden' (9). The same author continues by claiming that the current insistence of the Portuguese towards immigrants' cultural integration shares a lot with the colonisers' view and practice of cultural assimilation. The author further

strengthens this view by observing that, although it is increasingly common to hear about the positive impact of Portuguese groups going to live abroad, the same is not true regarding the positive impact of immigrants living in Portugal. Indeed, recent studies (Vala, Lopes, and Lima 2008; António and Policarpo 2011) exploring the views of Portuguese adult and children populations towards Black immigrants have led to this common result: although explicit views expressed may be neutral or positive towards the Black population living in Portugal, implicit views are still highly marked by prejudice. As Vala, Lopes, and Lima (2008) conclude, 'the luso-tropicalist representation can protect against the expression of overt prejudice but not against its covert dimensions' (287).

Beyond the Portuguese context, whilst attitudes towards immigrants have received considerable scholarly attention, empirical studies on the perception of local population towards refugees remain a neglected research issue. As Hatton (2016) remarks, 'it is worth distinguishing between opinion on refugees and opinion on immigrants in general. While there is a wide range of survey evidence on various aspects of attitudes to immigration there is far less information relating specifically to refugees' (15). Moreover, looking at the attitudes of young adolescents in the formal education system of a country that is still at the beginning of refugee acceptance would shed some light on the level of preparedness of the Portuguese population regarding the reception of refugees and what the role of education may be in its improvement.

Methodology

This study forms part of a broader research project entitled 'Dialogue and Argumentation for cultural Literacy Learning in Schools – DIALLS.' As mentioned above, the main goal of this three-year European project is to promote cultural literacy values and dispositions, such as tolerance, empathy, and inclusion, among youth as a result of their engagement in activities based on constructive dialogue and argumentation.

The present study took place the year before the classes recruited for DIALLS would implement the cultural literacy learning program created to meet the project goals. During this year, four middle-grade teachers in three Portuguese public schools were voluntarily trained to deliver a ten-session programme focusing on their students' acquisition of critical argumentation skills. The teachers were free to choose the topics on the basis of which the programme was adapted to each. Two of the teachers focused on topics related to their curricular subjects, and the other two used materials created by the research team on the topic of whether or not Portugal should receive more refugees. The present paper reports on a qualitative in-depth analysis of the students' outcomes from classes with the latter two teachers because of the sensitivity and actuality of the topic, as well as its relevance to the DIALLS cultural literacy objectives. The following research questions were at issue:

- (1) What are the concerns and views expressed by young Portuguese adolescents on the issue of refugees, in particular, whether or not Portugal should receive more refugees?
- (2) What is the quality of their arguments concerning the above?
- (3) How do students' arguments relate to the interplay between perceived threats and reasons for the acceptance of refugees?

To address the varied nature of these questions, the study used a mixed methodology, also due to its increased relevance for educational research (see Rapanta and Felton 2019 for a recent review). In particular, our approach was mixed in two ways: first, within the qualitative data analysis, as we used two different tools for analysing the same data, further explained below; and second, between qualitative and quantitative analysis, as we performed a series of non-parametric comparative statistical analyses, to reveal any significant patterns among and between students' age groups, and their types of arguments and concerns.

Participants

The participants were 50 Portuguese adolescent students, 26 from the 7th grade, with an average age of 12.4 years, and 24 from the 10th grade, with an average age of 15.2 years. Two-thirds of the total sample were girls (66%). Forty-nine (49) students were white, and one of African heritage. The two classes were from two different public schools in Lisbon, near the city centre, with generally comparable (medium) socioeconomical status among their students.

Data collection

The data collected were of two types: (a) students' written texts; (b) complete transcripts of two student debates, one from each classroom.

The data were collected as part of the 'Argue with me' curriculum (Kuhn, Hemberger, and Khait 2014), which was adapted to the Portuguese context (Rapanta 2019). The 10 sessions in which both classes were engaged had the same structure:

- Sessions 1–2 ('pre-game'): Students, already divided into two sides (against or in favour of receiving refugees) worked in small groups providing reasons and supporting them with information given to them in the form of Q and As (see Appendix 1), gradually presented in envelopes for each group during Session 2. Students' group-work resulted in one Poster per group on which students stuck post-it notes giving their reasons and evidence supporting those reasons.
- Sessions 3–5 ('game'): Student groups were divided into pairs and triads, who engaged in argumentative dialogue with pairs and triads from the other side. The dialogue was written using a folder that was passed, with the help of the teacher, from one side to the other. During the 'written dialogue' sessions (session 3 and 4, with different pair combinations), students were also asked to keep a record of their arguments and counter-arguments, as well as of the arguments and counter-arguments that they received from the other side.
- Sessions 6–7 (preparation of the 'showdown'): Students came back to their groups and, with the help of the completed reflection sheets, added counter-arguments to their own arguments on their posters, as well as rebuttals, i.e., responses to those counter-arguments. Rebuttals had to be different from the initial arguments, and they also had to respond directly to the other side's arguments (real or anticipated).
- Session 8 (the 'showdown'): This was the debate session. Pairs of students, one from each side, sat in front of the classroom, with the rest of the students sitting in one of

the two sides (all same-side groups together). Each pair of students had a total of 3 min to debate the main issue (i.e., whether Portugal should receive more refugees or not) and each student had the right to one 30-s help, during which each participant could go to their side to receive help from classmates.

- Session 9 ('debrief'): After the debate, students reflected on the main arguments and counter-arguments raised during the debate as well as the quality of evidence used to support them. This was done with guidance from the teacher and with the help of the first author who was present in all sessions as a non-participant observer. Students then had time to go back to their posters for the last time to make any final changes.
- Session 10 (written essays): Each student wrote an individual essay on the main topic with the following instruction: 'Write an opinion text helping the local authorities to decide on the topic of whether Portugal should receive more refugees or not.' Students could spend as much time as they wanted on the essay, in class, but the time dedicated on average was 20 min.

In total, 50 essays were collected at the end of Session 10 from both classes. Each text was segmented into idea units, with 7th-graders' texts having an average of eight lines each, and 10th-graders' having an average of 11.5 lines each. Regarding the debates, 110 min in total for both classes were audio recorded and fully transcribed using Jefferson conventions. An excerpt of the debate between two 7th-graders is shown in [Appendix 2](#).

Data analysis

Based on the idea that cultural literacy is expressed through argumentation, and that arguments are based on assumptions that can be unveiled through the analysis of their content, our method of analysis takes into account both formal (structure of arguments) and substantial (content of arguments) dimensions. In particular, the oral and written student data described above were analysed applying a two-fold approach: (a) an argument analysis; and (b) a social identity and intergroup threat analysis. After the two separate qualitative analyses were completed, as described below, statistical descriptions and correlations between variables of the same and different dimensions were performed, according to the stated research questions.

Argument analysis

The essays were coded using the argument analysis tool developed by Kuhn and her colleagues (Kuhn, Hemberger, and Khait 2014, 2016; Hemberger et al. 2017). According to this coding tool, four discourse units are identified: (a) units functionally supporting my side (M+), (b) units functionally weakening my side (M-), (c) units functionally supporting the other side (O+), and (d) units functionally weakening the other side (O-). [Table 1](#) shows an example of each. This coding is based on the idea that a main critical thinking skill manifested in argumentative discourse is the ability to look through the eyes of the other, namely to consider counter-arguments and respond to them adequately (Walton 1989; Glassner and Schwarz 2007). Therefore, units coded as 'M-' and 'O+', considering/supporting the other side, are considered of higher quality than units coded as 'M+' and 'O-', supporting 'my side' (for the importance of avoiding the so-called 'my side' bias, see also Baron 1995;

Table 1. Types of discourse units with examples (translated from Portuguese).

Name	Code	Example
Support my side	M+	'On one side, Portugal is a very good country for receiving refugees, because after escaping from the violence they can be in a calm place without any terrorist or violent act, which is what they were used to ...'
Weaken my side	M-	'... but it is also true that the two welcoming houses are not enough for the expected number of refugees.'
Support other side	O+	'With regard to the unemployment issue, I think that in other countries they would have more job options ...'
Weaken other side	O-	'... but less security.'

Wolfe and Britt 2008). As a consequence, units coded as supporting the other side received a score of 2 points each, whereas units supporting 'my side' received a score of 1 point each. Units that revealed non-functional statements, meaning ideas that were not complete or were invalid from an argumentative point of view, did not receive any score.

In addition to Kuhn et al.'s coding scheme, we introduced two more criteria for evaluating the argument quality of students' texts. The first was how 'balanced' the final essay was, as calculated proportionally dividing the number of 'other-side' units by the number of 'my-side' units per text: if the result was less or equal to 2, the text was marked as 'balanced'; if it was greater than 2, meaning that 'my-side' units were more than the half the 'other-side' units, the text was marked as 'slightly balanced'. Finally, if no 'other-side' units were present at all, the text was marked as 'non-balanced.' The second additional criterion was the presence of fallacies in students' discourse, which was also used as a criterion for analysing the oral debates. In our approach, following Walton (2010) and Rapanta and Walton (2016), fallacies are invalid argumentation schemes, i.e., arguments that fail to be complete either due to the insufficiency of their premises, or the inadequacy of the logical connections between the parts of the argument, namely premises and conclusion. The presence of fallacies, especially in adolescents' discourse, is a counter-indicator of argument quality as it reveals a lack of reflective (King and Kitchener 1994) or analytic (Klaczynski 2001) thinking.

Social identity and intergroup threat analysis

Due to the absence of a unified theory of public opinion on the acceptance/refusal of refugees (Rustenbach 2010), the analytical approach of Portuguese adolescents' concerns and perceptions towards refugees attempts to articulate two main theoretical and conceptual domains, which partially overlap in their main assumptions (Hermann and Neumann 2019), namely the social identity theory (SIT) and the intergroup threat theory (ITT).

Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel 1982) starts from the premise that individuals develop identifications with regard to social groups and categories, associated with positive or negative value images, to protect, maintain and bolster a positive self-identity. Social identity theorists provide further experimental evidence that when individuals define their own identities with regard to social groups and categories, they tend to favour their in-group/category of membership, exaggerating the value of their social image and striving to demonise the out-group/category created by the categorisation process itself. The aim of differentiation to achieve comparative superiority is even detected when individuals are aware that the formation of groups and categories is

momentary, arbitrary, and with no symbolic-identity value. Beyond the increase of distinctiveness and relational superiority regarding significant out-groups, social identity research also highlights how identification with in-groups confers psychological and social benefits on group members, such as acceptance, belonging, safety and support as much as values, beliefs and rules to guide their behaviour.

Intergroup threat theory (Stephan, Ybarra, and Rios 2016) is interrelated to social identity theory, positing that individuals as members of an in-group may be predisposed to perceive threats from the characteristics and actions of out-groups, related both to tangible and meaning resources, as well as with in-group social esteem. Accordingly, intergroup threat researchers have identified two basic types of threats: realistic and symbolic. Realistic threats are often described as individual concerns about physical, mental and material harm, health and personal security, and as social concerns about the in-group's power, general welfare and economic resources (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). Associated with social identity theory (Hochman 2015), symbolic threats usually involve individual self-identity and self-esteem as much as threats related to the integrity and validity of the in-groups' cultural, religious and value systems.

In addition to the hypothesis that the reason why refugees apply for asylum operates as a main predictor for their acceptance in host countries (Czymara and Schmidt-Catran 2017; Hermanni and Neumann 2019), ITT provides heuristic hypotheses to understand how and why refugees' characteristics may foster a perception of threat. The ITT approach also provides an opportunity to test and analyse whether Portuguese adolescents' concerns regarding their in-group predict the refusal of refugees, regardless of refugees' features and contextual circumstances (Hermanni and Neumann 2019).

Findings

The findings are structured as follows. First, the findings of the formal (argument structure and quality) analysis of students' discourse will be presented, followed by the content (concerns and views) analysis of their social constructs regarding reception of refugees. In the end, the relations between the two dimensions, i.e., reasoning structure/quality and construction of social reality, will be presented, based on statistical correlational analyses.

Students' reasoning quality

Regarding adolescents' positions on the issue of receiving refugees, 20% expressed an overall view of being against, whereas the remaining 80% expressed a positive view (N = 50). Moreover, the distribution of students being 'against' (negative position) and 'in favour' (positive position) was similar in both age groups, as shown in Table 2.

The quality of students' argumentation was calculated in terms of a) how balanced their arguments were in terms of considering the 'other side'; and b) their obtained argument quality scores following the coding procedure explained in the Methodology. In total, almost half of the students (48%) achieved a medium score in their written argumentative essays, one third (32%) received a high score, and few students (10%) received a low score. The level for each text was calculated based on three ranks (1–5, 6–10, and 11–15), as emerging scores varied from 1 to 15 for each age group. In terms of

Table 2. Frequency of position per age group.

7th Grade (N = 26)		10th Grade (N = 24)	
Position			
Negative	4	Negative	6
Positive	22	Positive	18

Table 3. Argument quality per level and two-sidedness.

7th Grade (N = 26)		10th Grade (N = 24)	
Argument Level			
Low	6	Low	4
Medium	13	Medium	11
High	7	High	9
Two-sidedness			
No	10	No	8
Slightly	7	Slightly	13
Yes	9	Yes	3

how balanced (two-sided) the essays were, only 12 out of the 50 students managed to clearly include the other's perspective in their discourse, as shown in Table 3.

Regarding the argument fallacies emerging in students' written and oral discourse, the following types were identified: (a) hasty generalisation; (b) appeal to fear; (c) false presupposition/interpretation; (d) slippery slope; (e) post hoc; (f) faulty comparison; and (g) non sequitur. Table 4 shows their explanations as well as their respective frequencies within each age group. The most commonly appearing fallacy for both age groups was false presupposition, meaning that students took for granted the truth of a specific piece of information without any supporting evidence (e.g., '*If the refugees came to our country, they could cause various consequences such as for example the increase of the unemployment rate*'). Within the older group of students, two other types of fallacies were also very common, notably hasty generalisations, when generalising a judgement based on one or a few cases (e.g., '*As everyone knows many terrorists are*

Table 4. Types and distribution of fallacies.

Fallacy type	Explanation	7th grade	10th grade
hasty generalisation	When a judgement is generalised on the basis of one or a few cases.	2	9
appeal to fear	Attempt to increase fear towards an alternative.	0	4
false presupposition	Taking for granted the truth of a presupposition or of a piece of information used as evidence without any evidence for that.	5	7
slippery slope	The conclusion of an argument (often an extreme negative consequence) is based on a 'shaky' and unlikely chain of events.	3	2
post hoc (false cause)	When one event that follows another is also considered to be implied/caused by the other.	3	2
faulty comparison	Presuming that there is equivalence between two situations when there is not.	0	1
non sequitur	A conclusion does not logically follow from what preceded it.	4	3
	Total	17	25

immigrants in the countries where they live when they commit the attack'), and appeal to fear, when fear towards an alternative was expressed and used as a method of persuasion ('If Portugal continues to accept refugees, for sure one day they will accept a psycho "serial killer" and then they will be surprised how this happened').

Students' construction of social reality

When it comes to social identity and intergroup threat analysis, the following constructs emerged from both students' written and oral discourses: (a) Cause for refugees' flight; (b) Identification with the out-group; (c) High concern with refugees' ascribed characteristics; (d) High concern with the decline of the in-group (regardless of refugees' characteristics); (e) Out-group size argument; (f) Positive (and safety) conditions for the host-group; (g) Realistic threats; (h) Symbolic threats; and (i) Refusal of realistic and symbolic threats. Table 5 provides some discursive examples of these analytical dimensions.

Table 5. Examples (translated from Portuguese) of the main constructs emerged within the framework of SIT and ITT analysis.

Main constructs	Examples from students' texts and oral discourse
Cause of flight and asylum application	'Refugees escape from war. They lost everything they had. This is why we should give them the right to re-begin a new life, in which they recover their rights as citizens' (Female, 7th grade, Medium argument level).
Identification with the out-group	'Everyone deserves a life in peace, a house, health, education, just imagine yourself in their place. It must be horrible knowing that you can die at any moment ... ' (Male, 7th grade, High argument level).
High concern on the ascribed characteristics of refugees	'Refugees may bring along various bad things for us such as wars, terrorism, contagious diseases, dangerous ones. Before wanting the best for the others, we should want the best for us and for our country' (Female, 10th grade, Medium argument level).
High concern with the decline of the in-group (independently of refugees' characteristics)	'We are in a financial crisis. In reality, who pays the refuges is the Portuguese people because, as we pay taxes, the State uses this money to pay the refugees. If we hardly manage to take care of our people, why should we accept refugees?' (Female, 10th grade, Medium argument level).
Out-group size concern	'Portugal should receive refugees. But there is a problem. If we gather more and more refugees, they may occupy jobs that Portugal's poor could occupy to earn something' (Female, 7th grade, Medium argument level).
Positive (and safety) conditions of the host-group	'Portugal is a very nice country for receiving refugees, because after they escape from war they can be in a safe place without any terrorist or violent act, which is what they were used to' (Male, 7th grade, Medium argument level).
Realistic and symbolic threats	'I am mainly pointing out the crisis (financial) and the culture shock. There are several unemployed people who receive the minimum salary which is barely enough for them to survive per month, and then we also have the culture shock in which there may exist racism and xenophobia from both parts' (Male, 10th grade, Medium argument level). 'It would be a danger for Portugal residents, because of religion and of cultures, which would lead to many wars. For example, as they have different habits, if they see a Christian doing things that they don't do, they may hurt the citizens to oblige them to do the things that they do' (Female, 7th grade, Low argument level).
Refusal of realistic and symbolic threats	'There exists a big prejudice against refugees due to them being Muslims and coming from a country at war (.) it is not because they come from a country at war that they necessarily bring "war" with them. Portugal already received various refugee families and since then no terrorist act has taken place. What is more, the criminality rate has been decreasing' (Female, 10th grade, Medium argument level).

As shown in [Table 6](#), the cause of flight and asylum application is the most relevant argument used by 80% of Portuguese adolescent students to support welcoming refugees. More precisely, the high risk of death due to war and violence, as much as the lack of survival conditions associated with extreme poverty and famine were perceived as key causes of flight. Refugees' countries of origin in which human rights abuses and the persecution of minorities were commonplace was also reported as another justified reason for applying for asylum. What is more, 62.5% of the students whose position was in favour of the receiving stance often placed themselves in refugees' contextual circumstances, emphasising how they would like to receive support, also seeking to induce a similar identification in those whose position was against receiving refugees. Additionally, their written and oral arguments reflect a certain degree of concern with the refugee group size (45%) and its potential impact on the Portuguese economic situation in terms of labour market competition, potential increase of unemployment rate and rising financial burdens (32,5%).

An ITT approach would predict that in-group economic concerns and the relative size of the out-group could elicit realistic threats and predict a rejection of refugees, regardless of their characteristics. However, Portuguese students' arguments combined a significant concern for the country and its people's economic wellbeing with an explicit rejection of realistic threats coming from the acceptance of refugees (50%). According to both SIT and ITT approaches, it could also be expected that cultural and religious differences would be better predictors of symbolic threats. This hypothesis did not find support in Portuguese students' arguments who were in favour of receiving refugees. Not only did they express a low concern regarding the values and practices of refugees' cultural and religious dissimilarity, but they also responded to cognitive biases towards refugees and reacted to inter-group threats by arguing against ethnocentric stereotypes and general homogenising perceptions which tend to identify refugees with criminals and terrorists.

On the other hand, as shown in [Table 7](#), a high perception of realistic threats triggered by the arrival of refugees (100%), along with a great concern with the living conditions of the Portuguese host group (90.9%) was evident among students' written and oral arguments whose position was against. We also found that economic concerns and fear of crime, terrorism and infectious diseases constituted major reasons for refusing to accept immigrants. Furthermore, descriptions of refugees' ascribed religious affiliations (as Muslims) and cultural dissimilarities often expressed as negative stereotypes, fostered the perception of refugees as symbolic threats (45.4%). However, as reported by a few students (10th-graders), identification with the out-group seemed to act as a moderating influence for their fears and concerns.

Relations between reasoning and social constructs

The final research question considered the relationship, if any, between students' positions, arguments, and views (concerns and perceptions).

Is positioning related to students' arguments and views?

To answer this question, we searched for any association between students' positions against or in favour of refugees' entrance in the country and a) the manifestation of

Table 6. Students' concerns and arguments for *welcoming* refugees (distribution is expressed in percentages of the total number of students per grade).

	Cause	Identification with the out-group	High concern regarding the ascribed characteristics of refugees	High concern with the decline of the in-group (independently of refugees' characteristics)	Out-group size	Positive conditions of the out-group	Realistic threats	Symbolic threats	Refusal of realistic symbolic threats
SUM	86,3%	72,7%	9,1%	36,3%	40,9%	54,6%	36,3%	9,1%	40,9%
SUM	77,8%	50%	27,8%	38,9%	50%	33,3%	16,7%	16,7%	61%
TOTAL (N = 50)	80%	62,5%	17,5%	32,5%	45%	45%	27,5%	12,5%	50%



Table 7. Students' concerns and arguments for *not welcoming* refugees (distribution is expressed in percentages of the total number of students per grade).

Cause	Identification with the out-group	High concern regarding the ascribed characteristics of refugees	High concern with the decline of the in-group (independently of refugees' characteristics)	Out-group size	Positive conditions of the out-group	Realistic threats	Symbolic threats	Refusal of realistic symbolic threats
SUM	-	40%	80%	80%	20%	100%	40%	-
SUM	16%	-	100%	16,7%	-	100%	50%	-
TOTAL (N = 50)	18,2%	18,2%	90,9%	45,4%	9,1%	100%	45,4%	-

fallacies in their discourse; b) the types of concerns and perceptions manifested in their discourse.

Regarding the association among the first pair of variables, namely students' position and fallacious discourse, the Spearman's Rho non-parametric statistical test showed a significant result ($r_s = 0.35417$, p (2-tailed) = $0.01162 < .05$) when performed for the whole dataset ($N = 50$), revealing that, by normal standards, the association between the two variables would be considered statistically significant. However, when the test was performed separately for the two age groups, the result was only significant for the older students ($r_s = 0.65477$, p (2-tailed) = $0.00235 < .05$). For the younger students, there seems not to be an association between the two variables, namely students' position and fallacious discourse ($r_s = 0.37816$, p (2-tailed) = $0.0568 > .05$).

Regarding the second pair of variables, i.e., position and types of concerns, Table 8 shows the distribution of each social construct type per the dichotomous variable of students' position being positive (in favour) or negative (against) the arrival of refugees. The Mann-Whitney U test performed showed that the difference of how concerns and perceptions are distributed among the 'yes' and the 'no' groups is statistically significant at $p < .05$ ($z = 2.91397$; $p = .00362$), therefore the two variables can be said to be associated.

In summary, the type of positioning, i.e., whether students positioned themselves in favour or against the refugees' arrival, was significantly correlated with both the type of argument fallacies and concerns/perceptions expressed in their oral and written discourses.

Is the quality of students' arguments related to their expressed perceptions and concerns?

To answer this question, we searched for any association between the quality of students' arguments and the type of social constructs (perceptions and concerns) expressed. Table 9 shows the distribution of concern and perception types as they occurred within the three argument quality levels (low, medium, and high). The Kruskal-Wallis test performed showed a significant difference between the levels ($H = 13.6058$ (2, $N = 27$); $p = .00111$), therefore, it may be inferred that the two variables, namely concern/perception type and argument level are associated.

Table 8. Frequency distribution of types of views (concerns/perceptions) per students' position being positive or negative.

	cause	outgroup	concern refugees	concern ingroup	outgroup size	positive host	realistic threat	symbolic threat	refusal threat
Positive	31	25	8	14	17	17	11	4	17
Negative	1	2	2	11	5	1	11	5	0

Table 9. Frequency distribution of types of views (concerns/perceptions) per students' argument level being low, medium, and high.

	cause	outgroup	concern refugees	concern ingroup	outgroup size	positive host	realistic threat	symbolic threat	refusal threat
Low	5	3	2	5	4	0	4	1	2
Medium	16	13	3	12	9	10	12	5	8
High	11	11	5	8	9	8	6	3	10

Based on the above findings, we additionally asked whether there was any association between the existence or not of a fallacy in students' written arguments and the existence of the 'threat' type perception in their discourse. The answer was positive both for the whole sample (both age groups together) as well as for the 10th-graders alone as the Spearman's Rho test showed ($r_s = 0.42642$, p (2-tailed) = $0.00202 < .05$, for the whole sample; $r_s = 0.47809$, p (2-tailed) = $0.01813 < .05$, for the 10th-graders). However, when the same test was performed only for the 7th-graders, the result was not statistically significant ($r_s = 0.37816$, p (2-tailed) = $0.0568 > .05$). Therefore, the two variables, namely 'existence of fallacious discourse' and 'threat-related perception' (both realistic and symbolic threats), seem to be associated for the older students, whereas this is not the case for the younger ones.

Discussion

Our mixed-method exploratory study showed that although the majority of adolescent students expressed a positive position towards accepting refugees in their country of origin, their oral and written argumentative discourse revealed a significant number of concerns and perceptions typically associated with the Social Identity Theory and the Intergroup Threat Theory. Summarising our results, we found that the causes of refugee application for asylum are the most important reasons underlying students' majority positive position. Nevertheless, the high level of concern with the decline of Portuguese socio-economic conditions, the perception of realistic threats in terms of economic resources and general welfare, as well as the influence of refugee group size on perceived threats were reported by both age groups and types of positions. The recent Portuguese context of economic crisis and austerity, imposed by the Troika memorandum, in which two million Portuguese people lived on incomes below the poverty line and the unemployment rate exceeded 16% cannot be dissociated from students' fears and worries. In addition, the discrepancy between a generally positive position, on one hand, and the expression of negative views, on the other, is in accordance with the discrepancy found in other studies focusing on Portuguese people's attitudes towards immigrants: although they are apparently positive, they also reveal a great deal of prejudice (Vala, Lopes, and Lima 2008; António and Policarpo 2011).

Another finding worthy of discussion regards the fact that both students' positioning either against or in favour to the topic of welcoming refugees, and the quality of their arguments were significantly associated with the type of social constructs expressed. In particular, we found that even when students had specific, verbal information they could use as evidence for their viewpoints, they still showed difficulties in doing so functionally, possibly because of the interplay between their reasoning, on one hand, and their socially justified concerns and perceptions, on the other, as our findings showed. This finding implies that general public concerns and social representations triggered by the migration process of refugees may have power in forming reasoning structure and decision-making from an early age. Therefore, intervening in the development of some representations rather than others is an important challenge for educators.

In addition, our study shows that fallacious discourse was related to the expressed position and perceptions only among older students. This finding may imply that the assumed greater exposure of older students to social media and uncontrolled, mostly

incomplete or invalid information, also known as ‘fake news’, may be responsible for the manifestation of greater fallacies in their discourse regarding refugees. This assumption is further confirmed by the fact that fallacies of the type ‘hasty generalization’ and ‘appeal to fear’ were almost exclusively present among 10th-graders’ discourse, as compared to 7th-graders. An important question is raised which calls for further investigation: Does social media exposure inaugurate an ‘education’ into prejudice, rather than the extension of various forms of empathy via dialogue and critical reconsiderations?

Our future work is based on the assumption that, through bringing to light different cultural frames and identities and opening them up to meaningful constructive interaction between peers of the same or different ethnic cultures, it is possible for non-functional (from a cultural literacy point of view) representations to be replaced by functional ones, i.e., in accordance with enacted values of tolerance, empathy, and inclusion. In other words, our future work within DIALLS will be based on the hypothesis that it is through *engaging in cultural literacy interactions* that students’ reasoning skills can be improved.

Conclusion

This study was small and exploratory being limited to two middle-grade classes in Portugal. However, it contains a finding that already demands educators’ attention: although students were exposed to facts and information that they could use as evidence to support their position (see [Appendix 1](#)), they still used general public concerns and social representations as part of their arguments, sometimes even distorting their arguments, especially in the case of older students. This finding is not critical against social representations themselves, as they are inevitable and form an important part of human reasoning. It does, however, raise concerns regarding the source of social representations and how ill-informed they are. In light of the possibility that social media plays a negative role in the creation of uninformed social representations, we recommend that education take a more active role in shaping informed understandings of (a) the available information and (b) the others.

The DIALLS project aims to do this by exposing students to multimodal cultural texts from which they can extract information to support their views, as well as by engaging students in constructive dialogue with peers from the same or a different country, about these texts. Through engaging students in activities that require them to make their cultural values and representations explicit in their arguments and justifications, a pedagogy that is both ‘culturally relevant’ and ‘culturally sustaining’ (Ladson-Billings 2014) can be enabled. Culturally relevant, because through engaging with the interpretation of cultural texts, students are helped to construct their own cultural identities. Culturally sustaining, because it insists on the ‘social and cultural mediation of knowledge reconstruction’ (Murphy and Iverson 2003, 6). Reconceiving cultural literacy, changing it from a static concept to be acquired externally to a dynamic relationship between actors, interactions, and experiences is the only way for a pluralistic society to be represented and enacted in the classroom.

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Appendix 1. Questions/Answers given to students as part of the intervention

Q1: What do we mean by 'refugees'?

Refugees are people who flee from war and/or persecution in their home country. The refugee status exists precisely because these people are at risk of life and have no choice but to escape, often in a dangerous and uncertain way, to other countries. One of the basic principles of the status indicates that no refugee can be expelled or returned to situations where his or her life and freedom are in danger.

Q2: What is the difference between an international protection applicant (refugee) and an immigrant?

An immigrant is someone who moves in search of better living conditions, whether in search of more opportunities in the labour market or better educational conditions, but is not in danger of life in his native country. A great difference between them is that the latter can freely return to their countries of origin, still enjoying the protection of their own government, while the former cannot.

Q3: Is there any legislation that binds us to the reception of applicants for international protection (asylum)?

Yes, the Geneva Convention, the Common European Asylum System and the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic.

Q4: What are the main rights of refugees?

The Geneva Convention (1951) defines what a refugee is, what legal protection he is entitled to, what aid is to be provided to him, and his rights and duties in the host country. These include rights to education, health, housing and religious freedom.

Q5: What institution is responsible in Portugal for the analysis and acceptance/rejection of applications for international protection (asylum)?

The Immigration and Borders Service (SEF).

Q6: Are there many refugees who are received by Portugal?

A6: Portugal does not usually receive direct asylum applications but of re-establishment. This means that since it is neither directly bordered by countries of origin of international asylum applicants, nor is it on the direct route of ships arriving in Europe, it is not traditionally a first-line country, such as Greece or Italy, but a country of resettlement of refugees. Resettled refugees are those from other host countries, not those arriving directly from the countries they flee. Up to now, Portugal has already accommodated around 1,700 refugees, and by 2019 the Government has pledged to host another 1010 (one thousand and ten).

Do refugees have access to public services, just like Portuguese citizens?

A7: In the welcoming phase, the process of delivering a resident visa issued by the SEF, which may take up to 3 months to be granted, begins. Only after issuing the visa, can the refugee have access to Social Security, which will allow him access to employment, education and health. Despite the existence of a process, most cases do not correspond to the plan, there is a significant delay in visa issuance, lack of teachers to teach the language, among others.

Q8. What is the number of shelters for refugees in Portugal?

There are two reception houses throughout Portugal: the Bobadela Reception Centre with the integrated Space 'The Child'; and the Shelter for Refugee Children (for unaccompanied minors aged 0-18). In addition to these spaces, the construction of a new shelter in Almoçageme, Sintra, is already underway, with a capacity to accommodate 50 people and an area dedicated to children.

Q9. What are the equipment and services available to refugees in shelters in Portugal?

Day-care/Kindergarten; Internet access; Library and Media Library; Auditorium; Training Rooms (Learning Portuguese is mandatory); Workshops; Laundry and small repairs; Sports complex; legal and social counselling, Office for help with finding work; distribution of food, clothing and other donated goods; sports and leisure activities; kitchen for preparing meals; awareness activities on asylum and refugees. Sports complex, training rooms and auditorium available for rent by anyone – fundraising and promotion of interaction between asylum applicants and the host community.

Q10. Where does the funding of shelters come from?

From the Social Security Institute and the European Refugee Fund.

Q11. What is the number of mosques and Islamic worship houses in Portugal?

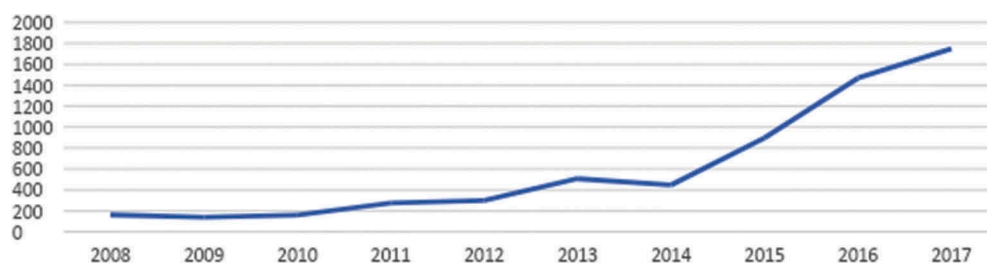
Northern Zone: 1 mosque and 3 worship houses

Central zone: 1 mosque and 1 worship house

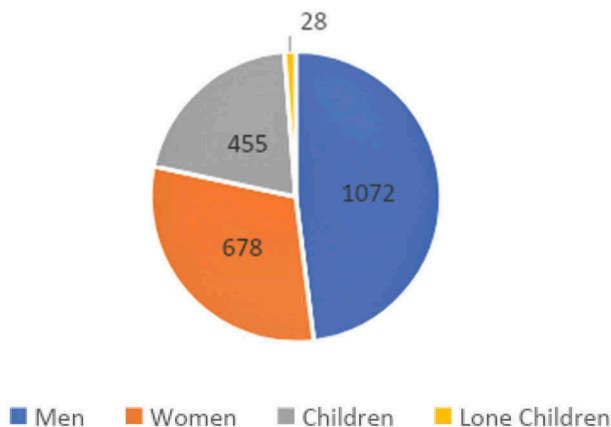
Lisbon and surrounding area: 10 mosques and 15 worship houses

Southern zone: 0 mosques and 7 worship houses

Islands: 2 worship houses



Continent of origin	Nº
Asia	803
Africa	711
Europe	163
America	55
Others	18
TOTAL	1750



Q12. Does Portugal get anything for receiving refugees?

Yes. The Portuguese State receives € 6,000 (six thousand euros) for each hosted refugee.

Q13. What is the quantitative evolution of applications for international protection (asylum) in Portugal?

Q14. What are the main continents and background countries of applicants for international protection (asylum) in Portugal in 2017?

Q15. What is the age and gender of applicants for international protection (asylum) in Portugal in 2017?

Most adults are between 19 and 39 years old.

Q16. Is it easy for refugees to find a job?

According to the High Commission for Migration, about 50% of refugees in Portugal are already working and/or studying. In Portugal, since the beginning of June, there has been a digital platform (Refujobs), managed by the High Commission for Migration, which aims to cross job offers with the skills and capabilities of refugees.

Appendix 2. Excerpt of a transcribed debate between two 7th-graders

Speaker	Discourse
Student A	Ahm- so, the refugees are obliged to get out of their country to escape war- they don't have other options rather than escaping.
Student B	My group and I have been discussing it – they may not have another option than escape- but I think that Portugal does not have the financial conditions for them, not even for its own- not even for its own people, even less for people coming from outside.
A	Portugal receives six thousand euros for every refugee- and there are in Portugal two welcoming houses and another one is under construction in Sintra.
B	I don't know if they are- if these six thousand euros go to the construction of houses of the refugees themselves, this is why they end up not receiving them, and I don't know if you know but they receive housing allowance- allowances- money for living here.
A	But we should help them- because they don't have another option- ok there are countries- there are countries that are much richer than Portugal- but if every country helped (.) it is something, isn't it?
B	It is OK but do you think it is right for a nation that comes from outside- I don't know if you know but Portugal has an unemployment tax of 6.8 and almost 8 thousand homeless people- do you think it is right when a person arrives here and comes to a country that has already all this- receive what the others do not have? Who already live here?
A	50% of the refugees who are here are already studying or working (.) therefore, also ...
B	Thanks for the reason you gave me- so, let me tell you something- these 50% that you are- these 50% imagine they are 100- so 50 will find a job and will study- this means that you will occupy 50 job positions that could be occupied by Portuguese.
A	Maybe these Portuguese are not as competent as they are- we cannot give preference- you are giving preference to the Portuguese.