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## Adolescent's views on immigration in Spain<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

*This paper attempts to analyze the views of a group of Spanish and foreign students, aged 12-17 years, with respect some issues related to the migration process and some of its consequences. A semi-structured interview was applied to 61 students, 33 of them were Spanish and 28 proceeds from different socio-cultural backgrounds (Ecuador, Romania, Morocco, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela, China, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Equatorial Guinea). Content analysis of their ideas and arguments on the topics studied were made to check the differences in student's views. Overall, there are some differences between the spontaneous views maintained by Spanish and Foreign students with respect immigration issues. For example, some interesting differences were found in the views hold by Spanish and Foreign students with respect immigration process and some of its consequences. However, adolescents from both groups tend to maintain an unrealistic view with respect the number of immigrants living in Madrid and Spain.*

### **1. Introduction**

During the last fifteen years, Spain has experienced a significant change on the migratory flow. Spain has traditionally been a country of emigration, but nowadays has experienced an important shift on its social composition. This situation has generated a vast array of studies in the social sciences and educational domains. As an example, we can find studies devoted to explore the development of the identity processes from infancy to adolescence from minority groups; those dedicated to study the attitudes toward immigrant groups, different stereotypes and prejudices that can lead to discriminatory or xenophobic behaviour, and those which investigate the school achievement of immigrant children and adolescents in order to foster their integration into the education system and promote the inter-ethnic relations, etc. (García, Navas, Molero and Cuadrado, 2003; Baigorri, Chávez and Fernández, 2004; Enesco, Navarro, Guerrero and Jones, 2005; Vila, 2006; García, 2007; Essomba, 2008; Soriano and Osorio, 2008; Felgueroso, Vázquez, and Zinovyeva, 2009; Navarro, Troncoso, Gómez and Gómez, 2009; Esteban, Nadal, and Vila, in press, among others).

However, in the Spanish literature there are very few studies (i.e. Aguado et al., 2006) that have been investigated thoroughly the spontaneous conceptions of adolescents about immigration and the problems it represents. The study described in this paper has been aimed precisely to examine the views of young people about immigration and its social

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implications. We were particularly interested in comparing the views of Spanish and foreign teenagers living in Madrid area. Our prediction was that they would have different perceptions in some respects, particularly with regard to their awareness of immigration as a problem in Spain. Therefore, we conducted in-depth interviews to present their arguments and make a note of such differences.

As we have mentioned, the social composition of our country has undergone a substantial change with the arrival of the foreign population in the last fifteen years. For reasons of space, we will not dedicate time to describe this phenomenon and we will focus on the results and conclusions.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Participants<sup>2</sup>

Participants in the study were 61 secondary students attending public schools in the area of Madrid. Thirty three were Spanish, aged between 13 and 17;3 years, and 28 foreigners from different countries (See Table 1), aged between 12 and 17;8 years. The mean (and SD) age in months for each group was 181.52 (15.3) and 181.32 (19.95) months, respectively. All participants were informed that the interview was confidential, voluntary and anonymous. Both students and parents signed an informed consent.

**Table 1. Origin of foreign students**

Ecuador	5
Romania	4
Morocco	4
Colombia	4
Peru	2
Bolivia	2
Venezuela	2
China	1
Bulgaria	1
Ukraine	1
Equatorial Guinea	1

### 2.2 Procedure and analysis

A semi-structured interview designed for this study was individually administrated to the participants. The issues explored were related to the concept of migration and its causes, the Spanish emigration to other countries, the concept of immigration and other issues related to the current situation in Spain. For space-related matters, in this paper we present the results of the second part of the interview, giving special attention to the following questions:

- When we talk about immigrants, what's the first thing that comes to your mind?
- In Spain, how many people are immigrants? Can you say a percentage?
- And in Madrid?

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<sup>2</sup> The data in this research were collected between the months of February and March 2008.

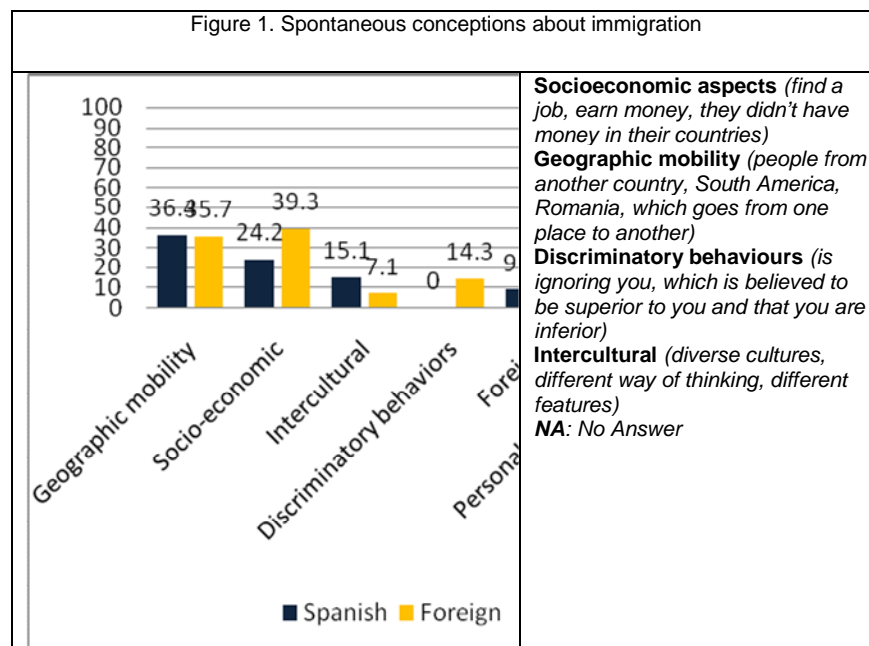
- Some people think that immigration is a problem in Spain. What do you think? Why?

The interviews were analyzed and discussed by three members of the research team in order to develop categories of analysis. Data are presented as percentages of participants in each category. The percentages refer to the number of responses assigned to each category so the sum is not necessarily 100%. As initial analyses between students of 2nd and 4th grades were no found differences the participants of both courses have been grouped. Participants were informed that the interviews were confidential, voluntary and anonymous. In order to include them in our study, parental permission forms were signed. The in deep interviews were recruited in February-March 2008.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Spontaneous conceptions about immigration

In order to obtain a spontaneous response, adolescents were asked to respond the first thing that comes to their mind upon hearing the word immigrant. Results appear in Figure 1.



As shown in Figure 1, the same proportion of Spaniards and foreigners perceive that immigration is "geographically mobility", (*outsiders, who come from another country, South America, Romania, which goes from one place to another ...*). However, we found some differences in the views between foreigners and Spaniards. For example, foreigners pay a little more attention to "socioeconomic aspects" (*look for work, make money, they did not have enough for living in their country ...*) and "discriminatory

behaviours" (*which is ignoring you, which is believed that is superior to you and that you are inferior ...*), while Spanish adolescents refers further to what we call "intercultural" issues (*different cultures, different features and different thinking ...*).

### 3.2 Perception of the immigrant population in Spain and Madrid

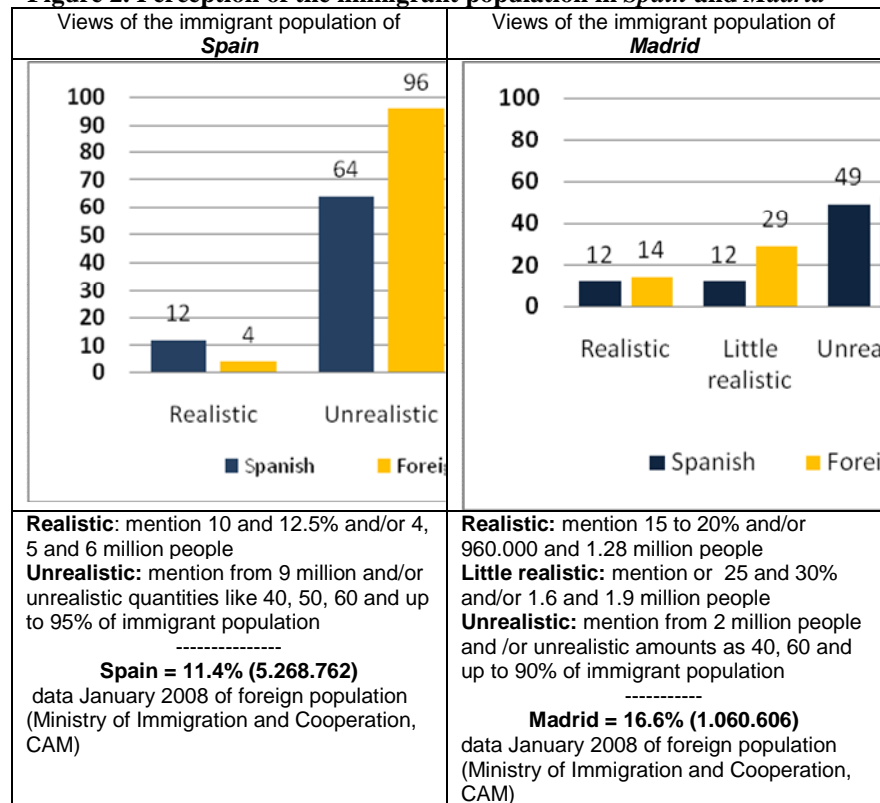
With regard to the question of how many immigrants live in Spain and in Madrid, we were interested in knowing adolescents' representation of immigration in Spain, and in their place of residence. Table 2 shows the Governmental data of the foreign population on January the 1<sup>st</sup> of 2008 (data were recruited in February/March, 2008). We want to remark that Spain, as other members of the European Union, has experienced a 'dramatically' increase on the migratory tendencies since the early nineties (1991, 0.91%; 2010, 12.2% respect Spanish population), being, at this time (2010), the country with the highest percentage of immigrants in the European Union.

**Table 2. Foreign population in Spain and Madrid on January 1, 2008**

	People	%		People	%
<b>Spain</b>	5.268.762 (46.157.822)	11.4	<b>Madrid</b>	1.060.606 (6.380.238)	16.6
Romania	731.806	13.9	Romania	195.676	18.4
Morocco	652.695	12.4	Ecuador	145.352	13.7
Ecuador	427.718	8.1	Morocco	85.626	8
United Kingdom	352.957	6.7	Colombia	72.940	6.8
Colombia	284.581	5,4	Bolivia	60.797	5,7
Source: INJUVE, 2008			Source: Consejería de Inmigración y Cooperación CAM, 2008		

As we can see below in Figure 2, the general perception of adolescents on the number of immigrants living in Spain and in Madrid tend to be highly unrealistic and, in the case of the foreigners, this perception tends to be even more unrealistic. It is noteworthy that only 12% of the Spanish students have a realistic view, although 24% of them have not been asked this question. Regarding adolescent's views of the immigrant population of Madrid, it can be said that their perception is closest to the reality than in the case of Spain: about half of them, both Spaniards and foreigners, have an unrealistic perception, and the remainder have a realistic or little realistic vision.

After the graphics are some examples to illustrate their ideas.

**Figure 2. Perception of the immigrant population in Spain and Madrid**

R.C. (14;15 Spain) - Can you tell me a percentage? For example, for every 100 people how many immigrants do you think there are in Spain? *For example, of one hundred people, how many I think (...) uff, 95% - Immigrants? Yes. - And in Madrid, you think there are more or less? More - More than the 95%? In Madrid? Yes. I do not know, 80% or thereabouts - So a little less than in the rest of Spain, in proportion. Yes. - And why do you think there is less in Madrid than in the rest of Spain? It is... not, is.. there are many, few, is that just cannot tell you much you know? 90% or 80% - And what do you think are the main countries? Ecuador, Colombia, and Morocco, because there Moroccan men but not so many (...) - Those are the main countries from which they come? Ecuador, Colombia and Morocco. - And...Bolivia, Venezuela more.*

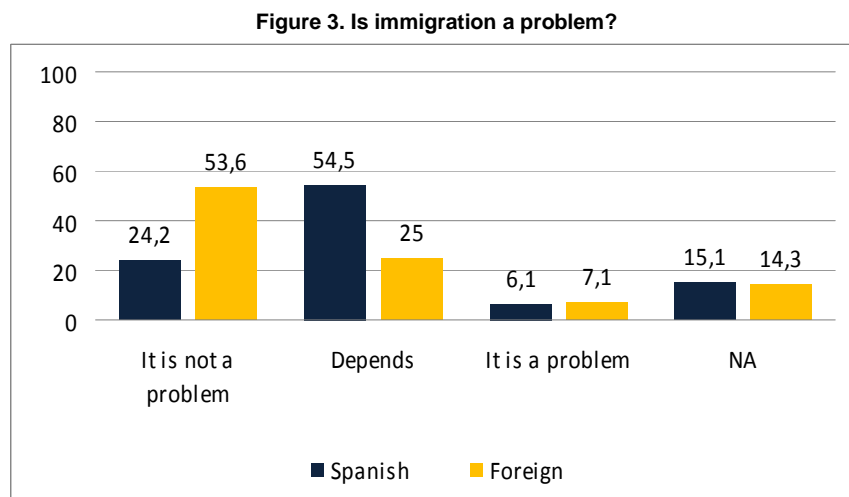
J. (17;8 Equatorial Guinea) - And in general, how many immigrants do you think there are in Spain? On a percentage (*laughs*) I do not know, percentage? ... 80%? - Of immigrants? (*Laughs*) Yes - And in Madrid? I think less, there is less. - Less in Madrid than in Spain or more in Spain than in Madrid. *More in Madrid than in Spain.* - And in a percentage? 90 - And from which other countries people come to Spain, the main countries, what do you think? *mm ... the Moroccans, and from Africa many, - And from other continents? I think that Portugal, no, Portugal is almost Spain, I do not remember now - From America, for example, the Latin*

Americans. *From Colombia, from Cuba, maybe I do not know, I do not like the news.*

It should also be noted that adolescents tend to mention some of the countries that coincide with those contained in official statistics. In the case of Spanish adolescents, there is a tendency to refer to Africans and their arrival to Spain by boats in very poor conditions called “pateras”.

### 3.3. Is immigration a problem?

When the study was conducted, there was a vivid public debate<sup>3</sup> about whether "immigration" was a social problem or not. Given this fact, we consider important to question adolescents about this matter that was on the street, media, family, etc.



Note: Percentages have been elaborated according to the number of participants who answered in each section, "no", "depends" and "yes"

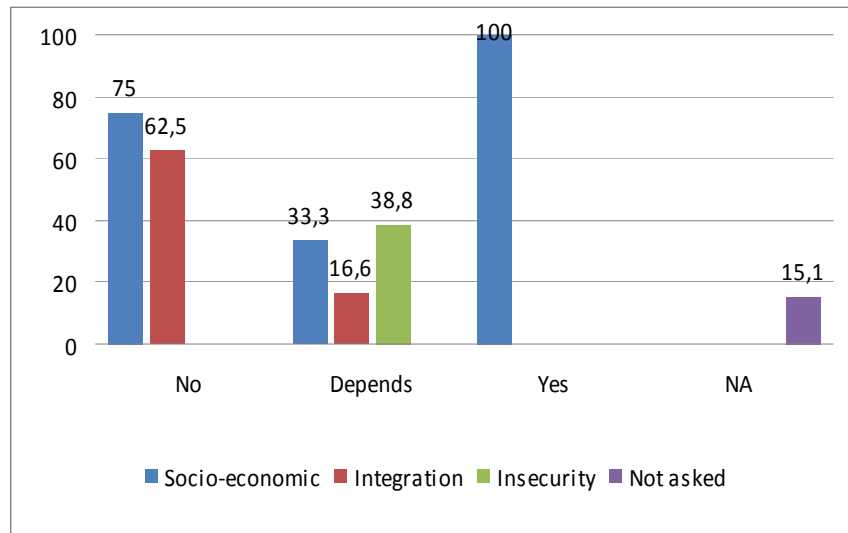
Figure 3 shows some interesting differences when comparing the sample of Spanish adolescents and foreigners. While half of the foreigners believed that immigration is not a problem and 25% said that "it depends" (which often includes positive and negative), half of Spanish adolescents show a more relativistic view and 25% believe that immigration is not a problem. It is remarkable that only one participant from each sample considers that immigration is a problem.

An interesting issue is the different arguments mentioned by adolescents in their responses. As we can see in Figure 4, the arguments which are referred to “socioeconomic aspects” are mentioned quite frequently. In a negative sense, they often said that immigrants have caused *a decrease in the living standards of the Spanish, or that foreigners have taken away resources of the country*. And in a positive sense, they

<sup>3</sup> Spain was in national election campaign and the right party state in the public debate the immigration as a problem.

mentioned that *immigrants help to improve the economy, increase the birth rate, and take those jobs that the Spanish people do not want ...* Moreover, some of them talk about the positive aspects such as *immigration promotes the "integration" as it allows to know diverse cultures, customs, ways of thinking, and so on.*

**Figure 4. Arguments used by adolescents when they refer to whether immigration is a problem or not.**



Note: Percentages have been elaborated according to the number of participants who answered in each section, "no", "depends" and "yes".

Below are excerpts of the interviews to illustrate the responses of adolescents.

*No*

*Socio-economic issues*

(ACP 13;7. Ecuador) - Some people think that immigration is a problem in Spain. What do you think? - *I ... do not think it's a problem... (Moving hands) ... because if they come to work is also good for the country ... and the economy is better.*

*Depends*

*Integration*

(IP 16;3 Spain) - What do you think about what some people say that immigration is a problem for Spain? *Well, I do not know (first he talks about the negative issues related to immigration ...)* - Why it is good for you? *To me is positive because, well, I can meet people from other countries, new cultures, new languages, new things and (...) I have always been interested in discovering something new, especially from other countries.*



*Insecurity*

(JMB 13;6 Spain) - Some people think that immigration is a problem for Spain. What do you think? *Well, I think that while immigration is not uncontrolled and immigrants do not commit crimes.* - What do you mean that uncontrolled immigration is not? *Well, I mean that they do not come here in gangs, because otherwise we can not help everyone to be here either.*

*Yes*

*Socio-economic issues*

(CSD 13;7 Spain) - Some people think that immigration is a problem for Spain. What do you think? (...) *A little, yes. They are doing, are taking away the work, because they work for minimum wage, taking work opportunities for Spanish.*

(RC 14;5 Spain) - And in nurseries too? *To put them in another place apart from the Spanish or to go away. Look, I do not care if they go away or put them in another school or if someone has to make a school for them* -But do you mean that immigrants do not have to mix with the Spanish in the same schools? *Sure, because it is what I say, they adapt to them, you know? And maybe we come with a higher level than them, because there the teaching is not the same as here, and (...) and that's what they should do, or to make some separate classes for immigration.*

(KCI 13;11 Ecuador) - Some people think that immigration is a problem in Spain. What do you think? *I think so ... because many immigrants come to Spain and... I do not know ... they have very little ....not have enough to give to those who are unemployed, and is not sufficient for everyone.*

**Conclusions**

Regarding *spontaneous views about immigration* our data revealed that both Spanish and foreigners' adolescents refer to "geographical mobility" as a main cause of immigration. Attending to the differences among them, foreigners tend to refer more to "socioeconomic factors" than Spanish ones. This result is not surprising as it reflects their own experiences as evidenced by the examples given in our study and that of Aguado et al. (2006). It is worth mentioning that only foreigners mentioned "discriminatory behaviours". This kind of arguments was found also in the study of Aguado et al. (2006).

With respect the *perception of the immigrant population on Spain*, the vast majority of adolescents of the total sample had a "non realistic" view about the immigrant residents in the country. This result is an unexpected one, and our interpretation is that in recent years the media treat the arrival of immigrants to Spain as if it were "mass arrival of people" and that is why the adolescents have the perception of a 'lot of people'. In the case of *perception of the immigrant population on Madrid*, more than a half of the total sample had a "non realistic" view. These data are consistent with the findings in the opinion poll conducted by the INJUVE (2008), in which the Spanish youth group aged 15 to 19 years, 67.7% considered "excessive" the number of immigrants living in Spain. Moreover, in this same survey, 65.2% young people of the same age believe that there are many immigrants in their neighbourhood, town or city.

In the section *Immigration as a problem*, results revealed that half (54%) of the foreigners adolescents perceived that immigration 'it is not a problem', while 24% of

Spanish do. This result is understandable because they are themselves actors of the migration process and have economic benefits. On their part, 50% of Spanish adolescents argued a relativistic point of view. That is, their views included both the positive and negative impact of the process. As we have seen in the examples, they mention both the economic benefits and the insecurity produced by the migration phenomenon.

Somehow, these data can be compared with those obtained in the survey conducted by INJUVE (2008), which shows that 3.7% of young people between 15-19 years-old think that immigration "has only disadvantages" while 37.3% and 43.7% of them think that "has more disadvantages than advantages" and that "has more advantages than disadvantages", respectively.

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