

Contemporary challenges in education: xenophobia and its impacts on immigrant professors in Brazilian higher education.

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Abstract: There is a broad spectrum of movements and displacements of people in various spaces of the world caused by numerous factors and reasons. This movement fosters interaction between diverse people and cultures, which can have either positive or negative impacts. One of these impacts is the theme of this study: xenophobia in the Brazilian educational environment. Xenophobia in the educational environment is a relevant challenge for the internationalization of education and the integration of immigrant professors and students. The research aims to analyze the perception of foreign professors concerning xenophobic manifestations in Brazilian federal higher education, identifying the primary forms of occurrence, verifying what impacts are implied on the well-being of these people, and analyzing, from the perspective of the immigrant professor, whether the institutions have policies/programs capable of fostering respect and cultural diversity. The methodology consists of a survey as a technical procedure for data collection. The research is based on the perception of 205 non-Brazilian professors of the federal higher education network. The data was processed through content analysis. The results of this study indicate that xenophobia against foreign professors occurs in Brazilian federal higher education, developing in different ways, directly affecting the well-being and professional performance of those surveyed. Additionally, most participants believe that university administrations do not act adequately to inhibit the occurrence of xenophobic acts.

Keywords: xenophobia; foreign professors; higher education; internationalization of education; professor immigration.

1 Introduction

People migration encompasses a broad spectrum of movements and displacements across different geographical spaces. Such mobility is defined as the act of moving from one region to another to establish oneself, either within the same country or across international borders (Damarafi; Suwadono, 2022). This phenomenon can be encouraged for several reasons, such as political conflicts, military conflicts, economic situations, climate change, or the pursuit of a better life, marking it as a complex issue in several countries worldwide (Kaleshi; Gripshi; Zhebo, 2022).

The complexity of migration is widely recognized, as it involves issues that often exceed the management capacity of countries and require a broad understanding of its causes and the consequences of its increase (Koumoutsakos, 2020). This massive global movement, motivated by diverse reasons, can generate adverse reactions in local populations, such as xenophobia, driven by religious, ethnic, and cultural differences, as well as economic competition (Barberis; Costa; Castiglione, 2023). Brazil presents different forms of xenophobic manifestations, influenced by historical, social, and political factors.

The increase in anti-immigrant hatred manifestations, especially in municipalities bordering other countries, has converted xenophobia into official discourse, which promotes intolerance against minorities and vulnerable groups (Guizardi; Mardones 2020). Because they cover different contexts, acts of xenophobia also reach the educational space at its various levels, including higher education. In this context, the exclusion of the individual becomes one of the primary forms in these environments, which ultimately entails difficulty in integration and affects the emotional and mental health of these immigrants (Santos; Diana, 2018).

The study of xenophobia against professors in higher education is relevant because these institutions are fragments of society and reflect broader social issues, including xenophobia, which can significantly impact social cohesion and inclusion (Mgogo; Osunkunle, 2023). In addition, this phenomenon contributes to a cycle of school violence, emphasizing the urgent need to raise awareness of its distressing effects on those who suffer from it in educational environments (Dube; Setlalentoa, 2024).

Most of the research¹ on xenophobia in the educational field in Brazil, regardless of the level, is directed to the student (Kohatsu; Saito, 2022; Moraes; Campos; Cotrin, 2023; Fischmann, 2020). International literature also presents studies in this sense (Metin *et al.*, 2023; Mgogo; Osunkunle, 2023; Ngobeni, 2022), with a lack of research aimed at professors. This research focuses on this gap and seeks to add to the literature concerning the topic.

¹ The papers mentioned here, conducted between March 2024 and January 2025, were surveyed from the SciELO, Periódicos CAPES, *Google Scholar*, Oasisbr, and *Web of Science* databases. The searches were made using Boolean operators and quotes in the terms of interest.

Thus, considering the abolition of borders and internationalization in education, this paper seeks to analyze the perception of foreign professors regarding xenophobic manifestations in Brazilian federal higher education, identifying the primary forms of occurrence and impacts implied on the well-being of this group of people. It also seeks to analyze, from the perspective of the foreign professor, whether the respective institutions have policies or programs that can foster respect and cultural diversity in their environments. Therefore, it aims to contribute to filling this gap and verify how these attitudes can influence the various aspects of the professors' lives.

2 Xenophobia, its manifestations in the educational sphere, and the internationalization of Education

Xenophobia is characterized by excessive fear or negative attitudes towards strangers or foreigners (Peterie; Neil, 2020). It has occurred in different forms throughout history, influenced by various reasons, such as social, political, and economic factors. Historical analyses suggest that xenophobia is not a modern phenomenon, but rather a systematic part of the historical development of societies (Baker, 2022). In ancient Greece, foreigners were seen as a threat to established politics and a risk to social order. In ancient Rome, it was fueled by a belief that foreigners would be culturally inferior (Alves, 2020).

The modern institutionalization of xenophobia begins with the nation-state, which discriminates based on place of birth. The foreigner is, in this case, banned by law, exploited, and structurally subjected to the principles of exception (Rigouste, 2018). Allied to this, the advance of nationalist political forces reinforces this discrimination, attacking freedoms and proposing the restriction of minority rights, with hate speech and demagogic manipulation. These groups portray the immigrant as a threat to the cultural identity and jobs of the local population (Castro, 2023).

This type of nationalism is repeated on different continents, as the study by Culpi, Mècher, and Pereira shows (2021) for South America. The authors analyzed the promotion of xenophobic practices by the governments of Argentina, as of 2015, and Brazil, more explicitly, as of 2019. The study by Costa and Vieira (2019), who address nationalism and xenophobia in the European Union, concluded that dehumanizing discourses concerning the inhabitants of the global south, from the time

of the creation of the colonial nation-states, continue to give rise to xenophobic discrimination even in contemporary times.

Xenophobic acts arise from the fear of the one who is strange, supposedly unknown, and who, in the imagination, represents a potential threat, provoking irrational reactions of aversion, intolerance, and hatred (Kohatsu; Saito, 2022). However, xenophobia is more intense towards certain groups of immigrants or may be associated with specific situations, such as periods of global and/or economic instability (Chen; Trinh; Yang, 2020).

This was clear during times of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which escalated xenophobia and discrimination by race, in particular against Asian people, evidencing a historical connection between disease and xenophobia. To this example, which addresses a specific situation of global/economic instability, Cheng (2020) and Rzymiski and Nowicki (2020) reported that xenophobic episodes, not only against people of Chinese descent, but also people of Asian origin, occurred as a result of and with a strong influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, due to its rapid spread, its global relevance, and for having initially emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan.

These studies are corroborated by the results of a survey conducted in April 2020, which included the participation of more than 1000 American adults, which helps to understand this "blame" attributed to the Chinese. The results showed that 44% of the respondents mentioned the Chinese or Chinese companies as responsible for the coronavirus pandemic (IPSOS, 2020). The same research showed that a third (32%) of respondents witnessed someone blaming people for the coronavirus pandemic simply for being Asian (IPSOS, 2020).

Another example, this time linked to the economic-financial issue, is the instability observed in Venezuela, a country facing an economic and humanitarian crisis that has forced thousands of Venezuelans to migrate to other countries, among which is Brazil. This relevant flow influenced the growth of discourse toward xenophobic rhetoric among the authorities of Roraima, including the Civil Action 3121, in which the government of Roraima requested that the Federal Supreme Court determine that the Union close Brazil's borders with Venezuela (Milesi; Coury; Rovey, 2018).

The African continent also faces a migration process that is relevant in the current global context. Migrants from that continent make their journeys using various

means, such as barges, boats in poor condition, and even infiltrated ships subject to unsanitary conditions. The images distributed by the multiple media show these desperate migrants and refugees trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, with an explicit increase since 2014 (Williams, 2019).

Several factors culminate in the decision to migrate from the country of origin to another country, or even a new continent. For Patrício and Peixoto (2018), the determinants of the African migration process are related to political destabilization, armed conflicts, ethnic and religious persecution, and social and economic precariousness.

Many of these migrants and refugees from different continents are children and young people who accompany their families in search of refuge and better living conditions. In this context, the educational environment can, in some cases, provide conditions for xenophobic attitudes by the locals. According to Kohatsu and Saito (2022), some of these migrants who become students in a new country, even if they have not suffered explicit and open discrimination, may live with the veiled prejudice existing in educational environments.

It is worth noting that Brazil has stood out in Latin America in terms of its reception of immigrants, especially after the enactment of Law No. 9,474/1997, which introduced expanded definitions of refugee status, including situations involving human rights violations (Brasil, 1997). This law established the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), which is responsible for processing refugee applications and coordinating integration policies for these individuals (Moreira, 2020). The Brazilian Migration Law (Law No. 13,445/2017) also aims to improve the reception of foreigners, as it expands rights and guarantees equal treatment between nationals and foreigners (Brasil, 2017).

Despite the country's efforts, xenophobia in the teaching environment remains a relevant challenge, affecting the well-being and integration of international students and professors, especially those stereotyped by the media, which contributes to this perception and discriminatory attitudes towards these people (Mgogo; Osunkunle, 2023). The control of these manifestations is hindered by the global advance of xenophobic discourses and policies, highlighting the need for educators to promote inclusion, justice, and equity (Metin *et al.*, 2023).

In Brazilian society, xenophobia manifests itself in various contexts, including in the educational environment. The study by Kohatsu and Saito (2022) examined the experiences of Bolivian and Brazilian students, including children of Bolivian immigrants, in elementary and high school public schools in São Paulo. It revealed aggressions linked to nationality and physical traits throughout the students' school trajectory. Although immigrant families value education, they still face barriers such as documentary difficulties for enrollment, a lack of professor preparation for addressing immigrant students, racism, and xenophobia in the school environment, especially against black children and adolescents, which must still be treated and overcome (Ghiggi; Scalabrin, 2022).

The educational environment, including universities, which should generally be inclusive and welcoming to foreigners, does not escape the rule of discrimination based on nationality. Xenophobia in the context of higher education also creates a fog of intolerance that negatively affects the experience of foreigners in the academic community (Fischmann, 2020). In addition, it can cause disorders such as anxiety, depression, and other emotional problems, which compromise mental health and quality of life during their experience in academia (Mancebo, 2023).

Xenophobia in higher education is a multi-faceted issue that manifests itself in various global contexts, significantly affecting students, professors, the academic environment itself, and broader social perceptions (Mgogo; Osunkunle, 2023). The study conducted by Haft and Zhou (2021) with Chinese-American students in higher education in the United States on the relationship of xenophobia during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that students perceived an increase in discrimination from the beginning of the pandemic period, in addition to the increase in anxiety symptoms. In South Africa, the majority of international students at the University of Johannesburg have perceived or already experienced xenophobia, including linguistic discrimination and social and academic exclusion (Ngoben, 2022).

However, the educational environment can also be very receptive and play a fundamental role in providing a dignified welcome to foreigners. According to Moraes, Campos, and Cotrin (2023), despite many difficulties of immigrant adaptation, educational institutions can be very welcoming. The authors found that both Brazilian professors and students, and, fundamentally, colleagues of the same nationality, have an essential role in receiving and promoting situations for the integration of these

students in school. Integration with other students and professors allows immigrants to transmit and receive knowledge, serving as a foundation to provide their mutual development (Aita; Tuleski, 2017).

Social interactions within educational institutions can influence negative attitudes towards immigrants. However, more than the quantity, the quality of these social interactions may indicate the presence of xenophobic attitudes among members of the educational community. Therefore, this social behavior becomes relevant for the promotion of understanding and empathy with people of different origins (Bozdag, 2020). Bozdag (2020) reports that the quality of social contact explained 43% of the xenophobic attitudes of members of the university community, concluding that the positive form of this social contact is highly effective in reducing xenophobia towards immigrants.

All levels of educational institutions must act to combat xenophobia, promoting a culture of respect, valuing diversity, and training conscious and tolerant citizens (Oliveira; Horochovski, 2021). These policies should seek to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for foreigners, offering emotional, social, and linguistic support (Fischmann, 2020). It is essential to involve the academic community, stimulating dialogue and reflection on cultural diversity. Only thus will it be possible to build a truly inclusive and international environment (Milesi; Coury; Roverly, 2018).

The promotion of the culture of respect and the valorization of diversity in educational institutions, raised by Oliveira and Horochovski (2021) and the involvement of the entire academic community suggested by Milesi, Coury, and Roverly (2018), are primordial and relevant factors for the development of university internationalization. For Hatsek, Woicolesco, and Rosso (2023), we have been experiencing (since the last decades) a conjuncture marked by transformations in the field of education, which can influence supranational policies that comprise the set of directions, indications, and recommendations issued by international education organizations (Hatsek; Woicolesco; Rosso, 2023).

The internationalization of higher education is a transformative trend influenced by several factors, among which are the social, cultural, economic, and political, emphasizing human values and other perspectives to enhance education globally (Tran *et al.*, 2023). According to Wit (2020), the internationalization of third-degree education encompasses the integration of global dimensions in post-secondary

education, aiming to improve the quality of education and research, as well as social contributions, moving in the direction of a more ethical and qualitative approach.

Internationalization is a two-dimensional integration process: the international dimension and the intercultural dimension. It is a means for broader and denser conceptions related to good living, sustainable development, and the achievement of global citizenship (Morosini, 2019). In contrast, Santos Filho (2020) believes the internationalization process cannot be understood as a set of independent forces, as it comprises three dimensions: the international, the intercultural, and the global, that is, it is a triangular relationship between nations, cultures, or countries.

This internationalization has become strategic in higher education, reflecting the advancement of globalization on the world stage (Wit, 2019). In this context, knowledge is a crucial element for the sustainable development of countries. Institutions have invested in overcoming national borders, thereby strengthening cooperation and production between their countries and markets (Morosini; Corte, 2018).

3 Methodological Path

This section presents the methodological approach adopted in this study, emphasizing the characterization of the research and the techniques used for data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the research participants are highlighted, providing a broad perspective of the methodological path used.

Concerning the objectives, this research is descriptive in nature, as it seeks to portray the perception of foreign professors regarding xenophobic manifestations in higher education. Descriptive studies aim to identify the properties, characteristics, and relevant traits of a phenomenon, describing trends of groups or populations, focusing on the collection and measurement of information in isolation or combination (Sampieri; Collado; Lucio, 2013).

The approach to the problem is classified as mixed in nature, as it has an investigative perspective that combines the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, integrating both types of data and employing different designs that reflect philosophical assumptions and theoretical structures. The fundamental premise of this approach is that combining qualitative and quantitative data provides a more

comprehensive understanding than that obtained from either qualitative or quantitative data in isolation (Creswell; Creswell, 2021).

This research employed the survey as a technical procedure, given that it enables the collection of data on the characteristics, actions, or opinions of a group of people through questionnaires with measurement scales. This method allows the researcher to interpret, discuss, and statistically correlate the data, offering a collective view of the group's behavior and thus bringing together aspects of the quantitative and qualitative approaches (Michel, 2015).

Concerning the data collection period, the research is considered cross-sectional, as the data were collected at a certain point in time, based on a random sample, thus reaching a ready-made image capable of informing the social situation at the time the data were collected (Richardson, 2017). As for the design, the present research can be classified as non-experimental since it observes the phenomena as they occurred within the natural context for further analysis (Sampieri; Collado; Lucio, 2013).

The research participants were non-Brazilian professors who have ties with Brazilian federal higher education institutions with at least 01 (one) year of teaching at these universities. The primary data were collected through a mixed questionnaire with open-ended and multiple-choice questions, using the Likert scale, in the form of an assessment scale, and *Google Forms*. According to Symon (2012), this type of questionnaire allows for more comprehensive and detailed data collection by combining open-ended and multiple-choice questions, allowing for a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the information.

The questionnaire was submitted and duly approved by the ethics and research committee, according to CAEE Opinion No. 78203224.5.0000.5294. It was then sent via institutional email to the professors, who could access it through the platform or *Google Forms*, only after obtaining consent. The email addresses of the professors were requested directly from 69 Brazilian federal universities through the website *Fala.br*, an integrated platform of the Ombudsman and access to information of the federal executive branch. Some educational institutions, justifying themselves in the data protection law, did not provide the emails of the professors but indicated the email address where the questionnaire should be sent for later sharing with the public of

interest in this study. Thus, all 69 universities and their professors were invited to contribute to this research.

The interview script of the questionnaire had 33 questions, 23 of them objective and another 10 descriptive. The script was structured in six thematic blocks and presented the response of 205 professors. Block 1 covered the sociodemographic and professional profile of the respondents (questions 1 to 6). Block 2 addressed the experiences of xenophobia in Brazil (questions 7 to 11). Block 3 investigated the personal and professional impacts of xenophobia (questions 12 to 16), while Block 4 explored possible causes and participants' perceptions of this phenomenon (questions 17 to 21). Block 5 addressed the individual perceptions of the participants regarding institutional and academic community behaviors concerning xenophobia (questions 22 to 27).

Block 6 gathered information on institutional policies and prevention measures concerning xenophobia in the academic environment (questions 28 to 32). Finally, question 33 sought to capture the participants' individual perspectives on the level of xenophobia since their arrival in the country and identify possible changes in this perception, as well as the factors to which they attribute such changes.

The qualitative data was processed using content analysis, which is a “[...] set of communication analysis techniques aimed at obtaining, through systematic and objective procedures for describing the content of messages, indicators that allow the inference of knowledge related to the conditions of production/reception of these messages” (Bardin, 2011, p. 47, our translation). The different stages of content analysis, such as experimentation or sociological inquiry, are organized in three chronological poles: pre-analysis, exploration of the material, and data treatment, inference, and interpretation (Bardin, 2016).

Thus, the content analysis of this work will be conducted in the three poles suggested by Bardin: 1. Pre-analysis, which is the organization phase, in which the choice of documents to be submitted for analysis and the formulation of hypotheses and objectives takes place. After data collection, a floating reading is performed, in which the researcher establishes contact with the documents to be analyzed and has knowledge of the text. The corpus of the text is constructed based on the rules of exhaustiveness, representativeness, homogeneity, and relevance; 2. The exploration of the material, which essentially involves coding and the use of the Atlas TI software

to aid in the qualitative analysis of text data, enables the identification of unstructured data and the systematization of data collected in questionnaires; 3. Process the data obtained and interpret it, considering the results found in the research, and then propose inferences and interpretations regarding the objectives.

Regarding the quantitative analysis, we opted for the use of basic statistics to analyze the data collected. According to Rodrigues, Lima, and Barbosa (2017), the proper use of basic statistics reduces errors in the interpretations and conclusions of studies. The choice of simple methods aims to offer a clear view of the observed phenomenon, with easy-to-understand analyses, even for those who do not have advanced statistical training, without compromising the accuracy of the results.

Additionally, basic statistics facilitates the replication of studies – a crucial aspect for the advancement of this theme. The statistical procedures applied, such as means, modes, and simple correlations, aim to identify general trends and respond directly to the objectives of the research. Far from compromising scientific rigor, its use broadens the applicability and relevance of research results, generating clear answers to the problems established here.

4 Result Analysis

In this section, we discuss the results found with foreign professors, with at least one year of work, who work in Brazilian federal public universities. Therefore, the answers obtained through the questionnaire are based on the experience and individual perceptions of each one of them.

The information in Table 1 provides relevant data for the research, including the profile of the participants and the distribution and perception of xenophobic attitudes across Brazilian regions. The discourses reveal the recurrence of similar acts of xenophobia against different foreign professors, as well as the perception of these professors regarding factors that influence the increase or reduction of such actions.

According to the information provided by the federal universities, via consultation with the Fala.br website, Brazil has about 2,800 foreign professors linked to the various Brazilian federal higher education institutions. This research presented the participation of 205 professors, which represents approximately 7.32% of the total study target population. The professors who declared themselves to be male added up to 130 people (63.41%), while 72 (35.12%) defined themselves as female, and 03

participants chose not to declare their gender, representing 1.47% of the total respondents.

Table 1 - Distribution by gender and respondents by region.

Brazilian Region	Indicated Gender			Total Participants per Region	Approximate Average Teaching Time (years)	Number of Participants Who Experienced Xenophobia				% Participants who experienced xenophobia
	Male	Female	Not Specified			Male	Female	Not Specified	Total	
NORTH	13	5		18	12,16	4	2		6	33,00%
NORTHEAST	36	13	1	50	14,23	17	9	1	27	54,00%
MIDWEST	19	21		40	13,38	4	6		10	25,00%
SOUTHEAST	38	20	1	59	12,57	18	10	1	29	49,15%
SOUTH	24	13	1	38	13,64	9	5	1	15	39,47%
TOTAL	130	72	3	205	13,1	52	32	3	87	

Source: The authors (2025).

The southeast region, as shown in Table 1, accommodates the largest share of professor participation in this research, followed by the northeast region. The north region has the lowest number of participating professors, and the south and midwest regions are in the intermediate position, with a very close number of professors between them. Concerning the continents, America contributed the largest number of survey respondents, with 56.58%; the European continent presented 36.58%; and Africa and Asia had 2% each, approximately. There were no respondents from Oceania, and the number of people who did not report their nationality stood at around 2%. Table 2 helps us to visualize these numbers more clearly.

Table 2 - Geographical profile of participants by continent.

Continent of origin	Number of different nationalities	Total participants per Continent	Country with most participants	Total Percentage in the study
America	14	116	Colombia (27)	56,58%
Europe	14	75	Portugal (20)	36,58%
Asia	1	5	Japan (5)	2,44%
Africa	2	4	Senegal (3)	1,96%
Not disclosed		5		2,44%

Source: The authors (2025).

About 42.43% (87) of the professors who responded to the questionnaire stated that they had already experienced situations in which they felt targeted by xenophobia by other employees (technicians or professors) or students of the educational institution to which they were connected. Symbolic xenophobia, including perceptions,

attitudes, and related behaviors, is experienced by foreigners in higher education institutions (Mgogo; Osunkunle, 2023).

Of this extract, 32 were women, representing 36.78% of the total of those who claimed to have suffered some type of xenophobic situation, while men represented 59.77%, or 52 participants. Those who did not inform or did not wish to indicate their gender totalled three respondents, or 3.45% of the total. The xenophobic situations reported the most are linked to the language, occupation of a position that should be occupied by a Brazilian, moral harassment, and phenotypic issues, as observed in the responses of the participants below:

I was asked to do speech therapy to exclude my accent (Interviewee 03).
Some university technicians made aggressive comments about my accent, and it affected me (Interviewee 128).
Professional colleagues expressed themselves by saying that, by assuming the position of professor, I would be taking the position of a Brazilian, and that they thought this was wrong (Interviewee 72).
I feel xenophobia from students, employees, and colleagues... in the sense that, as a foreigner, I find myself occupying a position that should be for Brazilians (Interviewee 94).
My fellow professors (doctors) feel entitled to treat me as a slave and pack animal to do chores (Interviewee 89).
I was compared to a person from the indigenous people because of my similar characteristics, but not in a respectful way, it was ironic and unpleasant (Interviewee 08).

The responses collected indicate that these circumstances involved offensive comments, offensive jokes, and explicit discrimination, suggesting that many of the participants face xenophobia openly in their workplaces. Many reported problems with their accent, language, and the stigmatization of Portuguese pronunciation, indicating that language barriers are relevant agents in xenophobic experiences.

A cultural bias was observed in the responses, in which even stereotypical professors felt that their abilities were questioned due to their origins, demonstrating that xenophobia can also be externalized through cultural stigmas. This creates a hostile environment for these people, with reports of a sense of isolation by the academic community, which has the potential to generate a negative impact on the work environment, professional performance, and well-being of these professors.

Each participant reported how they addressed the situations of xenophobia with which they were faced based on their experience. Different units of context emerged from this reality. The most repeated were feelings of exclusion, impact on the development of professional activities, and psychological influences. The excerpts

below from the professors' responses show how the experiences reinforced the feeling of exclusion:

We feel excluded, we feel that we do not belong to a given group, and this is very bad for our lives (Interviewee 32).
It generates a feeling of exclusion for the simple fact of being born in another different country; the consequence is to avoid participating in certain activities at the University (Interviewee 165).
The feeling of not being accepted for the simple fact of having a different nationality brings me a lot of sadness and anguish (Interviewee 185).
Shaken mood, sadness, and loneliness. When we are immigrants and have no family or lifelong friends around, the feeling of loneliness intensifies (Interviewee 51).

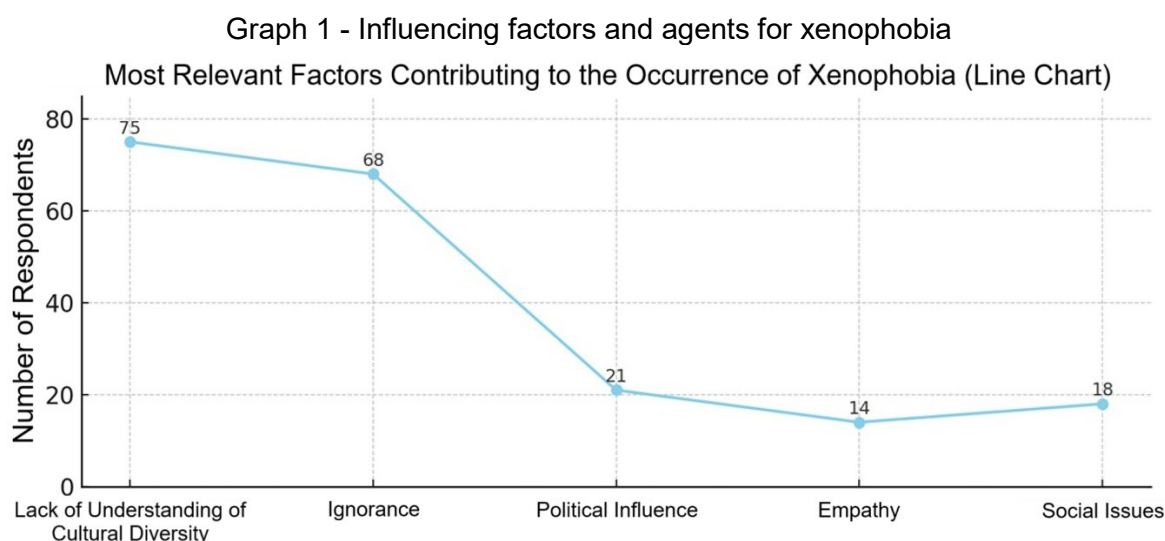
Professors also reported that acts of xenophobia directly influence the development of their work and mental health. Examples of the most reported influences include avoiding department activities, feeling a lack of academic relevance, damage to students' academic training, and a negative impact on their psychological condition. Anxiety and depression, generated from xenophobic acts, are adversities that directly affect mental health and, consequently, the well-being of the individual during their experience at the University (Mancebo, 2023). Other excerpts from the responses below present the feelings arising from xenophobic attitudes.

I was afraid to attend college meetings, I was insecure about my abilities, it is a feeling of being alone, with little solidarity from colleagues, insecurity about the probationary stage, and lack of concentration in preparing for classes (Interviewee 42).
In collegiate meetings, sometimes my opinion and experience are discarded, something I have never observed with other colleagues. All my experience was ignored in collegiate (Interviewee 09).
In many situations, I feel that my placements are not being considered and valued by some colleagues, and it is a bad feeling (Interviewee 105).
It mainly affects the development of research and the training that should be passed to students (Interviewee 142).
Low spirits, a lot of sadness, influencing the desire to participate in the department activities. It also influences the treatment with family members (Interviewee 204).

In this sense, many responses demonstrated a significant emotional impact on the participants, including feelings of sadness, discouragement, and isolation, which directly affected their confidence and generated a lack of motivation and feelings of devaluation at work. Some answers referred to the lack of support from institutions, which can exacerbate the impact of these experiences and amplify the feeling of helplessness.

When asked about the motive driving degrading actions in the higher education environment, most respondents identified a lack of diverse cultural understanding as a determining factor for xenophobic attitudes. Other factors were mentioned and included ignorance, political influences, and social issues, highlighting the complexity of contexts in which xenophobia manifests. However, there have been reports of people who have managed to cope with the situations, mentioning resilience to overcome these adversities.

Although the vast majority of respondents who reported xenophobia – about 84% – stated that these situations did not endanger their physical integrity, 13% expressed concern about their safety, which must be taken into account since all types of aggression have negative implications on the lives of victims within the educational context. In some cases, it is even necessary to seek psychological help (Kohatsu; Saito, 2022).



Source: The authors (2025).

Therefore, given the figures presented in Graph 1 concerning the influences for xenophobic practices, we highlight some reports that corroborate the feeling of the participants and help us understand their individual perceptions that end up becoming even more relevant when grouped into an indicator. It should be noted that 11 respondents, or 13% of those who said they had experienced xenophobia, reported that they feared that xenophobic actions would cross the barriers of verbal and psychological hostilities and reach physical aggression.

It may be the greater influx of foreigners and the creation of diverse cultural understandings, understanding of objectively different worldviews that impose

difficulties on the Brazilian people that are beyond their possibilities (Interviewee 22).

Xenophobia is on the rise, but with ethno-racial and social class bias (Interviewee 34).

My integration is greater because I know the local culture better, but I recognize that cultural issues can increase xenophobia (Interviewee 77).

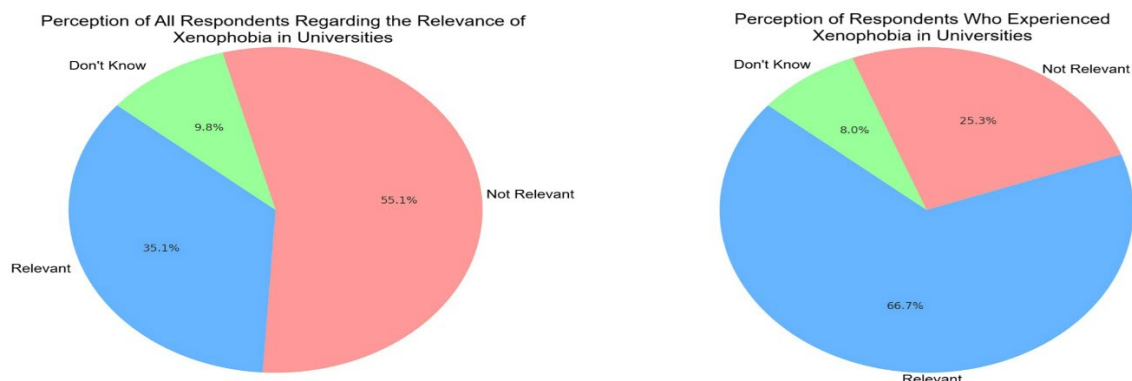
I see that xenophobia has increased, perhaps because of ignorance, social conditions, and political ideology (Interviewee 126).

Drawing a parallel between the factors that contribute to xenophobic attitudes and the subjective responses of the questionnaire, the lack of diverse cultural understanding, as perceived by these professors, can be attributed to the education and awareness of the community. Issues such as nationalist rhetoric or segregation policies, enshrined in the speeches of political leaders, stamp the responses linked to political influence. Another aspect is the social issue, seen as directly linked by competition for resources or jobs in contexts of scarcity, and is explicitly cited in the questionnaire responses.

Issues related to the treatment of cases of xenophobia that manifest themselves in academia were also addressed. Regarding the importance that this theme occupies or should occupy in universities, more than half of the professors (55%) believe that the subject is not relevant to the debate in institutions. This sample includes all professors, regardless of whether they have experienced xenophobic episodes. On the other hand, a third of the total respondents (35%) argue that the issue should be addressed with greater emphasis within the academic environment for immediate solution and prevention of future acts.

These perceptions undergo significant changes when only professors who have already experienced xenophobia in their institutions are taken into account. For this specific group of professors, the topic is relevant to 69% of respondents. On the other hand, about one-fifth, or 20%, affirm that there is no relevance to the debate in the academic field. Graph 2, presented below, helps to understand these conceptions of the total group of research participants and of the part that reported having experienced xenophobic attitudes.

Graph 2 - Perception of the relevance of xenophobia in universities



Source: The authors (2025).

The questionnaire also had a block composed of multiple-choice questions, which addressed the perception of professors concerning the behavior of institutional administration in the face of xenophobic practices. The questions were structured on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5, with the respective captions in descending order: 1 - Yes, most often; 2 - Yes, less often; 3 - Neutral; 4 - No, less often; 5 - No, less often. Table 3 reveals the perceptions about the context and the possibility of awareness-raising programs to mitigate xenophobia in federal higher education institutions in Brazil, according to participants who were victims of xenophobic acts.

Table 3 – Regarding the perception of professors on institutional action in the face of xenophobia

Absolute frequency at each scale point								
Sentence	Group	Yes, most of the time	Yes, in a few cases	Neutral	No, in a few cases	No, most of the time	Top Two Box CT [1] e C[2]	Bottom Two Box DT [5] e D [4]
Is the university administration aware of this issue?		8.23%	7.06%	20.00%	10.59%	54.12%	15.29%	64.71%
Does the administration take any action regarding these issues?		2.35%	7.05%	20.00%	8.25%	62.35%	9.40%	70.60%
Does your institution have specific policies to combat xenophobia in the academic environment?		9.42%	4.70%	22.35%	9.42%	54.11%	14.12%	63.53%
Do you believe that implementing awareness programs for the academic community on cultural diversity is useful?		80.00%	14.11%	4.71%	1.18%	0	94.11%	1.18%

Source: The authors (2025).

If we evaluate the Bottom Two Box DT, from Table 3, which represents the sum of those who responded to option "No, less often" with alternative "No, most often", we found that for more than 64.71% of those affected by xenophobia, the university administration had no knowledge about xenophobic acts within institutions, and that for 70.60%, even though the administration knew about the incidents, there is no active approach to resolving the facts. This shows us a worrying disconnect between the administration of universities and the reality to which more than 40% of immigrant professors in Brazilian federal higher education institutions participating in this study are subjected.

The continuity of the Bottom Two Box DT analysis also reveals that for 63.53% of professors, institutions have no specific policies aimed at combating xenophobia in universities. On the other hand, 94.11% of the participants affirm, as shown by the Top Two Box CT, which represent the sum of "Yes, most often" with "Yes, less often", that the implementation of these policies/programs would be beneficial to the awareness of the academic community, as respect and the right to fair treatment are independent of the place of origin.

Another question brought to the foreign professors concerned the hypothesis of leaving Brazil as a result of xenophobia experienced within the academic environment. The responses indicated that, although 87 respondents (about 42.43% of the total participants) reported experiences of xenophobia, those who considered leaving the country due to xenophobic situations represent about 15% (13 professors). In contrast, 85% (74) of the professors did not consider leaving Brazil at any time as a result of the acts committed against them.

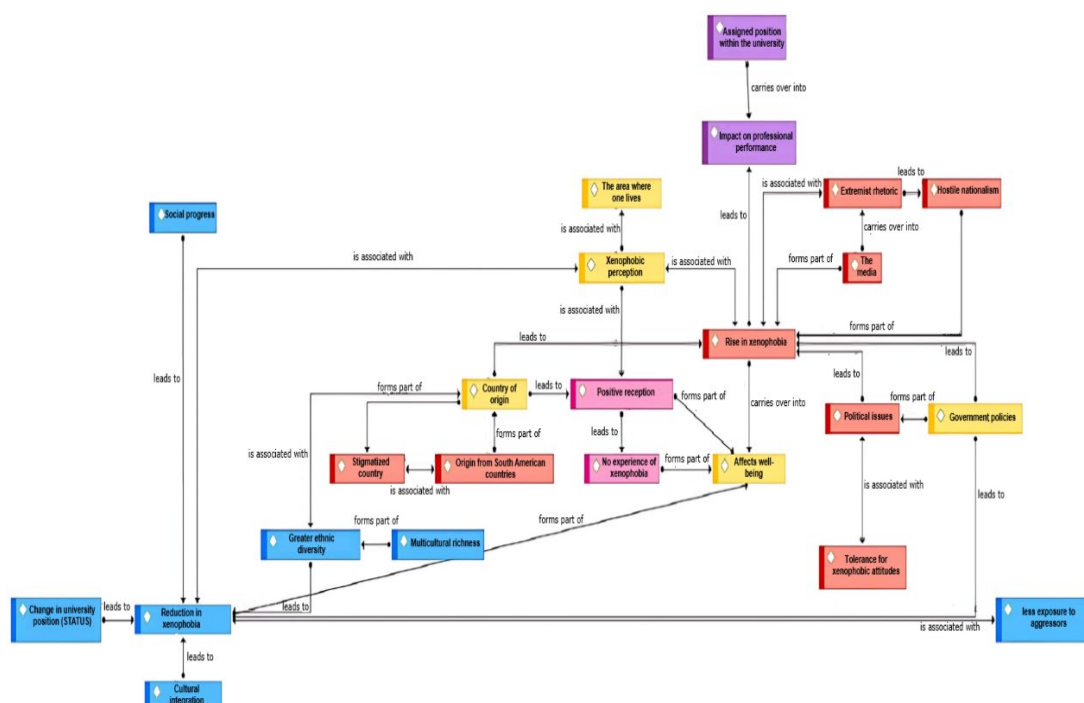
Finally, the participating professors were asked about their perception of the level of xenophobia over the time they have been in Brazil. For 23.80% of respondents, with an average of 21.7 years of residence in Brazil, the answer was yes, that they noticed a decrease in the xenophobic attitudes of Brazilians. However, 36 professors, or 17.56%, with an average of 16 years living in Brazil, stated that xenophobia has not decreased; the increase has been noticeable throughout the period since their arrival in Brazil. Most of the research target audience, 58.64% of professors, with an average of approximately 20 years of residence in the country, indicated that there was no change and that cases of xenophobia remained at the same levels, as the question

was not limited to the personal perception of xenophobic experimentation, but of the entire academic context in which they were inserted.

When considering only the group of professors who reported having experienced xenophobia, there is a perception of growth both from the perspective of reducing and increasing xenophobic behaviors. In this group, 35.7% perceived a decrease in xenophobia — a percentage higher than the 23.9% observed for all participants, that is, 205 people. On the other hand, the perception of an increase in xenophobic actions reached 35.7%, representing a growth of more than 100% compared to the percentage measured considering the total sample of participants (205 professors), which indicates a polarization in perceptions about the evolution of the phenomenon.

Following the content analysis of professors' perceptions on the evolution of xenophobia, the Atlas TI software attributed cells from these responses, from which we generated a semantic network (Figure 1), presented below.

Figure 1 - Semantic network on the variation of acts of xenophobia.



Source: The authors based on the Atlas TI *software* (2025).

The semantic network exposed demonstrates the professors' perception about the reasons that contribute to the individual interpretation of the quantitative variation of xenophobic acts. The evaluated responses showed a repetition of words or terms

considered as causing both the increase and decrease of xenophobic practice in institutions. In this sense, by associating the answers with the studies that formed the theoretical basis of this work, it is noticed that the respondents indicate which causes contribute to the increase or decrease of xenophobia.

In the network, the red cells refer to the process of increasing xenophobia. They are interconnected with the perceptions mentioned by the respondents: stigma of a country, origin from a South American country, issues of political ideologies that trigger comfort for xenophobic attitudes, extremist discourse, hostile nationalism, media coverage, and competition for a spot at the university. On the other hand, the blue cells allude to the perception of mitigation of xenophobia, interconnecting with each other from the speeches of the participants, which are: social advances, change of position in the university (status), local cultural integration with the community, greater ethnic diversification in universities, multicultural plurality, and less contact with aggressors.

The yellow cells correspond to ambiguous questions, that is, that influences both xenophobic growth and reduction, namely: the origin of the immigrant, government policies, the region of the country in which the immigrant works and lives, and the perception of what is considered xenophobia subjectively by each of the respondents, given that equal situations were considered as xenophobic by some and not considered by other research participants. Pink cells are linked to the lack of experience with xenophobic acts, to which participants link good receptivity as a result of their country of origin. The purple cells indicate that the respondents believe that the place in universities where they work is also an essential factor that impacts professional performance both positively and negatively.

The subjective responses of professors, such as the descriptions presented, also help to understand the perception of the phenomenon of xenophobia:

I see in the Brazilian academic environment a good tolerance of foreigners. Being British, I have had no experience with xenophobia. I believe that professors from countries like Peru, Chile, Bolivia, etc., may have other reports (Interviewee 02).

Xenophobia about the fact that I am Portuguese is at the same level as 12 years ago. I didn't notice any change" (Interviewee 65).

It has decreased, the educational level has improved (Interviewee 62).

It has changed, there is more understanding and empathy, the Brazilian people have improved their welcome and respect for foreigners (Interviewee 77).

I have the feeling that it is increasing and that it may increase more in the coming years with the polarization of politics and new social directions (Interviewee 149).

Therefore, participants noticed both a decrease and an increase in xenophobia over time. Those who have observed the mitigation attribute this change to the growth of awareness about cultural diversity and the improvement in intercultural education, giving us a direction that awareness actions can have a positive impact on this relationship. On the other hand, the participants who perceived an increase in xenophobia most often linked the advance to political factors, such as extremism and nationalist ideology, indicating that the political context has the power to influence social attitudes towards immigrants. For Castro (2023), these political groups represent a direct assault on the essence of human rights, taking advantage of the large number of people who surrender to the arms of messianic and authoritarian leaders.

These changes in perceptions can be linked to personal factors, such as the length of residence in Brazil, fluency in the native language, and social and cultural integration of the environment. The reports indicated that those who said they mastered the Portuguese language or that they felt more integrated into society were inclined to observe less xenophobic attitudes.

5 Final Remarks

The migration process is the result of several factors that force people to leave their native country to begin a new journey in a new place, with a new culture, new customs, and a new society, which is not always ready and open to receiving non-nationals. The present research sought to analyze these relationships based on the experiences of non-national professors from Brazilian federal universities to verify the presence of xenophobia and, if it occurs, how these xenophobic events affect the professional performance and well-being of this group of people.

The results of this research showed differences in the academic experiences of immigrant professors, with reports of satisfactory integration, good receptivity, and the consequent lack of experience of xenophobia. However, a significant number (87 - 42.43%) participants reported xenophobic situations within federal universities, providing negative and significant reflections on their emotional well-being and professional performance. These findings corroborate the results of Fischman (2020) and Mgogo and Osunkunle (2023), who concluded that xenophobia can influence well-being and negatively affect the experiences of non-nationals in academia.

The reported experiences showed that xenophobic attitudes manifest in different forms, either practiced directly or uttered subtly and indirectly, revealing itself through comments and jokes regarding from language to social and professional exclusion. This type of attitude was also found in the study by Ngobeni (2022) conducted with immigrant students at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, which identified that most international students at that University experienced xenophobia, with reports related to linguistic issues and social exclusion, among other factors.

Most respondents, who are victims of xenophobia, believe that university administrations are not aware of this problem, and even when they are aware of it, they do not act adequately to resolve the situation. In addition, two-thirds stated that universities have no policies to combat this type of attitude, but that implementing awareness programs for the academic community on cultural diversity is effective in reducing xenophobia.

Considering, then, the responses of the participants, the directions of the research led to the conclusion that xenophobia occurs in the environment of federal higher education in Brazil and is considered relevant for some participants and less critical for others. Still, it affected 87 respondents (42.43%). Several reports have made it explicit that the psychological, social, and professional consequences can be profound, directly affecting the well-being of professors who are victims of xenophobic prejudice. The professors also identified the lack of policies/programs that support the promotion of respect and cultural diversity in these environments.

Given the results, there is a need to expand the studies of xenophobia in Brazilian education at all levels and with different target audiences, as there are few studies with this specific theme in Brazil. This may allow us to understand the phenomenon better and develop solutions to mitigate the perpetuation of xenophobia in education.

Therefore, the fight against xenophobia cannot be addressed solely as a matter of social justice, but also as a perspective to enhance and develop the environment of Brazilian federal higher education. This fight presents an opportunity to stimulate diversity among people and cultures, making the academy a space of inclusion with diverse conceptions, promoting innovation, and fostering intellectual development, thus benefiting the entire academic community.

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