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# DISCRIMINATION IN THE BRAZILIAN SCHOOL CONTEXT: A RESEARCH OVERVIEW

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## Abstract

This qualitative study analyzes discrimination in school contexts by reviewing academic literature from 2010 to 2023. Fifty-nine scholarly works were examined, sourced from the SciELO database, the Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações da Capes, and the Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações. The analysis revealed four primary research categories and a significant focus on discrimination against specific identity groups. The study suggests an interdisciplinary approach, integrating various fields of knowledge, as essential for understanding the complexities and specificities involved in the phenomenon within school contexts.

DISCRIMINATION • SCHOOL CONTEXT • LITERATURE REVIEW

## DISCRIMINAÇÃO NO CONTEXTO ESCOLAR BRASILEIRO: PANORAMA DAS PESQUISAS

### Resumo

Este estudo qualitativo analisa a discriminação em contextos escolares, por meio de uma revisão da produção científica de 2010 a 2023. Foram examinadas 59 obras acadêmicas presentes nos repositórios da SciELO, Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações da Capes e Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações. A análise dos trabalhos evidenciou quatro categorias principais de pesquisa e um foco significativo na discriminação contra grupos identitários específicos. O estudo sugere a abordagem interdisciplinar, que integre diferentes áreas do conhecimento, para a compreensão das complexidades e especificidades que envolvem o fenômeno no contexto escolar.

DISCRIMINAÇÃO • CONTEXTO ESCOLAR • REVISÃO DE LITERATURA

## DISCRIMINACIÓN EN EL CONTEXTO ESCOLAR BRASILEÑO: PANORAMA DE LAS INVESTIGACIONES

### Resumen

Este estudio cualitativo analiza la discriminación en contextos escolares, a través de una revisión de la producción científica de 2010 a 2023. Fueron examinados 59 trabajos académicos presentes en los repositorios SciELO, el Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações da Capes y la Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações. El análisis de los trabajos destacó cuatro categorías principales de investigación y un enfoque significativo en la discriminación contra grupos identitarios específicos. El estudio sugiere un enfoque interdisciplinario, que integre diferentes áreas del conocimiento para la comprensión de las complejidades y especificidades que involucran el fenómeno en el contexto escolar.

DISCRIMINACIÓN • CONTEXTO ESCOLAR • REVISIÓN DE LITERATURA

## DISCRIMINATION DANS LE CONTEXTE SCOLAIRE BRÉSILIEN: APERÇU SUR LES RECHERCHES

### Résumé

Cette étude qualitative analyse la discrimination scolaire à travers une revue de la littérature scientifique de 2010 à 2023. Cinquante-neuf travaux universitaires ont été examinés dans les banques de données de SciELO, du Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações da Capes et de la Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações. L'analyse des travaux a mis en évidence quatre catégories principales de recherche ainsi qu'une attention particulière sur la discrimination à l'encontre de certains groupes identitaires. L'étude recommande qu'une approche interdisciplinaire intégrée par différents domaines de connaissance soit adoptée pour mieux comprendre les complexités et les spécificités du phénomène en milieu scolaire.

DISCRIMINATION • CONTEXTE SCOLAIRE • REVUE DE LA LITTÉRATURE

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**S**CHOOL IS AN ENVIRONMENT OF VITAL IMPORTANCE FOR HUMANITY, AN INSTITUTION in which individuals develop ethical and moral values, knowledge, and abilities that should correspond to intellectual and social aspects. To do so, the school is responsible for promoting respect towards human rights and others, welcoming and valuing the diversity of individuals and social groups regarding their respective knowledge, identities, cultures, and potentials, without prejudice (Lei n. 9.394, 1996). As a space of social coexistence, the school allows children and young people to form their first complex social interactions outside their families, interacting with groups that have different values, beliefs, and worldviews.

The need to promote an inclusive and respectful environment is echoed in the national regulations, such as the Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional [National Education Bases and Guidelines Law] (LDB) and the Plano Nacional de Educação [National Education Plan] (PNE), which establish a consensus about the fundamental mission of school education: guarantee that all students have access to educational opportunities that are not only adequate but also inclusive and equitable. These documents highlight the importance of a learning environment that respects and values diversity, promoting equal opportunity to all, regardless of their origins, physical, social, cultural, or economic conditions.

However, discrimination is also a meaningful obstacle to achieving inclusion and equity in education. This challenge is shown in the 2023 data of Conselho Nacional de Justiça [National Council of Justice] (CNJ), which recorded 169 new legal processes related to discrimination incidents in the school context.<sup>1</sup> Considering that discrimination incurs a type of violence and is considered a crime by Brazilian legislation (Lei n. 7.716, 1989, among others), this number is high and particularly concerning given the complexity of educational environments, where people are frequently influenced by contextual variables and specific forms of inequality that can mask or veil such practices (Ben-Ayed, 2023).

Therefore, the present study proposes a scientific literature review aiming to map, present, and discuss the production on the theme of discrimination in school. This work offers a detailed analysis of discrimination in school contexts, integrating multiple perspectives and highlighting the most recent developments in the area. The review encompasses masters's theses and PhD dissertations, and articles published in journals that explore the dynamics and impacts of discrimination, as well as the strategies used to combat them. The goal is not only to consolidate the empirical and theoretical basis accumulated but also to delineate the existing gaps, guiding future investigations. Hence, the intention is to contribute to a deeper understanding of discrimination in the school context.

To establish this discussion, the work is divided into six sections, including this introduction. The following section discusses the understanding of the discrimination concept in social psychology, sociology, and law. After, we present the procedures used to raise the articles, theses, and dissertations, and how data was treated. The research findings were analyzed, and the results were discussed. Finally, some final remarks are made on the theme, highlighting the main gaps found in the academic production.

1 Available at: <https://painel-estatistica.stg.cloud.cnj.jus.br/estatisticas.html>. This number does not represent all discrimination cases in Brazilian schools, as many incidents might not reach the legal system due to underreporting, the resolution of the conflict through internal approaches of the schools, or the lack of awareness regarding ways to complain. Furthermore, the legal system represents the last resort for peaceful conflict resolution. Before reaching this point, several phases and mechanisms within schools and other social spheres can effectively and peacefully approach and solve these issues.

## Notes on the discrimination phenomenon

Initially, the word discrimination had a neutral sense, simply indicating the action of differentiating or distinguishing without necessarily implying a value judgment. This application continues in some contexts, such as the decisions based on objective criteria. However, throughout time, particularly with the advancement of social movements and civil rights, mainly in the legal and social contexts, the term acquired a predominantly negative character, connected to unfair practices that structure and perpetuate inequalities and social injustice. Thus, even if the term discrimination can be used in situations that do not necessarily connote only negative aspects, in common sense, it is frequently embedded with a pejorative connotation, associated with practices that culminate in the creation of circumstances that engender inequalities and perpetuate disadvantage states.

As a social phenomenon, discrimination has profound implications that shape social dynamics and individual experiences. Faced with its complexity and broad reach, the study of discrimination has attracted the attention of multiple academic subjects, each enriching the debate from different but converging perspectives. Over the decades, fields such as sociology, social psychology, and law have significantly advanced the analysis of this phenomenon. Such areas offer complementary approaches that not only highlight explicit and subtle manifestations of discrimination but also reveal the connections with power structures and social hierarchies, pointing out the critical need for an interdisciplinary view to effectively face the roots and repercussions of this phenomenon.

In sociology, discrimination is frequently examined as a social process that perpetuates existing inequalities and directly interferes with individuals' capacity to fully exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms (Pager, 2006; Diehl, 2015). Discrimination has a systemic and institutional nature, perpetuating disadvantage cycles for marginalized groups, and can be shown as segregation based on physical or cultural characteristics, or more subtle, with differences in the treatment and the expectations toward students' performance based on social and cultural prejudices, for example.

In turn, social psychology approaches discrimination, highlighting the role of mental processes and interactions between individuals and groups. This discipline investigates how stereotypes, prejudices, and attitudes contribute to discriminatory behaviors. According to social psychology authors (Smith-Castro, 2006; Pereira & Souza, 2016), discrimination can be direct and intentional, such as insults and aggressions, or indirect, manifested through subtle exclusions and omissions that harm specific groups. Discrimination is also seen as a product of situational factors, including competition for resources or perceived threats against the group identity, which can intensify discriminatory attitudes.

From the legal perspective, discrimination is mainly centered in legislation and policy projects to protect individuals and groups against unfair and prejudiced treatment. Traditionally, the legal scope focused on combating direct and intentional discrimination, but recent theoretical developments have expanded to include ways to combat indirect discrimination. These are the less obvious and emerge from practices that seem neutral but that result in inequalities. Modern laws started to recognize and dismantle structural discrimination embedded in our social and economic institutions, demanding a more critical and broader analysis of institutional policies and practices (Moreira, 2017, 2020).

The convergence of these areas of knowledge reveals the multifaceted complexity of discrimination. Understanding discrimination as a socio-psychological and legal phenomenon shows that it is not limited to isolated acts. Instead, it is intrinsically connected to social, economic, and political structures that serve as a domination and power maintenance tool.

Under this understanding, discrimination materializes through a broad array of practices, actions, and behaviors that happen explicitly and implicitly and are manifested through distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preferences based on social markers such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity statuses.

Given the essential role of educational institutions, particularly schools, in human socialization and formation, the investigation of discrimination in the school context is vitally important. Studying discrimination in school allows the examination of nuances and subtle, and often misunderstood, forms that permeate this environment.

### Methodological procedure

This qualitative study uses a literature review to discuss the academic production of discrimination in the school context in recent years. The approach goes beyond simply cataloging productions, aiming to analyze and categorize the existing *corpus* of research on the theme to reveal the diversity of focuses and perspectives that characterize the theme, identifying tendencies, patterns, gaps, and new directions in the research about the theme.

To do so, a review of articles, theses, and dissertations was conducted between 2010 and 2023 in the data repositories of Portal de Periódicos da Capes [Capes Periodicals Portal] and by SciELO, for scientific articles, and in the Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações da Capes [Capes Theses and Dissertations Catalog] and the Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações [Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations] (BDTD), for theses and dissertations. The choice of these bases was strategic, as they represent some of the richest digital archives in Brazil.

The reviews conducted are structured around two axes of descriptors: the first focuses on the fundamental theoretical construct of the study represented by the keyword (1) *discrimination*; and the second axis refers to the specific environment of interest, identified only by the keyword (2) *school*, delimiting the *locus* of social dynamics to be examined. Using the term ‘*school*’ broadens the search scope to include studies on discrimination in several phases of basic education, avoiding limitations that could exclude relevant insights from different education segments.

The delineation of this review’s time frame was established based on a significant milestone to understand discrimination in the school environment. The year 2009 is considered an inflection point due to the publication of the data from the *Pesquisa sobre Preconceito e Discriminação no Ambiente Escolar* [Research on Prejudice and Discrimination in the School Environment] by Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira [National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira] (Inep), which encompassed 501 public education institutions nationwide (Mazzon, 2009). We have opted to include in the analysis the works published since 2010, after the Inep research, until 2023.

The search took place in the following manner: in the *search field* in the repositories pages, the descriptors were inserted in the configuration (discrimination AND school); in the filter *publication date*, the option “2010-2023” was selected. The strategies for the review were combined with the precision criteria, aiming for a result strictly aligned with the intended theme.

After applying the terms and specifications established, we qualitatively screened the works found. Based on the analysis of titles, the first qualitative filter aimed to identify studies that approached any keywords associated with the investigation theme: *discrimination, prejudice, stereotype, stigma, intolerance, violence, and bullying*, associated with the term *school*.

The inclusion of these terms in the qualitative phase of the literature review is justified by the recognition that discrimination is a multifaceted phenomenon, intricately connected to an array of related concepts and practices. This allowed the research to capture a broader spectrum of relevant studies, providing a holistic view of discrimination issues and their intersections.

The second filter involved reading the abstracts to determine the relevance and potential of the works regarding the research objectives. These qualitative filters converged to the selection of 20 articles, 35 master's theses, and four PhD dissertations.

Data categorization and analysis were conducted using Bardin's (2011) content analysis method through a systematic data organization that allowed the identification of thematic categories. In the study context, the content analysis allowed us to extract meaning cores that revealed patterns and tendencies of current studies on discrimination in the school context.

### **Discrimination in Brazilian school context: Research overview**

In general, the literature presented a consensus about the presence of prejudice and discrimination in the school environment, discussing the effects of these phenomena on the school community, especially for students. The investigations stand out for their theoretical rigor when approaching the particularities of vulnerable social groups; however, they frequently use the terms *discrimination* and *prejudice* indistinctively, often assuming them as interchangeable or synonymous concepts.

The studies highlight the need to understand and adequately manage the educational context's diversity. There is a call for developing and implementing educational actions and assertive public policies that seek to combat the various manifestations of prejudice and promote an inclusive school space that respects singularities.

Based on Bardin (2011), the studies were organized into four investigation categories to systematize the analysis of articles, theses, and dissertations: (1) analysis of the panorama of diversity, prejudice, and discrimination in the school context; (2) studies on the perception and the experience of prejudice and discrimination; (3) pedagogical approaches and intervention strategies to combat discrimination and the promotion of inclusion; and (4) discussions about resistance found in the implementation of educational practices regarding respect to diversity and forment tolerance. Table 1 organizes the academic production that grounds the analysis, categorized according to empirically identified theme areas.

**Table 1**  
*Distribution of academic production per identified category*

Categories	Works	N
1. Panorama of diversity, prejudice, and discrimination in the school context	Almeida (2015); Almeida Castro (2021); Amoras (2019); Bittencourt (2019); Campos (2021); Carreira (2019); Crochik and Giordano (2015); Corrêa (2012); Menezes (2003); Munhoz (2011); Nascimento (2011); Oliveira (2016); Poço (2018); Quintana (2018); Santos (2011); Santos (2017); Souza (2019); Souza (2020); Tannuri (2017); Tavares da Silva and Bittencourt (2019)	20
2. Perception and experience of prejudice and discrimination	Almeida (2023); Alves (2016); Bastos (2020); Cerqueira (2010); Cordeiro and Buendgens (2012); Costa (2018); Costa et al. (2012); César et al. (2017); Filizola (2019); Freitas (2019); Guimarães (2010); Matos (2020); Mendes and Straub (2014); Oliveira (2014); Pautz (2015); Périco (2021); Silva (2015); F. A. F. da Silva (2019); R. D. Silva (2019); Silva (2022); Sonetti (2020); Zucchi et al. (2010)	22
3. Pedagogical approaches and intervention strategies to combat discrimination and promote inclusion	Ames (2018); Lima (2021); Miranda (2021); Pedersen (2020); Ribeiro (2012); Santos (2019); Santos and Dias (2020); Santos and Maia (2016); Scriptori and Borges (2010); Silva (2017); Lamego and Santos (2018); Paula and Branco (2022)	12
4. Resistance in the implementation of educational practices to respect diversity and foment tolerance	Cecchetti (2022); Reis (2016); Rocha (2012); Rocha (2016); Silva et al. (2019)	5
Total		59

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The studies on categories 1 and 2 were found in higher numbers, showing that the analytical focus is on the perception of school actors – especially students – about discriminatory situations they lived in, as well as the forms of acting in school when facing discrimination. Categories 3 and 4 encompass fewer works, showing a lower interest in these themes. This is already the first gap, mainly when identifying that, in the last 13 years, only 5 studies have investigated the resistance to implementing school actions to fight discrimination. Understanding the reasons for these resistances is extremely relevant to comprehending the phenomenon and seeking paths that deconstruct these oppositions.

The analyses of the works in category 1 seek to discuss school as a social microcosm. In particular, there is a concern about how schools can reflect and amplify the power dynamics and inequalities present in society, highlighting the double role of education in perpetuating and combating discriminatory practices.

Using critical reflection from the bibliographical and document analyses, the first-category studies recognize the schools' importance in welcoming diversity and fomenting the reflection about social relationships as pillars to articulate values and human rights. The discussion here stresses the schools' responsibility to promote a culture of social progress and respect for cultural groups. The collaboration between schools and the community is considered vital when dealing with diversity and prejudice, highlighting the need for an educational approach that favors inclusion and equity.

The studies on category 2 shed light on the complex and multidimensional nature of prejudice, showing how it affects several groups segmented by race, gender, and sexual orientation. The studies highlight how prejudice and discriminatory experiences affect the perceptions, emotional and psychological well-being, academic performance, mental health, and social development of students, teachers, and families. The texts point out the reality faced by students belonging to minority groups that, according to the results presented, are systematically affected

by discriminatory practices related to negative stereotypes. These perceptions harm their academic performance and undermine the integrity of their identity construction.

The works in this category discuss discrimination in the school context through students' perspectives from observations, interviews, and ethnographic studies. The analyses point out an issue that transcends individuality, reflecting the rooted prejudices and discriminatory structures that permeate social interactions and shape the opportunities for educational development. These studies synthesize a school reality in which prejudice and discrimination are not only sporadic events but constitutive elements of the school context.

The third category of investigations is composed of empirical studies highlighting the relevance of dialogical pedagogical practices to promote mutual respect and pedagogical models focused on combating prejudice and fomenting more inclusive and respectful school environments. Such practices include educational activities such as conversation circles, debates, workshops, and the use of audiovisual resources that foment critical discussion and reflection between students about tolerance and collective coexistence.

The studies show the importance of the intentional action of education institutions and educators to create inclusive and respectful learning environments, as well as the challenge to integrate different cultures in the curriculum to overcome the monoculture logic. The need for support from public policies is also highlighted in the studies, reinforcing the role of systemic structures in combating prejudice and promoting education for diversity.

The last research category about prejudice and discrimination in school is composed of investigations that explore how the educational environment can resist the discussion of themes such as cultural, racial, religious, and gender diversity, which are considered essential to developing a culture of tolerance.

The studies point out the importance of overcoming institutional, cultural, and social resistances that prevent the effective implementation of inclusion and diversity in schools. When stressing the barriers that hinder the creation of more inclusive and tolerant school environments, these studies are fundamental to understanding the factors that contribute to the persistence of discrimination and the development of strategies that effectively face these resistances. The lack of information is identified as a factor that contributes to the maintenance of prejudice, halting essential dialogues to deconstruct stereotypes.

Another element that appears in the investigations of this category is the representation of these issues (gender, sexuality, racism, religious intolerance, etc.) as subversive of family values, representing obstacles to teachers' work and the materialization of an inclusive space. Thus, they delineate a spectrum of barriers to implementing educational equity, which helps to propose strategies to deal with resistance and promote inclusion more efficiently.

As a whole, the studies on the four categories provide the analytical tools to understand the complexity of social interaction in a school environment and allow drawing a parallel between school reality and broader social processes.

Besides the theme categories previously delineated, it is important to observe that the investigations on discrimination in the school context can also be organized according to the identity groups of interest. The revised studies highlight an expressive concentration in specific identity areas, mainly in the dimensions of race, gender, sexuality, and intersectionality between race and gender, besides investigations that simultaneously examine gender and sexuality and studies on religious issues. However, we point out that there are themes of less interest in the



revised studies, such as language (2), people with disabilities (2), socioeconomic level (1), orphans living with HIV (1), issues related to aesthetic and body (1), as well as studies that approach discrimination in the school context in general, not focusing on specific identity groups (11). These studies (18 in total) are presented in Table 2 in the category *others*, and, in the combined analysis, can indicate a possible gap in the academic production about the discrimination of these specific groups. Future studies in other databases and with other descriptors can confirm or refute this gap.

Hence, though the revised literature shows other identity groups as the focus of interest, this analysis focuses on the six main groups presented in Table 2, demonstrating a more significant volume of research. These groups were identified as having a substantial number of studies, clearly distinguishing them in terms of academic production. The other studies, though relevant, do not establish a body of work sufficiently robust to establish distinct categories by themselves, thus, they are approached and contemplated within the general discussion of the study. Table 2 organizes the distribution of academic production based on its main identity themes.

**Table 2**  
*Academic production organized by main identity themes*

Identity group	Works	N
Race	Alves (2016); Bittencourt (2019); Scriptori and Borges (2010); Costa (2018); Costa et al. (2012); Guimarães (2010); Menezes (2003); Nascimento (2011); Poço (2018); Santos (2017); Santos and Dias (2020); Souza (2019)	12
Race and gender	Oliveira (2016); Santos (2019); Silva (2022)	3
Gender	Almeida (2015); Campos (2021); Carreira (2019); Freitas (2019); Périgo (2021); Reis (2016); Ribeiro (2012); Sonetti (2020)	8
Gender and sexuality	Bastos (2020); Paula and Branco (2022); Silva (2017); Silva et al. (2019)	4
Sexuality	Corrêa (2012); Pedersen (2020); Rocha (2012); Santos (2011); Silva (2015); F. A. F. da Silva (2019); R. D. Silva (2019); Tannuri (2017)	8
Religion	Amoras (2019); Cecchetti (2022); Filizola (2019); Oliveira (2014); Quintana (2018); Rocha (2016)	6
Others	Almeida Castro (2021); Crochík and Giordano (2015); Munhoz (2011); Souza (2020); Tavares da Silva and Bittencourt (2019); Almeida (2023); Cerqueira (2010); Cordeiro and Buendgens (2012); César et al. (2017); Matos (2020); Mendes and Straub (2014); Pautz (2015); Zucchi et al. (2010); Ames (2018); Lima (2021); Miranda (2021); Santos and Maia (2016); Lamego and Santos (2018)	18
Total		59

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The studies on racial discrimination in the Brazilian school context provide a detailed analysis of the complex dynamics of prejudice, symbolic violence, and exclusion. Racial prejudice is broadly explored as a fundament of discrimination, portraying how stereotypes and negative expectations based on race negatively impact students' well-being and academic performance. Racism, manifested in symbolic and aversive forms, is analyzed as a system of beliefs and practices that perpetuate exclusion and inequality, besides negatively influencing the construction of their identities. Thinkers such as Abdias do Nascimento, Clóvis Moura, and Kabengele Munanga are cited as critical contributions to the analysis of race and racism, offering valuable insights into the social construction of the race construct and the complex interactions of identity in educational environments.

The studies focused on the confluence between race and gender in the educational context use the concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, to unveil how racial and gender discrimination are intertwined, deeply affecting educational experiences and opportunities. Authors such as Crenshaw, Carla Akotirene, bell hooks, and Nilma Lino Gomes contribute as a theoretical base for these studies, emphasizing the need for educational approaches that recognize and combat these complexities. Such studies are essential to understanding interpersonal interaction and highlight the importance of exploring more deeply the several intersections that impact mainly black women students, whose experiences of discrimination are exacerbated by these interconnected dynamics.

The studies on gender discrimination point out the need to dismantle culturally established gender standards to promote inclusion and equity. The analysis extends to the concepts of gender, heteronormativity, gender violence, gender identity, and gender stereotype. Judith Butler is particularly influential here with her theories on gender identity and the performativity of gender norms that challenge traditional concepts and instigate a deep questioning of gender roles.

Regarding gender and sexuality discrimination, gender norms and heterosexuality are perceived as significant barriers for LGBTQIAPN+ students. The studies focusing on this theme indicate that, despite inclusive educational policies, many schools still perpetuate stereotypes and exclude certain identities. Nevertheless, they also highlight that well-defined educational projects can effectively fight this discrimination and promote inclusion. Theoretical perspectives of renowned academics such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault are used to base a detailed analysis on prejudice dynamics and sexual diversity in educational contexts.

In the same direction, investigations on discrimination and sexuality in the school context explore the complexity of experiences lived by LGBTQIAPN+ students and their families in Brazilian education institutions. These studies highlight the importance of educational projects focused on mitigating discrimination and promoting an inclusive educational environment. However, they point out education professionals' lack of training to effectively and pedagogically manage sexual diversity. The concepts of homophobia, LGBTphobia, and heteronormativity are central in the analyzed texts, serving as critical lenses to understand the barriers faced by individuals that do not follow the normative standard of heterosexuality. The works by Daniel Borrillo, Guacira Lopes Louro, Judith Butler, and Michel Foucault are frequently referenced, providing theoretical frameworks that explore how social norms shape the construction of identity and sexuality.

Finally, the studies on religious discrimination in the Brazilian school context highlight the challenges faced by followers of African-based religions, showing the predominance of religious intolerance and the resistance strategies of these groups. These studies emphasize the importance of inter-religious dialogue and the recognition of religious plurality as fundamental ways to combat discrimination in public schools. Furthermore, the impacts of religious racism are analyzed, stressing the negative effects of these experiences on young people's development and well-being. This research category incorporates discussions around fundamental concepts, such as religious intolerance, religious racism, religious plurality, inter-religious dialogue, and religious identity, which are essential to understanding and approaching the phenomenon. Though these studies use a varied array of theoreticians to ground their analysis, we could not identify a predominant theoretical reference that directly approaches the theme of religious discrimination in most of these studies.

The complexity of discrimination in the school context is shown not only in how it is manifested but also in the intersections of identities that affect the experience and the perception of these discriminatory practices. The discrimination dynamics are deeply influenced by social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and religion, among others, which shape individual experiences and configure social interactions in educational environments. This intersectional perspective is crucial to understanding the multiplicity and specificity of challenges faced by vulnerable groups.

## Discussion

The analysis of studies about discrimination in the school context shows an interesting tendency in the use of sociological, sociopsychology, and legal perspectives. In general, the studies included in the review conducted in this study employ these perspectives in a complementary way, though with variations in their emphasis and in the integration of these disciplinary focuses. For example, Cerqueira (2010) integrates sociology and social psychology when exploring the influence of media beauty and symbolic violence in schools. Oliveira (2014) combines sociological and legal perspectives to examine religious intolerance and the resistance strategies followers of African-based religions use. Costa (2018) uses authors from the field of social psychology and law to investigate how racial discrimination affects the school performance of black children, approaching its psychological impacts and legal implications. Santos (2011) adopts an interdisciplinary approach, joining sociology, social psychology, and law to investigate homophobia in schools and the importance of inclusive pedagogical practices.

From the sociology perspective, it is clear that many studies approach discrimination as a systemic social process manifested in policies and institutional practices. The sociological analysis is frequently explored, focusing on the perpetuation of inequalities and the role of institutions, such as schools, to maintain or challenge these dynamics. This perspective can be seen, for instance, in the discussions about how educational practices and school policies can reinforce or combat discriminations (Bittencourt, 2019; Campos, 2021; Carreira, 2019; Cecchetti, 2022; Costa et al., 2012; Crochík & Giordano, 2015; Guimarães, 2010; Munhoz, 2011; Paula & Branco, 2022; Pedersen, 2020; Santos & Dias, 2020; Santos & Maia, 2016; Scriptori & Borges, 2010; Silva et al., 2019; Lamego & Santos, 2018; Silva, 2017; Souza, 2019; Tavares da Silva & Bittencourt, 2019). Studies investigating the impact of teachers' and peers' expectations on performance and students' participation exemplify this approach, showing how cultural and social prejudices translate into different treatment and opportunities (Almeida, 2015; Costa, 2018; Ribeiro, 2012).

Social psychology has significantly contributed to highlighting the mental processes and interactions that support discriminatory attitudes, such as stereotypes and prejudices. The studies that approach students' perception of discrimination and prejudice highlight how these attitudes affect students' emotional and psychological integrity, as well as social interactions (Alves, 2016; Amoras, 2019; Costa, 2018; Filizola, 2019; Freitas, 2019; Lima, 2021; Matos, 2020; Mendes & Straub, 2014; Périco, 2021; Santos, 2017; Santos, 2019; R. D. Silva, 2019; Silva, 2022; Sonetti, 2020). Studies that analyze the effect of discriminatory interactions on students' feelings of belonging and mental health are examples of how social psychology approaches the phenomenon (Bastos, 2020; Corrêa, 2012; Matos, 2020).

From a legal perspective, though less represented in terms of research volume, there is a clear concern with the legislation and the educational policies as tools to combat discrimination.

This includes discussing laws that protect against direct and indirect discrimination and studying policies that seek to dismantle structural discrimination in schools. For example, discussions that cite or are grounded on the implementation of inclusive policies and the legal fulfillment of anti-discrimination laws within schools illustrate this approach (Amoras, 2019; Nascimento, 2011; Quintana, 2018; Rocha, 2012; Santos & Maia, 2016; Silva, 2017).

In general, while each of these knowledge areas offers valuable and needed insights, the studies tend to use, in dialogue, these three areas, or at least two of these theoretical approaches, to capture the complexity of discrimination. Hence, there is an effective intertwining of these disciplinary areas, which allows for a more complete understanding of the discrimination criteria in the school context, highlighting the explicit and the subtle manifestations and proposing efficient forms of intervention.

The literature review conducted in this study approaches discrimination extensively, contemplating its direct manifestations and interactions with other concepts such as prejudice, stereotype, bullying, violence, segregation, and marginalization. Though each concept has specific definitions and applications, they are frequently intertwined in the analysis, revealing an entanglement of causes and consequences that influence social and institutional relationships. The eventual interlocution and even conceptual confusion reflect the complexity of the social fabric and the inherent difficulty of categorizing experiences that are intrinsically fluid and interconnected.

The discussion about how segregation and marginalization are related to discrimination is particularly relevant, showing that the last not only excludes but also socially organizes individuals into hierarchies of value based on arbitrary characteristics. Segregation implies a physical or social separation, while marginalization refers to a form of inclusion that, though apparent, relegates individuals to a state of restricted and precarious participation in society. Moreover, the data highlights the vital importance of educating students and education professionals about discrimination issues, showing that this understanding is crucial to ground the urgency of interventions that prevent discrimination and promote the recognition and the valuing of diversity under an intersectional perspective.

The literature analysis indicates the need to expand investigations on specific forms of discrimination in the school context, which are now gaps in the area. While several studies focus predominantly on interpersonal aspects and the direct consequences of discrimination, such as attacks on dignity and impacts on school trajectories (Almeida, 2023; Alves, 2016; Amoras, 2019; Bastos, 2020; César et al., 2017; Costa, 2018; Filizola, 2019; Freitas, 2019; Lima, 2021; Matos, 2020; Miranda, 2021; Périco, 2021; Ribeiro, 2012; Santos, 2011; Santos, 2019; Santos & Dias, 2020; Scriptori & Borges, 2010; Silva, 2022; Souza, 2019; Souza, 2020; Zucchi et al., 2010), issues such as income (re)distribution policies and sanction regimes that reflect and reinforce inequalities, together with assessment and feedback practices that are often shaped by prejudices are critical areas that need to be further explored. Likewise, the exclusion of students from extracurricular activities and the security measures applied unequally highlight specific forms of discrimination that limit equalitarian access to school education and full development.

Furthermore, categories 3 and 4, which respectively approach pedagogical and intervention strategies and resistances in implementing inclusive educational practices, reveal a reduced number of studies compared to other categories. In particular, category 4 highlights a meaningful gap in the literature, suggesting a lack of understanding of the barriers faced in the promotion of inclusion and diversity in schools.

Such dimensions, which have still been explored, point out the need to integrate the different facets of discrimination in the school context. Moreover, future studies can benefit from a longitudinal approach to better understand the impact trajectories of inclusion policies throughout time. It is essential to treat school not only as a social microcosm but also as an entity with its own ends and characteristics. Therefore, future studies must adopt a more encompassing and coordinated strategy to reveal the complexity of these discriminatory dynamics within school.

### Concluding remarks

The present study aimed to analyze the academic production about discrimination in school context, using as sources the databases SciELO, Capes, and the Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações (BDTD). Through a careful selection of articles, theses, and dissertations, it was possible to delineate a panorama of investigations about the theme encompassing publications between 2010 and 2023. The analytical corpus included 59 works: 20 articles, 35 master's theses, and 4 PhD dissertations.

The period limitation, the choice of descriptors, and the databases are necessary methodological decisions but have a meaningful influence on the results and the research scope. Though the repositories chosen were central for academic dissemination in the country, they do not fully encompass the national scientific production. Furthermore, the restriction of the period between 2010 and 2023, though focusing on more recent trends, does not cover contributions previous to 2010. The choice of specific descriptors is needed to efficiently filter the data on large academic bases. However, it can inadvertently limit the research, excluding studies that use different names or explore the theme under varied or complementary perspectives.

The literature was characterized using the content analysis method (Bardin, 2011). This procedure allowed us to identify four main thematic categories that encompass the structures that perpetuate discrimination in schools and the experiences reported by members of the school community, as well as educational strategies used to combat discrimination and the challenges in the implementation of inclusive policies. Besides these categories, the literature analysis revealed that the investigations focus mainly on understanding discrimination against specific social groups within the school environment, especially race, gender, sexuality, intersection of race, gender, and religion.

Even though the studies discussed offer valuable contributions, there are still important gaps, such as the lack of studies on intersectionality (race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic level, disability, and minority groups) and the lack of longitudinal investigations about the impacts of discrimination and anti-discrimination policies. Furthermore, there is a need to explore the resistance against the implementation of inclusive practices and analyze the specific discrimination in the school context, including income (re)distribution policies, sanction regimes, assessment practices, biased feedback, exclusion of extracurricular activities, and the unequal application of security measures, which limit the equalitarian access to education and students' total development.

The literature discussed highlights the complexity of discriminatory dynamics in schools and stresses the need for educational policies and pedagogical practices that are informed and responsive to the different realities in schools. In this sense, we point out the importance of adopting interdisciplinary strategies that integrate perspectives of different knowledge areas to understand and face the discrimination challenges in the school environment.

Despite methodological limitations, this study contributes to the literature about discrimination in the Brazilian school context when mapping recent investigations' main tendencies and focuses.

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### Note on authorship

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### Data availability statement

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