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The incorporation of foreign students into the classroom: assessment of teachers and families

M^a Carmen Cerezo Máiquez*, Rocío Angosto Fuentes & Josefina Lozano Martínez

University of Murcia, Faculty of Education, Murcia -30100, Spain

Abstract

This research is part of an educational project[†], developed in Infant and Primary schools in Murcia, with a purpose to examine the appraisal of teachers and families involved in the integration of foreign students into the classroom. To achieve this, a mixed methodology was followed, using a questionnaire and debate groups for researching. The results obtained in both groups showed that educational work is mainly affected by the incorporation of these students into the classroom. Furthermore, opinions are divided on whether such incorporation affects educational achievement in a positive or a negative way.

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1. Introduction

During the 21st century schools have undergone a number of significant changes, one of them being the incorporation of a large number of foreign students into the classroom. Students of different nationalities, different economic and socio-educational background, as a result of the migratory phenomenon that is currently taking place. The phenomenon of immigration has grown in Spain due to its strategic geographical situation in the south of Europe and its attractiveness as a nation, as well as its closeness to the Iberoamerican community (Santos - Rego and Lorenzo Moledo, 2011).

* Corresponding author. *E-mail address:* mcarmen.cerezo@um.es

From this situation, Echeíta (2006) states that intercultural and educational diversity appears to be an unavoidable requirement and schools are a mean of socialization for students, thereby taking part in the construction of a democratic, egalitarian, fair and inclusive society. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to deal with issues related to intercultural education in isolation, i.e. not as part of the problems that already affect the educational system in general and the school system in particular. Possibly, it would be advisable to consider whether educational institutions are prepared to assume and take advantage of a multicultural educational reality and if education centres are ready to face the challenges involved in the coexistence of different cultures and languages in the classroom.

In addition, similarly Escudero (2002) claims that intercultural education requires changes and reforms and a change of educational practice, trying to respond to the cultural diversity of our current society and thereby becoming a key to quality education in schools. We therefore, believe that the presence of new groups of students coming from other cultures without knowledge of the native language in many cases makes it necessary to reconsider a new organizational and curricular proposal to respond to these needs, from the educational institution, to the community in consideration. The need of educational compensation arises from their unfavorable social and cultural situation as well as the lack of resources already existing in most of the education centres (Ballesta, Lozano and Serrano, 2003; Lozano and Illán 2001)

Due to this situation measures should be taken to provide human and material resources to schools as well as new didactic resources and innovative proposals (Macarulla and Saiz, 2009; Arnaiz, 2011). Schools have to change their organization and functioning, their general pattern of education, to review the curriculum and promote collaborative work among all members of the educational community (González, 2008; Torres, 2012).

It is important to take into consideration the perception of the members of the educational community, teachers and families due to the incorporation of a large number of foreign students in Infant and Primary schools in the Region of Murcia, from the group EDUCODI. That is, if the task of the teacher is considered to be more difficult because of the substantial increase in the number of foreign students and at the same time, whether this incorporation of students from other countries influences academic achievements.

As far as the first question is concerned, it is true that from the point of view of the teacher, it requires a great effort to attempt to respond adequately to educational diversity; but it is also true that, if successful, it is a reward and the level of satisfaction is enormous (Oñate, 2008). For this reason it is necessary a new approach which, in the scope of their work, involves many issues, such as promoting active tolerance, overcoming ethnocentrism, learning to listen to others and becoming interested, as well as enjoying deep diversity in the classroom, in the school and in the world, despite difficulties such as the resources, the lack of time, lack of communication, etc (Díe et al, 2012). But above all, to achieve the improvement in the teaching process which is meant to be achieved with intercultural diversity, it is of paramount importance a transformation of thinking attitude and behaviour (Aguado and Del Olmo, 2009; Santos Rego, 2009).

The problem of ghettoization or the formation of groups of the same nationality in schools and the little or no presence of students of foreign families in charter schools (stated-financed but privately managed) is a significant issue because it implies acting against equal opportunities: "Quality education for an intercultural citizenship, requires a minimum of conditions, and none of them are present in a school ghetto, which is rather a paradigm of its antithesis" (Carbonell, 2002 a, p.160). Moreover, the problem of unequal distribution has always existed and it does not only affect the immigrant population. In fact, there is a close relationship in terms of segregation between foreign students and the students whose parents have a low level of education (Alegre, Benito and González, 2008; Santos-Rego and Lorenzo-Moledo, 2011). The OECD (2015) likewise, comments that it is not only the socio-economic status which affects different results in performance but that there are also other factors such as the motivation of students and the support they receive from their parents.

2. Objectives

The main objective of this research is to show the teaching process in relation to this matter as well as the attitudes of teachers and families with respect to the schooling of foreign students in Infant and Primary schools in the Region of Murcia.

More specifically in this article, we will focus on knowing the assessment and opinion of the educational community (parents and teachers) in response to one aspect which we consider to be of the utmost importance, that is, if the incorporation of foreign pupils increases the difficulty of the teaching process on a daily basis regarding the

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