6th International Conference on Intercultural Education "Education and Health: From a transcultural perspective"

Beyond compulsory schooling: resilience and academic success of immigrant youth

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Abstract

The present study examines the relationship between resilience and school completion of immigrant youth in Spain. Ninety-four students in their fourth year compulsory education participated in the study; they were from 19 different nationalities, between 15 and 18 years of age, and the ratio boys/girls was 55/45. There were no significant differences by gender, age, residence time, or incorporation into the education system. Differences were associated to cultural groups and variables related with academic self-perception. Finally, it was shown that young students that continue their studies beyond obligatory education have higher levels of resilience, as measured by the SV-RES scale. Overall, the findings in this study suggest the activation of the relational dimension of "social capital" in youth, as for example through mentoring or service-learning programs.

1. Introduction

Research regarding the academic results of immigrant students from a disadvantaged background has shown there is great complexity in the teaching-learning process when this is carried out in a different language and is accompanied with cultural and social changes (Palou, 2011), with the consequent low-level academic performance and failure to adapt (Huguet and Navarro, 2006; Rodríguez and Luque, 2002). Despite educational disadvantage

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related to the fact of being an immigrant, some of these students achieve the mean of school success when compared with other students under similar circumstances (Pereda, 2006).

The following hypothesis has been developed here. Foreign students that overcome the risk transition period between Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO) and Post-16 (Post-Compulsory Education), and are candidates to continue to higher education, have specific resilience characteristics that combine certain individual features and social-educational support. Explanations are trying to be found to why some youths succeed in school, while others in the same context, social community, or in unfavorable economical situations do not by focusing on the worldwide emerging perspective of "*resilience*". Herein, resilience is understood as an "effective coping competence" in response to a risky or adverse situation (Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The study was carried out in public secondary schools with a high number of immigrant students located in Barcelona and provincial towns; two or more groups of students per level were included. From the four participating schools, three of them offer high school as a Post-16 educational option, and the fourth offers additionally mid-level vocational training.

Non-probability incidental sampling was used to choose participants, taking into account the disposition of the school to apply the instruments and the geographical diversity to ensure the highest representation. The sample included all foreign students from all cultural origins enrolled in the last year of Compulsory Secondary Education (2010-2011). Ninety four (94) children participated in the study, aged between 15 and 18; the ratio boys/girls was 55/45.

Participating students came from 19 different countries, implying diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds. For subsequent analysis, their origin was classified according the geographical regions specified in Table 1:

Table 1. Participants according to their origin

Origin	Nº of students	Percentage (%)	Valid percent (%)
Latin America	53	56.4	59.6
Asia (China)	7	7.4	7.9
Central Asia (Russia)	1	1.1	1.1
Southern Asia (Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh)	13	13.8	14.6
Non-EU state Romania	2	2.1	2.2
Maghreb	11	11.7	12.4
Rest of Africa	2	2.1	2.2
Doesn't know/Didn't answer	5	5.3	
Total	94	100	100

Regarding the number of years of residence in Catalonia, most of them had been living there between two and 10 years (79,7%); the number of students with less than 2 years of residence or more than 10 years is significantly lower (20,2%).