Cultural diversity in secondary school: The response to immigrant students in Spain from a counselling perspective.

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Cultural diversity in secondary school: The response to immigrant students in Spain from a counselling perspective.

Managing cultural diversity remains a challenge in secondary schools in Spain. In this paper, we approach cultural diversity from the standpoint of school counsellors who are key professionals attending to immigrant pupils. Through the use of qualitative research techniques (semi-structured interviews and discussion groups), the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are identified by counsellors. The findings show the need to implement pupil-focused responses sensitive to their cultural identity and based on the collaboration of all agents involved. Likewise, the school is defined as a privileged setting in which to celebrate cultural diversity and the pivotal role that counsellors play in this process is highlighted.

Keywords: Counsellors, cultural diversity, immigrant pupils, secondary school, educational response

Introduction

The relevance of counselling in educational processes with immigrant pupils and in cultural diversity contexts has been widely addressed in the literature (Portera *et al.*, 2020). School counsellors and comprehensive school counselling programmes play an essential role in multicultural issues and education (Barrett, 2016; Lee, 2001; Nassar-McMillan *et al.*, 2009; Williams & Butler, 2003). Their intervention can have a positive impact on how immigrant pupils adjust to the school by building cross-cultural bridges (Goh *et al.*, 2007). Tatar (~~1998,~~ 2012) acknowledged the different roles of counsellors in their work with immigrant students as the people responsible for promoting assimilation of the dominant culture, self-facilitators in a process of inclusion more individual than collective, specialists in immigration and school, and cultural

'translators' who see this process as an exchange rather than merely adaptive. For Go *et al.* (2007), counsellors' actions make a positive contribution to the acculturation process and the forging of intercultural links between the immigrant and indigenous populations.

An essential part of the counsellor's job consists of attending to the social, psychological, linguistic and academic difficulties that students may encounter in their process of cultural adjustment and family reorganisation (Dusi, 2016; Monaghan & Hawkins, 2019). Counsellors' work with multicultural populations, especially regarding aspects of the sociocultural and psychological adaptation of immigrant students, is crucial (Tatar, 2012). Immigrant students have a diverse set of experiences both pre- and post-migration, but these pupils usually present specific needs linked to lack of knowledge of the language of instruction of the school, difficulties in the cultural adjustment process that can result in culture shock, the uprooting caused by the migratory process and to the delicate socioeconomic situation of the migrant population. Another need that immigrant students have relates to being on the receiving end of prejudices and stereotypes about 'the other' (Baruth & Manning, 2000).

The profile of immigrant students in Spain is very heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, cultural background and language, as well as academic achievement. However, they usually have needs related to their economic situation, require additional instruction in the language of instruction and need guidance and help in their cultural and family adjustment processes (González-Falcón, 2020). As this author points out, immigrant students are particularly vulnerable pupils, who do not always have social and family support. To this end, 'guidance and counselling can support individual paths to self-sufficiency, better wellbeing and provide stability by addressing trauma, displacement, mental health and transitional readjustment, or simply opening up access to

opportunities and creating new ones' (Hughes *et al.*, 2019, p.2). Moreover, Berry's (2005; Berry & Dansen, 2019; Berry *et al.*, 2006) work on acculturation processes serves as the theoretical grounding in this study.

The counsellor is also in a privileged position within the educational organisation, given their role as a 'key' (González-Falcón *et al.*, 2016) to or 'bridge' (Goh *et al.*, 2007) between the different sectors and members of the educational community. Counsellors carried out their work in collaboration with teachers, principals, families and other educators and external agents, helping to spread and encourage a culture that recognises and manages diversity in a positive manner. In this sense, school counsellors are in the best and most opportune position to promote cross-cultural understanding (Lee, 2001).

Consequently, the role of the school counsellor in cultural diversity management, understood here as promoting intercultural education and working with immigrant pupils in the school, is decisive. The analysis of their viewpoints and experiences in relation to this issue is clearly important.

School guidance counsellors in Spain

In Spain, school counsellors provide their service in Compulsory Secondary Education schools (for pupils 13-to-18 years old). Their work has gradually gained weight over the past 30 years and their current activity with immigrant students is acknowledged as one of their key areas of intervention. From the outset, their functions have been focused on responding to pupil diversity due to learning capacities, interests and motivations, or social and cultural differences. More recently, and specifically with immigrant pupils, their actions are linked to three fundamental aspects: a) collaborating in receiving and welcoming immigrant students, b) identifying immigrant students' level of competence with Spanish (i.e. the language of instruction); and c) encouraging the development of

their own culture and mother tongue. The first includes meetings with students and their families to introduce them to the school and its operating rules, together with the management team. The second includes collaborating with teachers to provide students with resources, in addition to the psychopedagogical or curricular assessment of the students if necessary. Thirdly, in the interest of looking after the emotional wellbeing of immigrant pupils, counsellors collaborate with intercultural mediators and non-government associations to simultaneously support the language and culture of immigrant families. Likewise, in addition to the academic and professional guidance that the counsellor provides to all pupils, they must also encourage coexistence in the school, promoting intercultural relations and partnering students in their personal development processes (González-Falcón, 2020). The counsellor must provide a helping relationship for adolescents with different cultural backgrounds, worldviews, sexual orientation and social class (Baruth & Manning, 2000). The complexity and diversity of functions that Spanish counsellors must fulfil is therefore one of the main features of their work. Counsellors are not only required to engage in therapeutic conversations with individual students and facilitate cross-cultural school projects, such as peer support. In addition, they are required to promote the continuity of the mother tongue and culture of the immigrant pupil, in collaboration with other external agents. They must support families in their processes of cultural adjustment to school. They also have to guide students academically according to their skills and interests, identify their learning difficulties, define the educational supports they need and refer them, if necessary, to other specialists.

In Spain, this guiding process has not been without its hurdles. For example, counsellors have needed a lot of time for their role to be accepted and acknowledged by the other members of the school (González-Falcón *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, they have

encountered obstacles when it comes to acting in school cultures that are not inclined to interdisciplinary and collaborative work. In secondary schools in Spain, a professional culture based on instruction and discipline holds sway (Coronel & Gómez-Hurtado, 2015). As these same authors point out, teachers focus on teaching their subjects and pay less attention to diversity-related issues. Lack of multicultural competence and associated problems in managing it prevent counsellors from going beyond the dominant discourse on cultural difference (Leeman & Ledoux, 2005). The dominant discourse on cultural difference makes it easier for principals and teachers to ignore this issue and manage it as a particular problem for counsellors.

(Gómez-Hurtado *et al.*, 2018). ~~This situation is compounded by the fact that management teams often employ a predominantly bureaucratic approach in the development of their school policies, without adopting cultural diversity as a core aspect of their management In general, management teams, teachers and families have left the task of attending to pupil diversity in counsellors' hands, understanding that it is a matter of their exclusive competence.~~ This way, diversity has not been taken up and incorporated collectively as a substantial part of school culture, but rather understood as a particular issue to be handled by a specialist (González-Falcón *et al.*, 2016).

Other challenges are highlighted in the international literature. These include the attitudes and prejudices of counsellors towards immigrant students, usually due to skin colour, religion, language and cultural practices (Chen & Park-Taylor, 2006), which negatively impact the implementation of intercultural practices (Constantine & Gushue, 2003). Moreover, an overload of work and stress in counsellors is noted (Sánchez, Freeman & Martin, 2018), coupled with a lack of intercultural training and skills especially linked to emotional aspects (Fernández-Tilvey & Malvar, 2020; Liu & Day, 2002; Mohd-Jaladin, 2013 and 2017), shortage of resources to deal with the complexity

of intercultural counselling (Ponterotto *et al.*, 2010), and inadequacy of compensatory responses by the educational administration (Rodríguez-Izquierdo & Darmody, 2019). Most countries have mainly focused on solving the problems of immigrant students related to learning the language of instruction, adopting a compensatory and assimilation approach based on 'pedagogical theories of deficit' (Jiménez-Gámez & Goenechea, 2018). Some researchers have debated and conceptually established the principal dimensions of multiculturalism (Sleeter & Grant, 2003), placing special emphasis on the various forms of exclusion that operate in the management of difference and culture through school policies and practices (Blackmore, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2011).

All in all, school guidance counsellors have become pivotal points of reference for educational attention to immigrant students. Research on intercultural education in Spain and other countries has also included the practices, perceptions and attitudes of school guidance counsellors (e.g. Lin & Clay, 2002; Robinson *et al.*, 2000; Sue *et al.*, 1992). It is acknowledged that counsellors manage cultural diversity despite the difficulties and obstacles involved (Goh *et al.*, 2007; Lynn *et al.*, 2012; Tatar, 2012), and play an essential role in matters related to interculturality, inclusion and diversity (Awe & Portman, 2009; Lee, 2017; Monk *et al.*, 2008; Ponterotto *et al.*, 2010).

Aim

Given all of the above, it seems reasonable to analyse how school counsellors evaluate the management of cultural diversity and, more specifically, the attention to immigrant pupils, emphasising the advantages and disadvantages, obstacles and supports that they perceive today in the application of intercultural guidance in Spain. This work is part of broader research analysing cultural diversity management in Secondary Education and

the representation of cultural diversity in different groups through case studies, including counsellors.

In this study, the voices of the counsellors are explored, as they are key agents of educational organisation. The aim is to assess the educational responses that guidance counsellors and schools provide to immigrant pupils in order to establish the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that mediate this process. This analysis should reveal the strengths and weaknesses which, in the opinion of school counsellors, highlight and then determine the improvements and future lines of action to continue promoting multicultural counselling and positive management of cultural diversity.

Methods

Participants

Counsellors from four schools participated in this study: they included three women and one man, aged 40-to-55 years. All had more than 10 years of experience as counsellors and more than five in cultural diversity contexts. Their professional careers were located in state-run secondary schools. They were currently working in state schools (two urban and two rural) with a schooling rate of immigrant pupils of 10 to 15%. More than 95% of immigrant pupils were born in a country other than Spain (i.e. they are first generation students). All the counsellors collaborate with other professionals (social educators, intercultural mediators, experts in special education and Spanish teaching) in the care of immigrant pupils.

The majority of immigrant students come from Eastern Europe (32.2%), Latin America (25.4%), Africa (23.8%) and, to a lesser extent, Asia (9.6%). The most common countries of origin were in this order: Morocco, Romania, Colombia, Ecuador, Poland, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Algeria and China. Pupils born in Spain are mainly from the same city or neighbouring towns (over 90%).

The participating schools were located in Huelva, in southern Spain, which is one of the main destinations for immigrant families looking for work, mainly in agriculture (strawberry and red fruit) and hospitality (bars and restaurants in the city or on the coast.). The schools were located in disadvantaged socioeconomic areas. In rural schools, around 20% of families have a high income derived from their agricultural businesses. However, these families tend to show low interest in their children's education, as they have a future job guaranteed. In urban schools, there is greater diversity in terms of educational aspirations. Among the Spanish population, around 25% of families are college educated. Many of these families are single-earner families with around 60% of the women not engaged in paid work.

Procedure and measurement

Semi-structured interviews and a discussion group were held with the counsellors. Each researcher went to a school and interviewed a counsellor, recorded the interview, took notes, reviewed the information discussed with the counsellors and transcribed the interview as soon as possible. The interviews, lasting 45 minutes on average, were conducted according to qualitative research principles (Rodríguez-Izquierdo *et al.*, 2020; Tatar, 2012).

The following questions were used:

(1) What strengths and opportunities do you identify in intercultural care and guidance for immigrant students?
(2) What weaknesses and threats do you detect in intercultural care and guidance for immigrant students?

The analysis categories were designed based on the network of internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factors typical of the SWOT technique (Raines, 2006). Studying the strengths revolved around the internal positive

aspects that depended on the school organisation and through which it could continue to encourage intercultural education and attention to immigrant students. Weaknesses, in contrast, were studied to reveal the internal negative aspects with room for improvement. Likewise, the opportunities were studied in an attempt to highlight the positive external possibilities, beyond the school's sphere of influence, which could be taken advantage of in the context of the current strengths and weaknesses. And threats included all the issues, obstacles or external limitations that could hamper or limit the development of school initiatives and actions favouring cultural diversity.

These terms, and the aim of the research, were explained to the counsellors before starting the interviews. The discussion group lasted 90 minutes and was held after analysing the interviews. Two researchers guided the group discussion and took notes. This enabled us to focus attention on some emerging issues and to gather more information on the topics with more and less consensus of the counsellors, although the counsellors were also allowed to contribute any other information not previously revealed. The focus group was recorded, with the permission of the participants, and later transcribed.

Data analysis

Narrative discourse analysis (Krippendorff, 2013) was applied to interpret the data, and we specified patterns and themes through identification, coding and categorisation, and established relationships between them in order to reduce the volume of data collected. The analysis followed was thus inductive and deductive and a number of steps were taken to ensure internal validity, credibility and reliability (Constantine *et al.*, 2004). The process, procedure and results were examined by all team members at different stages of the analysis. In an initial phase, the interviews were analysed individually by the researcher who conducted them. The themes that had

emerged in the interviews with teachers and principals in a previous phase of the research were used (Gómez-Hurtado *et al.*, 2018), although each researcher adapted and modified these when necessary. In a second phase, the analysis was discussed in a meeting with all the researchers. The process served to clarify meanings and refine the themes. Each interview was subsequently analysed by another researcher, thus facilitating triangulation of the data. A first report on the results was drawn up from the interviews that helped provide the topics for the discussion group.

Additionally, the final outcomes and conclusions were presented to all the interviewees, who gave their opinion on the validity of the study's final findings and commented on them. MAxQda -12 software was used. No information was ruled out during the data analysis. Particular attention was paid to less frequent data and implicit messages to try to place the data as a whole in perspective and bring out meanings. The reiteration of themes and congruence of the assessments in the different interviews, discussion groups and presentation of the final report to the counsellors allowed us to reach the saturation principle, as the later processes implemented did not generate new data and, as a whole, they allowed us to build a comprehensive theory (see Morse, 1995). Investigation continued until we considered that we had enough and relevant information to say something important about the phenomenon studied (see Denzim 2010; Mayan, 2009; Morse, 1995).

The data analysis revealed a series of key categories on which the counsellors' discourse was constructed. These included conceptions about immigrant pupils, the importance of training, the degree of teacher coordination, the role of counsellors, the prominence of the language, the family-school-community relationship and the weight of culture. Each of these points is analysed in the following section, distinguishing the

information by the technique (INT:Interviews, FG:Forum Group) and agent: counsellor (CO1, CO2, CO3 and CO4) used to extract it.

Results

The themes are presented according to the internal (strengths, weaknesses) and external (opportunities, threats) conditions observed by the participating counsellors in the promotion of intercultural education and attention to immigrant pupils in their schools.

Strengths

Regarding the attitude and role assumed by teachers in the face of cultural diversity, the counsellor group considered that the response in general was positive. They noted that teaching staff manage this issue as something that is inexorably part of the school dynamic. Although there were, as always, particular cases, cultural diversity among students was no longer seen as an issue to which nobody wished to respond. One of the counsellors expressed it as follows:

> Nobody now says "this child is a problem for me…how do I assess him/her". These are no longer issues nowadays. They are treated like any other child needing a measure attending to diversity. And their diversity involves having a different culture and a different language, and this is how it is approached. Attending to them is normal procedure, but within their diversity. (FGCO1)

The counsellors noted significant progress compared to the early years, when lack of knowledge, strategies and training played an important part in determining the response given. As one counsellor noted:

> We didn't know how to go about it. There were meetings in the afternoons on this issue, because no one on either side knew how to act…They've been in this school for 15 years and the situation has totally changed. Teachers now know pupils from different origins. The majority have received training through the teacher training centre or

> courses that they found themselves. And now we know how to respond and support them. (INTCO2)

The counsellors emphasised the experience accumulated over the years was a strength, especially in terms of articulating procedures for the schooling of immigrant pupils, access to the curriculum for these students through the learning of Spanish, and their pedagogical reinforcement and the resolution of coexistence problems. They also highlighted the teachers' involvement and commitment in providing an appropriate response to pupils, as in some schools knowing how the pupil feels is more important than their academic outcomes. One of them explains: 'It's the pupils we're interested in; the classroom subjects are something secondary (INTCO3).

They also valued the entry of other support professionals in educational management, such as intercultural mediators, social workers, social educators and Spanish language teachers for immigrant students. Counsellors unanimously highlighted the importance of Spanish language teachers in schools. All emphasised their role in facilitating the early days of immigrant pupils in schools and accelerating Spanish learning. In some cases, they also underlined the importance of these teachers in terms of the pedagogical support of pupils, inclusion of intercultural content in the curriculum and the organisation of intercultural practices in the day-to-day life of schools. Some counsellors insisted on the value of coordination among all the trainers, teachers and guidance counsellors in making these practices possible. One of the counsellors expressed it this way in the discussion group:

> The teacher in charge of the Spanish classroom runs things really well. She provides the children with a lot of material, stays in close contact with other teachers and, for example, assessment in the language area is done jointly. All courses include work on the different countries: location, culture, history, gastronomy, and this teacher works with all of them. (FGCOI4)

Likewise, the counsellors acknowledged the changes over time with respect to their professional status. They noted that they have gone from being a solitary figure not recognised by their colleagues to playing a key part in school life and dynamics. Thanks to their participation in most of the school's initiatives and coordinating with the different sectors (pupils, tutors, specialist teachers, management team, families and external agents), they have a very well-rounded overview of the school per se. Their pivotal role among the different groups in the school, and between them and their environment, further accentuates their importance for the proper functioning of the school. One of the counsellors summed it up: ‘The fundamental issue of guidance counselling is that it sets up all the transmission gears so that the thing flows as smoothly as possible’(INCO3T).

On the other hand, and despite the isolation they still experience at some points, they also said that they were a very cohesive group, with no hesitation when it came to helping each other. One counsellor pointed out: ‘I’m on my own, but I know that I have a human network of counsellors to turn to for support. We share projects, and we quickly forward any plans we draw up, and there is a very united group. We’re quite alone, but also very united.’(INTCO2)

Weaknesses

As already mentioned, most counsellors really appreciated the achievements made in recent years on the issue of cultural diversity management. They emphasised a better predisposition and training to manage cultural diversity. However, their comments highlighted a construction of immigrant pupils based on otherness, deficit and ethnocentrism. The language used by the counsellors affects the construction of immigrant pupils as a distinct, different and deficient group. Some counsellors used expressions like 'they' or 'the others' to underline it:

> ‘Where do I place them… how should I treat them’. (FGCO1)
>
> ‘We didn’t know how to go about it, and the teachers didn’t know what to do with them either’. (INTCO2)

This emphasises the distance that separates them from the rest of the pupils and, moreover, the difference is equated with deficiency. In some comments, a negative image of immigrant pupils prevailed, focused on the deficit, difficulties and problems that cultural diversity posed for the school. One of the counsellors even equated immigrant pupils with students with learning difficulties:

> We try to treat immigrant pupils as though they were Spanish with learning difficulties, if they have any. It’s just the same as if I went to Catalonia; I don’t know Catalan, and I’d be a special educational needs pupil until I learnt the language. We already know about the rest…(INTCO3)

These negative comments about immigrant pupils also point to a lack of consideration for their culture, origin, abilities, skills, previous experiences, identity and diversity. Some counsellors labelled immigrant pupils and created a superficial and stereotyped image based, in many cases, on prejudices linked to nationality, religion, culture or skin colour. Some remarks in this regard were as follows:

> ‘If they have a Moroccan in their street, they will be with the Moroccan. (FGCO3)
>
> ‘The main thing is how the pupil feels, and we don’t care if they are black, white, yellow, Catholic, Evangelist or homosexual.’ (INTCO3)

These negative representations were also detected in some of the teachers, families and pupils of the schools. Prejudices mainly aimed at the Maghreb pupils and their families stand out. As several counsellors pointed out:

> “Moroccans bear the brunt of it. They are considered dangerous, arrogant and very macho.” (INTCO2)

"Skin colour also counts. Students from Eastern Europe, with their blue eyes and white skin, are viewed differently." (FGCO1)

On the other hand, the counsellors also agreed that once the cultural diversity in schools is 'institutionalised', the work is essentially the same: responding to the academic hurdles of the pupils due to their lack of competence in Spanish or learning difficulties. As a result, the cultural issue and the value of interculturality are not always taken into account. One of the counsellors explained:

> A large part of our time is dedicated to resolving the learning difficulties and coexistence of the pupils in the school and with the immigrant students we do the same. At the outset, as they do not know Spanish, we mainly work on this area, and after that, the same as with the rest. If the teacher tells us that the pupil has difficulties with something, we try to deal with it.
>
> …We already know about the rest…In other words, we don't have a school culture so powerful or monolithic as to make it so hard to integrate children into our system. (INTCO3)

Although efforts were made to encourage coexistence, the majority did not usually promote actions to ensure an intercultural school, and this affects both the opportunities the pupils have to communicate amongst themselves and the intercultural relations they establish both inside and outside the school. One of the counsellors noted:

> I do believe that we still have a long way to go. People think integration merely consists of 'here you are at my side and I'm talking to you and that's that'. But when these children leave the school, I don't think they relate to other host pupils. (FGCO4)

The pupils had hardly any opportunities for communication and exchange in the school, beyond the informal moments of class changes and the half-hour reserved for break time. Among the reasons cited for this were the use of traditional teaching

methodologies by staff and the scant training or personal skills of some teachers in terms of knowing how to manage groups and resolve conflicts. One counsellor also pointed out:

> The truth is that the classroom structure as it is currently organised totally fails to encourage the question of relationships. The issue of classroom management is a very big handicap. In other words, the issue of controlling the group, the activities proposed and the classes are the same purely teacher-centred type as always, and anyone who innovates at all ends up saying "I'm not doing this anymore, because it's upset the group". (FGCO4)

The counsellors were aware of the need to promote time and space for intercultural communication and encounters, but they also pointed out that they could not achieve everything. They all highlighted the multitude and diversity of tasks they needed to work on and how the excessive workload prevented them from dedicating time to analysing, identifying needs and scheduling programmes in this area. One counsellor summed up: 'What happens is that the counsellor is there for everything. In other words, there's nothing we don't do, so it's hard to have any time to foresee other needs. We're always putting out fires'(INTCO3). The counsellors' reflections on their own professional practice also underlined the feeling of loneliness occasionally experienced by some of them. Although this view was not unanimous, several counsellors lamented the lack of options for sharing and assessing the actions taken with other colleagues from the school (INTCO2, FGCO3). In particular, they called for greater commitment and involvement from some tutors with immigrant students. One of the counsellors explained: 'We can help, but the tutors must also take responsibility and not everyone does it. They can't expect us to solve all their problems' (FGCO1).

Opportunities

One highly positive aspect noted by the counsellors was the change of criteria adopted by the educational administration when it comes to schooling immigrant pupils of foreign origin. Now, the number of immigrant students enrolled in the schools is considered so that the creation of exclusive schools for immigrants is avoided. The counsellors pointed to the administration's greater involvement in implementing a fairer schooling policy, with the concentration of immigrant pupils in certain schools. They also underscored the administration's greater commitment to ensuring access to education for these pupils through specific attention programmes, such as reinforcement in learning the language of instruction, training courses that are offered to teachers and the creation of online resources and materials that can be accessed (FGCO1, FGCO2).

Likewise, the intervention of other professionals from the local authority or non-governmental associations was also considered an opportunity. According to the counsellors' group, collaborating with these bodies allowed them to expand the school resources network and afforded opportunities to develop initiatives favouring intercultural schooling. The counsellors' work with these professionals is essential to meet the needs of immigrant families, mediate in misunderstandings or cultural clashes, and provide a response in cases calling for the intervention of other community services, such as health centres. A counsellor commented: 'We also have the Arabic interpreter who comes to the school on Wednesdays, through an agreement between the kingdom of Morocco and the educational administration. He also works with the family'. (FGCO4)

Finally, on the role of the school institution itself in cultural diversity management, they acknowledged its importance insofar as it a privileged space in which to develop the process of inclusion, adaptation and construction of identities. In this sense, they emphasised issues such as:

1) The importance of time spent in school as an opportunity for interaction: 'Nowadays, we live at home and with today's prevailing media culture, the Internet and all that, the only way for students to meet with more than four or five children at once and get to know others is the school. So, the foreigner who comes here is just a drop in the ocean and can only meet up with the four or five kids in his or her street, and this is becoming increasingly difficult. However, here, you can meet with the kids from the street, with the one next door, or with the one across from you, even if it's only to fight.'(FGCO3)
2) On many occasions, the classroom structure, organisation and dynamic are not exactly favourably disposed towards relational issues. But despite this, other opportunities, spaces and times (corridors, break time, exit and entry, games…) can be taken advantage of to cultivate interaction. Again, the counsellors consider that 'the opportunity to get to know others is in the school' (FGCO3).

Threats

Although the counsellors acknowledged the efforts made over the years by the educational authority in cultural diversity management, they complained that actions were often taken using exclusively bureaucratic or quantitative criteria when allocating resources or providing support to schools. They criticised that it was necessary to have a minimum number of students in the school with the same problem before receiving support, or that the assignment of students to courses by age was imposed by the Education Inspectorate. Several counsellors commented:

> 'The Spanish teacher for immigrant students used to come every day; then one pupil left and the whole thing fell apart, and the others that were left still had the same issues and nobody was attending to them.'(FGCO1)

> ‘I remember that they used to come to me with a circular from the Inspectorate saying “this kid is this age, so he’s going into this course.” And that was that. In fact, we used to advise teachers that it was preferable for students with a very low level to repeat the first year than to fail in more advanced courses, because it was a ridiculous situation.’ (FGCO2)

The counsellors believed that pupils needed to be schooled along with their peer group, by age, but it would also be necessary to have an initial assessment of their skills and knowledge level, or conduct one in the school if this information was not available from their respective countries. The also criticised the high ratio of these pupils per class. Managing cultural diversity becomes more complex the bigger the group is and the more diverse its members are. One of the counsellors explained: ‘They are also very many. Here we have 33 in a class and we are working with a very, very diverse group …It’s really complicated’ (FGCO4).

Another threat which all the counsellors agreed to was the instability of resources received from the administration and local authorities. The programmes started were not always continued. One of the counsellors noted:

> We have this intercultural mediator; the problem is that this year they haven’t received any subsidies and we’re falling short. And the same goes for the Arabic interpreter. We don’t know if he’s going to be able to continue. (FGCO4)

The instability of resources also made some teachers less keen to attend to the needs of foreign students when there was a lack of complementary resources. These attitudes, in the counsellors’ opinion and not generalised, were also reinforced by the current teacher selection process and the initial and ongoing training received. Counsellors noted that in initial teacher training, cultural diversity management-related issues should take priority and the staff selection system should also distinguish

between ‘good and bad’ professionals. In this sense, they emphasised that ‘you need to have sensitivity on these issues and not everybody is up to the task’(FGCO1).

As for the ongoing training of counsellors, they stated that they should be given the opportunity to share experiences, disseminate them, get to know other realities and foster more contacts among their colleagues in the profession. These meetings, nevertheless, must be very well structured and designed to foment autonomy and a better educational response than each counsellor can provide in their own context. One counsellor clarified: ‘We all have to recycle ourselves and learn what is done in our country and in others’(INTCO2). Along with this, counsellors also considered that it was essential to change the content and delivery modes of the curriculum, including a serious rethinking of textbooks and their role in the teaching-learning process. A counsellor explained:

> Then the maths teacher comes along, with the best of intentions, and says “I have to teach all this; they pay me to teach all this” and says “I can’t just skip the polynomials”. In other words, the first thing that needs to be done is changing the curriculum, modifying it completely. Because otherwise it will not be suitable to meet the needs of a young sixteen-year-old nowadays. (FGCO3).

Finally, the counsellors also identified difficulties due to the economic situation and cultural differences of immigrant families. Faced with economic needs, many immigrant families lived and worked in farming areas, far from the town school. This means that their children have fewer opportunities to form relations with Spanish pupils and learn Spanish, as there is no public transport connecting the farming areas with urban centres. One counsellor added: ‘We have Ukrainians and the only Spanish contact they have is when they’re talking with their classmates. They are definitely more displaced, as they live in the countryside. They don’t have any friends they can talk to’. (FGCO3).

Regarding cultural patterns, some counsellors considered that immigrant families of foreign origin are less interested in education due to their culture and professional aspirations. They emphasised that this lower interest negatively affects the commitment and involvement of their children. As one counsellor commented:

> Families already have their business and the child has no interest in education, so perhaps from a cultural point of view there is no such requirement. In general, I don't think they have much interest in education. Or else they're only interested up to the level they see as useful, in other words learning the language and little else. (FGCO3).

On the other hand, they pointed out that sometimes it was very difficult to perform their mentoring tasks. The limits between the responsibility of teachers and the responsibility of families were not clear and it was not always understood which role each of them should assume, especially when it came to cultural and gender issues. This ambiguity can give rise to culture clashes or conflicts in family-school relationships, hampering positive management of cultural diversity. Culture, religion and gender issues were also mentioned as obstacles impacting the interaction of students of foreign origin with their peers. In the counsellors' opinion, it was mainly Chinese and Muslim students that had the least opportunities for inclusion. Although Chinese students were very diligent pupils, they found it hard to form relationships with other children with whom they did not share the same nationality, and Muslim students, due to religious influence. One of the counsellors stated:

> This is what they find most difficult, integrating with their peers. But it depends on where they come from. For example, we've had Romanian children who had no problem interacting with their peers, and quickly became friends. But for example, right now I have two Muslim girls who are having a hard time integrating. They're also quite nervous, they come to school very heavily clothed... (INTCO2).

Discussion

Our study reveals a change in attitude when managing cultural diversity and care for immigrant students in schools in Spain. Teachers have moved away from the initial rejection and denial, from 'no issue'—as previously reported by Tatar (2012) in other research— to assuming that attending to pupil diversity is their responsibility. However, the response provided is still based on the deficit theory (Arroyo & Berzosa, 2018), with a notably negative concept of immigrant pupils. The majority of schools have focused on resolving the difficulties presented by these pupils, attempting to offset their enrolment issues and study difficulties, mainly their lack of knowledge of the language. It remains significant that, although the teaching staff, acknowledge that the diversity of immigrant students is mainly marked by their culture and language, they basically attend to the linguistic diversity of the pupils, but from a compensatory and assimilationist standpoint. In this regard, our research coincides with the previous work by Alcalde (2008); Berry (2005); Berry *et al.* (2006), Lee (2017) and Rodríguez-Izquierdo & Darmody (2019). The aim is for immigrant children to learn Spanish as soon as possible, in order to compensate for their academic difficulties, thus precluding the availability of learning opportunities to all students that comes from having a great diversity and richness of languages in the school.

The few references to the culture of immigrant pupils and their families are also made in a negative sense. The teachers in general, as well as some of the counsellors, allude to problems of coexistence, rejection and scant interaction of the immigrant pupils with the native peers due to cultural differences. This is mainly attributed to immigrant pupils, and Muslim students (Cuevas *et al.*, 2004; Dusi, 2016), in particular are attributed cultural difficulties in relating to others, which may possibly compound the low participation of families and limited interest in their children's education. Much

of the argumentation is based on hypotheses and beliefs which, in agreement with Baruth and Manning (2000), Chen and Park-Taylor (2006), González-Falcón, (2020), and Olmos and Martínez (2019), are usually based on stereotypes and prejudices towards other cultures. The consequences can be very negative. As Berry has articulated (2005): 'Those groups that are less well accepted often experience hostility, rejection, and discrimination, one factor that is predictive of poor long-term adaptation' (p.704). Moreover, although it would be necessary to further and specifically explore the attitudes and strategies that immigrant students use in their acculturation processes, some of our findings seem to point to a tendency towards what Berry (2005) has called *separation,* especially in the case of Maghrebi female students. This may be because there are only a few initiatives observed taken by the school to encourage acquisition of the new culture and the maintenance of their own by the immigrant pupils.

Counsellors did not discuss the enrichment of having different cultures and experiences in the school, and therefore, missing from the discussion are the opportunities for learning and personal growth for all students that arise from the experience and critical rethinking of diverse norms and lifestyles (see Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2009). The work is sporadic and superficial, more focused on folkloric aspects (celebration of intercultural days or snacks and allusion to some celebrations of the countries of origin in the curriculum). These actions also come from the specialist teachers (Spanish teacher) or other external professionals who collaborate with schools (mainly intercultural mediators or social educators). We agree with Coleman (2012) and Williams & Butler (2003) in that, despite the presence of a multicultural model of action in schools, the implementation is inadequate due to a lack of intercultural guidelines promoted by the school management, which could have been planned with all professionals.

On the other hand, as also occurred in the works by Dusi (2016) and Monaghan & Hawkins (2019), the counsellors in this study made hardly any reference to the demands of the families or the needs that immigrant pupils may experience as a consequence of the migratory experience, the access to new cultural guidelines and the questioning of their own. In contrast with the research by Portera *et al.* (2020), ensuring the wellbeing of immigrant students, listening to how they feel and developing strategies that allow for their best adaptation and cultural fit, while also dealing with possible imbalances, has been worked upon to a lesser extent. As Berry (2005) and Berry and Dansen (2019) have already pointed out, this action is especially relevant, given that acculturation is a two-dimensional process in which, in addition to the sociocultural aspects of the different groups - both majority and minority- the psychological aspects of specific individuals come into play. Moreover, there is also a great variability: "Not every individual enters into, and participates in, or changes in the same way; here are vast individual differences in psychological acculturation, even among individuals who live in the same acculturative arena" (Berry, 2005, p.702). Constantine and Gushue (2003) found that higher ethnic tolerance attitudes were associated with greater multicultural case conceptualisation ability, while higher racist attitudes were related to lower multicultural case conceptualisation ability (i.e., ability to conceptualise the mental health concerns of an immigrant pupil in the light of salient cultural information). In line with Hughes *et al.* (2019), it is necessary to refocus the counsellors' task towards the personal work they carry out with each pupil and promote more research that considers the type of cultural guidance and support provided to them.

The SWOT analysis highlights a certain decompensation between the factors that exclusively affect the work carried out by counsellors with immigrant pupils and other more general aspects. One would expect that in an analysis focused on rating the

management of cultural diversity, the former would stand out. However, issues related to educational policy such as human resources, training programmes that counsellors can access or the role of the counsellor, also take centre stage. As mentioned already, in the management of cultural diversity by the counsellors, a compensatory model prevails, based on a negative and deficient construction of immigrant pupils. As a result, there are hardly any references to the cultural heritage of immigrant students. The counsellors prioritise the same functions that they carry out with Spanish students and focus on resolving learning difficulties and problems of indiscipline or coexistence. Thus, the diversity of the pupils, the particular needs due to their migrant condition and the specific factors that affect the work that counsellors carry out with cultural diversity are overlooked. We agree with Constantine & Gushue (2003) when they state that multiculturalism is sidelined in favour of a response supposedly based on equal opportunities and inclusion. Positions which, according to the bidimensional acculturation theory proposed by Berry (2005), situate the school on the plane of assimilation.

Three more general factors, and not all strictly linked to cultural diversity management, favour assimilation. On the one hand, the therapeutic or diagnostic model that predominates in the counsellors' actions. On the other, the lack of specific training in intercultural education of the counsellors and, finally, the lack of inclusive culture in Secondary Education.

The intervention model adopted by school counsellors and demanded by administrators, teachers and families agree with what Arredondo *et al.* (2005) call more pathology-oriented rather than exploratory and developmental. School counsellors act as "fast intervention units", as if they were "merchants" involved in identifying the type of information that for example teachers "need" and that they as "experts" supply them

with, or as "medical examiners", identifying determined pathologies in the student body and deciding what is "wrong" in order to prescribe a "suitable treatment". In this regard, calls for intervention have primarily been associated with cognitive-type disabilities, learning difficulties and low achievement, leaving other questions such as cultural diversity or gender issues aside, in the background and/or treated without the attention, intensity, dedication and time required.

Our study has highlighted that to promote intercultural education it is essential to improve the pre-service and in-service training of teachers, counsellors and school principals. As observed by Fernández (1999) in Spain, the initial training received (general in nature, rarely useful and focused on acquisition of basically 'technical' and 'clinical' knowledge) is frankly improvable. Among the factors that negatively condition the schools' response to immigrant pupils, the previous inexperience of teachers with languages and cultures different from their own stands out as also noted by Constantine *et al.* (2004) and Georgiadou (2015), along with the lack of specific training focused on cultural identity that would enable them to develop intercultural skills, corroborating Mohd-Jaladin (2017) and Portman (2009). Previous experience in cultural diversity contexts is essential, as well as training programmes that especially work on emotional competencies and favour an inclusive climate (Fernández-Tilvey & Malvar, 2020).

Opportunities for encounter, interaction and exchange between cultures and among students and families in the educational community are scarce. It is taken for granted that the shared time and spaces in the school make this institution a privileged space for coexistence and intermingling, especially in contexts where opportunities for encounters in their surroundings are diminished (Adams & Kirova, 2006). However, as noted by Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2009), the shared time is not enough.

The school, therefore, has the possibility (and responsibility) to become a main stage for the promotion of interculturality. We agree with Sales *et al.* (2012) in that this is only possible if teachers as a whole develop a collaborative policy in favour of cultural diversity. As evidenced in this study, some steps have been taken in this direction. For example, the educational administration has increased the resources allocated to this end and has reformulated its schooling policy for immigrant pupils towards positions closer to social justice. The entry of new professionals into the school (e.g. intercultural mediators, social educators, Spanish teacher) and their collaboration with school counsellors has also afforded improvements in the care of immigrant pupils and their families, boosting the deployment of resources for attention to diversity. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to ensure the stability of many of these professionals and articulate a new professional work culture based on collaboration and participation. As Coronel and Gómez-Hurtado (2015) have already shown in secondary schools, a fragmented conception of teaching prevails. Teachers prioritise teaching their subject individually and delegate attention to immigrant students to Spanish teachers and counsellors (Gómez-Hurtado *et al.*, 2018; González-Falcón *et al.*, 2016). Counsellors often feel that they are unable to cover everything. Consequently, the workload of these professionals and the feeling of isolation they manifest in the absence of reciprocity and collaboration are exacerbated (Mohd-Jaladin, 2017; Sánchez *et al.*, 2018).

The research carried out also has its limitations. More counsellors could have been interviewed, and for a greater number of times. In this way, we could have defined other recurring themes, identifying possible patterns, and better explored the meanings and symbols constructed by counsellors in terms of cultural diversity. However, the study has already made it possible to point out some emerging issues on which further analysis is necessary. Among them: the way in which counsellors conceptualise cultural

diversity through language and how their conceptions affect their practices (Constantine & Gushue, 2003), the forms of exclusion that operate in educational policy and the role of institutional and school culture (Nieto & Bode, 2011; Tatar, 2012). In addition, the way in which Spanish school counsellors, in particular, are sensitive to cultural issues (Lee, 2001; Lynn *et al.*, 2012). Analysing the voices of immigrant students and the psychological consequences generated by the migratory and acculturation process is also equally relevant.

Conclusion

This research has confirmed the need for a new culture of collaboration among educational agents that considers students and their cultural diversity as the starting point and objective of all their proposals. We agree with Mata & Ballesteros (2012) in that organisational and methodological changes must be promoted so that teachers can detach themselves from traditional teaching methodologies, make the curriculum more flexible and manage the coexistence of pupils in different times and spaces. The aim, then, is to improve the opportunities for student interaction, exploring other channels of communication through experimentation, research and cooperative learning, so that all students can be acknowledged, accepted, and appreciated. A collaborative model (Nassar-McMillan *et al.*, 2009), infused with culture (Mohd-Jaladin, 2017; Portman 2009; Tatar, 2012), which recognises students as the focus of its discourse and is based on the concept of personal cultural identity is needed to improve the multicultural competence of professionals (Collins & Arthur, 2010).

Moreover, assimilation can also be considered a prior step to integration in schools. According to Berry *et al.* (2006) adopting assimilationist strategies can be more positive than segregation and exclusion, especially in public spaces where greater prejudices towards the culture of the immigrant population are detected. It is necessary

to continue analysing the various forms of exclusion that operate in the management of difference and culture through school policies and practices. Blackmore (2006), stresses that:

> 'the discourse of diversity has been mobilised and operationalised in educational policy and practice within market and managerialist frames that tend to limit the possibilities of delivering its promise of more inclusive and equitable schooling'. (pp. 182-189)

Counsellors are faced with a formidable professional challenge in managing cultural diversity in their schools. Counsellors play a decisive role in achieving the involvement of the rest of the educational agents in this process and, it is important to note that the responsibility for this task is no longer an exercise in their heroism but is becoming one shared by the educational community.

Funding details: This work was supported by the Ministry of Education by grant [number EDU2008-05539]

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