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Migrant Children in the Voice of Preschool Educators: Challenges and Strategies to Address Cultural Diversity during COVID-19

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Abstract

The present study investigated the didactic and intercultural strategies used by Early Childhood Educators during the health crisis to promote learning in culturally diverse children. A qualitative methodology and an instrumental case design were used. The participants were three Early Childhood Educators from a public educational center in a commune of Santiago de Chile, characterized by poverty and migrant school enrollment. Through semi-structured interviews, the voices of the Educators were collected, transcribed, coded, and categorized inductively for analysis. The results indicate that Educators need training and updating in didactic strategies and resources to teach in diverse and adverse educational contexts. Difficulties arose, especially in the implementation of intercultural approaches in learning experiences. The Educators highlighted the importance of updated training in new approaches, which should be integrated into initial teacher training. Advances and limitations in inclusive and intercultural education in Chile are evident, especially in early childhood, where attention has been primarily focused on the inclusion of children with special educational needs, indigenous peoples, and language barriers, leaving aside the promotion of a deeper inclusive and intercultural environment. These findings highlight the importance of comprehensively addressing cultural diversity in early childhood education and developing training and updating programs for Early Childhood Educators.

Keywords

Early childhood, intercultural approach, pandemic, migrant children, inclusion.

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La Niñez Migrante en la Voz de Educadoras de Preescolar: Desafíos y Estrategias para Abordar la Diversidad Cultural durante el COVID-19

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Resumen

El presente estudio investigó las estrategias didácticas e interculturales utilizadas por los Educadores Infantiles durante la crisis sanitaria para promover el aprendizaje en niños culturalmente diversos. Se utilizó una metodología cualitativa y un diseño de caso instrumental. Los participantes fueron tres Educadoras Infantiles de un centro educativo público de una comuna de Santiago de Chile, caracterizada por la pobreza y la matrícula escolar de migrantes. A través de entrevistas semiestructuradas, las voces de los Educadores fueron recopiladas, transcritas, codificadas y categorizadas inductivamente para su análisis. Los resultados indican que los Educadores necesitan capacitación y actualización en estrategias y recursos didácticos para enseñar en contextos educativos diversos y adversos. Surgieron dificultades, especialmente en la implementación de enfoques interculturales en las experiencias de aprendizaje. Los Educadores resaltaron la importancia de una formación actualizada en nuevos enfoques, que deben integrarse en la formación inicial docente. Los avances y limitaciones de la educación inclusiva e intercultural en Chile son evidentes, especialmente en la primera infancia, donde la atención se ha centrado principalmente en la inclusión de niños con necesidades educativas especiales, pueblos indígenas y barreras idiomáticas, dejando de lado la promoción de una educación inclusiva e intercultural más profunda. ambiente intercultural. Estos hallazgos resaltan la importancia de abordar de manera integral la diversidad cultural en la educación infantil y desarrollar programas de capacitación y actualización para Educadores de la Primera Infancia.

Palabras clave

Niñez temprana, enfoque intercultural, pandemia; niños migrantes, inclusión.

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This article reports on the results of a study that aimed to identify the didactic and intercultural strategies implemented in times of health crisis by three early childhood educators immersed in a culturally diverse educational context. Likewise, it focused on knowing the action plans, pedagogical guidelines, and intervention programs the educators and the center implemented to continue the learning processes remotely. It should be noted that the educators, girls, and boys belonged to a public kindergarten located in a commune of Santiago de Chile, which presents 23.3% of people and families in a situation of poverty according to the 2017 census (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, from now on [INE, 2018](#)), as well as a large number of the migrant population.

International evidence indicates that the health crisis resulting from confinement during the COVID-19 emergency had a solid impact to the detriment of the learning of girls and boys (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, from now on [CEPAL, 2023](#)), affecting the integral development of girls and boys from 0 to 5 years old. In this, the lack of direct interaction of infants with their peers and educators stands out as a detrimental factor; the discontinuity in educational processes due to the closure of kindergartens; the lack of resources, preparation, and time of the families to continue with the educational processes; and the incompatibility of remote education with early childhood, since they still do not have the autonomy or concentration required to be connected for extended periods ([UNICEF, 2021](#)).

Regarding the lags in learning, the World Health Organization ([WHO, 2021](#)) has indicated that the affectation in the learning processes of toddlers can last for a long time since girls and boys in early childhood cement the foundations for their future development. The interactions, the ties they establish with their peers and educators, and the sociocultural environment play a fundamental role in the integral development of infants. Similarly, the lack of early stimulation intervenes in children's cognitive, physical, and language development, which will be reflected in future development stages.

Regarding the Chilean national context, the Subsecretaria de Educación Parvularia ([MINESUC, 2022](#)) indicates that the total enrollment in initial education throughout the country in all types of establishments is 739,112 girls and boys, distributed at the different levels of Early Childhood Education (ECE). In this regard, there is no figure on how many are first-generation or second-generation migrants (born in Chile to migrant parents). The National Board of Kindergartens ([JUNJI, 2019](#)) indicates that in 2021 there were 214,341 migrant girls and boys enrolled in kindergartens and nursery schools throughout the country (Ministerio de Educación – Gobierno de Chile).

In this context, it is relevant to investigate how educators addressed educational demands in times of health crisis and in educational contexts that present a high migration, considering that the implementation of systematic pedagogical strategies in virtual modalities does not achieve an impact on the cultural adaptation processes of children and their families ([Flores-Meza et al., 2023](#)). Even though JUNJI has trained a third of the preschool educators to implement Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in learning processes, they have not been trained to integrate the intercultural approach in the classroom ([Subsecretaria de Educación Parvularia, MINEDUC & UNICEF, 2019](#)).

Theoretical Framework

Early Childhood and Migration

Being a migrant girl or boy is a challenge that is faced daily. In the first place, many of these children have experienced separation and estrangement from their families and loved ones and arrive at their destination for family reunification. In addition, in this new unknown territory, without understanding their customs, values, norms, and communication with others, girls and boys must face frustration and disappointment in the face of a series of discriminations (Pavez Soto et al., 2018), such as bullying and verbal and physical violence. Children might not necessarily experience these circumstances in their country of origin. However, they arise as a consequence of having, for example, a different phenotype, among other characteristics (Pavez-Soto et al., 2020).

Furthermore, during early childhood, learning and interactions in the sociocultural environment play a fundamental role in the number and strength of neural connections established. Through experience, some ties are removed, and others strengthened, resulting in noticeable changes in behavior. When the stimulation is of lower quality, later stages of development are also affected in the cognitive and physical aspects. If the interactions are less frequent, they permanently affect language, behavior, and self-esteem. Therefore, the opportunities the environment offers, or the lack thereof, will significantly impact the brain's physical architecture (UNICEF, 2016).

Regarding discrimination in the educational context, Chilean legislation establishes in Article 1 of the Inclusion Act 20,845 that "the system will tend to eliminate all forms of arbitrary discrimination that impede the learning and participation of students." Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the school coexistence policy in educational communities from a rights-based approach, which effectively guarantees the protection and integration of all children, especially those who belong to the migrant population.

Inclusive Education and Early Childhood

Inclusive education has evolved in different fashions according to the contexts where it is implemented. Some paradigmatic cases in Europe shed some light on it. In the case of England and France, the new inclusive provisions for migrant children after 2010 have been shown to reflect functionalist perspectives on economic inclusion for the benefit of both individuals and society as a whole. Although the commodification of school management has introduced diversity, differentiation, and competition into the system, inclusion in this context "consists of providing equal opportunities to all girls, boys, and adolescents to compete, recognizing that unequal contenders have few possibilities of obtaining equal results" (Alexiadou et al., 2016, p.18). Therefore, the impact of differentiated pedagogy must be studied in terms of the achievements of migrant children (Oyama, 2019).

An interesting case is the Maltese, where citizens of the European Union (mostly) or non-EU citizens (mainly from Libya, Serbia, Syria, and Pakistan) are welcomed. This second group of migrants has little or no knowledge of English and sometimes a limited, interrupted, or non-existent formal education. A mechanism of educational public policy is related to the induction classrooms implemented in Malta. Newly arrived students with no proficiency in

English or Maltese may attend induction classrooms for one year to gain communicative proficiency in the languages used in school instruction before being placed in regular classrooms where academic instruction is conducted in English and Maltese. Teachers have different proficiency levels in reading, writing, and speaking in both languages. English and Maltese are used in academic and social interactions, but formal academic writing is usually done in English. One of the difficulties stated by Ariza, Calleja & Vassallo Gauci (2019) is the practical instruction of Maltese teachers with their students from different countries, with different languages and literacy levels in their mother tongue.

Through the comparison of different approaches and experiences in inclusive education for migrant children, the importance of considering the particularities of each national context is evident. The implementation of inclusive provisions must address not only the educational needs of migrant children but also the social, cultural, and political factors that influence their inclusion. Promoting differentiated approaches and adapted pedagogies and encouraging collaboration and knowledge sharing between schools and teachers is necessary. In addition, special attention is required to critical perspectives on social inclusion, which seek to challenge power structures and promote broader social change. Inclusive education for migrant children is a complex challenge, but by addressing it holistically, significant progress can be made toward a more inclusive and equitable society.

According to Sánchez-Otero et al. (2019), didactic strategies are a set of activities proposed by teachers to facilitate the teaching-learning process, adapting to the characteristics of each group, area, content, and objectives. Nevertheless, various factors combine to block the incorporation of interculturality in educational practice. For example, the curricular bases of early childhood education (BCEP from now on) of the Ministry of Education (*Ministerio de Educación – Gobierno de Chile, 2018*) mention the importance of culture(s). However, they need to be defined practically and explicitly in the intercultural approach. In addition, it is pointed out that adult mediators need adequate training in dealing with the intercultural approach in their pedagogical practices. Regarding the first aspect, significant progress has been made in incorporating the concept of culture in the BCEP and the pedagogical orientations of the Coexistence and Citizenship nucleus. However, these sections are insufficient in terms of specific learning objectives.

Diversity, Interculturality, and Inclusion in Preschool Contexts

Cultural and linguistic diversity in preschool classrooms poses significant challenges for teachers, who are immersed in building their professional identity by working with students of different cultural origins (Andrade, 2023). This tension is generally ignored in the reciprocal influence occurring in the formative processes of educators. Various aspects influence teacher identity, such as personal life, previous experiences with girls and boys, the teacher training program, and future aspirations. According to the results obtained by Andrade (2023), preschool teachers show an inclination toward the fight against educational injustices, which reflects their commitment to inclusion and equity. Therefore, exposure to inclusion in teacher training processes contributes to forming teacher identity from a perspective that is open to critical inclusion. Another relevant element in initial education is

collaborative work with families and responsible adults as actors and agents in the educational processes of their daughters and sons or girls or boys in their care.

Cultural diversity must also be addressed in the classroom through the creation of open and inclusive spaces in schools. Although these spaces can generate a sense of belonging and achievement for newly arrived children, it is vital to consider the specific needs and resources of these girls and boys (Rinde, 2023). Indeed, the use of language is considered a primary resource to express social and cultural identity and belonging to social groups. Following Miller (2000), the links between using a second language, belonging, and social contexts are fundamental. The representation of themselves and how girls and boys are represented in schools is closely related to the social interactions in which they participate, their language acquisition process, and their integration into school and social contexts. To effectively address the identity and self-representations of children who do not speak the native language, it is essential to understand the dynamic interrelationships between institutional contexts, linguistic resources, and social identities (Miller, 2000).

Besides, the educational inclusion of displaced children poses specific challenges related to educational factors and the school environment, especially for refugee children or children in emergency camp situations. These children are considered a vulnerable group experiencing social and educational exclusion. To achieve their inclusion, it is crucial to consider several forms of educational integration at all levels, emphasizing educational factors at the institutional level (Demidenko & Stuopyte, 2021). In this sense, it is vital to recognize the importance of preparing the school community, applying forms of non-formal education, joint social activities between local and migrant children, and intercultural cognitive activities. Furthermore, the role of school infrastructure in creating a safe and inclusive environment for displaced people is crucial (Demidenko & Stuopyte, 2021). Indeed, the integration of these children is influenced by educational factors and the school environment. In this, the intercultural competencies of teachers and the development of the profession of intercultural assistants are configured as critical elements to support the integration of migrant children, improve their well-being and empower them in their new environment (Kościółek, 2020).

Method

The methodology used was qualitative, and the instrumental case study was chosen in order to provide a deeper understanding of the particular case and the study phenomenon. The qualitative approach was used because it allowed us to collect dense information on the processes and social relationships experienced by the educators, evidencing "the pluralization of vital worlds" (Flick, 2010, p. 195; Glass & Hopkins, 1984).

The instrumental case study was employed to generalize from a set of specific situations. The case is examined to deepen a topic or refine a theory so that the case plays a secondary, supportive role in formulating affirmations about the object of study. It is the multiple case design used when there are several cases to replicate" (Alvarez & San Fabián, 2012, p. 6).

Furthermore, following Stake (2020), the study of multiple or multi-case cases is a qualitative research design to examine several interconnected cases closely. Departing widely

from the design of experiments and hypothesis testing, the author establishes an inseparable link between this type of study and qualitative research. This link gives meaning and orientation to his methodological position (p. 67).

The data collection technique was through the semi-structured interview with the purpose of collecting the meanings that the subjects provide to the events they are experiencing. The interview script was organized around thematic axes: Didactic and intercultural strategies and guarantee and access to rights.

The fieldwork was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic (during the year 2021). The interviews were conducted through an online communication application (Zoom), and the video audio was transcribed. The texts obtained from the interview transcripts were inductively coded and categorized using qualitative content analysis. It is necessary to specify that the purpose of the study is to know the didactic and intercultural strategies from the learning experiences implemented in the distance educational modalities to promote learning from an inclusive perspective.

The study was conducted in a kindergarten located in a commune of Santiago de Chile that leads the indexes of social exclusion and vulnerability. To respect the ethical protocol of scientific research, this study adheres to the Singapore Declaration on Research Ethics and respects the rights of the participants. An informed consent form was applied, and pseudonyms were used to guarantee the confidentiality of the data. The names presented here are fictitious in order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewees and not mention the commune in question to avoid bias.

Therefore, the sample was made up of three educators following the following inclusion criteria:

- Profession: Kindergarten educator
- Age: 35 to 40 years old
- Sex-gender: women
- Type of establishment: Kindergarten
- Manager: public
- Years of experience: More than ten

Results

The categories that emerged from the qualitative content analysis are presented below. Said categories refer to the digital and didactic strategies implemented in virtual modality and the guarantee of access to rights by migrant girls and boys from an intercultural approach.

Distance Learning During the COVID19 Pandemic

At the beginning of the outbreak, the kindergartens implemented various emerging strategies to continue, within the possibilities, with the mentoring and teaching practice in the global context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, we were able to find that the teaching teams carried out their classes through virtual connection platforms; that is, they had to implement information and communication technologies (ICTs) in preschool educational environments that are not usually wholly based on the use of digital or virtual resources. As

mentioned by UNICEF (2021), girls and boys still do not have autonomy or concentration for a long time in a virtual environment. Undoubtedly, the didactic mobilization of digital and virtual resources constituted a challenge for preschool educators:

When we greet each other virtually, I tell the children to greet their partner and wait their turn, but it is still difficult because there is much noise, and sometimes when the children connect, the families have the radio or television on. Also, they live in tiny places. So, they do not listen well to the educator's instructions, and from there, it is difficult to try to work on learning in general, but they always look for the opportunity to develop it (Frida, 40 years old).

According to Frida's words, the virtual environment created the challenge of maintaining communication during classes. Although the teacher requests the realization of basic rules of coexistence and respect (greeting, turns, among others), distance education presents new challenges. According to Cruz Peñafiel, Veytia Bucheli & Moreno Tapia (2023), most teachers of different levels were not prepared to use technologies in their teaching practice from a virtual modality, specifically in preschool, a level that was little favored in this health contingency. In addition, in Frida's quote, two aspects hindered childhood learning: on the one hand, her students' housing conditions are precarious, and on the other, the families tried to continue with their daily lives (conversations, radio, or television). These daily activities that revealed family practices in online sessions during the confinement affected a class's "normal" development, preventing children from hearing the educator's instructions and completing the task. Despite the limitations, the teachers find creative teaching solutions during virtual classes, even in less-than-ideal environments.

One of the didactic activities that the educator implemented to facilitate the virtual connection refers to the use of intercultural elements; in this case, it refers to the Kultrún, a musical instrument of the Mapuche culture:

I started playing [with] a Kultrún so that they would dance with me, and [there were] two connected children and the virtual connection, no, it is tough; one can work with the children in the school because one does that (Frida, 40 years old).

Using the Kultrún as an activation resource aims to generate an interactive and playful experience that motivates children to participate and dance; the educator demonstrated effort and creativity to promote active participation during the virtual sessions. Despite the technological limitations and physical distancing imposed during the pandemic (UNICEF, 2021), the educator's role remains fundamental. However, it is possible to infer that Frida was frustrated with the poor participation and unstable internet connection ("it is tough"), which hindered the pace of her class.

Regarding the rhythms and learning characteristics of immigrant children, one of the difficulties arises from the advent of technology in education and one of the language barriers present in the Haitian community:

No, you plan activities that discuss and communicate these experiences, but of course, you send videos of activities, but they remain undone. So, the evidence does not come back; it has been difficult in times of pandemic, especially with children who are born here in Chile or come from other countries, especially when the mothers maintain the same language where

they come from (...). We have done everything, so they respond to the activities and do not fall behind in their learning because we have always been there; the family at this age does not take education seriously” (Frida, 40).

The difficulties that the pandemic has generated have been accentuated in those contexts of high migration, especially of girls and boys born in Chile or from countries with a language other than Spanish. Linguistic immersion is already critical in intercultural education (Beniscelli et al., 2019; Riedemann et al., 2020). Therefore, in a virtual context, this task was even more complex. In addition, the same language difficulties are endorsed in the advances and progress of preschool girls and boys. Consequently, if the evidence of children's learning in a virtual environment is not received satisfactorily, the evaluation and monitoring of educational progress is complex. In this case, the language barrier is established as a differentiating element in the learning of girls and boys, as we will see below.

Strategies to Overcome the Language Barrier

Secondly, the strategies developed by the preschool educators regarding the language barriers that could exist in those cases of non-Spanish-speaking migrant children were explored. Concerning this issue, one of the educators mentions that the kindergarten conducts a background check on each student at the beginning of the school year through a family interview:

At the beginning of the year, they [families] are interviewed to learn about their cultures and the needs of the child through a person who can understand both languages (Carla, 35 years old).

This interview that is carried out with the families of the migrant students has the objective of detecting their needs and understanding their culture. However, Carla stresses that communication can be difficult due to language barriers, an issue that they overcome through the help of a translator. The informality with which this figure is referred allows us to infer that it could be a person belonging to the foreign community but not a Mediator hired by the Ministry of Education. The figure of an intercultural Mediator and Translator has been highly recommended as part of implementing intercultural education (Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2020). In the case of Chile, according to Carmona and Naudón (2018), teachers perceive that they do not have the training or the adequate tools to carry out intercultural education in the classroom with immigrant students. A few pilot integration programs have been developed at the initiative of the teams but without institutional support.

Girls and boys from Haiti create a more complex situation by not speaking Spanish. On the one hand, the children and their families have difficulties communicating with the teaching team; on the other, they may become victims of discrimination and racism. This violation of rights has been previously identified in Chile (Pavez-Soto et al., 2019):

Sometimes it is the language; some parents still do not understand. They do not understand us. We must have a third party that understands and translates; there is no such direct contact with them so that they can give us a demonstration. It is different when we teach our indigenous culture that we already have super included; on the other hand, this same group of parents sometimes feels discriminated against; they do not connect or send evidence because

they do not feel included, nor does the kindergarten help with communication (Carla, 35 years old).

In this quote, the educator expresses various situations and challenges that she faces in communication with the parents of migrant children. She emphasizes that sometimes the language barrier makes mutual understanding difficult, which requires the intervention of a third party who can translate and facilitate communication. The mothers and fathers sometimes feel discriminated against and excluded, which affects their willingness to connect and send homework and school activities to their children. It also mentions that the kindergarten does not provide enough support to facilitate communication with this group of parents. According to Chávez, Torres & Albornoz (2021), during the COVID-19 pandemic, mediation became a crucial means of pedagogical support for students and their families. In our case, given the context of high migration, the participation of an intercultural facilitator who could cross the language barrier was also required to make a complete and timely diagnosis of children's needs.

Intercultural educational competence requires bilingual programs for foreign children to promote linguistic immersion (Ariza et al., 2019). In this case, an educator stresses the importance of adapting the Internal Regulations of the kindergarten to the linguistic needs of families and non-Spanish-speaking migrant children. The internal regulations work as a response protocol in different situations of violating the rights of girls and boys and workers, emergencies of a different order, and other action protocols. Therefore, those non-Spanish-speaking communities cannot access these protocols:

I think that this document [Internal Regulation] should be done in different languages since it is only in Spanish (Nataly, 36 years old).

On the other hand, the intercultural approach at the different levels of the Chilean school system presents various challenges. For example, the lack of training regarding intercultural education has been widely identified (Riedeman et al., 2020). One of the educators interviewed acknowledges that there is little training in terms of the intercultural approach that allows the inclusion of students of different national and linguistic origins:

We do not have real training; that is what is missing to be able to carry out the classes either online or in person. There must be a person for children and parents who speak Creole because sometimes mothers have difficulty understanding some words (Nataly, 36 years old).

According to the educator, the presence of a Translator who acts as an Intercultural Mediator is vital (Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2020). In this case, the Haitian children speak Creole or Creole French, a dialect used in some Caribbean countries. The fact that mothers have difficulties understanding Spanish is revealing since this would expose the level of linguistic competence of migrant families and how this affects their participation in the educational process.

For example, the Haitians, of course, you do not understand them very much, but you can have the strategy to communicate with them (Frida, 40 years old).

Frida explicitly expresses her difficulty in understanding Haitian children due to linguistic and cultural differences. Previous studies have identified this situation (Pavez-Soto et al., 2019). At the same time, the teacher highlights the importance of developing effective communication strategies to interact and facilitate mutual understanding. As Miller (2000) points out, inclusion occurs in those dynamic interrelationships between institutional contexts, linguistic resources, and social identities. Therefore, different mechanisms are put in place by the educator in order to promote effective communication. In this sense, the educator shows her agency as a teacher to look for communicative alternatives. It is interesting to observe that, despite acknowledging the use of an intercultural communication strategy, she does not attribute its use to the development of personal teaching strategies that allow her to maintain relatively satisfactory communication with the children's family.

Strategies to Address Cultural Diversity

Third, we wanted to analyze and understand the strategies used to address cultural diversity during the pandemic. According to the literature (Poblete & Galaz, 2016, 2017; Stefoni & Stang, 2016; Riedemann et al., 2020), implementing misunderstood intercultural education could give rise to the folklorization of a diverse school habitus. One of the educators mentions the strategies implemented to maintain children's learning and, at the same time, address cultural diversity during the pandemic:

Now that we are in contingency because our kindergarten is overwhelmed, due to lack of personnel and time, since there are other needs that were generated as a result of the pandemic, as children are declining in learning, we are trying to solve problems that are more urgent and the establishment still does not pay attention to that (Nataly, 36 years old).

According to Nataly's account, there would be a lack of attention and resources devoted to addressing cultural diversity in the context of the pandemic. Let us remember that most teachers at the different school levels were not prepared to use technologies in their teaching practice from a virtual modality, specifically in preschool. This level was little favored in this health contingency (Cruz Peñafiel et al., 2023). This situation can make it challenging to create an inclusive and respectful environment where the specific needs of children from different cultures are addressed and their active participation in the educational process is promoted.

On the other hand, in our study, we wanted to investigate the strategies used by preschool educators regarding the use of educational resources adapted to the different cultures represented in the classroom, the promotion of spaces for dialogue and mutual understanding, and teacher training:

But we don't do it so much with migrant children, perhaps in the week of interculturality. We have dates where we include migrant peoples. There we work with exhibitions; we observe which countries we have children from (Bolivia, Peru, Haiti), which are the most common [nationalities] that we have in the school. We make a traditional fair of those countries, we show the food and the families of these children, we show their dances and typical foods. In this way we include their interests in the school: Only in that week (Nataly, 36 years old).

When I arrived about three years ago, we included the celebrations of different countries in different stands: Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Chile, and each stand represented typical foods, dance including families. For example, families where they were given the space to show their dance or if she wanted to play an instrument, she was given that beautiful freedom, that experience (Frida, 40 years old).

The educators mention that kindergarten's approach to cultural diversity is mainly limited to specific activities, such as the intercultural week or celebrations, dances, and typical foods. In this sense, when inquiring about the didactic strategies to address cultural diversity in the classroom, a folklorizing interpretation of diverse cultural practices or situated as otherness is identified (Poblete, 2018). This means that the educational context analyzed presents a kind of folklorization of some cultural practices of foreign communities. Activities such as culinary shows or intercultural weeks have been understood as the first stage in implementing intercultural education (Poblete, 2018). From this starting point, it is necessary to move towards the inclusion of the rights and needs of migrant children. In this sense, it is vital to strengthen inclusion and respect for diversity in education beyond fairs or intercultural activities since a more profound conception of interculturality will help reduce the reproduction of folkloric or superficial stereotypes of the cultures of migrant children. This implies not limiting the attention to a single week but looking for ways to incorporate the experiences and perspectives of migrant children more continuously and effectively in all areas of the curriculum and the daily life of the kindergarten. Doing so will strengthen the connection between migrant children's cultural identity and educational experience, contributing to their emotional, social, and academic well-being. Additionally, this will promote intercultural understanding among all children and foster an inclusive and respectful environment.

While providing a space to showcase culture fosters a sense of belonging and pride, this must be done with knowledge and a genuine appreciation for the diversity in the school community. In this sense, we believe that this practice not only promotes the inclusion of migrant families but also provides all children with the opportunity to learn about different cultures and develop an open and respectful mindset toward diversity. Likewise, it establishes more meaningful and genuine connections between educational staff, children, and their families, strengthening collaboration and a sense of community in kindergartens.

Self-Perception of Intercultural Skills

Fourthly, we wanted to inquire about preschool educators' self-perception of intercultural skills and competencies. According to Aguayo et al. (2023), the MINEDUC regulations seem insufficient to address the migrant school reality. Although there is a robust legal body, an educational approach tending to functional interculturality is evident, which leaves a question mark about the educational inclusion of migrant students in Chile. In addition, the lack of training in intercultural education is a historical demand of the teaching staff in general (Riedemann et al., 2020), specifically in the preschool space (Chavez et al., 2021). One of the educators openly acknowledges that she lacks the tools to promote the learning of immigrant children:

We do not have the necessary tools to deliver this knowledge (...) We are not trained to do intercultural classes because until now, we have taught Peruvian and Bolivian children; they have a culture very similar to ours, they are not so far away countries, but when we start to have children from countries like Venezuela, Haiti, those countries are further away and have a more distant custom (Nataly, 36 years old).

In the previous quote, a gap can be seen in their ability to attend to the specific educational needs of immigrant children who, in the educator's opinion, would have cultures that are more distant from the Chilean one. Therefore, their inclusion would be more complex and challenging for her, as a professional in charge. The most significant concern is related to the perception of their development of pedagogical and intercultural skills and the lack of suitable training to cope (Chavez et al., 2021). This perception focuses on the training received as a strategic resource for developing their skills, missing a vision of its leading role in the formation of skills in pedagogical practice. Demidenko & Stuopyte (2021) point out that educational processes depend to a large extent on institutional responses, particularly in the case of girls and boys who have been displaced. The educator's response, in this sense, is limited by her own experiences. However, she recognizes the need to understand and appreciate students' cultural differences and develop pedagogical strategies that are inclusive and respectful of those differences.

Guarantee of Access to Rights

Fifth, our research delved into how to provide education at the initial levels of early childhood education, specifically regarding the mobilization of pedagogical strategies that guarantee access to the right to education. The following educator mentions that the rights-based approach would be taken into account when planning the activities:

It has to be respected and promoted according to the interests and needs of the child. This year the rights were implemented in each planning, since [it] mentions that they work for children (sic); therefore, their rights cannot be violated (Carla, 35 years old).

Educational planning aims to work for the benefit of children, avoiding any situation that may violate their rights (MINEDUC, 2021). In other words, the educator recognizes that her role as a teacher involves respecting and promoting the rights of each child, guaranteeing that they are not put at risk of being violated. In the same way, as in the previous case, another educator interviewed in our study points out that on the first day of school, parents receive a copy of the Internal Regulations, which allows them to know the rights and duties of families:

This document has not been delivered since 2019 from that year it is not delivered, so only the families of 2019 know those rights and duties (Nataly, 36 years old).

The rights of girls and boys would be detailed in an official document called Internal Regulations, which is used in Chile according to the guidance of the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC, 2021) and must be delivered to the entire school community. However, according to the account just exposed, it would not have been delivered due to the pandemic. Therefore, families that joined kindergarten after 2019 are probably unaware of school regulations, creating a gap in understanding their roles and responsibilities in the educational

field. However, as we have mentioned before, those regulations are in Spanish, so only Spanish-speaking families may understand its content. The delay in delivering the regulations to the families then affects all families and children in general. On the other hand, one of the educators points out that immigrant children learn the meaning of their rights in a transversal way; the above would be reflected in the educational plans and all the activities:

The rights of the child must always prevail in play, in education and diversity (...), always as an educator, each experience must be related to that (Frida, 40 years old).

Learning children's rights obeys a transversal approach to the Curricular Bases of Initial Education in Chile (MINEDUC, 2018). Education is one of the fundamental rights of all children since it fosters their integral development and is inherent to their status as subjects of rights. Young girls and boys can learn to exercise their rights in the preschool space. This implies that play and educational activities must be designed to promote and respect children's rights, ensuring they can exercise them and understand their importance.

Conclusions

Currently, the educational system faces various challenges regarding interculturality in early childhood education. As we have considered in this article, in the voices and experiences of preschool educators, one of the challenges they face is the lack of focus and attention to the needs of migrant communities, as is the case of the Haitian community in the context mentioned earlier. Although there are curricular documents that guide the pedagogical practice in initial education in Chile, there is a lack of specific curricular references for selecting strategies that enhance the cultural identity of said community.

On the one hand, educators recognize the importance of interculturality in the integral development of girls and boys since it contributes to their formation as conscious, respectful, and tolerant citizens. In addition, it promotes the recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity as an enriching asset for society. However, it is necessary that the curricular documents explicitly incorporate the intercultural dimension and provide clear guidelines on how to approach it in the preschool classroom. This implies considering the diverse cultures present in the educational community and promoting the participation of families in the educational process more actively, understanding the adult world's key role in promoting and guaranteeing the rights of girls and boys.

On the other hand, the educators interviewed mentioned that they constantly address the integration of migrant children through strategies, activities, and family participation. However, they recognize that verbal communication is limited in most cases. These activities are carried out on specific occasions during the year and within the school environment. In the interviews, intercultural strategies, as Poblete (2018) suggests, constitute a first base for intercultural rapprochement in schools, such as fairs, weeks, or celebrations to express cultural diversity. In other words, the folklorization of cultural expressions can cement a more critical and profound intercultural approach to the intercultural strategies adopted by schools, such as kindergartens. We believe it is essential to approach interculturality from a critical perspective that questions and challenges stereotypes and cultural prejudices. This

implies encouraging reflection and analysis of the stereotypes present in the media and society in general and promoting the appreciation of cultural diversity and respect for all cultures.

Regarding the pandemic, educators report that communication and experiences that favor the teaching-learning process have been significantly reduced. The reduction in communication and teaching-learning experiences due to social distancing measures affected the child population around the world (UNICEF, 2021), but with a remarkable impact on groups of girls and boys in conditions of social exclusion, such as migrant children, who may face additional barriers in accessing educational resources and maintaining a connection to their cultures of origin.

Due to the pandemic and confinement, the educators mentioned the difficulty of maintaining a virtual classroom environment conducive to learning and having educational resources other than those they usually use in the preschool room. Consequently, the role of ICTs should be considered both in the didactic articulation of the curriculum and in the promotion of interculturality. ICTs can be a powerful tool to facilitate communication, access to educational resources, and collaboration between the different actors involved in the educational process. Therefore, it is necessary to provide educators with (co)training spaces and support to use these tools in contexts of high cultural diversity effectively. The situation of migrant children requires special attention, ensuring their access to quality education that respects their cultural identity. This implies adapting pedagogical strategies to these girls' and boys' needs and using ICTs to facilitate their participation and learning. Even so, we agree with UNICEF (2021) that the pedagogical link in the classroom is irreplaceable in preschool classrooms due to the characteristics of early childhood children. However, it is necessary to be prepared for health or other emergencies that require virtual teaching.

Likewise, the educators mentioned in their interviews that the language barrier is, without a doubt, an impediment beyond communication since it does not allow both girls and boys and their caregivers to access information regarding the internal protocols of the kindergarten. Therefore, from a dogmatic perspective, the right of girls and boys is violated by not having a clear and accessible definition of their rights and duties when the command of Spanish is limited. In addition, it is also essential to foster respect for and appreciation of the mother tongues of migrant children, as well as of the indigenous languages present in the community. Recognizing and promoting linguistic diversity as a value and cultural richness would encourage communication and collaboration between teachers and families of migrant children by creating spaces for dialogue and participation, establishing communication channels, and promoting activities that involve migrant families in school life.

Another point educators declare is related to the need for formal training by public organizations to guarantee a quality education to which they express adherence. Therefore, we conclude that it is necessary to strengthen their preparation in specific critical knots regarding interculturality and cultural diversity in the preschool classroom. This implies offering training and updating programs that allow them to acquire theoretical and practical knowledge to address cultural diversity effectively in the classroom. In other words, it is about providing training in topics such as intercultural competence, intercultural pedagogy, didactics of cultural diversity, and diversity management in the classroom, as well as reflecting on their beliefs and attitudes concerning cultural diversity. Indeed, the educators

express in their own self-perception about the intercultural skills that they "do not have skills," associating the development of their own pedagogical practice with the official training received. However, they suggest "having their strategies" primarily to communicate with non-Spanish-speaking families. Therefore, we infer that some abilities to allow the inclusion of migrant families have already been developed in an incipient way through daily intercultural practices. However, these are not recognized as such.

Despite the difficulties presented, it is encouraging to note that children's rights are always present in educational plans, and work is being done to favor them. In this sense, we agree with the results obtained by Andrade (2023), where a characteristic seal of preschool educators oriented toward social justice and equity is evident. However, it is recognized that there are challenges in covering these rights at home, especially for migrant children who come to the country in search of a better life and comprehensive and quality education. This situation reveals the need for a comprehensive approach to early childhood education, which includes not only the promotion of interculturality but also emotional support, socio-emotional development, and attention to the specific needs of migrant children.

In summary, promoting interculturality in early childhood education is a challenge that requires a collective commitment. Curricular documents and educational policies need to explicitly incorporate the intercultural dimension and provide clear guidelines for approaching it in the classroom. In addition, it is essential to provide educators with the necessary tools to develop interculturality effectively and foster collaboration between teachers and migrant families. On the other hand, it is vital to highlight the importance of developing specific educational programs that address interculturality from a comprehensive approach. These programs must go beyond the mere inclusion of specific activities. They must integrate interculturality in all dimensions of the curriculum, such as the development of competencies, the selection of contents, and the evaluation of learning. Providing adequate support, resources, and training will make it possible to move towards an education that values and respects cultural diversity, promoting equity and the participation of all girls and boys, regardless of their origin or migratory history.

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