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Training Challenges to Face the New Social Configuration

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Abstract

Changes in society and education place new demands on the teaching profession. Due to the increasing cultural diversity in the classrooms, teacher education should provide teachers with knowledge about intercultural issues, both in the initial and the permanent training. With this in mind, this paper seeks to determine if teachers have the professional knowledge (skills, teaching strategies...) required to adequately address the student diversity in the classrooms and the value they give to the initial/permanent training received to face successfully their professional practice in an intercultural context. For this purpose, a quantitative research methodology has been used. The questionnaire, constructed ad hoc to collect data, has been applied to a representative sample of pre-primary and primary teachers; the obtained data have been subjected to various statistical treatments. The results reveal that an important problem in the commitment to interculturalism is the insufficient teacher education, especially the pre-service training. Also, significant relationships between the identification variables and the responses of the teachers have been found.

Keywords: teacher training; intercultural education; migration; pre-service training; in-service training.

1. Introduction

In the last years the schools are facing new challenges, compositions and structures. Migration is an obvious phenomenon that is increasingly determining the configuration of our society. The schools are a reflection of it, and therefore we cannot shirk longer the multicultural reality of our classrooms.

Globally there seems to be an awareness of social support through the provision of community and specialized social services in order to attend the immigrants, who constitute foreign cultural minorities at risk of exclusion. But the error of not analyzing what happens in classrooms is committed. In our opinion, not to do that is a big error since one of the major political and social progress is the educational attention.

Teacher training remains to be an important issue because in this changing context it is a key element to deal the new idiosyncrasies of classrooms with quality and sufficient guarantees. The classrooms are no longer homogeneous and monocultural, becoming heterogeneous and multicultural.

In accordance with Ochoa, Rodríguez and Villaverde (2005), one of the main problems to address the intercultural education is the lack of teacher training. In this regard, Herrera (2005) reveals the urgent need that teachers who are in multicultural educational situations receive special training in this respect. Teacher training cannot remain aloof and indifferent to the new educational scenarios where multiculturalism should be considered as a positive issue and not a problem.

In order to give an adequate response to the new challenges of today's society and more specifically to its multicultural reflection in the classroom a solid and consistent teacher training is required. We must not ignore the impact that the socio-demographic changes are having on education. This situation forces us to rethink the teaching function and, therefore, to pay preferential attention to the teacher training.

2. Teacher Training in an Intercultural Context

In the current context, intercultural education is an unavoidable and urgent necessity. Teacher training is a key element to give an effective educational response in the multicultural classrooms in which we are immersed.

Santos and Pérez (1998) predicted that teacher training in intercultural education was a growing necessity to rise. Sixteen years later we are immersed in a pure social, cultural and educational diversity which we have not yet addressed as we should have done.

Nowadays the cultural diversity is evident but unfortunately some stereotypes and negative attitudes that consider certain groups as a problem continue to exist, hence one of the main objectives should be to replace the negative vision of the multiculturalism with other open to challenge and to the enriching potentiality that diversity implies (López and Pérez, 2013).

The cultural diversity is a social phenomenon that has been boosted by migrations. For many people, migration may be a new development in recent years but for certain populations is an innate issue. For example, for those who live in a frontier city.

In this sense, if we want to avoid stereotypes and negative attitudes towards immigrants we must consider that what unites us is much more than what divides us. In the educational context teachers should receive more intercultural training and be aware of the responsibility they have since, as Yavas-Bozkurt, Eksi and Alci (2013) point, any change in school will end in society.

Intercultural education is indispensable for all students and should not simply be seen as a way to integrate immigrant students because all students should have the opportunity to see diversity as normal and as a means for personal development (Alred, Byram and Fleming, 2002; Gil and Ballesteros, 2009).

The school must ensure equal opportunities, recognizing the right to be different. The presence of the intercultural education in the curriculum is a key factor as well as the participation of not only teachers and students, but also of families and social agents.

Teacher training systems are based on the concept of lifelong learning and they consist of an initial teacher training and a permanent in-service teacher training (Angelides, Stylianou and Leigh, 2007). In the next sections we analyze these two types of teacher training.

2.1 Initial (pre-service) teacher training in intercultural education

If the school does not want to become obsolete regarding the response to the current reality, the teacher education has to be rethought (García, 2003).

One of the issues that we have to think about is the teacher training from its early days, i.e., the training at university. Teachers in their initial training period have not been trained to deal with the new problems arising from the disappearance of homogeneity in the classrooms, so this issue needs to be reconsidered.

The curriculum for future teachers should correspond to the diverse, rich, complex and changing reality of the classroom. It makes no sense to work ignoring this reality, which is a reflection of the society that surrounds it. Based on the cultural diversity in the classrooms, many authors agree with the fact that the initial training must raise teachers' intercultural awareness and provide core knowledge and intercultural skills (Banks, 2001; Crichton and Scarino, 2007; Ermenc, 2005; Portera, 2011).

Thus, the curriculum content must be updated and adapted to the new social circumstances, since what future teachers learn at University cannot be separated from what they will find at school and in their environment. In this respect, Álvarez (2013) underlines the frustration of teachers when they start working at schools due to the expectations they had generated during their initial training. According to the author, this is motivated by the large distance between theory and practice. The initial training should not be understood as storage of theoretical concepts, but as a period in which experiences can be shared.

In short, a new model of initial teacher training (Rodríguez, 2003) and a reform in the profile of teachers (Escalante, Fernández and Gaete, 2014) are required.

2.2 Permanent (in-service) teacher training in intercultural education

Teacher training in intercultural education should be a concern of all educational institutions, not only during their initial training but also during their continuous training.

Cardona (2008) argues that the new challenges posed by society should make us see that teacher education must

be conceived as an unfinished and always capable of improvement task. This thought of exigency, reflection, criticism and nonconformity encourages the teacher to be in constant renewal and updating.

The continuous changes that occur in our society affect the education system, the schools, the classrooms and the key players, i.e., the students and the teachers. Given these transformations the requirement of a permanent teacher training is justified.

In the context of growing diversity, there are new content to learn, new tools to manage, new strategies in order to transmit knowledge, different ways of working and different skills to be implemented. In this regard, teachers must be involved in the permanent training so as to achieve a quality teaching due to the important role that the intercultural education plays, which is based on the general aim of enabling the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others, thus contributing to the good of society (Tormey, 2005).

Many authors, such as Fernández (2013), García and Castro (2012) and Olander and Ljung-Djarf (2012), consider the permanent teacher training as one of the criteria that define the quality of education. In fact, the current teacher is required not only to explain and examine, but also motivate the students, promote empathy, design strategies, experience new communication channels, promote the critical thinking... and many other functions that are complex, especially if the teacher is not sufficiently trained.

3. Research Methodology

Quantitative research method has been used for the data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Blanco and Latorre, 2012; Creswell, 2008; De Leeuw, Hox and Dillman, 2008). We have chosen this type of methodology because of the following reasons:

- It is objective, providing reliable information.
- It provides precise and numerical data.
- Systematic data collection and analysis.
- The results can be extrapolated to the entire population.

Teachers who work at public schools in Ceuta (a Spanish city, frontier with Morocco) have been selected randomly for the research as the sample of the study.

3.1 Participants

A total of 246 teachers, 67 pre-primary education teachers and 179 primary education teachers, from the sixteen public schools in Ceuta (Spain) participated in the study. Of them, 74.8% were female and, therefore, 25.2% male. The following figure shows the distribution of respondents by age range.

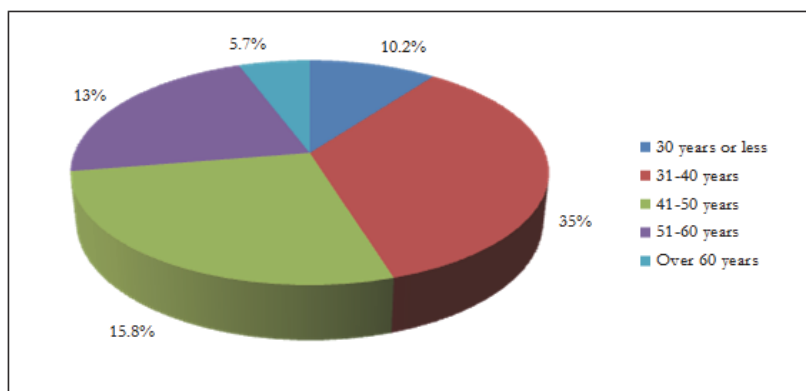


Figure 1. Sample distribution by age of respondent

Continuing with the description of the sample and taking into account the variable 'educational stage', 27.2% of the teachers work in pre-primary education level and 72.8% of them in primary education level.

3.2 Instrument

Data-collection was conducted using a questionnaire entitled "*Questionnaire on teacher training challenges to address the student diversity*", which we prepared from the literature review and other questionnaires used in previous studies. Through this instrument we intend to determine if the teachers have the professional knowledge (skills, teaching strategies...) required to adequately address the student diversity in the classrooms (items 1-10) and the value they give to the initial/permanent training received to face successfully their professional practice in an intercultural context (items 11-32). A Likert scale was used with four alternative responses (1= totally disagree; 2= disagree; 3= agree; and 4= totally agree).

Regarding the validity of the questionnaire, the items were discussed with various experts and the required changes were made in order to finalize the questionnaire.

Moreover, the Cronbach Alpha inter consistency coefficient of the conjoint questionnaire used in the study was found to be 0.853. The obtained reliability coefficient is quite high.

3.3 Data analysis

The data from the questionnaire were examined statistically using the SPSS software. We first performed a descriptive analysis (percentages, means and standard deviations) to have an overview of the teachers' perceptions; and, secondly, we conducted a contingency analysis to determine which identification variables maintained a significant association with respect to the items considered, depending on the sex, the age and the educational stage.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Descriptive analysis

Given the structure of the questionnaire, we firstly present the results corresponding to the items considered in order to determine the degree in which the pre-primary and primary education teachers from the public schools in Ceuta have certain professional knowledge required to address the student diversity in their daily practice.

We observe that the highest percentage of response falls on the Item 'I am able to correct the completed activities' with 61.6% for option 4 (totally agree). There are other items with a high percentage of response, above 50%, such as the items: 'I am able to teach new contents or reinforce the previous ones' (57.3% for option 'totally agree'); 'I am able to diagnose the learning difficulties' (56.1% for option 'agree') and 'I am able to motivate and encourage the students to get involved in learning' (54.9% for option 'agree').

Regarding the average scores, the highest values correspond to the items: 'I am able to correct the completed activities' (3.56), 'I am able to teach new contents or reinforce the previous ones' (3.55) and 'I am able to help the students when they need' (3.52). And the lowest values correspond to the items: 'I am able to diagnose the learning difficulties' (3.10), 'I am able to provide new reinforcement or extension activities' (3.25) and 'I am able to determine the most suitable resources for achieving the objectives' (3.29).

As regards the standard deviations, we observe that the lowest values pertain to the Item 'I am able to help the students when they need' (0.517) and the Item 'I am able to teach new contents or reinforce the previous ones' (0.538), while the highest values to the Item 'I am able to provide new reinforcement or extension activities' (0.670) and the Item 'I am able to diagnose the learning difficulties' (0.657).

Note that the items for which the highest means and the lowest standard deviations are given indicate not only a great acceptance of respondents but also a low variability in their responses.

On the other hand, regarding the items considered in order to know the value the teachers give to the initial/permanent training received to face successfully their professional practice in an intercultural context, we find the highest percentages of response in the Item 'During my training at University I acquired the necessary knowledge to develop a classroom programming in a multicultural environment' (63.4% for option 'disagree') and the Item 'I am interested in receiving training in multicultural contexts' (63.4% for option 'agree').

The highest means pertain to the items: 'The teacher training is one of the pillars that ensure the quality of an education system' (3.42), 'As Ceuta is a frontier city, the difficulties in classroom are higher because of the the cultural diversity' (3.35), 'I consider it is necessary to promote the teacher training in intercultural education' (3.20) and 'I am willing to address students who are increasingly diverse from a socio-cultural perspective' (3.18). Meanwhile, the lowest values are found in the items: 'In my initial teacher training those curricular, organizational and methodological aspects

necessary to face the requirements arising from the late incorporation of immigrant students were taken into account' (1.76), 'During the pre-service training at University the strategies needed to develop the teaching practice in a multicultural context are shown' (1.85), 'During my training at University I acquired the necessary knowledge to develop a classroom programming in a multicultural environment' (1.86) and 'The information provided about the immigrant students when they are incorporated throughout the school year is sufficient' (1.88).

Concerning the standard deviations, the lowest scores are presented in the items: 'I am willing to address students who are increasingly diverse from a socio-cultural perspective' (0.621), 'During the pre-service training at University the strategies needed to develop the teaching practice in a multicultural context are shown' (0.628) and 'The permanent teacher training is one of the pillars that ensure the quality of an education system' (0.651). And the highest scores fall on the items: 'The cultural diversity in a school is an added problem in the development of teaching' (0.920), 'The school where I work has an adequate training program in intercultural education' (0.867) and 'I think the teachers are discouraged by the lack of effective training offers on multiculturalism, needed to develop their teaching' (0.856).

It is worth highlighting the Item 19, which presents the highest mean and one of the lowest standard deviations. This means that the majority of teachers who participated in this research points that the teacher is one of the pillars that ensure the quality of an education system and there is a little variability in their responses.

4.2 Contingency Analyses

Firstly, the different contingency analyses conducted allow us to identify the items of the questionnaire that maintain a significant association with respect to the identification variable 'sex'. The significance of this relationship is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Significant relationship between the variable 'sex' and the questionnaire items

ITEMS	χ^2
I am able to diagnose the learning difficulties	7,298**
I am able to teach new contents or reinforce the previous ones	9,858*
I am able to correct the completed activities	12,147*
I am able to provide new reinforcement or extension activities	9,183*
I am able to supervise and record the individual and group students' progress	11,674*
The training received in multicultural programs has helped me later in the classroom practice	13,025*
The degree of involvement of the competent authority in the development of a specific training plan for teachers, given the cultural diversity existent in the classrooms, is high	11,048*

* $p \leq 0.01$ ** $p \leq 0.05$

From the analysis of the associations between the variables listed in the table above we can say that female teachers feel themselves more trained than male teachers when diagnosing the learning difficulties (30.4% vs. 16.1%), teaching new contents or reinforcing the previous ones (62.5% vs. 41.9%), correcting the completed activities (67.2% vs. 45.2%), providing new reinforcement or extension activities (90.8% vs. 75.8%), and supervising and recording the individual and group students' progress (51.6% vs. 30.6%). Also, more female than male teachers think that the training received in multicultural programs has not helped them in the classroom practice (23.5% vs. 8.2%). Furthermore, more male teachers totally disagree with the fact that the involvement of the competent authority is sufficient (30.6% vs. 15.2% for female teachers).

Secondly, Table 2 captures the significance of the relationship between the descriptive variable 'age' and each of the items included in the questionnaire.

Table 2. Significant relationship between the variable 'age' and the questionnaire items

ITEMS	χ^2
In my initial teacher training those curricular, organizational and methodological aspects necessary to face the requirements arising from the late incorporation of immigrant students were taken into account	22,285**
I am interested in training in multicultural education	33,201*

* $p \leq 0.01$ ** $p \leq 0.05$

There is also a significant relationship between age and two items considered in the questionnaire. Specifically, the older the teachers are, the more negative their perceptions about the multicultural education received are. For example, the 57.1% of the teachers over 60 years consider that in their pre-service training any important aspect necessary to face the requirements arising from the late incorporation of immigrant students was taken into account at all. For teachers aged 30 years or less the percentage is 24%, almost half of the previous value. Also note that the older the teachers are, the less interested in training in multicultural education they are.

And finally, from Table 3 we observe the significance of the relationship between the identification variable 'educational stage' and each of the items included in the questionnaire.

Table 3. Significant relationship between the variable 'educational stage' and questionnaire items

ITEMS	χ^2
I am able to provide new reinforcement or extension activities	15,133**
I am able to supervise and record the individual and group students' progress	23,044*
I am able to determine the most suitable resources for achieving the objectives	14,504**
During the pre-service training at University the strategies needed to develop the teaching practice in a multicultural context are shown	18,971**
To address educationally the immigrant students who come to the schools is a challenge	19,075**
Teachers show a high degree of involvement in the proposed training activities on intercultural education	18,836**

* $p \leq 0.01$ ** $p \leq 0.05$

This last analysis reveals that the pre-primary education teachers and the primary education ones have different perceptions about their professional knowledge and the value they give to the initial/permanent training received in intercultural education. Thus, the pre-primary education teachers feel themselves more trained than the primary education teachers when providing new reinforcement or extension activities (50.7% vs. 32.8%), supervising and recording the individual and group students' progress (55.2% vs. 43.5%), and determining the most suitable resources for achieving the objectives (46.3% vs. 34.7%). Regarding the training received to face successfully their professional practice in an intercultural context, more primary education teachers than pre-primary education ones disagree or totally disagree with the idea that during the pre-service training at University the strategies needed to develop the teaching practice in a multicultural context are shown (92.6% vs. 83.6%) and that teachers show a high degree of involvement in the proposed training activities on intercultural education (48.1% vs. 23.9%). With respect to the consideration of the educational assistance to immigrant students as a challenge, more pre-primary education teachers than primary education ones disagree or totally disagree with this (30.7% vs. 15.5%).

5. Conclusion

One of the most important problems registered in the commitment to interculturalism is the insufficient teacher education, especially the pre-service training. The majority of teachers recognize that during the pre-service training at University the strategies needed to develop the teaching practice in a multicultural context were not shown. Closely related to this idea, we find that the contents transmitted to them have not take into account the social, cultural and demographic characteristics of the current context in which they teach.

Given these pronounced shortcomings, it is essential not only to rethink the initial training but also an adequate lifelong learning. Teachers, being aware of it, consider this issue as a fundamental pillar.

In this regard, teachers are willing to address the increasingly diverse students, and interested in training in order to be able to develop their teaching in multicultural contexts. But even valuing it as a challenge, they show a high degree of demotivation by the lack of training offers; if any, they are not adequate because they do not take into account the peculiarities and special features of the context. If we add the notable lack of involvement of the competent authorities, the scenario is discouraging and demoralizing.

Moreover, from this study we have found significant relationships between the sex, the age and the educational stage in which the teachers work with their perceptions about the professional knowledge (skills, teaching strategies...) they have and the initial/permanent training received to face successfully their professional practice in an intercultural context.

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