

8th ICEEPSY
The International Conference on Education and Educational Psychology

THE INTEGRATION OF PUPILS FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES INTO PORTUGUESE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This paper presents a research work about issues that elucidate the collected data related to the integration of pupils from different cultures in Portuguese primary schools, an increasingly evident reality in the educational setting. In empirical terms, a qualitative research was conducted through interviews, sociometric tests and data search involving the class teachers. These tools were applied to primary school classes in five schools belonging to a school grouping in the central region of Portugal. The data collected through the sociometric tests allow us to realise that the majority of the foreign pupils is not fully integrated in the primary school classes. However, according to the analysis of the interviews, this is not always the case, since the pupils' answers showed that they do feel integrated. Based on the information gathered, it can be understood that most of the teachers consider the pupils to be well integrated and the parents/those in charge of their education to be able to keep up with them in the best way. Nevertheless, some shortage of information on the part of teachers was noticed concerning these pupils, which indicates an absence of communication between school and family, a situation that does not favour a more effective integration of these pupils.

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Keywords: Primary schools, multiculturalism, integration, foreign pupils



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1. Introduction

Over the years, there have been several generations of immigrants in Portugal. Initially they came from Lusophone countries of African origin (Cabo Verde, Guiné, Angola, etc.). Then those from the European Union began to appear, followed by the ones from the American continent and a small number from the Asian continent. However, people coming from the African Countries of Portuguese Official Language (PALOP) never ceased to exist. This means that the immigrants from Eastern countries, such as those from Ukraine, and the ones from Brazil appeared later (Oliveira, 2010).

Portugal has undergone several immigratory flows, in variable numbers: in 2010 the registered figures were 445,262 immigrants living in Portugal; in 2011 there was a slight decrease to 436,822; in 2012 the number was 414,610 and finally, in 2013, when the last report was made available by the Immigration and Borders Service (SEF), the number of foreigners living in Portugal changed to 401,320. It should be noticed that the majority of the immigrants living in our country in 2013 came from Brazil, Cabo Verde, Ukraine and Romania (SEF, 2013).

It should be understood that these mass flows result from the internationalization of the economies and cultures (Milagre & Trigo-Santos, 2001). However, besides this, the Portuguese reality comprises a great internal diversity, coming from regional and local specificities. Thus, it should be considered as a heterogeneous society, since it includes diverse cultures, ethnicities and/or religions.

Given all these data, it is up to the school to respond to the challenges of globalization, making it possible for all pupils to be oriented and prepared for a global and plural society and world (Vieira, 2011). The institutional responses are organized at the level of the Ministry of Education and the educational system, but as far as the teaching practices are concerned, teachers play a very important role, since there must be an effective implementation of the principle of equal opportunities for success in school education.

This way, the motto was found in order to investigate the topic of school integration of pupils coming from different cultures, relating it to the migratory movements that are increasingly common and considered one of the most prominent characteristics of contemporary societies (Padilla & Ortiz, 2012), an area where Portugal follows the rule.

Thus, the need to define "integration" should be stressed, so that throughout this article the relationships established within the educational context can be focused, always aiming at the implementation of this practice. Peres (2011) defines this concept as being the process that allows individuals or minority groups to incorporate themselves and share the same social structures, promoting mutual respect for one another's personal and cultural identities.

This led us to develop our knowledge on the subject a little bit more and, in some way, to contribute to a better integration of the pupils coming from different cultures in the Portuguese schools, particularly trying to understand how these pupils are integrated into the Portuguese primary schools belonging to a school grouping in the central region of Portugal.

Our attention was focused on the pedagogical interactions established between the teacher and the foreign pupils, as well as between these and their classmates, taking into account that the classroom is a privileged space for interaction and personal development. Contextual factors were also analysed in order

to better understand this issue, such as the economic and social condition of the household, the family situation, among others.

Besides, it is worth noting that, according to Milagre and Trigo-Santos (2001), language appears as the main source of learning difficulties for minority pupils, either because they do not master it, or mispronounce it, or use it incorrectly. Thus, this linguistic duality, which could be seen as a resource, is after all considered as an obstacle to learning. It should be highlighted that language is a dominant factor for the relationship that is established in the classroom context, since it is through oral language, verbalization, that most of the interactions between the pupil and his/her classmates are created and even between the pupil and the teacher, so it is of great importance when pupils' integration in school is concerned.

Other factors that directly or indirectly influence the integration of foreign pupils in the Portuguese schools, listed by authors such as Marques (2001), are: the school level of those in charge of pupils' education, with direct implications as to the help they can or cannot give to learners; families' socioeconomic level; parents' presence or absence in their children's school life; the participation in extracurricular activities to encourage the child's further development; and the previous attendance of pre-school education.

In this context, in order to understand if the pupils from different cultures are integrated in the Portuguese school and some associated factors, some objectives were defined for the present study:

- To characterize the relationship between the pupils from different cultures and the class teacher;
- To characterize the relationship between the pupils from different cultures and the other classmates;
- To identify the main difficulties that foreign pupils feel while getting integrated in the school;
- To identify personal and contextual factors that can promote the integration of pupils from different cultures in the Portuguese school;
- To identify possible school or family constraints on the full integration of pupils from different cultures.

2. Problem Statement

The present study intends to understand if the pupils coming from different cultures and nationalities are integrated in Portuguese primary schools, since these are a privileged space for immigrant children and youth's social and cultural integration.

3. Research Questions

To what extent are foreign pupils from the 1st to the 4th grade integrated in Portuguese primary schools? Which factors may promote their integration?

4. Purpose of the Study

To understand that the integration of pupils coming from different cultures in Portuguese primary schools is fundamental, as there are more and more foreign pupils attending our schools, and it is

important to promote these children's educational success, as well as their full development and well-being.

5. Research Methods

Throughout this section the various stages of the research process are described, as well as the methodology used to address the problem and the stated objectives.

5.1. Research design

A qualitative research was chosen, more oriented to the understanding of the phenomena described by the participants, rather than to their explanation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This is a type of research that uses the natural environment as a direct source. The researcher focuses his attention on the meaning of the phenomena, trying to capture and understand the participants' perspective. He also seeks to gather as much data as possible, so he can describe them in detail (Bogdan & Biklen, 2013).

It is worth emphasizing the fact that, in this study, a variety of data collection techniques was used (documental research, the sociometric test and semi-structured interviews), in order to triangulate the information collected.

5.2. Participants

The target population in this study are pupils from different foreign cultures, attending from the 1st to the 4th grade of primary schools belonging to a school grouping in the central region of Portugal. Five out of the six schools in the mentioned school grouping were selected, comprising eight classes, with 165 pupils, among whom 13 foreign pupils could be found, who are the main target of this study.

At first, sociometric tests were carried out in the eight classes that included foreign pupils. Subsequently, all the pupils coming from different cultures, who had been authorised by their parents/those in charge of their education to participate in the study, were individually interviewed, each one having been given a fictitious name.

Thus, out of a total of 13 pupils, 11 were interviewed, six being female and five male, aged between 6 and 10. These pupils come from countries in Europe, South America, Asia and Africa and have a foreign or dual nationality.

5.3. Data collection tools

Documental research was carried out, centred on the analysis of the School Grouping Educational Project and of information collected from the class teachers. This information allowed us to have a deeper knowledge of the family environment of the children coming from foreign countries and also to fill some information gap, or clarify any doubt when analyzing the data. Thus, all information has to do with the relationships established between the children studied and their peers and, moreover, with the resources and aids these children had access to.

The sociometric test was conducted in all classes of the school grouping that included foreign pupils. This is a tool that allows to capture the situation of insertion versus isolation felt by each pupil in the class. According to Estrela (2013), the test enables, in small, less organized groups, to easily capture spontaneous relationships, also highlighting the position of each individual within the group, concerning those relationships.

In simple terms, the sociometric test consists of asking each member of a group to indicate the people they would like to be associated with in various situations (Northway & Weld, 1999). In this study the pupils were confronted with three situations, in which they were asked to choose three classmates, according to certain criteria. In the first, pupils were asked to choose three classmates to do group work. In the second, the same pupils should mention three classmates they would like to invite to their birthday parties. In the third and last situation, all students should choose three classmates they would like to take with them if they moved to another class.

A semi-structured interview was also conducted with each of the foreign pupils, in order to understand how they see their relationship with the teacher and their classmates (Pardal & Lopes, 2011). To help conducting the interviews, a guide subdivided into several sections was developed, aiming to gather information about the interviewee, taking into account the pupil-family-society plan, the relationship between the pupil and the rest of the class and the relationship between the pupil and the class teacher.

5.4. Data treatment and analysis

In order to analyse the information from the sociometric test, Northway and Weld's guidelines (1999) were followed. The results were organized in sociometric matrices that include the data concerning all class pupils and their choices, from which the foreign children's individual sociograms were developed.

Depending on the number of choices, the pupil is ranked in a sociometric position index. These indices, calculated according to Northway and Weld (1999), can also be grouped into the following categories: 15 or more - far above average; 10 to 14 - above average; 9 - average; 8 to 4 - below average; 3 or less - far below average.

In order to deal with the interview data, content analysis was accomplished, defined by Berelson (quoted by Bardin, 2009) as a research technique that, through an objective, systematic and quantitative description of the communications content, has the purpose of interpreting these same communications.

6. Findings

The documental research made it possible to collect a set of information about the foreign pupils from their class teachers and also in the Educational Project of the selected school grouping.

In this Educational Project children of foreign nationality are mentioned. Thus, it was possible to confirm that one of the aims of this school grouping project is to prevent absenteeism and dropping out of school, in order to encourage inclusion practices concerning children/pupils with special educational needs, learning difficulties, Gypsies and foreigners. It should also be stressed that the careful and

articulated work of all educational agents and other entities is recommended, thus helping the integration of pupils of different cultures and ethnicities, using, among other measures, the presence of mediators and the participation in projects.

All class teachers consider that their foreign pupils are well integrated in the classes and even in the schools they belong to. Most teachers mention that the pupils have a well-defined group of friends. Some of them point out that, initially, this integration had some difficulties, which were overcome with the passage of time and, at the moment, those children have a stable relationship with the other classmates.

As for the data collected through the interviews, it was possible to conclude that most children claim they feel integrated. Pupils generally indicate, without any inhibition, their best friends, also stressing that they feel good in their classes and that, if they had the opportunity to choose, they would remain in the same class the following year.

Only one pupil says that his/her choice would be not to stay in the same class. However, when justifying it, he/she claims to feel good in his/her class. He/she just wanted to find other friends he/she left behind, because when they started primary school each one went to a different school.

Regarding the relationship with their peers, most of the pupils interviewed are aware of the fact that their classmates have problems/conflicts with one another. However, they also recognize that these can be easily overcome.

The answers given in the interviews clarify that, in general, besides liking their classes, most pupils also like their teacher, and want to keep the same teacher the next year, if possible. None of the pupils reports to have difficulties in their relationship or even in the communication with the others, which facilitates the process of integration.

Many of these pupils, when questioned about the existence of friends outside the school, mention their friends from their home countries, which means that their cultural roots did not disappear and, in those cases, they remember with some nostalgia the games they played together.

Based on the analysis of the information from the class teachers and of the data from the pupils' interviews, we can have the impression that all pupils coming from different cultures are integrated. However, when analyzing the results of the sociometric tests carried out in the respective classes, we find out that this is not exactly true.

Table 1. Distribution of the eleven foreign pupils by the sociometric position indices

Sociometric position indices	N.º of pupils	Pupils	School level/Classes
Far above average	1	Otávio	3rd year SD
Above average	3	Mónica; Iva; Luana	1st year SD (2x); 3rd year CAR
Average	1	Maria	1st year AR
Below average	5	Leonor; Rui; Manuela; Alexandre; Emanuel	4th year SD (2x); 3rd year POU (2x); 2nd year SD
Far below average	1	Luis	3rd year SO

The analysis of Table 1 allows us to conclude that more than half of the foreign pupils in our sample is below average (6) as to the probability of being chosen by their classmates, with one of them

being ranked far below average. It should also be noticed that one of the pupils is in the middle position and less than half of them is above average (4). These data lead us to consider that, according to the distribution of the pupils by the sociometric position indices (Northway & Weld, 1999), only 5 pupils are integrated into their respective classes.

6.1. Pupils ranked below the average of choices.

The analysis of the sociograms allowed us to verify that **Luis** had a 0 choice index in the 3rd year class of the SO school, composed of 19 pupils, 13 males and 6 females. It is worth noticing that most of the children in this room are boys and yet Luis was not chosen, not even once. This fact makes us suppose that this pupil would need a more individualized attention from the class teacher, in order to be more integrated in his class, which is not the case now. Curiously, during the interview, the pupil points out that he has many friends in the class, but this does not show up in the sociometric tests, since, as was pointed out, he was not chosen by anyone.

Based on the obtained data, we could realise that this child has a poorly structured family, with an unstable family environment, since he spends a week in each parent's house. This situation means that the pupil does not benefit from a regular monitoring from his parents, both at home and at school, which would be fundamental for his educational success. Also having in mind the collected data, the extent to which the class teacher is aware of Luis's weak integration in class can be questioned, since no specific measure was taken by the teacher to improve that integration.

In relation to the other pupils with below average indices as far as the probability of being chosen is concerned, **Leonor**, who obtained an index 7, can be referred. In this case, the factors related to the reduced choice by her classmates are not so evident. It can be understood that one of the shortcomings of this child may have been the lack of attendance of pre-school education and, consequently, the lack of previous contact with her colleagues, since most of the children in class attended the same nursery school. Thus, they already knew one another when Leonor appeared. It should also be mentioned that the 1st year class in the POU school only has 18 pupils, 9 males and 9 females, which makes the integration into an already existing group possibly more complex. Another important factor to add is that the pupil's father is an emigrant and that may interfere with her success on a relational level, since the contact with him is clearly reduced.

Rui is also below the average concerning the probability of being chosen (index 5). He is in a situation quite similar to that of Leonor, since they are both part of the same class and entered the group/class when it was already previously defined. Besides, another factor that may negatively influence the integration process should still be mentioned: the fact that this pupil has already had a less positive experience in another school and in another school grouping. The class teacher considers that the pupil has overcome that situation and is well integrated. However, this is not what stands out when the sociometric test is carried out and, when interviewed, he talks about various aspects of his experience, which leads us to believe that the situation is still not as well resolved as it is supposed to be.

Manuela, also with index 5, is another child who is below average too in terms of the probability of being chosen by classmates. When analyzing the situation of this pupil, it is clear that her parents do not reveal the required skills to help her with the school contents. The pupil's aunt and cousin are the ones

who take on this role. Besides, it should be emphasized that she is not attending any extracurricular activity, which may contribute to her weak integration. Unlike most of the interviewees, this pupil states that, if she could choose, she would not stay in the same class the following year. This leads us to believe that, despite the pupil and the class teacher's positive comments, Manuela is not as integrated as she appears to be in the 2nd year class of the SD school she belongs to, which has 25 pupils, 13 males and 12 females.

Also **Alexandre** is one of the pupils who got a 7 choice index from his classmates in the 4th year class of the SD school, which has 24 pupils, 14 males and 10 females. It should be said that his parents are divorced and that the pupil has little contact with his father and his father's family, which may be a destabilizing factor, influencing the relationships established by the child. In addition to that, Alexandre did not attend pre-school education and does not attend any extracurricular activities, situations that could help establishing relationships with other children.

Emanuel is another child who is also below the average of choices, with an index 5, and who attends the 4th year in the SD school. Considering what we could find out from the interview, the dialogue with the class teacher and the observation made, this pupil may be at the sociometric level referred because he was absent due to serious health reasons. This problem prevented the child from attending pre-school education, which may have influenced his relationship with the group/class. The fact that Emanuel wants to stay in the same class the following year may indicate that he fears the integration into another class, since, as he points out, "he did not need to know new classmates".

6.2. Pupils ranked average or above the average of choices

As far as the other five pupils are concerned, one of them, Maria, is at the average level of the probability of choices, and the rest - Monica, Iva, Luana and Otávio - are above average in terms of the probability of being chosen by their classmates, according to Northway and Weld's categorization (1999).

Maria, with an index 9, is in the 1st year class of the AR school, which has 15 students, 9 males and 6 females. However, we can assume that she may not have reached a higher index due to the friendship bonds she established in nursery school, that she has not been able to forget, because this is constantly mentioned throughout her interview and will possibly be remembered in her daily life as well. This child does not have a regular family model, since she lives with her aunt and uncle, which may have repercussions on her relationship with the other educational actors. According to the class teacher, Maria has a lot of support from the aunt and uncle she lives with, but it may not be enough, because she would have the possibility to reach a higher level. Nevertheless, although she is in a middle position, she can cope well with all these factors and have balanced relationships.

As for **Mónica**, a pupil in the 3rd year class of the CA school consisting of 21 pupils, 10 males and 11 females, she is in index 10, therefore, in a position above the average of the probability of choices.

The fact that she has been in Portugal for only a year and that her parents speak Portuguese poorly, practically does not affect her integration in the class/school. An effort has been made on the part of the parents so that the pupil feels supported outside the school, since they do not understand the language clearly and, consequently, cannot help her. That is why she is attending a study centre, so she can develop her skills.

It should be added, according to the class teacher, that this child did not have an easy integration when she arrived. She played in an aggressive way, which made the whole process more difficult. For that very reason, we believe that if that kind of behaviour had not existed or had been overcome earlier, her integration could have happened more quickly. As stated by Pereira (2008), culture is a way of life and the way you play and interact with your peers differs from country to country. This may have made this child's integration more difficult, since the way she interacted with her colleagues in her home country would probably be more "violent" than it is supposed to be in our country.

Iva attends a 1st year class in the SD school, with 17 pupils, 6 of whom are male and 11 female. This pupil is in index 12, also in a position above the average. Iva has been in Portugal for some time, which means that she and her parents speak Portuguese fluently. This may have contributed to the success of her integration. According to the class teacher, this child is and has always been integrated, having undergone a process similar to the one of any child who begins primary school.

Luana also attends the 1st year class in the SD school and is in index 13, also above the average concerning the probability of choices. The class teacher's opinion is that her integration is complete. However, the teacher emphasizes that, as this child comes from a different nursery school, this may have extended her integration process a little bit more. Even so, we understand that her family stability, as well as the good relationship she has with her classmates may have facilitated her integration.

Otávio is in the 3rd year class of the SD school, which has 26 pupils, 19 males and 7 females. He obtained index 17, well above the average of the probability of choices. The fact that this child's parents have dual nationality and speak Portuguese fluently (and so does the pupil), may have contributed to his good integration. Thus, his parents can give him the essential support he needs, so he fully develops in school. It should be noticed that this pupil showed the strongest link to his "home country", even though he was not born there, since he refers to have a strong connection with his fellow countrymen. This way, it is clear that Otávio is a well integrated pupil, who is at ease with his dual nationality. According to the class teacher, he has never shown any problem with the fact that he speaks another language and has friends from another nationality.

The joint analysis of the data on the pupils who are in an average or above average sociometric position in terms of the likelihood of being chosen by their classmates, emphasizes the importance of the support given by parents or other family members concerning school, as well as the importance of the mastery of the Portuguese language.

As far as the referred cases are concerned, it can be stated that, in a certain way, there is integration of the pupils from other cultures, in a climate of mutual respect for personal and cultural identities (Peres, 2011), the differences being used to enrich relationships (Rodrigues, 2009). All these children claim to keep in touch with their origins, which they consider to be a positive factor.

7. Conclusion

Based on the results of this study we concluded that the pupils, as well as the teachers, consider they are integrated in their classes, taking into account the information provided by the teachers and the data from the interviews to the pupils. However, the information from the sociometric tests indicates another reality: more than half of the pupils being studied are below the average of choices, according to

Northway and Weld's (1999) categorization. These cases highlight the fact that not all pupils are fully integrated into the class and the school they attend. The factors that contribute to this situation are diverse and mostly related to family context (absence of one of the parents, unstable family environment, etc), parents' difficulties when monitoring the homework, non-participation in extracurricular activities, among other reasons.

The questions asked to class teachers about data they should have access to, namely in relation to the sociocultural and family context of their pupils, also revealed that there are, in many cases, deficits in the information about these pupils, specifically in the individual records of each one of them. The lack of these data indicates that communication between the school and the family is not being effective. When dealing with pupils coming from different cultures, it is fundamental to have information about the number of years the parents have been living in Portugal, as well as about the main difficulties they have helping/trying to help their children, among other pertinent data for pupils' educational success.

In fact, it is through an effective communication between the school and the family that we get to know children better, and become aware of their gaps, needs and demands. Each child is considered to have an individual rhythm and has knowledge that he/she brings from his/her sociocultural context, factors that must be considered in the educational process. Thus, only by taking into account the individuality of each child, will we be able to promote a good relationship between them and their classmates, because knowing the other is the only way to help (Marques, 2001).

There are a number of studies in Europe that demonstrate that parents' involvement can bring multiple benefits to schools and teachers. Thus, disruption between families and schools is responsible for the school failure of most children, and is often associated with pupils' deficient integration (Marques, 2001; Partasi, 2011; Sánchez-Medina, Macías-Gómez-Stern, & Martínez-Lozano, 2014).

In all the analysed contexts, it could be confirmed that teachers tried to achieve equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of their ethnic or social origin (UNESCO, 2002). However, it cannot be stated that interculturalism exists, allowing ethnic minorities the opportunity to express and keep their home culture (Rodrigues, 2009), since there are teachers who claimed that classmates do not know these pupils come from other countries.

Contrary to what Pedro, Pires and González (2007) advocate, teachers in this study are not always able to provide their pupils with an intercultural education. What often exists is just the crossing of the various cultures present in the classroom, but these are not mutually transforming themselves, as it would be expected.

It can thus be emphasized that the present study helped us to acknowledge and value pupils' feelings, realities and contexts, so they can feel integrated and, consequently, achieve better school results. We have also been able to better understand the importance of the interaction not only among pupils, but also among pupils and teachers, the way pupils feel at school, as well as the support they have at home. Furthermore, we have been able to realise that all these factors are crucial for the child's proper development and integration in school.

Thus, all educational professionals should be advised to take these issues into consideration, since only this way will they be able to develop appropriate strategies suitable for all children, because all the different intervenients and variables associated with pupils are considered. Any teacher's main objective

should always be to foster learning. In order to do that, pupils' motivation and the necessary adaptation of the tasks to their age level and their needs must be considered, a very difficult task to accomplish if you don't know them well.

Acknowledgments

This work is financed by national funds through FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, I.P., under the project UID/Multi/04016/2016. Furthermore, we would like to thank the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu and CI&DETS for their support.

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