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Inclusion of Migrant Children in School in Chile

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to analyze the school insertion processes experienced by Haitian migrant children in Chile, from the point of view of the intervention carried out by professionals in the field of Phonoaudiology. Although school entry is guaranteed in the country, Haitian children face a language barrier because they speak Creole and must learn a new language (Spanish) without the availability of official reception and support programs. This study employed a qualitative approach, and semi-structured interviews were applied to professionals of Speech Therapy working in public schools in the Metropolitan Region. It is concluded that the main difficulties are found in the comprehension and expressive areas of Chilean Spanish, although the phonoaudiological intervention has facilitated the learning of the new language, also supporting teachers and families. Finally, social and linguistic intervention is an emerging area for the profession. This electronic document is a "live" template. The various components of your paper (title, text, heads, etc.) are already defined on the style sheet, as illustrated by the portions given in this document.

Subject Areas

Sociology

Keywords

Migration, Childhood, Phonoaudiology, School Insertion, Linguistic Immersion, Chile

1. Introduction

In recent years, Chile has experienced an increase in the migrant population,

which has settled in the main cities of the country, as is the case of the city of Santiago in the Metropolitan Region, particularly in the communes of the north and south, characterized by high rates of social vulnerability (INE-DEM, 2019) [1]. According to official estimates of the National Institute of Statistics and the Department of Foreigners and Migration (hereinafter INE-DEM, 2019) [1], more than one million foreigners reside in the country, with a greater predominance of men over women. At the national level, Haiti is the third foreign community with 179,338 people, representing 14.3% of the total migrant population, preceded by Peru and Venezuela, in turn, the presence of migrant children in Chilean schools has increased.

Although the Ministry of Education has issued various instructions to guarantee the school entry of migrant children, in 2017 it delivered guidelines for their educational inclusion (Ministry of Education, 2017) [2], so far there are no official plans for reception and linguistic immersion.

Therefore, each educational establishment has developed intervention strategies according to the economic and/or human resources at its disposal. This situation means that schools have limited funding to carry out school inclusion programs. An example of this is the School Integration Program (PIE), which aims to include students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), whether transitory (such as learning to read, language difficulties) and/or permanent (such as physical, intellectual, sensory or multiple difficulties, through which support strategies are granted, such as pedagogical, physical and human resources (MINEDUC, 2016) [3]. In this case, psychologists, social workers, educators, special educators, occupational therapists, and speech therapists work in the PIE. A difficulty faced by migrant families refers to the lack of information regarding the school process since they do not know how the educational system works and encounter a high level of bureaucratization (Joiko, 2016) [4]. Therefore, the different difficulties in the municipal school system are solved with various institutional initiatives to contribute to the development of learning. However, sometimes, these actions are left to the goodwill of the staff on duty. As can be imagined, this situation has generated difficulties in the process of school insertion of non-Spanish-speaking migrant children, since many of these practices are part of the institutional management that is in place during this period, without being an established inclusive policy, which leads to their implementation being conducted according to the priorities of each management team. In our study, we delved into the case of Haitian children, but more likely in the medium and long term, this situation could also affect other national groups coming from Brazil, the United States, or China, to name the most numerous nationalities living in the country and who also do not speak Spanish.

Another of the strategies referred to is the curricular adaptation based on intercultural education to support the process of linguistic immersion to guarantee the inclusion of migrant girls and boys and achieve access to learning (Ministry of Education, 2017 [2]; Poblete, 2018 [5]). So far, few educational establishments have carried out pedagogical adaptations and provided the conditions to carry

them out. From intercultural education, a public policy of linguistic immersion implies a paradigm shift and concrete actions such as hiring bilingual teachers, cultural mediators, interpreters or translators, and educational materials in other languages, among others. Today, schools lack material, human, economic, and infrastructure resources; they do what they can with what they have at their disposal.

According to data from the Center of Studies of the Ministry of Education (2018) [6], there are more than three thousand Haitian children in the school system, representing 0.09% of the total school enrollment. Some studies (Fuenzalida, 2017) [7] have shown the difficulties experienced by Haitian children in their process of integration and adaptation to Chilean culture, especially due to the language difference since they speak Creole. An investigation (Galaz, Ahumada, and Benavides, 2013) [8] found that the lack of mastery of the Spanish language affects their communication because they cannot express their feelings and emotions adequately; they feel fear of being teased by their peers as they do not handle Spanish correctly, and as they do not know the rules of the language, they find it difficult to communicate verbally. The process of adapting to a new culture becomes difficult and challenging for girls and boys (Pavez-Soto, Ortiz-López, Jara, Olguín & Domaica, 2018) [9].

It has been recorded (Toledo Vega, 2016, pp. 83) [10] that migrant groups that speak the same language as the receiving society achieve greater insertion, while the language barrier becomes a factor of vulnerability for the migrant population. Learning the local language could be seen as a key to the integration process because it helps to communicate daily, it is a way of inserting oneself into the new culture. The school, in this sense, plays a fundamental role, since it acts as a mediating entity in the learning and development of languages and, in order to achieve this, it must have the appropriate conditions.

Learning a new language depends not only on the context but also on one's personal experience and the perception or attitude one has towards the mother tongue and the language of the new place. As Pérez Arreaza (2016, pp. 107) [11] points out, "languages are not abstractions, but practices that exist to the extent that their speakers believe in them and have ideas about them", from there derive "linguistic attitudes", that is, the different valuations that people have of languages or a set of languages, which emanates from sociocultural, political, historical and economic facts (Pérez Arreaza, 2016, pp. 108) [11]. In addition to the above, age and years of exposure to the new language are relevant factors in the development of verbal and grammatical skills during its learning (Díaz de Gereñu and García-Azkoaga, 2016, pp. 30 ff.) [12].

According to various studies (Pedemonte and Koechlin, 2017) [13] (Pavez-Soto, Ortiz-López, Jara, Olguín & Domaica, 2018) [9], Haitian migrant families often live in socioeconomic conditions of great precariousness and high socioeconomic exclusion. This situation is due, in part, to the linguistic characteristics of this group, since by not fully mastering the Spanish language, sometimes, they

can only access poorly paid jobs in conditions of vulnerability and are forced to live in neighborhoods with high rates of social exclusion. In addition to the language barrier, Haitian migrant children are more exposed than other migrant groups to racism and discrimination. Factors such as skin color, phenotype, a language that does not enjoy prestige, and the label of coming from the “poorest country in Latin America” have created a highly stereotyped social representation (Pavez-Soto, Ortiz-López, Jara, Olguín & Domaica, 2018) [9].

In countries with a high level of migrant population, reception and language immersion programs have been implemented, whose main objective is for them to learn the language of the destination country. Jiménez (2012) [14] conducted a study in Navarra, Spain, where this type of program has a limited duration (four months), with the possibility of extending the permanence, so that migrant children acquire a basic command, understand frequently used phrases, understand instructions and simple everyday tasks, and describe in simple terms aspects of their past or their immediate needs.

Precisely, the concept of linguistic acculturation refers to the process of insertion into the new society and language that allows adaptation to take place. Acculturation is determined by micro and macro social factors, such as country of origin, social class, or family structure (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001) [15]. These authors have identified three types of acculturation of migrant families in the United States: 1) Consonant acculturation: where all members of the nuclear family learn the local language, and the new culture and gradually abandon the customs and ties of the culture of origin; 2) Dissonant acculturation: where only the daughters and sons adopt the customs and language of the destination country, but their parents resist doing so; 3) Selective acculturation: where all members of the family group learn the language and customs of the destination country, but, at the same time, participate in the migrant community present in the destination country, generating situations of bilingualism. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) [15] recommend that this last type of acculturation be promoted in public policies because it would avoid situations of social exclusion.

2. Method

This study was developed from a qualitative methodology. The study sample was composed of four adults, with balanced sex-gender representation and the following characteristics: Speech-language pathology professionals; working in public schools with vulnerability index; with between one and three years of work experience; performing an intervention with migrant children and insertion in the School Integration Program (PIE). The selection procedure was non-probabilistic or by convenience (Valles, 2003) [16], we were interested in investigating public schools with high vulnerability index and located in the southern area of the Metropolitan Region, since migrant families live in these territories (DEM, 2016) [17].

The sample size is based on the multiple case study method, which makes it

possible to describe different aspects of human behavior in order to understand complex phenomena from the particularity of each situation (Stake, 1998 [18]; Yin, 2003 [19]). In a multiple or collective case study, the researcher selects a focus of interest together with cases that can illustrate the problem. In this way, researchers can account for the research problem through the lens of paradigmatic cases. Likewise, the qualitative nature of the research allows for a deep and reflexive analysis of the subjective and intersubjective meanings that are part of an emerging phenomenon in the social studies of our country (Hernández, 2010) [20].

The research project adheres to the Declaration of Helsinki (1975) and was approved by the committee (the respective approval document is presented at the following link: <https://n9.cl/h43o8>). In this regard, an informed consent form was used to ensure anonymity. The data collection technique used was the semi-structured interview and the data were tabulated following the thematic discourse analysis (Valles, 2003) [16].

The design of the questionnaire and the scheme used in the semi-structured interview were based on categories defined a priori and observed through questions, which are explained below:

Education category, questions: According to your perception, do teachers require support to solve learning deficiencies due to language? What type of support?

Phonological category, questions: Do you believe that the speech therapist is the ideal professional to work with these children who are in schools where classes are conducted in a language that is not their mother tongue? In what way?/According to your experience, what linguistic-communicative skill do you believe is most relevant to work with Haitian children?/How would you make an intervention plan if a Haitian child arrives at the school who does not master Spanish?

Migration category, questions: What experience have you had with migrant children/What recommendations would you give to parents and teachers so that the intervention process is carried out optimally?

3. Results

The forms of phonological intervention deployed by the professionals participating in our study are being perfected during the praxis. As already mentioned, they had been working with foreign children for at least one year. An initial diagnosis and the design of a work plan according to the characteristics of each reality were evidenced:

“Here the school has a special program for foreign students, where an evaluation is made that determines what the approach with these [migrant] children is going to be (FP1, female).”

According to Bruner (1981) [21], the importance of the family environment at an early age is crucial for the development of linguistic-communicative skills.

Traditionally, phonoaudiological support was provided in primary health care, but given the context of linguistic diversity in schools, it has turned out to be an ideal profession to support the acquisition of a new language:

“From experience, a more instantaneous response can be observed in Haitian pre-school children, so it follows that the earlier the intervention with the children, the greater the adaptive response they will have to the environment and their peers (PF3, male).”

In recent years, the presence of the phonoaudiological discipline in the area of education has increased considerably (Vega, Torres, & Rivas, 2017) [22], since it possesses diverse intervention strategies in communication and language:

“The speech therapist could contribute to the educational community for the insertion of Haitian children, mainly by being able to lead intervention teams that involve the entire educational community, knowledge should be made available to the rest of the team (PF2, male).”

According to Pugliese (2005) [23], language arises spontaneously, due to the need to communicate with gestures, words, images, or writing. We develop speaking with articulated sounds and we make a linguistic creation that arises from the first years of life. The development of this and other skills will be delimited by family, environment, and education. For this reason, speech therapists consider that their profession is vital in the processes of intercultural inclusion:

“If you ask me if the speech therapist is the right professional to work with these children who are in schools where classes are conducted in a language that is not their mother tongue. The answer to this would be a question: Why wouldn't it be? We know the normal development of language, as well as each of its stages, we recognize the term bilingualism as proper to our area, we know that a child who develops a new language requires stimulation and linguistic-communicative skills that will allow him/her to generate greater cognitive flexibility (FP, 4, woman).”

The phonoaudiological intervention method takes the form of an intervention plan, with an initial evaluation to establish the level of Spanish language proficiency of the Haitian children. The objective is to promote bilingualism since they hear Spanish in class every day and begin to understand it, but at the same time, they speak Creole with their families. The action strategies are varied, but the use of pictograms, the development of vocabulary through basic instructions for everyday use, and the reinforcement of the pragmatic aspect of the language stand out. According to Owens (2003: 14) [24], the pragmatic level of language transforms the process into something meaningful that helps build a foundation for linguistic development:

“The prototype intervention plan establishes an initial evaluation, where we determine the communicative management of the Spanish language, both at the comprehension and expressive level, and also at the pragmatic level, considering the great differences in the pragmatic management of the language between Haitians and Chileans (PF2, male).”

The main difficulties of the speech therapy intervention are related to linguistic diversity, since each child has different degrees of command of Spanish, depending on their age, the time they have been living in Chile, or the stimulation they have received from the environment. Intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Monfort and Juárez, 2010) [25] influence the linguistic organization of each child and how he or she will adapt to the world around him or her and the communication that will be established:

“We already have a prototype intervention plan that is still under review, because we have had a great heterogeneity in terms of the profile, both communicative and social of the students (PF2, male).”

The speech therapists interviewed mentioned that all language levels are important to address. However, the semantic lexical level is decisive for promoting school inclusion processes, because it refers to the meaning of words (Acosta and Moreno, 1999) [26], everyday vocabulary, and the understanding of basic instructions (Monfort and Juárez, 2010) [25]. Migrant children must learn the morphosyntax (Owens, 2003, pp. 16 ff.) [24] of Spanish, in its Chilean variant, for which they must know the internal structure of words and the rules for combining syntagma in sentences (group of words that have a unitary meaning within an utterance). Morphosyntactic structures are learned through imitation, for example, when a complex sentence is imitated, but omissions or corrections are generated in each individual (Monfort and Juárez, 2010) [25]. These aspects are the basis for the correct acquisition of Spanish and, thus, achieve true integration:

“The most important linguistic-communicative skill to work with Haitian children is each language level. However, first of all, one must work on the semantic lexical level, increasing vocabulary in Spanish. At the morphosyntactic level, understanding of commands, interrogative adverbs, function and content words and verb inflections. On the other hand, it is important to work on the pragmatic level, in terms of the verbal: the maintenance of topics, conversational turns and thematic attingence. And as for the nonverbal, it is also important, since it is a totally different culture from ours, therefore, kinesics and proxemics are of great importance to work on (PF1, female).”

An intercultural education helps to understand that the same things have different meanings in each culture, as does nonverbal language, another aspect of the semantic level of language. Gestures and gestures are also learned, corrected, and imitated. To promote school inclusion, migrant children must understand the new language and be appropriate to the Chilean culture: adapting, sometimes in a dizzying way:

“It is a whole, from nonverbal communication, in the beginning, to each level of language, in particular, to begin to generate communicative intention, since they arrive in Chile and have been in the country for two days, they are left in a school with children totally different from them (FP4, female).”

As already mentioned, there are currently no public policies in line with the linguistic diversity present in Chilean classrooms. Despite this structural defi-

ciency, the teaching staff values phonoaudiological support, because it is collaborative work:

“Teachers do require support. Therefore, it is vitally important for the speech therapist to work collaboratively with the teacher and the different communication professionals (FP1, female).”

The discipline provides support through innovative intervention strategies. In our study, we identified a workshop developed by a speech therapist who offered specialized support to Haitian children who required it and, in this way, supported the work of teachers; since he was not directly in the classroom, he had the knowledge to strengthen communication in a personalized way. Several studies (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001) [15] have shown that migrant children choose to use the language of the destination country in their daily interactions; it could be a way of feeling part of the new culture, but also because the new language enjoys greater prestige:

“It is important to highlight that at the school and at the initiative of the speech therapist in charge, together with the collaboration of the teachers, they implemented a workshop called “Words of Union”, which brought Spanish closer to the children from Haiti, who presented greater communication and linguistic difficulties, making evident how essential the collaboration of various professionals was, since this workshop contributed greatly to the acquisition of the language by Haitian children of various ages (PF3, male).”

In addition to technical phonoaudiological support, emotional support is also needed for migrant children, given the complexity of adaptation. Moreover, emotional factors are linked to learning, where the school plays a mediating role (Díaz de Gereñu and García-Azkoaga, 2016) [12]:

“It is logical to think that learners are going to need support in all areas, from something as basic as emotional support, to some linguistic facilitator who agrees to communicate the teachers with the children, in this process of linguistic immersion (FP4, female).”

Not knowing the language of the country to which one migrates is not a language or communication disorder, but rather an unprecedented and fortuitous condition that also happens to adults. It is clear that it is not possible to leave all the responsibility for adaptation to children, even less so when they live in vulnerable conditions and schools are overwhelmed. This has been understood by other countries with a greater migratory tradition, which is why they have developed official language immersion programs (Jiménez, 2012) [14]:

“Evidently, they require support and, at the moment, there is no system or coverage by the educational system that allows this approach and access to learning for these students, generating in them a special educational need, which is not being resolved (PF2, male).”

As has already been reiterated, the speech therapy intervention is collaborative with the teaching staff, both in terms of reinforcement of specialized content, as well as positive reinforcement or recognition of small advances. The integrated work in educational contexts (teacher-speech therapist) allows for strengthening

learning, strengthening linguistic-communicative skills, and significantly increasing the reading and writing process (Torres and Montaña, 2003) [27]:

“I would recommend that teachers reinforce what they have learned session by session, in the classroom with the teacher (...) congratulate the child when he/she manages to communicate in Spanish, encourage him/her and be patient (FP1, female).”

The family environment is also important in the process of acquiring a second language because it can favor positive or negative attitudes toward each language (Owens, 2003) [24]. In addition, in the case of migrant families, some studies (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001) [15] have recorded various patterns of linguistic and cultural adaptation in the new society (the authors call this assimilation), which will depend on the country of origin, social class or the programs and incentives of the destination for learning the new language:

“Evidently I would recommend to the parents of Haitian children to increase and favor the use of Spanish in the family communicative context, considering these norms or parameters of Spanish acquisition (PF2, male).”

An intercultural phonoaudiological intervention implies (re)knowing the reality of each migrant family group and respecting their right to maintain their own cultural and linguistic identity, which was referred to as a process of selective acculturation (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001) [15]. Therefore, professional recommendations aimed at developing positive attitudes in Haitian families towards Chilean Spanish, without them having to abandon their mother tongue and culture of origin:

“From experience, the relevance of the recommendations lies in the consistency of the intervention with Haitian children, as well as in the committed participation of their parents to accompany their learning process, so that parents should participate as much as possible in language inclusion activities (PF3, man).”

4. Conclusions

Migration from Central American countries such as Haiti is a new reality in Chilean schools, which were not prepared for these challenges and did not have the professional resources to carry out inclusion processes. However, they must also welcome migrant students, because education is called to guarantee the rights of children. Evidently, this situation has generated new linguistic and communicative needs in the school context, because the arrival of children whose mother tongue is Creole has created the need for intercultural inclusion.

In the Chilean context, moreover, it has challenged the traditional forms of phonoaudiological intervention, generating new innovative and intercultural praxis. This research was the first approach to the contributions and opportunities that are opening up for the discipline. The results obtained show that phonoaudiological intervention with migrant children should be carried out in coordination with interdisciplinary teams and from critical paradigms. We have

seen that the teaching teams value the professional support that can be provided by the discipline of speech therapy. The specific work that has been done is related to strengthening communication skills (verbal and non-verbal) and promoting the different levels of language and culture, as elements interrelated in a complex and dialectical way that are vital in the integration processes of migrant communities.

In a scenario where there are no public policies for the reception and linguistic immersion of non-Spanish-speaking migrant children, schools have designed intervention strategies based on the professional teams available to them, such as the Educational Integration Programs (PIE), which were not designed for migrant children. Nevertheless, Speech Therapy has turned out to be a discipline that can support school inclusion processes. But this action cannot be left to the will of professionals on duty but must be supported by public policies that ensure human and economic resources and infrastructure and respond to the needs of educational communities.

Finally, this study opens new lines of research on phonaudiology and the inclusion of migrant children in our country, particularly in the field of education and interculturality. This is an emerging topic for the discipline of speech therapy, but it has a solid theoretical and methodological background to promote social integration in our country.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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