

Are schools promoting social and economic integration of migrant and ethnic minorities? The experiences of some young people of Ecuadorian background in Spain.¹

Maria Ron-Balsera

Universität Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany

Abstract

Although school is usually considered the most promising institution for the social and economic integration of young people of migration background, the educational outcomes of young people of Ecuadorian background signal a broken promise. Their families, peers, and teachers mediate the effect of the intersections of age, gender, class and ethnicity. Using 15 biographical interviews and 10 expert interviews, this paper studies the role of schools in social mobility and integration under the circumstances of high levels of school attrition, rampant youth unemployment, lack of absorption of migrants' human capital and relative poverty. The findings point at different levels of institutional discrimination related to the curriculum, teacher-student relationship, peer relations and family factors.

Keywords: *Intersectionality, Migration, Schools, Ecuadorian Youth, Institutional Discrimination, Spain*

Introduction

School is one of the most important institutions for socialisation. Together with the family, schools are supposed to provide the necessary knowledge and skills to function adequately in society (Ballantine and Spade, 2008). Schools are not isolated institutions; they influence and are influenced by society. Students' experiences of school are not just mediated by their families, peer groups, their teachers, teachers' pedagogy, school ethos, mandatory and hidden curricula (Ballantine and Spade, 2008) but also by their age, gender, social class and ethnicity (Lareau and McNamara Horvat, 1999, Walker and Unterhalter, 2007).

Socioeconomic mobility for migrants, measured in terms of education achievement and medium to high-income occupations, is linked to successful integration and higher access to valuable opportunities and resources. However, the findings from this research do not signal this upward mobility, at least not in the short term. A high proportion of students of Ecuadorian background drop out of school as a result of the lack of embeddedness in school due to institutional discrimination at different levels: curriculum and ethos, pedagogy, relationships with teachers and with peers, among other issues (Ron-Balsera, 2014a).

Since the 1990s migration has transformed the population landscape in Spain, which has transformed from being a country of origin to a recipient of migrants. Latin American countries represent the main source of migration, and among them, the Ecuadorian immigrants are the most numerous in Spain (Statistics from the Spanish Permanent Observatory for Migration).

The official statistics from the Spanish ministry of education signal that students of Ecuadorian background achieve lower education levels than native Spanish student. The number of Ecuadorian students enrolled in 2011/2012 decreased considerably from middle school 31002 to high school 7231 and then to university 2019; similarly they are overrepresented 2.92% of the total population in the short vocational courses created as an alternative remedial programme for those students who had not finished compulsory education.

A common thread in the Spanish literature concerning education and migration is the imperative to understand the complexity of the link between immigration and school failure, and the need to situate the school within the broader family, community and socio-economic and political context (García Castaño, Gómez and Bouachra, 2008). The present study provides new data regarding a specific group, young Ecuadorian background students who migrated to Spain before the age to 14 and are currently in high school, remedial education or detention. Thus, it intends to shed light on the stressors that lead to education failure, from the perspective of the participants, taking into account the wider family and socio-economic context (Ron-Balsera, 2014a; Ron-Balsera, 2014b).

The analytical tool of intersectionality captures the growing argument in the international academic literature (Willis, 2013; Finn, 2010; Fenández Enguita, 2003; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Gans, 1992), which considers that the risks typically associated to the education of students with a migration background find their root in their socioeconomic status rather than

on ethnic differences. Therefore, it seems necessary to study the compounded effect of the different social identities such as ethnicity, but also social class, gender and age.

Methods

This research adopts a qualitative methodology in order to get a deeper understanding of the experiences and perceptions of ethnicity, class, gender and age allowing for detailed descriptions of everyday practices. Seeking to explore participant's perceptions of their education journey, biographical interviews give voice to those who are often unheard. Delving into the literature on migration and educational processes, this research focuses on the role of schools in social integration, and reflects on some of the findings from the author's Ph.D. research (Ron-Balsera, 2014a). During this research, biographical interviews were conducted with 15 selected young boys and girls with an Ecuadorian origin in Spain. A third of the participants were high school students, another third were completing a short vocational course after having dropped out of secondary education and the last third were serving sentences in young offenders' institutions. Among the young participants 3 were girls and 12 were boys, all them from working class background. The 10 experts interviews comprise both Ecuadorian and Spanish teachers, civil association activists, cultural mediators, young offenders' institution' staff and migration researchers.

All the interviews were face-to-face and conducted in Spanish. The extracts used in the paper correspond to the author's translation of the transcripts. The names used in the paper are pseudonyms following ethical procedures of anonymity as well as informed consent.

Research context

The foreign born population in Spain presented the algid point of 14.1% of the total population in 2008, compared to only 4.9% in 2000 (OECD, 2010: 240). Nonetheless, the latest data points at a decrease in the percentage of the foreign population 9.77% (INE, 2014) due to the acquisition of the Spanish nationality as well as the return migration and migration to a third country linked to the economic crisis. The reasons behind the exceptional Ecuadorian migration to Spain from 2000, where the number of Ecuadorian registered increased from around 4,000 in 1997 to almost 140,000 in 2000 (INE, 2014), are associated to the 1998/1999 economic crisis, with the subsequent fall of GNP, the dollarization, privatisation and decrease of public spending (Ron-Balsera, 2014a; Ron-Balsera, 2014c).

These changes resulted in lower levels of quality of life, increased inequality and high levels of unemployment (Herrera, Carrillo and Torres, 2005, Camacho, 2010) pushing many Ecuadorians to leave their country. The attraction to Spain is explained in terms of Spanish as the main language, as well as other cultural links such as catholic religion, and political factors such as bilateral agreements, which facilitates the acquisition of residence permit and Spanish nationality (Ron-Balsera, 2014a; Ron-Balsera, 2014c).

Regarding the education level of Ecuadorian migrants in Spain, they seem to arrive with higher levels of education than the average population in the host country (IOE, 2007 and Camacho, 2010). However, their human capital is not absorbed in the Spanish labour market, where 43% of the Ecuadorian workers are placed in unskilled positions, compared to the 36% for Latin American migrants in general (IOE, 2007:43). The main occupation for Ecuadorian male migrants is construction (34.8%) (Camacho, 2010: 170) and for Ecuadorian female migrants is domestic service (27%), both of them instable and unskilled occupations (IOE, 2007: 40). Since language cannot be blamed in the case of Ecuadorians in Spain, other factors such as racism towards the 'Mestizo' phenotypes, 72.4% of the Ecuadorian Population (Sanchez, 2010:8) and xenophobiaⁱⁱ seem to be related. Racism affects individual health from both a psychological perspective and in terms of limiting access to valuable opportunities and resources (Pantzer, et al., 2006: 694). Thus structural racism influences social acceptance but also self-perception, which has an impact on their education journeys, their entire life, and the future generations (Ron-Balsera, 2014a; Ron-Balsera, 2014b).

The Spanish academic debate is concerned about the impact of the increasing number of students with migration background in the Spanish education system. According to García Castaño, Rubio Gómez and Buachra (2008), the Spanish scientific literature in the last decade regarding this issue has focused on: 1) quantifying the phenomenon in statistical terms and studying the effect of the concentration of immigrant students in State schools; 2) analysing specific programmes and special school measures for these new students; 3) studying the way in which the mainstream language is taught in school and if and in which way mother tongue instruction is promoted or taught; 4) researching the relationship between family and school; 5) analysing the factors that contribute to the education success or failure of these immigrant students in the school system. The present research would be situated in the last of these dimensions, however due to the open character of the biographical interviews and the expert interviews, it deals with some of the other dimensions, particularly the relation between family and school.

In the Spanish literature, although scant, there are some studies delving into immigrant reception and inclusion processes in schools. Essomba (2006) highlights the importance of variables such as late incorporation in the school system, proficiency in the language of instruction, tension between school cultures, tension between family values and school culture, economic factor, school-social environment relation, and degree of welcoming attitude of education community, i.e., school staff, students and families. Alegre (2008) proposes a list of very similar variables, adding the legal status of the student and his or her parents or guardian, and institutional characteristics such as comprehensive structures of the system (whether it differentiates by tracking students), teacher's pedagogy, diversity management, immigrant student enrolment process, social composition of the school, and school climate (Alegre, 2008: 64).

Some other authors (Garreta and Llevot, 2004) draw attention to the importance of communication between the school and the family. Notwithstanding, the concern about the lack of communication between teachers and parents is not ultimately linked to the immigrant background variable, but rather to the socio-economic status of the family and other variables such as stable, caring and loving environment; positive attitude towards school, teachers and learning; realistic but high expectations; open attitude towards the host society which favours dialogue and interchange (Besalú, 2002). Certain studies (e.g. Pàmies, 2006) criticise teachers' perceptions of immigrant families as not interested in their children's academic success, implicitly or explicitly blaming them for the high rate of repetition and school dropout. Some authors propose to have some specific points of reference in schools: such as welcoming tutors with inclusion and intercultural training, student / peer mentors, and cultural mediators (Miró, 2003; García Fernández, 2002).

A substantial proportion of the Spanish academic literature focusing on the incorporation of migration background student to the Spanish education system is devoted to the importance of the language of instruction, the learning of it when different to the mother tongue, and multilingualism (see García Castaño, 2008 for a list of references). However, this research purposely selected the participants so they would be native Spanish speakers; therefore the difference between language of instruction and mother tongue is only a difference of dialect or particular country or region linguistic expressions.

The analysis of the present study participants' narratives evidences the relevance of the time elapsed between parents' migration and family reunification, parents' working conditions and salary, *de facto* single parenthood, and students' relation with native peers and teachers in the

education trajectories of the selected participants, but also gender, type of school, concentration of migrant student background, and peer pressure (Ron-Balsera, 2014a).

Education and social mobility

Schools have been criticised as active reproducers of social inequalities, where heterogeneities such as sex and particular phenotypes are turned into defined class, gender and racial roles in society and accordingly individuals are ascribed a position in the hierarchy ladder. The role of schools in social reproduction has been studied by scholars such as Bourdieu (1999, 1997, 1968; Willis, 1977; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). Nevertheless, historically schools are also seen as great equalisers and crucial sites for upward mobility.

Most of the participants reported their parents' desire for them to achieve in school and spend time and effort pushing them in this direction. Although two thirds of the research participants had dropped out of school at some point, they still valued education and would like to gain a higher qualification than the one they had already achieved (Ron-Balsera, 2014a; Ron-Balsera, 2014b).

Alvaro, a sixteen year old student who was in his last year of middle school during the first round of the interviews and managed to go to first year of high school during the second round described his parent's expectations "*they want me to be someone, who has a university degree, like all my cousins and to be someone in the future*" (Alvaro, 16). Also the parents' of the participants who were serving sentences in young offenders institutions encouraged them to study and go to university:

My mom tells me to study, study, study and take advantage. Since you have that [having completed compulsory education through remedial programs whilst being in the detention centre], you can get yourself a degree, whatever you want. And I don't know, don't know. I'll listen to her one day (laughter) (Bartolo, 20).

Talking about how his parents support him to study and expect him to go to university to study engineering in order to improve his social status and escaping the possibility of being exploited in Spain a high school student narrated:

Yes, my parents, from the beginning, they've always taught me, I have to be more than them, because, because they tell me: look the situation we are in, we are looking for a job, and people, people trash us, they tell me. I don't want you to be like that, and they've told me so since I was a wee little boy. And I have it here in my head. I want to be someone in life (Alberto, 17).

These respondents reported that their parents see education as the key for the upward integration of their children into the middle class. Parents' hopes to give their children a better life lead them to praise education as their lifesaving float for upward mobility.

The idea of meritocracy, i.e., those who deserve it because of working hard and being intelligent will do well in education and will have a successful career, is well spread in the popular culture. Even when many scholars (e.g. Johnson, 2006) have shown the mirage of the "American dream" of working hard bringing success regardless of your class, ethnicity or gender; most families at either end of the wealth spectrum seem to take responsibility for their situation of richness saying that they deserve their income and status because of their hard work, and their situation of poverty, blaming themselves because of being lazy in school, joining the wrong crowd, drug or alcohol abuse or not being intelligent enough. For instance, a male in a juvenile detention centre explains why he did not do well in school "*because I was too lazy, I'm very lazy in school, you know? I'm a bit thick; I can't get things in my head easily*" (Javier, 19). Similarly, a high school student after having completed middle school and complaining that he finds the first year of high school difficult he blames himself saying that it is hard "*I don't know, because I'm lazy, I guess [laughs] I don't know*" (Felipe, 18). Instead of blaming the lack of motivation on the personal predispositions of these students, Varenne and McDermott refer to the "adaptive withdrawal" (1998: 152) as a type of resistance mechanism in which predicting that working hard would not offer them the same types of rewards than it would to their native peers or middle class students, they become disengaged to the school.

The analysis of the participants' narratives signals an "attitude-achievement paradox" (Mickelson, 1990), by which, even when migrant background students share the same educational values as the native majority and believe in the upward mobility promise offered by education, they are more likely to become disengaged and face greater risk of school attrition than their native counterparts. The reasons behind this disengagement are related to the lack of embeddedness or how welcome and fitting they feel within the educational institutions. Ethnocentric curricula and school ethos contribute to the construction and expansion of social distance between migrant background students and the native peers. Some teachers seemed to act as "cultural gatekeepers", parcelling out rewards and sanctions according to who abides by dominant cultural rules; contributing to the disengagement of students of migration background. Yet, some exceptional teachers seemed to act as cultural mediators, helping to build mutual knowledge and understanding, recognising and including

migrant students' background knowledge as valuable learning for everyone in the class. Peer relations are particularly important factors that promote or hinder embeddedness in school. The following sections will deal with these issues.

School progression and school failure

The number of young people of Ecuadorian background that go to university is very lowⁱⁱⁱ (See table 1). One of the experts interviewed, a high school teacher, comments on the small number of students of Ecuadorian background who achieve high grades and go to university:

Very few go to university, they usually do modules [short vocational courses] [...] electricity, IT, these things are the most ... [...]. [But] when they want to go to university, they really go for it, they are people who study medicine; medicine is in great demand by the students”.

According to a recent survey conducted on young people of migrant background in Spain, Ecuadorian students seem to have lower career expectations than other migration background youth (Portes et al, 2013 and Portes et al 2011). However, like in every minority group, there are some exceptions that manage to overcome the barriers representing success stories.

Yet, even when managing to access university, the participants interviewed seem to encounter more obstacles than natives. On the female participants, Alicia, was a high school student who migrated to Spain at the age of 12; she recounted her aspiration to study medicine when she was interviewed at the ages of 16 and 17, but she did not get the necessary grades, so she opted for becoming a nurse. Unlike other participants interviewed in high schools whose parents or close relatives had university degrees, even when they held unskilled occupations in Spain, Alicia was a first generation university student. This adds an extra layer of disadvantage that compounds her ethnicity and social class, having to face more challenges in order to access university and gain a degree than those students whose parents or other relatives have graduate degrees (Ron-Balsera, 2014a).

The weight of evidence shows that:

Compared to their peers, first-generation university students tend to be at a distinct disadvantage with respect to basic knowledge about postsecondary education (e.g., costs and application process), level of family income and support, educational degree expectations and plans, and academic preparation in high school (Pascarella et al, 2004: 250).

Likewise, the literature (Loo and Rolison, 1986) predicts a likely socio cultural alienation of the Ecuadorian background students in predominantly Spanish native universities. Several studies show that ethnic minority first-generation university students are especially vulnerable

because of the higher risk of poor academic performance and high dropout rates (Dennis et al, 2005). The vulnerability has its roots in the lack of social capital, where the scarce familiarity with the university culture makes it harder to navigate the institutional bureaucracy as well as the University *savoir-faire et savoir-être*, which reinforces the unequal distribution of valuable assets outside the academic institution. Frequently, family obligations and economic difficulties may jeopardise fulfilling the tasks assigned to university students. Yet, there is evidence that ethnic minority first generation students develop rewarding strategies to overcome these shortcomings, such as a stronger motivation to succeed due to the higher stakes attached to education to lift them out of poverty (Dennis et al, 2005). But these success stories should not divert the attention from the institutionalised discrimination recreated and normalised through these credentialising institutions that defer unequal rights and privileges upon those holding these certificates, which are mainly native students from a middle and upper middle class background (Ron-Balsera, 2014a).

Statistics show that students originating from Ecuador seem to have more difficulties than their native counterparts to progress through schooling. As it can be observed from Table 1, the number of students enrolled in 2011/2012 decreased considerably from middle school 31002 to high school 7231 and then to university 2019; similarly they are overrepresented 2.92% of the total population in the short vocational courses created as an alternative remedial programme for those students who had not finished compulsory education. According to Fernández Enguita *et al* (2010:94) out of the total number of students with a migration background who drop out, 77% stop studying before completing compulsory education, only 23% of those who stop studying had achieved the compulsory education degree; whereas in the case of their natives peers 62% of those leaving education had already attained the compulsory education degree. Fernández Enguita blames the high levels of school attrition among students with a migration background to the migration process and cultural readjustment, together with the language differences and the education idiosyncrasies such as curriculum and pedagogies from either the host country or the country of origin. However, according to this author, for those who were born in the host country, the likelihood of school failure is linked to their social class rather than their ethnicity (Fernández Enguita *et al*, 2010:87). The findings from this research point at the compounded effect of ethnicity and social class, as well as age and gender, among other factors; where the difficulties in education faced by working-class migrant communities are intertwined at four different

levels: curriculum, teacher-student relationship, peer relations and family factors (Ron-Balsera, 2014a; Ron-Balsera, 2014b).

| Table 1. Number of students enrolled in the different levels of education in Spain 2011/2012 | | | | | | |
|--|---------|----------------------|--------|---------|-------------------------------|--|
| | Total | From other countries | EU 27 | Ecuador | % of Ecuadorians out of total | % of Ecuadorians out of foreign students |
| TOTAL | 7923293 | 781236 | 203182 | 79400 | 1,00% | 39,08% |
| Early childhood education | 1917236 | 144369 | 42392 | 6774 | 0,35% | 15,98% |
| Primary education | 2797804 | 272305 | 76451 | 22664 | 0,81% | 29,65% |
| Special needs education | 32233 | 3955 | 691 | 485 | 1,50% | 70,19% |
| Middle school ESO | 1792548 | 215386 | 50414 | 31002 | 1,73% | 61,49% |
| High school | 628753 | 46448 | 12348 | 7231 | 1,15% | 58,56% |
| VET first cycle | 312016 | 30215 | 5366 | 4986 | 1,60% | 92,92% |
| VET second cycle | 303063 | 18545 | 3301 | 2183 | 0,72% | 66,13% |
| Short vocational courses PCPI | 84217 | 17589 | 3036 | 2456 | 2,92% | 80,90% |
| University | 1456783 | 47003 | 7497 | 2019 | 0,14% | 26,93% |

Source: INE

First level: Curriculum

Some institutional factors associated with school disengagement include low teachers' expectations on students of migration background. One of the teachers interviewed looked for explanations in the country or origin, blaming the lack of achievement on the curricular gap:

“The education gap [...] is striking. [...]. But in the case of Ecuador, you know what public education is like there, don't you? It is residual, without means, then they arrive with a huge curricular gap. There are kids who come and don't understand. They ask very basic concepts, and they understand nothing, nothing, nothing”.

The director of a young offenders' institution concurred: *“the curricular gap [is] very big, very big. Most of the cases we have, it is very big, 5, 6 or 7 courses [gap]”*. This deficit perception does not question the existence of an hegemonic curriculum that may neglect knowledge from other cultures, in this case the learning that these students would have done in Ecuador.

Ironically, the participants never mentioned this curricular gap, they pointed at the lack of engagement in the class:

“At first, as I was saying, I was doing well, well, well, but only studying what I liked, I mean, if I liked a subject such as crafts, what I most liked was drawing, and I put myself into it ... It was the only subject that I used to pass, that and geography. And ... why didn't I study? [...] Studying doesn't work for me [...] I don't want to study” (Melanie, 16).

This girl was serving a sentence in a juvenile detention centre; she dropped out of school at the age of 13. Another participant from a juvenile detention centre describes the different curriculum and pedagogy in Ecuador:

“Not difficult, but it was different because the first days I had to get used to it, and I didn't get used to the class. Because in history there I studied Latin America history and it seemed more interesting than this history, which, when I came here, they taught the History of European wars, Spanish civil war ... and then, I didn't like it, but hey, I had to adjust. But everything is very different, I don't know why, but there everything is different. Both because you know the people, teachers, they didn't know your ... how to say? As they say, they are not of your race, they don't understand you the way they understood me there” (Bartolo, 20).

One of the experts interviewed, an Ecuadorian working for a civil society organisation who had experience working as a teacher both in Ecuador and Spain complained about the ethnocentric representation of Latin American culture in Spanish text books; he complained about how Spanish teachers

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“Always looked at them [Ecuadorian students] from ethnocentrism, from the point of view of the super European culture while looking at Latin American subculture, cultures that don’t work, that have no worth, where they measured, they regarded Latin American education as a deficit [...]. Spanish texts were not adapted and they even induced to stigmatize Latin American population or immigrants in general, they [text books] portrayed our cultures as inferior in a subliminal way in comparison to the Spanish or European culture”.

These representations of other cultures constitute a form “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), by imposing meanings that overtly legitimises the power relations of the historical colonial oppression.

Notwithstanding, some teachers try to include knowledge from other cultures into the curriculum in order to make students more engaged and increase the multicultural knowledge.

That is the case of a male Spanish high school teacher of 57 years:

“Sometimes I try that students who come from other places, in this case Ecuadorians, find here certain sensitivity to the geography, history and art of their countries of origin. And I try to do something about it, i.e. introducing to the extent to which educational programs and rhythms allow, specific references, attentive to their geography, their history and even in the case of arts. I mean that an Art History student from Ecuador hear about Guayasamín in class, or that he or she hears mentioned in history, I do not know, Eloy Alfaro, or, or, or when talking about the duality of certain countries one can mention for example the contrast between the coast of Guayaquil and the interior highlands. Quito when citing World Heritage cities, the teacher can use Quito or Cuenca as examples. I mean, well, a certain sensitivity to their place of origin, for them to see it as a sign of respect as well as the fact that they, somehow, raising this curiosity they also contribute to the class”.

This cultural sensitiveness helps create a welcoming context of reception where all students are invited to bridge the cultural gap and feel embedded within the school; easing the transition for the newcomers and making them feel engaged (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel and Martin, 2009).

Second level: Teacher-Student relationship

The relation with teachers was an important theme in most interviews. Respect towards teachers seems to be linked to the perceived attitude towards old people in Ecuador fostered by their parents: “The teachers [in Ecuador] were good people, they cared, we respected them more, because in my country old people are very much respected” (Bartolo, 20). Nonetheless, this perception of respect and discipline is contradicted by other studies such as Cuenca et al. (2009) whose results point out a lack of discipline and respect and even cases of violence towards teachers in Ecuadorian schools (Cuenca et al., 2009:119).

In some instances, there was a conflictive relationship that discouraged students from attending their lessons. This was the case of a male participant doing a short vocational course who narrated how the middle school teachers' reaction to his appearance put him off going to class:

"I started here in third grade [primary school]. I don't know, I was good at school, I passed third grade, fourth, fifth and sixth grades [primary school]. And then went to high school [four years of compulsory education, middle school]. I started there. Well, there was a time that people started wearing wide clothes and all that, and I also wore wide clothes. People looked down on us, [...]. Well, I went there when I was in first year [of compulsory middle school]. I had a few teachers who were half racist. Well, because, as they picked on us I said, no, and I started to stop going to school. And I left that school [...]. At first they [the teachers] use to tell me to remove my piercings. And I said no, I'm not doing anything wrong. And [the teacher] said no, you don't go into my classroom like that. Okay, so I didn't go in" (Juan, 18).

Although this teacher probably saw his request on student' clothes and appearance as a sign of discipline, the authority he was trying to impose through these restrictions made Juan alienated and felt unfairly unwelcome in school. By targeting ethnic minorities when imposing discipline regarding their clothes, schools convert students' personality traits and fashion into subversive opposition, which brings more resistance to the school culture rather than adherence (Morris, 2005).

Yet, some students, such as a female Ecuadorian student finishing upper secondary education, described their relation with teachers as encouraging and increasing her social integration:

"You can make friends with the teachers here, I mean, it's like having one more friend. However in Ecuador it was different. The teachers were ... a..., like... you could say that they were like the law there and ... and that's it. But here it's more ... it's more like friends. With their jokes and all that" (Jennifer, 17).

Whereas other students reproach the lack of implications that some teachers showed in comparison to the perceived effort that Ecuadorian teachers had shown in the past. Explaining why teachers in Ecuador taught "very well" a male student in a short vocational course described: *"for those who didn't understand, they [teachers] explained there, and stood there, to explain a lot of times" (Jose, 16)*. Some complained about the fast pace of their teaching, especially in middle school. A male Ecuadorian who had finished serving his sentence in a young offenders' institution and who is trying to finish compulsory education through a remedial program for adults said: *"Here they are more patient, because in the high school everything is faster, cam' on, let's go, otherwise you'll learn it at home" (Roberto, 18).*

The longing for closer and more understanding relations with teachers is common among students of migration background and the distance is bigger for boys than for girls (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel and Martin, 2009). The progression from primary to secondary education is a critical point. A factor arguably related to the disengagement with schooling is the more distant relation with teachers in middle school, consequence of a higher number of students per teacher and different teachers for different subjects (Fernández Enguita, 2010:154). This distance was confirmed by some high school teachers:

“I’m not very interested in their family life, maybe I should be but I’m not. [...] I don’t know if I am being prudish or not sufficiently sensitive to their social context but I don’t go very deep in the, in the family context of my students, unless it comes up to me for some reason, which doesn’t usually happen otherwise”.

Another high school teacher commented, *“We don’t intrude in their lives, do we? [...] Neither do we interview them to know about their personal lives”*. The lack of knowledge and interest about their students’ family situation are explained either as respecting their privacy or as not being part of what high schools are supposed to do. It is only when there is a sharp decrease in a student’s attainment that the tutor might share some family details with the other teachers in one of the evaluation meetings that happen once a term. Yet, it is a commonplace in the school failure literature that the family, particularly parents’ socio cultural status and expectations for their children, together with family structure or the existence of family problems such as violence, drug or alcohol problems, partner instability, unemployment, etc highly influence the students’ achievement (Johnson, 2006; Aston and McLanahan, 1991; Benard, 1991; Coleman, 1987; Willis, 1977).

The distance between teachers and students is used to maintain discipline, and although students with a migration background are perceived as more respectful at first, they rapidly assume the presumed lack of discipline and respect professed by their native peers:

“discipline has also fallen sharply, sometimes kids haven’t internalised that the teacher’s role is very different from theirs, however democratic and civic that we are all” (high school teacher). Nevertheless, the interviews also reflect the implication of many other teachers in the student’s educational journey. Jose, a short vocational education course student narrated how his teachers used to say to him before he dropped out: *“don’t skip classes, you’re very smart, you could get it out right (pass the course) if you study, don’t skip classes”* (Jose, 16).

A common discipline measure among teachers is suspending the students for a few school days. Being sent home after clashes with teachers was not uncommon among those had dropped out, as one male participant in detention recounted:

“When I got to first year of the ESO [compulsory middle school] I was going to class, you know? And I retook the year because I was more or less lazy, because I went out and I was sent home a lot. I was thrown out the class, two, three days. And I saw myself able to pass, you know? Only that I was a little brat” (Javier, 19).

Being sent home is a popular sanction among teachers, albeit it can be argued to convey the wrong message for those students who are not enjoying being in school and long for being outside with other friends (Fernandez Enguita, 2010). Likewise, catching up the content of those missing classes because of being sent home implies a great effort for those students who tend to lack a disciplined work habit. Consequently they become more and more disengaged with the lesson topics and the school life in general.

The Spanish education law, similar to the French education system and unlike other countries such as Great Britain, determines that those students who fail more than three subjects have to retake the year. In primary education students can repeat a year once at the end of each cycle, which last two academic years. In all levels the percentages of boys retaking courses or dropping out are considerably higher than for girls and children of migrants are more likely to retake years than their national peers (Fernandez Enguita, et al, 2010; Arregui Martinez et al, 2009), working class students are at higher risk of retaking a year than middle and upper classes, therefore, the compounded effect of ethnicity, class and gender makes male working-migrant background students more vulnerable to school failure.

A male high school teacher explained:

“There are kids who don’t understand, that is, they are asking very basic concepts [...]. On the other hand, they are respectful, but they don’t have much to offer. Most of them are home alone, their parents often go to work, then they have no control, nor study habits, or they get discouraged. I mean it is rare the Ecuadorian who doesn’t repeat one course or two in order to begin to understand something more or less, right? And, they are in a precarious situation, especially now that many are leaving. Their parents have a lot of interest, really, when they come to talk with the tutor they are always very correct [...], but the kids are in a situation of returning to their country, not returning, no man's land and waiting to see what happens. But with such an absolute precariousness that is alarming”.

Although the teacher interviewed was referring to his experience with students of Ecuadorian background, he is describing the intersectional effect of ethnicity and social class, particularly the high levels of relative poverty among working class migrants. The uncertainty and

precariousness is a characteristic of what Bauman (1996) calls liquid postmodernity and its victims, with the notion of 'vagabondage' where these families move around like vagabonds, with a lack of freedom in choosing their life itineraries.

Those in favour of retaking courses argue that promoting students who were not able to understand the basic concepts learned during that particular academic year, are not likely to cope with learning higher levels of content in the following courses. Such was the case of an expert working in a juvenile detention institution:

“And also with the added problem as I said, by law they have to go progressing into the next course according to their age [regardless of whether they pass the exams] and what is the benefit for a boy to pass to the next year if he doesn't have the knowledge?”

Nevertheless, most studies have shown the scarce academic success of retaking a year and the high personal impact on students (Fernandez Enguita, et al, 2010; Arregui Martinez et al, 2009). Felipe, a 19-year-old male high school student who – during the second round of interviews – was retaking first year of non-compulsory high school recounted:

“Well, as I'm now too old for them [other class mates], because, you know, it's weird, I feel different and I don't know, I can't. [...] And It's also hard for me because of having repeated [retaken the year] and such” (Felipe, 19).

Felipe had some family problems that led him to fail 4 subjects out of a total of 9; he did not want to tell his teachers about these family predicaments because he did not want any special treatment: *“I didn't want to pass just for that, it's supposed that I have to be like the others” (Felipe, 19).* Nevertheless, due to having retaken the year and probably another year before, he was then two years older than most of his class mates and he would have the reputation of not being a good student among teachers, which would consequently lower their expectations and his academic performance.

Another participant, a young male in detention commented:

“I retook first year of ESO, then I stop studying for one and a half years. Then I went back to school and got into second year of ESO, then I also dropped out from this second year of ESO and they placed me in third year of ESO because of my age. And I stayed in the third year, I was studying, you know? But I had a problem at school and they let me out [being expelled] and I didn't go to school anymore. I got to the third year of ESO but without passing any subjects” (Javier, 19).

Yet automatic progression to the next year without extra support does not provide a suitable solution for those students who are struggling to understand the content of certain subjects. Provisions particularly designed to suit students' needs to catch up should be in place. All

these factors taken into account, it seems that retaking a year constrain students with a migration background's opportunities for affiliation or social relations, of self-respect, of knowledge, of aspiration (Walker, 2007) therefore decreasing well-being in general as well as their chances for successful integration.

Third Level: Peer relations

There seems to be more bonding – intra ethnic ties – than bridging – inter ethnic ties – (Putnam, 2001) regarding the integration of students of Ecuadorian background. That is, they seem to create stronger bonds with other Ecuadorians and students originating from other Latin American countries, than forming friendships with the native peers. Referring to his group of friends a male participant who migrated to Spain at the age of 11 said, *“Spanish, acquaintances, but friends are Latinos. Because we come from the same land, we enjoy ourselves more with Latinos than with people of Spain or anywhere else in Europe”* (Bartolo, 20). Another participant who arrived in Spain when he was 6 years old recalled his experience in primary school:

“Well, normally I used to go with two friends of colour, so black boys and, the others they were, were very nice to say the truth. The majority was Spanish but the two Black boys were, one was a Dominican and the other was African. And I related better to them because, like... because they were not Spanish, as they say, because I'm not ... Spanish. We met the three, but the others were, were very nice, very nice [...]. And the two brown-skinned, well, they were like my bodyguards” (Roberto, 18).

This extract represents the intersectionality of ethnicity and social class compounding the barriers to school engagement and, therefore, social and economic integration. It also reflects social construction, de-construction and re-construction: the social construction of Spanish as different to Black, and of the participant not being Spanish because of his migration origin; the de-construction of different national origins, given preference to being Black and not-being-Spanish; and the reconstruction of a social identity where social distance is narrowed among the Ecuadorian participant, a Dominican and an African migrant because of being outsiders in the mainstream class (Putnam, 2007; Alba and Nee, 2003). Although the participant seems to display an Ecuadorian identity, when being confronted with a majority of Spanish children, he feels closer to a black Dominican or a black African student because of sharing the stigma of having been ‘othered’. Portes et al (2011) study regarding parental influences on children of migrants’ self identity points out that Ecuadorian background youth show very low levels of identification with Spain. This is despite sharing the language and having closer cultural connections with Spain than other nationalities such as those

originating from Eastern Europe or Northern Africa. They suggest that the mestizo phenotypes predominant in the Andean region, similar to what happens with the mulatto and black phenotypes, are a target for racial discrimination that translates into lower levels of identification with Spain.

This discrimination was exemplified by one of the participants' experiences as victims of verbal or physical discriminatory abuse and racism, often intertwined with social class: *“other also [...] said, fucking Latino, [...], fucking Latino. Often they believed that they [native Spaniards] were superiors in the school, since they were, since they were well-off, coming from families they have [...] good money”* (Bartolo, 20). Sometimes the discrimination was subtler, in the form of ‘micro-aggressions’ (Solórzano et al, 2000) like in the case of Roberto, who was seven years old when he migrated to Spain:

“I don’t know, they didn’t accept me [...]. No, I wasn’t part of their group. [...] My Spanish peers didn’t accept me. They could talk to me and everything, but when for example, when, they said: hey, I invite you to my house. They invited, I don’t know 3, 4. Even when I was friends with them, I wasn’t invited, and such... and I used to think dammit! [...] Let’s see, I didn’t mind [...] And I ignored it, and I said I don’t care. And I used to go to my house, I didn’t care, that is, I was indifferent, but ... There lays the rejection” (Roberto, 18).

Nonetheless, some other participants made good friends with Spaniards, especially those involved in football teams. A male in a remedial vocational centre explained:

“Those in my team are mainly Spaniards. And I spend most of the time with them. We go training or sometimes we arrange to meet, we connect ourselves by Tuenti [Spanish social network similar to Facebook] or something and we meet in the park and ... I don’t know, we go out, we go for a walk, or we go to the cinema and stuff. [...]. Sometimes Spanish and Latinos and we go out together. [...] Yes, there in my neighbourhood [...], there are Latinos and Spaniards and we met when we were little and we are still friends.” (Juan, 18).

Juan arrived to Spain when he was 7 years old, similar to Alvaro, a high school student who arrived to Spain at the age of 6 who also seems to have made good Spanish friends through playing football:

“I made many friends from the early days, I was invited to play football, and as they lived nearby, they passed by my house and rang me but they did not know where I lived, but they rang all the floors until they found me” (Álvaro, 15).

The presence of other students of Ecuadorian background in the class tends to act as a factor of integration and well-being. A male in post-compulsory secondary school said: *“since the first day I made friends because, as they were from my country, Ecuador, that helped me”* (Alberto, 17). Another high school student remembers:

“Well ... yes, from the beginning I made good friends and ... man, of course I missed the, your friends there and all that, but ... generally well. They were nice to me. And, besides, since there are also, sometimes, some people from right there, from X ((little town in Ecuador)), or from Ecuador, you feel more comfortable too, because you are not the only one among everyone” (Alicia, 16).

However, as they progress in the academic track, this presence starts to wean and the few remaining feel more isolated. That is the case of Alberto, an Ecuadorian male student completing the first year of high school:

“Yes it used to be good. But now, I don’t like it anymore [...] because there are not many friends. Some stopped studying and others left the school. [...]. They work, or are in one of those PCPI [short vocational courses], and don’t study anymore. Most of them stopped studying.” (Alberto, 17).

Table 1 showed the high proportion of Ecuadorian students enrolled in these remedial short vocational courses: 2,92% out of the total student population enrolled in PCPIs^{iv} and 80,90% out of the total foreign student population enrolled in PCPIs, in comparison to compulsory middle school (ESO) 1,73% and 61,49% respectively and non-compulsory high school (Bachillerato) 1,15% and 58,56% respectively. This concentration of Ecuadorian students in these remedial courses does not facilitate their social or economic integration (Ron-Balsera, 2014a; Ron-Balsera, 2014b).

Fourth level: Family factors

The likelihood of belonging to low income and single parent families is higher for children of Latin American migrants than for natives (IOE, 2007, Fernández Enguita, 2010), Immigrant parents, particularly single mothers, often face the dilemma of having to work in order to support their families at the expense of providing parental emotional support; or spending time with their children at the expense of suffering economic deprivations (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, Martin, 2009: 736).

A male high school student recounted how the difficulties to con-validate his mother’ and aunt’s university degrees made them unable to apply their knowledge in the right fields:

“My mother has a university degree but she can’t work here because she needs to con--validate it and she can’t waste much time. [She did] nursing [and she works] cleaning. [...]. Yes, she validated it, but I don’t know, they created a lot of problems and in the end they said that she would have to study another year, but as a higher grade. And in the end my mother can’t waste time so she has left it. [...]. My aunt, who studied chemistry, also lives here in Spain and is working as a cleaner” (Felipe, 18).

The long process of degree con-validation makes many Ecuadorian migrants unable to apply their knowledge to the right fields. The requirement to do some extra courses in Spanish universities does not take into account their difficult economic situation, where they need to work full time to survive and usually pay the debts contracted during the migration journey. The institutional discrimination evidenced by this disempowering mechanism in which knowledge, skills legitimised by Ecuador certificates, were devalued and disregarded in Spain. The job-education mismatch endured by their parents, together with the barriers encountered in school, discouraged the participants to pursue higher education. The economic crisis and rampant youth unemployment only served to lower their career expectations (Ron-Balsera, 2014a).

The unpredictable economic situation at home is exemplified by the amount of times that some of the participants moved houses and school. As one of the male high school student whose family moved houses at least three times after migrating said:

“Well, at first when I arrived, I remember that I had a hard time at school, because there was a child that picked on me. And then I remember I changed school, I moved to another area X., and I lived there, for five years. [...]. Then I went to another school, where I spent one year and then I moved home, here in Y., and then I moved again, where I am now” (Alvaro, 15).

Another participant moved schools in his last year of compulsory education because his father decided to take him to Ecuador for a 6-month holiday and when he returned he could not enrol in his previous high school again, furthermore, he had to retake the year because of missing half of the academic year. These changes bring a great amount of instability and uncertainty that affect their well-being, integration in the school and chances to achieve. Like one of the experts explained:

“Building something sustainable with them, and developing the means so they can think what they want to become or what they want to live is very hard work. That is, very difficult, very difficult, because they don't ... They live in the provisionality [uncertainty] and the uncertainty they drag from their migration process, from the adaptation to different school classrooms. Since we move you because you don't fit the profile. Their adaptation to different addresses [homes], the tentativeness of this month you're okay [enough economic resources] and you live in a furnished 3-room flat, but next month something goes wrong and you have to rent one, then your room is no longer yours and you have to share with your mother in a small space where you don't have your own space, that is very common. [...] Reducing their personal space, the space to develop normally. The provisionality is what marks them”.

This uncertainty, provisionality seems to be associated to the current labour migrants experience, in Bauman's (1996) metaphor, they are victims of postmodernity wandering like 'vagabonds' with practically no choice in designing and pursuing their plan of life.

Conclusion

Thus, although education is usually portrayed as the way forward to achieve social mobility, this research data signals that the Spanish education system, similar to other Western countries, tends to reinforce social inequalities by producing higher levels of school failure among students with a low social class and ethnic background. The institutional discrimination takes place at different levels, and although sometimes is explicit, often goes unnoticed by the perpetrators and the victims, becoming a normalised practice.

The findings of this research confirm the existence the structural advantages and disadvantages in which different groups have unequal access to opportunities and resources (Barth and Noel, 1972) resulting in dynamic ethnic – although also gender, class and age – economic, educational and in general, well-being inequalities that tend to accumulate in the life span of the individual, and that are transmitted to the next generation. Immigrants and their children face institutional discrimination (Gomolla, 2006) such as a segmented school system and labour market unequally structured on the basis of gender, discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, where the different nationality and social status of economic migrants become key explanatory elements for the trajectories of individual mobility experienced by these individuals and their future itineraries.

For those achievers who manage to progress to high school and even university, the decreasing presence of other Ecuadorian peers in their class makes their educational journey more isolating. Few of the participants were accepted as equals by their native peers, and most of them searched for the comfort and support from other students with Ecuadorian background. They were a majority in remedial vocational institutions, which seem to provide a second class alternative to other academic tracks, but who succeed in rescuing students who would otherwise be categorised as NEETs (not in education, employment or training). However, the concentration of students with a migration background in certain inner-city schools and remedial courses does not benefit the social and economic integration of children of migrants, resulting in bonding with other Ecuadorians and Latinos in general, at the expense of bridging the gap between themselves and native Spaniards. Likewise, the job opportunities that these courses open are very questionable.

Although missing in the participants' narratives, who instead referred to a convivial relation with some teachers, some exceptional multicultural education efforts made by certain teachers include incorporating Ecuadorian references into the curriculum and adapting their pedagogy

to the heterogeneity of the students' needs. These efforts facilitate the mutual understanding of natives and migration background students, which increases school progression, particularly for the latter group. Likewise, social activities elicited during the interviews such as playing in school and local football teams also promote social integration. Yet, it is striking that schools in general and teachers in particular, do not try to address the unequal starting point of these students who are at disadvantage in terms of material and immaterial resources that affect their ability to learn. Neither did they seem to concern themselves with the lack of bridging, nor the daily micro and macro aggressions (nuanced and explicit forms of psychological and physical violence) of racisms, sexism and classism. For those who did not doom Ecuadorian background students with their low expectations, their preferred attitude of distance or neutrality reinforces the inequity, contributing to the legitimisation of a complex system of oppression.

Therefore, the lower levels of education achievement displayed by students of Ecuadorian background in the official statistics are not the result of particular traits of an imaginary "Ecuadorian culture". They are rooted in a complex system of inequality of opportunities, in which education institutions often end up building further barriers by not providing more effective mechanisms for the integration of all the students in the class regardless of their country of origin, by not paying attention to their diverse needs in order to increase their real opportunities to participate in education, or by not addressing and redistributing the inequality of valuable assets such as power, respect and resources that affect their educational journeys and career expectations.

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ⁱⁱ Racism is a historical and endemic problem in Spain, from the numerous works of art depicting Christians killing Moors, to the common language expressions using Jews and Black with negative connotations. The ethnic group which has suffered most racist discrimination in Spain has been the Roma community (Ajá and Carbonell, 2000: 182). However, Moroccan immigrants have also been victims of racist attacks such as the extreme case of "El Ejido" in February 2000 (Zapata-Barrero, 2003).

ⁱⁱⁱ In the academic year 2011/2012, there were 8728 students from South America enrolled at a university in Spain, out of a total university population of 810076; they would represent 1.07% of the total university student population. Out of those 8728 students from South America, 5439 (62%) were women and 3289 (38%) were men (INE).

^{iv} "In Spain, initial vocational qualification programmes (Programas de Cualificación Profesional Inicial – PCPI) are aimed at preventing early school dropout, opening up new possibilities for training and qualification and facilitating access to employment. PCPI programmes are aimed at those students aged over 16 who do not hold the Graduado en Educación Secundaria Obligatoria certificate. In

exceptional circumstances, this may apply to children aged 15 who have taken the second academic year of compulsory secondary education but do not meet the requirements to progress to the third year and who have already had to stay down once during this stage” (Eurydice, 2011:48).

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