

Immigration and Disability as Inequality Intersectional Axis in Education

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Abstract

The situations of social inequality, and hence those of educational inequality, are built on different cornerstones. In this work, we reflect on the inequality resulting from the intersectionality of two variables: disability and immigration. These variables have been widely studied separately. For this reason, the aim of this work is to do a literature review of the Spanish research about this subject, in which these variables are both considered. More concretely, in the education field.

Keywords: *Immigration, disability, inequality, education.*

1. Looking at the "intersectional discrimination" from the educational field:

School as a social space reflects the diversity presents in the society. The education system has to consider such diversity in order to address it for providing an inclusive education. In fact, diversity can often lead to marginalization or discrimination. That is the case of children and young immigrant people with disabilities, who entail two variables causing vulnerability: the immigrant condition and the disability. Although each of these factors is associated with vulnerability situations, their combination accentuates the situation of disadvantage and discrimination. The concept of "intersectionality" was introduced in 1980 by Crenshaw, a US lawyer. He defines this term by using the image of a crossroads where two causes of discrimination can be found. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2011) uses the term "multiple discrimination" to refer to the same situation, recognising that a person can be discriminated for more than a reason in any situation or given moment [1].

In the scientific literature, there is a major lack of studies that combine both categories. Conversely, the "one-axis approach" has been used hegemonically [2]. In such approach the reasons for discrimination are separated and studied independently. In the education field, in 2009 the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education points out that there are very few studies on immigrant students with disabilities. In contrast, it is remarkable that there is a large number of studies on each of the variables considered in isolation [3]. In the Spanish context, we note that this trend presents in the education policies, as well as in the statistics. Our aim is to review the studies that have been carried out in the educational field in Spain, in which both variables are concretely addressed.

2. Specifications:

Disabilities constitute a vulnerability factor for both local and immigrant population. Nevertheless, for the latter, the situation is aggravated by other issues related to the immigrant status, such as [4]:

- a) Lack of documents (residence and work permits) which limits or restricts the social attention they may have.
- b) Lack of awareness on healthcare resources and social benefits.
- c) Cultural factors inherent to the immigrants.
- d) Lack of knowledge of the host country language.
- e) Precarious conditions of the immigrants in terms of work, housing, health, etc.
- f) Lack of ties in our society, loss of social ties, family breakdown, etc.

Looking at the different trajectories of immigrants with disabilities of educational age, different vulnerability situations can be outlined. These can differ according to the following cases:

- a) They are minors or young immigrants born with disabilities in the country of origin.
- b) They are minors or young immigrants whose disability was acquired prior to the migration process.
- c) They are minors or young immigrants whose disability was acquired during the migration process.
- d) They are minors or young immigrants whose disability was acquired in the host country.



The time when disability occurs can have important consequences on the migration project and the development of the individual. For example, the situation experienced in relation to the disability in the country of origin can be a determining factor in the migration process, which may be a reason to emigrate. In the poorest countries, where hardly there are economic benefits or material resources for this group, or disability certificates, or specific care, the attention to disability is given as a matter of humanity, rather than as a fundamental right. Moreover, disability is not conceived in all countries as it is in the West. The idea of disease is culturally determined. What we consider a disease, in certain other countries may be considered as a normal condition. For example, the Tuareg of the Kel Tamasheq of Mali, have a list of deficiencies that are not considered as such from the Westerners. Some examples of these are illegitimate birth, immaturity, ugliness, etc. [5].

3. Education law in Spain:

The current immigration law regulating the system of rights and duties of foreigners in Spain differentiates between resident and non-resident foreigners. That is to say, between those provided with the mandatory administrative authorization and those who do not. In accordance with these two categories, the law establishes that:

- a) For the residents: foreigners under eighteen have the right to education. This includes the access to the free and compulsory primary and pre-school education (which is conditioned to the existence of seats) as well as post-compulsory education and access to the public system of scholarships and grants.
- b) For the non-residents: under eighteen have the right to the free and compulsory primary and pre-school education (which is conditioned to the existence of seats) and access to the public system of scholarships and grants. Therefore, non-resident over eighteen foreigners are excluded from the access to post-compulsory education.

Those who reach Spain when they are minors, once they turn eighteen they suddenly lose all their rights and begin a life of great difficulties.

4. Education research in the Spanish context:

In the Spanish context, like in the other countries, research on the two variables that we address is scarce. After a search within the main Spanish scientific databases in the field of education, namely Dialnet, Indices Csic, as well as Google Scholar, we have found ten works carried out in the Spanish context. Only four out of these ten studies are related with the education field. The first study [6] proposes a didactics for immigrant children over 7 years old with a mild intellectual disability. The children to whom this didactics is directed have also to be literate in their mother tongue and must have a knowledge of the Latin alphabet. The main aim of the proposal is to develop a communicative competence in Spanish at a linguistic, social, operational, and strategic level. This work has to be considered cautiously as it is the result of a Master thesis whose author declares having not put it into practice, hence its efficacy has not been proved. The second study [7] presents a speech therapy intervention for an 8-year-old girl of Moroccan origin, with mild intellectual disability and serious language problems derived from her native language and aggravated by her disability. The main aim of the intervention is to support the Spanish linguistic development of the girl by strengthening communication, expression and verbal comprehension. The intervention addresses the four levels of language: morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. By administrating a standardized test of language assessment before and after the intervention, a significant improvement is demonstrated. Nevertheless, the worst results are still maintained in the morphology module.

Within the higher education, the third research [8] attempts to quantify the evolution of immigrant students with functional disabilities. The study is conducted in the period 2003-2011 at the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), by compiling the data collected since the creation of the Office for the Integration of People with Disabilities (OIPD). The starting hypothesis of the study contemplates a 5% increase of the immigrant students with disability, compared to the Spanish students with disability. Nevertheless, the research could not verify this hypothesis for the whole studied period, because data was not recorded every year. However, the study shows that, for the course 2010/2011, the 6% of the students with disabilities are immigrants (20 immigrant students with disabilities out of a total of 333 students with disabilities). That is to say, 1% more than the expected percentage. According to the authors, this demonstrates that a great advance is taking place in the community, by eliminating possible discriminations and social inequalities, and giving rise to an Intercultural University within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). On the other hand, the authors mentioned the benefits resulting from the intervention of social workers at individual, group and community level in the educational field. In this regard, they pointed out that these professionals



receive specific training in disability and interculturality. More in details, they point out on one of their possible tasks, namely the awareness with students, teachers, workers and other members of the educational community. However, this study is quite superficial, as it does not really analyse the evolution of immigrant students with disabilities. That is because data was not available for the whole period, hence the study only presents the data of the 2010-11 course. On the other hand, the optimistic vision on the progress, both in society and in the University, seems not enough substantiated and excessively generalist.

Finally, the study 4 [9], analyses the initial training offered during the 2017-2018 course at the Bachelors in Infant Education and Primary Education, and the Master in Special Education Needs of the University of Almeria. For this research, the current reports, the study plans and the teaching guides of the two degrees and the master have been used. The study concludes that much stress has been put in addressing multiculturalism, but only few subjects treat both multiculturalism and disability. Exceptions are given by specific subjects like special education needs. Something similar happens in schools. Either the focus is on disability, or on multiculturalism, but not both. Both issues are only addressed in subjects that include competences and contents of other cultures, while those working on interculturality do not discuss the disability.

5. Conclusion:

This study brings to light the extreme lack of knowledge, both quantitative and qualitative, about the current situation of the disabled immigrants, specifically in the age of compulsory or post-compulsory education in Spain. This field of study needs to be explored and it can be done under many aspects. Very interesting would be the analysis of the school trajectories of this group, which could outline the situations of educational discrimination and vulnerability. It must not be forgotten that the size of the discriminated groups does not determine the degree of importance and interest of the problem. Furthermore, it must be bear in mind that the research in this field needs to go beyond the school context. That is because the condition of the immigrant aggravated by the disability is a phenomena that needs to be approached in a structural way through a holistic approach [10].

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