



Migrant Crisis and Language Education. The Case of Serbia

VUČO Julijana (1)

University of Belgrade, Serbia (1)

Abstract

The migrant crisis that has shaken Europe for years has also been reflected in the field of education and language policies through numerous challenges for which adequate solutions are continually sought. Language issues in this field are defined, inter alia, through problems related to the teaching of the recipient country's national language for personal, social and labor needs, integration into the recipient country and training migrants for equal and active civic participation in life, for the transfer of the baggage of origin as part of the new cultural capital and the advantage of the entire society. The paper reviews the responses of educational institutions and relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations in the Republic of Serbia to the linguistic needs of migrant children. The ways of possible realizations are seen in the affirmation of the educational, cultural and linguistic luggage of migrants, raising the awareness of all participants about linguistic needs and the tendency towards integration into life flows. Respecting the context of European values of multilingual education and intercultural dialogue, a critical overview of the proposal for the framework of the language support of Serbian as a foreign for migrant children is given.

Keywords: *migrant crisis, cultural identity, linguistic identity, educational policies;*

1. Introduction

In recent years, migrant routes lead to developed European countries, particularly to Mediterranean countries. From the spring of 2016, the migrant crisis also enveloped Serbia, which found itself on refugee routes to a desired new life. Refugees, most often from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Palestine, Algeria, Morocco, Ghana and Libya, including a significant number of school age children, although they do not consider Serbia their final destination, remain in Serbia and stay in a number of state housing centers. Since mid 2017, competent state institutions have sought to organize the inclusion of the migrant population of school age into the education system.

2. Migrant crisis and migrant education in Serbia

After months of hesitation and dilemmas about which way to support the integration of refugee children, measures have been taken to include children of migrants into the Serbian education system. In accordance with the uncertainties of the situation that depended primarily from international agreements and strategies for the appointment of migrants officially, the media used the fluctuating terminology: refugees, migrants, persons in need for international protection, etc. For the appointment of children who are included in the educational system of Serbia, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development uses the term children of migrants (See eg. Link 4). There were also dilemmas about the approach applied to the inclusion in the educational system of Serbia. Having in mind the many theoretical views (see Kovač-Cerović, 2016) and experiences of other countries, it is considered that the holistic support is the most appropriate, by which students are perceived as students with complex educational, social and emotional needs. Such support points to different types of support and how to understand support

According to reactions from European officials, Serbia has responded to this issue in a very responsible manner in cooperation with a number of relevant institutions and organizations (Link 1), respecting international laws and nurturing the values of a humane and tolerant society (Link 2), and striving for as many school age children from migrant populations as possible to get included in the regular course of teaching. The positions of Serbia are in line with modern European political values towards migrants: they are based on the fight against racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination, on principles of openness and unity, values which form the basis of the European union and democracies of the West. Furthermore, Serbia respects international laws and nurtures the values of a humane and tolerant society (Link 1), while school is considered to be the place where, among other things, values and values of tolerance and communion are taught.

The affirmative attitude of the Government of Serbia in relation to the integration of migrants into all life flows in Serbia is clearly expressed in all public appearances during the years of the migrant crisis.

With the inclusion of school-age children into the education system, the integration of migrants into the labor market is also supported, so that migration is seen as an opportunity for economic growth, and that, including migrants in labor flows, it aims to create an inclusive society (Link 3).

On the topic of educational needs of children of refugees, the importance of language needs as primary issues in the integration process is prominent. (Kovač-Cerović, 2016:5).

3. Language needs and support in migrant education

It is known that language learning is a decisive factor in the prospects of migrants for a successful reintegration, a path leading to self-fulfillment and achieving social and economic balance. The success of students is in direct relation with the quality of the academic language (Short & Spanos, 1989, Cummins 1991, DiPerna & Eliot 1999). Language issues in this area are defined, inter alia, through problems related to language teaching, the English language as a specific lingua franca, which most migrants bring in their educational baggage. English can serve to accomplish first communication, and in preparation for any final choice that migrants will steer them to other areas of Europe; and the national language of the receiving country, in our case Serbian as a foreign language, for equal and active participation in educational processes.

Concluding on the problem of education of children and youth of migrants, we emphasize that Serbia has significant experience in helping children and youth, refugees from the former Yugoslav territories, during the nineties' wars. Furthermore, we also consider that the establishment of feasible and comprehensive school approaches in Serbia can be hampered by the very limited autonomy of schools, the lack of donations to schools, the largely incompetent leadership of schools, the reduced number of school psychologists and pedagogues. In the analysis of international, European strategies and good practices for the education of children and youth of migrants, Cerović believes that should not be deprived complex holistic approaches to implementation (Kovač-Cerović 2016: 20). Holistic support implies a comprehensive, very complex school model that reflects the real needs of the migrant population (Kornhall, 2016). Students, asylum seekers, are viewed as students with numerous, complex needs of the educational, social and emotional type, and this attitude is reflected in the support system whose main goal is to contribute to the social inclusion, well-being and development of the students involved. Learning the language (English and the host country language) is seen as a means to enhance the students' ability to achieve in a school context, to follow the curriculum and to be included as equal members of society.

Suggested solutions are of a universal character and include language teaching, avoidance of segregation, parental involvement, capacity building and support for young people.

Criteria related to language needs include equal access to high quality education, psychological and educational support, teaching and learning of migrant languages, languages of education, and other languages, intercultural, cross curricular education and pre-service and in-service teacher training and continuous education.

4. The framework of program of language support

Taking the initiative for the implementation of concrete measures, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) has taken action to help integrate refugee children into the school system of Serbia, with the support of UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development. The document "From Serbian as a Foreign Language to Serbian as the Language of Environment and Education" has been compiled: The Framework Of Program Of Language Support (FPLS), which was created by the team of the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade (prof. dr Julijana Vučo, prof. dr Jelena Filipović, prof. dr Vesna Krajišnik, doc. dr Ljiljana Đuric, Ms. Nikica Strižak, Ms. Mina Suknović.), in support of persons who need to - for various reasons, the most frequent one being inclusion in the school system and the overall life in Serbia - acquire basic communicative competence of the Serbian language (Level A1 of the Common European Framework) needs and possibilities, master the basics of the Serbian language as the language of education (FPLS, 2017, 4). By setting the foundations of their scope, the authors of the FPLS consider that the knowledge of language, especially the language of education, is the key factor to success in learning and in professional life which these sensitive groups are often ostracized from. (see Short & Spanos, 1989, Cummins 1991, DiPerna & Eliot 1999).

This very complex initiative is based on all the above cited principles (participatory action research with integrative cooperation of teachers with experience with migrant children and other sensitive social groups in Serbia (Romani children in particular).



Language support is understood as an integral part of a general educational support aimed at enabling the development of communicative competences needed in the integration process (relational and cognitive and mediation which both involve language mediation, Coste & Cavalli, 2015: 28), plurilingual education with elements of translanguaging, based on a developmental bilingual model of plurilingual education (Roberts, 1995) in which language support is provided in specifically tailored language classes but also within all other subjects (cross curricular language support), targeting both BICS and CALP (Cummins, 2008).

Special emphasis placed on learning outcomes, which are not in any way correlated to those of native speakers, but rather on the content of communicative interactions, meaning and academic adequacy (including translanguaging).

Both speaking and writing should mediate different languages, scripts and cultures present in the experiences in both migrant and local children and their teachers.

CLIL is one of the main instruments of such knowledge construction within a general socio-cognitive approach, which places the student in the center of the educational process.

The manual is designed in three age-defined modules, based on the CEFR descriptors for the A1 level: age 6-10, age 10-15, age 15 and above (this module could also be further expanded in order to satisfy the communicative needs of migrants in the process of integration into the labor market)

The document put the emphasis on evaluation: language education and language support become an integral part of the Educational portfolio (based on the concept of ELP) which should include relevant information regarding ALL languages and intercultural experiences, thus opening the space for their formal recognition within the educational system.

The manual also includes didactic and methodological guidelines and sample classroom preparations and activities, which could help less experienced teachers.

5. Conclusion

The education of migrants, who found themselves in the Republic of Serbia due to the migrant crisis since the spring of 2015, began in September of 2017. For the purpose of regular education of migrant children (and adults) of different ages and provenances after initial hesitation and seeking adequate political, educational and pedagogical response, as well as the form of language support, the document "From Serbian as a Foreign Language to Serbian as Language of Environment and Education: Framework of Program of Language Support " was produced. The language education offered by this document is based on the democratic principles of tolerance and respect for the other, on recognized European principles of multilingualism and multiculturalism, on a holistic approach and a combined method that assumes that the teaching of the language of education takes place in Serbian as a foreign language and in the teaching of non-language subjects, translanguaging skills, principles of communicative teaching of Serbian as a foreign language, integrated teaching of Serbian as a foreign language and content. The language basis for migrant education is directed towards the goal of promoting the cultural and linguistic identity of migrants, which, according to theoretical knowledge and previous experience, is undoubtedly the most reliable path leading to a harmonious life in the new community

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