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I do the best i can: The role of immigrant parents in their children's educational inclusion

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The research highlights the importance of immigrant parents assuming a leading and mediating role in the processes of school adjustment and their children's educational inclusion. However, the difficulties that parents have to face as a consequence of the migration process are not always taken into account. These families have to face their own acculturation processes and reorganize their roles in the host society. This study analyses the functions that immigrant parents carry out in the new school context in order to favor the educational inclusion of their children. The analysis is approached from the parents' perspective, in order to understand the way in which families live and try to favor their children's access, participation and success at school. Ethnographic research and the use of qualitative techniques such as in-depth interviews are used. The perceptions of three immigrant fathers and seven immigrant mothers with different backgrounds and nationalities in a public school in Huelva (Andalusia, Spain) are analyzed. The results point to the great fragility and difficulty experienced by these parents in exercising their parental functions in the new context. Women, especially those from Poland, Lithuania, and Romania, compared to their husbands or partners, seem to suffer greater stress due to their dual role as guarantors of the culture of origin and facilitators of the host culture. In order to favor the educational inclusion of their children, parents prioritize – primarily – access to resources, but also the monitoring of their children's homework and emotional support. However, a relationship model based on cultural assimilation prevails. Among the factors that condition the behavior of parents are their economic vulnerability, lack of knowledge of the language, limited social support, cultural differences and prejudices. The importance of the school supporting parents, and especially mothers, in their acculturation processes and their relationship with the school is underlined. In this endeavor, it is essential to count on the collaboration of different agents, such as intercultural counselors or other parents in the school.

KEYWORDS

immigrant students, immigrant parents, school, educational inclusion, school adjustment, acculturation, ethnography

Introduction

The schooling and educational inclusion of immigrant students is clearly a complex and difficult process. The literature highlights additional risks on the part of immigrant students to face educational challenges such as “linguistic and cultural differences or the loss of classes” (Cutmore et al., 2018, p. 10). There are frequent studies that point out high dropout and school failure rates of immigrant students (Bernardi and Cebolla, 2014; González, 2022). As well as those that highlight the lack of recognition, non-acceptance, rejection and loneliness experienced by immigrant students at different times during their passage through school (Sedmak et al., 2021). Even among immigrant students who are successful and behave resiliently, tensions, stressful situations, and conflicts related to their adaptation to the new school context are detected (Dusi and González-Falcón, 2019).

As Berry (2005) has already pointed out, all these tensions are linked to acculturation, understood as a two-dimensional process in which, in addition to the sociocultural aspects of the different groups -both majority and minority-, the psychological aspects of specific individuals also come into play in their adaptation or adjustment to the new host context. In other words, psychological adaptation, which involves individual psychological and physical well-being, and sociocultural adaptation, which refers to the immigrants’ success in coping with daily life in the new cultural environment of the host country, are combined. And, in addition, there is a great deal of variability. “Not every individual enters into, and participates in, or changes in the same way; here are vast individual differences in psychological acculturation, even among individuals who live in the same acculturative arena” (Berry, 2005, p. 702).

Contact with another culture is an important and stressful life event that can provoke “culture shock” (Ward et al., 2001) or “acculturative stress” (Sam and Berry, 2006) and that, in school, can have an impact on having greater or lesser opportunities for academic success (Dusi and González-Falcón, 2021). Therefore, the cultural context cannot be ignored in order to understand the factors that affect the academic success of immigrant students, understood from a holistic understanding. As Makarova and Birman (2016) mention, current research focuses not only on students’ outcomes, but also on their psychological adjustment and highlights both risk factors and individual and contextual resources to explain individual resilience in the acculturation process. Educational inclusion of immigrant pupils is therefore conceived as a global and systemic process aimed at improving access options; relationship and participation; and school success of immigrant students (Booth and Ainscow, 2015; Naraian et al., 2020) from a contextual or community intercultural approach (Birman and Simon, 2014; Goenechea and Gallego-Noche, 2021), and not only individual. The context is therefore recognized as a condition that will

influence the acculturation and school adjustment processes of immigrant students (Castro and Murray, 2010).

From this perspective, the expectations, attitudes, practices and support of teachers and families are fundamental for the educational inclusion of immigrant students. Students who perceive social support for their schoolwork have, in fact, a better conception of school and greater motivation toward study (Demir and Leyendecker, 2018). Research rightly highlights the value of the coordination and understanding of both systems (family and school) for the academic success and promotion of immigrant students (Carrasco et al., 2009; Garreta, 2009; Turney and Kao, 2009; Brown et al., 2022). Similarly, it stresses the importance of families, understood in the framework of this article as the parents of the pupils, assuming a leading and mediating role in the school and acculturation processes of their sons and daughters (Makarova et al., 2021). As Suárez-Orozco et al. (2018) indicate, parents play a critical role in students’ lives. Their local circumstances, their relationships in the context of reception and participation in school, parents’ expectations about their children’s academic achievement, their social capital, and their ways of understanding and reacting to the majority culture will influence, to a large extent, the educational processes of their sons and daughters.

The parents’ background (educational level, socioeconomic status, job insecurity, social capital and social ties, and language barriers) have been identified as conditioning factors -among others- for the active participation of immigrant families in school (Santos-Rego and Lorenzo-Moledo, 2009; García Coll and Marks, 2012) and as risk or resource factors for the educational inclusion of immigrant students (Castro and Murray, 2010). According to Arun et al. (2021) the socioeconomic status of families is directly related to the low school results of many immigrant students, among other reasons, due to the less time (Alonso-Carmona and Martín-Criado, 2022) that parents dedicate to them because they have to spend more time working. Likewise, poor children are frequently excluded from participating in activities and deprived of fundamental economic, social, cultural, and political rights (Forbes and Sime, 2016).

Expectations linked to the migration project of families (aimed at increasing the educational success of the students or at getting a better job for the parents) have an impact on the expectations of academic achievement and performance of their children, with the former correlating with a greater chance of success than the latter (Capote and Fernández, 2021). Although, as Lubián and Rosado (2022) and Terrén and Carrasco (2007) show, high expectations of school success on the part of parents without sufficient support for their children to have opportunities for success may also influence lower self-esteem and higher levels of school failure among immigrant students.

On the other hand, acculturation discrepancies between parents and their children may hinder the adjustment of minority youth in the school context (Makarova et al., 2021). The called culture gap (Bornstein and Cote, 2006), which

occurs when children are more likely than their parents to adopt the host culture and the latter remain faithful to their original culture, correlates positively with greater parent-child conflict and poorer student adjustment to school. In this sense, when parents adopt strategies related to integration or assimilation, children's well-being and their chances of academic success increase (Berry, 2005; Birman, 2006). Other variables linked to the socio-cultural context, such as, for example, the prejudices detected toward immigrant families, also influence the performance of their parental roles and their own acculturation processes. Berry and Dasen (2019) highlight that in contexts of greater hostility it is more common for families to respond by avoiding relationships and constructing response models based on segregation.

A particularly important aspect of understanding the ways in which immigrant parents try to support their children in their school adjustment and educational inclusion processes is the upheaval that migrations often generate in the very articulation of families. As Suárez-Orozco et al. (2018) specify, migrating family members have to reorganize the roles, functions and responsibilities that each had in the country of origin. Parents need to discuss their own parenting competences according to the new circumstances and cultural and educational patterns of the host society. Affiliation relationships have to be rewritten (Dusi, 2008), as well as belonging to the home and host cultures (Strasser et al., 2009; Dusi and González-Falcón, 2021). However, they do not always feel empowered to do so and, in general, families experience these processes with great tension, loneliness, and stress (Vatz et al., 2008; González-Falcón, 2021). The consequences are unequal for each family and student but undeniably affect their children's opportunities for educational inclusion.

Even so, and as Makarova et al. (2021) and López et al. (2001) highlight, the literature has not given a prominent role to the analysis of the support that immigrant parents offer their children in their school adjustment processes in the new host context. For all these reasons, it seems interesting to delve deeper into how immigrant parents live their role in the host educational community and in what way they influence to favor the educational inclusion processes of their children. The analysis is approached from the perspective and vision of the parents themselves, in order to better understand the keys that, in their opinion, mediate these processes.

Materials and methods

This study is linked to two broader research projects. The first¹ focuses on the processes of inclusion of immigrant

students and models of cultural diversity management in schools in Andalusia (Spain). The second² one analyses the conditioning factors of immigrant families' participation in schools in Huelva (Andalusia). In both cases, the trajectories of immigrant students in their passage through schools and the role that teachers and parents play in these processes are analyzed. For this purpose, we advocate the use of qualitative methodology by means of case studies in educational centers.

This work is contextualized in one of the case studies in Huelva. It delves into the role that immigrant parents play in the host educational context. The objective is to analyze the role of these parents in the school adjustment processes of their sons and daughters and the support they provide to achieve their academic and social success. The research questions guiding the study are the following:

- 1) How do immigrant parents perceive their role in the new educational context?
- 2) How do they try to favor access, participation in school and academic success of their children?

To answer these questions, the positions of inclusive education (Naraian et al., 2020) and intercultural education (Goenechea and Gallego-Noche, 2021) are taken as epistemological references to highlight the importance that acculturation processes (Berry and Dasen, 2019) can exert on the opportunities for access, participation and academic success of immigrant students in school. The school adjustment of immigrant students is therefore understood as a process inherent to educational inclusion and the development of intercultural education understood as a positive encounter, exchange, interrelation, learning and stable dialogue between people from different cultures. From this position, the systemic perspective or context approach is also emphasized (Castro and Murray, 2010; Birman and Simon, 2014), and the responsibility that the family and the school institution have as mediators of such processes.

In this work we were interested in investigating the opinions, perceptions, assessments, and meanings that immigrant parents themselves construct about their role as such. Consequently, an ethnographic approach was adopted. From the use of qualitative instruments such as semi-structured interviews (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018), the accounts of these actors were collected and it was possible to deepen the analysis. To this end, one of the educational centers in Huelva in which a case study was being conducted was selected. Specifically, a public pre-school and primary school located in one of the towns dedicated to the intensive cultivation of strawberries and which had a high

1 National Research project "Constructing differences at school. Studies of the trajectories of ATALs in Andalusia, their teachers and students" (Ref. CSO2013-43266-R). Ministry of Economy.

2 Research project "Immigrants and their children's education. Family support in the school integration process" (Ref. 31-10-2002). Department of Education and Science. Andalusian Regional Government.

number of immigrant students (20% of the total number of students). The countries of origin present in the center, in order of highest proportion, are the following: Morocco, Algeria, Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Ecuador, and Netherlands.

A motivated sampling was carried out, without any statistical pretension, in which eight families were selected from the school. The selection of informants was motivated by the following criteria: (1) diversity of origin and nationality of the parents, (2) presence of fathers and mothers, (3) different trajectories (with different migratory processes and years in Spain), (4) diversity of stages (sons and daughters in kindergarten and primary education), (5) knowledge of Spanish (at least by one of the two parents) and (6) predisposition to collaborate and participate in the research.

The aim was to have the greatest plurality of voices in order to enrich the analysis with different points of view and taking into account situations and experiences that could be affected by issues of identity, gender, cultural elements, or transnational links. In this sense, and although parents are also selected according to their country or origin, the mention of different countries should not be interpreted as synonymous with a state, a nation, a language, (Wimmer and Schiller, 2003), but as an element that is also present in the migrant parents' own perceptions and experiences.

Although a greater number of parents were invited, three fathers and seven mothers (eight families) finally participated. The voices of families from the following countries were collected: Morocco (one married couple and a mother), Algeria (a father), Lithuania (a mother), Poland (a mother), Romania (a married couple and a mother), and Ecuador (a mother). The limitations linked to the families' working hours and access to the educational center (as many of them live in the strawberry fields, far from the village) limited, among other factors, the participation of the other families.

Most of the families interviewed have a low-medium cultural level, although there are some exceptions. Four of the seven women have basic studies or did not complete them, while other mothers have medium or higher studies. Two of the three men interviewed have medium studies and another has basic studies. In general, the economic level of these families is low, as they have access to precarious and seasonal jobs linked mainly to the strawberry agricultural campaigns or to the service sector (hotel and catering and house cleaning). One of the Moroccan mothers is the one with the highest economic level. Her migration process was different from that of the other families because he came to complete university studies. The rest of the families emigrated for economic reasons and in search of a better future for their sons and daughters. The average age is 37 for men and 32 for women. Men tend to have been in Spain longer than women. Some of them migrate after their husbands and, at the same time or shortly after, regroup with their sons and daughters or marry in their country

of origin and have their children in Spain. However, there is a diversity of migratory processes and there are also cases in which it is the woman who emigrates first or settles in the village after a period of seasonal contract in the strawberry campaign. As is usually in the study region, some women from the East form mixed families; starting relationships with Spanish couples and in some cases their children are born in Spain. All the families have been living in the village for more than 3 years, being the fathers and mothers coming from Morocco and Romania the ones who have been in Spain the longest. In general, the families' level of understanding of Spanish is high, although some women have difficulty understanding certain issues and tend to have more problems when it comes to expressing themselves orally. It is the women who have been in Spain for less time and have a lower level of education who have more difficulty expressing themselves in Spanish. Some families and women have not yet been able to regularize their situation in Spain, although most of them have already done so. All families have one to two children enrolled in Primary Education. In some cases, families also have younger children attending the village nursery school (babies from 0 to 3 years old) or older children attending Secondary Education (from 12 to 18 years old).

The interviews were planned and applied with all the scientific, technical, and ethical guarantees usually recommended by experts (Flick, 2022; Taquette and Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Care was taken to ensure that the interviewees understood the questions, with prior clarification of the meaning of the interview and the terms used. Care was taken in all aspects related to the preparation, development and recording (consent to the recording, room without noise or interference, climate of trust.) and the data were reviewed with the families at the end of the interviews. All interviews were conducted at the school, recorded and transcribed. The Spanish teachers were the ones who facilitated the contact with the parents although in almost all cases the interviews had to be postponed and postponed on several occasions due to different needs of the families. The interviews began with an introduction in which some identification data, the migratory process carried out until arriving at their places of residence and their first impressions of the school were asked. Subsequently, the two research questions were investigated. Two interviews were conducted with each family. The interviews lasted an average of 60 min, being slightly longer in the case of the two couple interviews and the Moroccan mother with a higher level of education.

Once transcribed and numerically coded, they were subjected to an exhaustive study, letting the data speak for themselves according to the guidelines of Grounded Theory (Corbin, 2021). They were then subjected to a double analysis (Simmons, 2010): one by each researcher separately, and a joint exchange and contrast analysis in order to

achieve greater reliability. After these two operations, an overall analysis was performed. The analysis carried out was returned to the families in a group meeting and the parents' comments were taken into account for the final analysis.

Throughout the narrative discourse analysis (Krippendorff, 2013), patterns and themes were concretized through the coding and categorization of the data and the identification of relationships between them. The analysis of the data revealed a series of key categories on which the final discourse of the parents was built. Among them: the conceptions and assessments of their role in the new host context, their priorities and concerns, the functions they perform, the support they provide to their children, the strategies and resources they use, the difficulties encountered or the differences detected with respect to their countries of origin and in relation to their role as parents. In the next section we will analyze each of the categories of analysis, discriminating the information according to the codes assigned to the interviews and interlocutors. These codes are formed according to the person interviewed in each family, immigrant father and/or mother (FA: Father/MO: Mother), the technique used (INT: interviews) and the order in which the interviews were carried out (1, 2, 3, 4).

Results

The main results according to the research questions and main categories of analysis are presented below.

How do immigrant parents perceive their role as parents in the new educational context?

When parents are asked about their role as such in the new context and host school, they all emphasize that their duty is to ensure that their children have the conditions that allow them to grow up healthy and go to school.

“We want to take good care of him, take good care of him until he reaches the point where he is ready to go to school and that's it. For example, dressing him, bring them their things, buy their books. right? That they don't lack anything” (FA-INT1: 37).

“Children have the right to study and we as parents give them a hand to study, not leaving them without school/Study, eat, dress like we used to do with my mother” (FA-INT2: 11 and 12).

The parents' priorities are to ensure the basic needs of food, care, protection, and hygiene so that their children can study, even if it means a great effort.

“I never liked to ask for a favor or something that might seem like a handout. That is why I preferred to work and give the children everything I can so that they can study” (MO-INT4: 10).

“There are days when there are a lot of strawberries you work from Monday to Sunday and again from Monday to Sunday, people were crying. And when it's hot you can't and the boss comes at the last minute or calls you on the phone and tells you one more hour. And you can't do it anymore, but since you think you want to some money home for your children, you have to work” (MO-INT5: 26).

Their role and main objective is to ensure that their sons and daughters have the necessary means to build a good future. Parents emphasize that they migrated for that reason and all their efforts make sense in relation to being able to provide a better future for their sons and daughters. For this reason, school plays a very important role for families. They see it as a means to progress socially and economically and, above all, to prevent their sons and daughters from ending up working – as many of them do – in the strawberry fields. Some parents have high expectations about their children's school achievement.

“Here there are many children who study this and that and in the end pick strawberries, but I don't want her to end up like that. She has to do well in school and study more.” (MO-INT5: 16).

“I like it when they get a career. Studying is good for us and for everyone to get a career, better than working in the fields. To get a good career, a doctor, a teacher, a nurse.” (FA-INT2: 11).

The question of schooling is, in fact, one of the main concerns of families. Before living with their children in Spain, parents try to find out how to send their children to school.

“I wanted to know what to do with the school before bringing the children to Spain. I asked a woman who works in a store and then another mother. And we set things up.” (MO-INT3: 9).

“My husband and I asked some friends about what to do to get the children into school. Then he, who speaks better Spanish, went to a school and talked to the director.” (MO-INT8: 16).

Another aspect that worries them the most in relation to their children is to be able to have decent housing. With the arrival of children, the search for a house becomes a priority. The goal is no longer to subsist, but to find a house that can be transformed into a home.

“At the beginning, I lived in the countryside. That wasn’t a house, it was the horse stable. It was a lot of horse stables and the owner took one that was empty and put a little plaster roof on it and put me there. I didn’t want to stay there with my wife and child.” (FA-INT1: 15).

“In the countryside, the housing is provided by the owner of the company and they deduct something, not much, from their salary. The problem is that most of these dwellings, to call them that, are very bad. I still remember a Moroccan girl who had to cover herself with plastic at night to avoid getting wet when it rained.” (FA-INT7: 2).

The parents are aware that living in the strawberry fields, far from the village, takes away opportunities for their children and themselves. For this reason, finding decent housing in the village that they can rent or buy is one of their greatest aspirations and desires.

“The other day they sent a paper so that the children and parents can come to study computer science as well/As we don’t have a car and we live far away it is a problem” (FA-INT2: 23).

“because we wanted to have our house. We wanted my son to be well and to live near the school.” (MO-INT6: 12).

The house becomes an essential element for the future project of immigrant families and the future of their sons and daughters. However, their economic difficulties hinder such aspirations.

“Last year we rented a house in Antonio Machado street, 5 months there and I went to the countryside, as I could not pay for water or electricity.” (FA-INT2: 5).

The parents do not find significant differences between their role as parents in their countries of origin and Spain. Their commitment continues to be to provide the resources their children need to progress in school and in life. In both cases, they defend a traditional model in the distribution of roles between men and women (with the exception of the Moroccan mother with the highest level of education). They consider that it is the men who should get the economic resources and the mothers who should

take care of household chores, childcare, and school follow-up.

“My boyfriend does not come to school. He says he doesn’t have time and tells me “you are the woman of the house, you have time.” “You worry about the children and I worry about the money and you worry about the house.” (MO-INT5: 21).

“The mother always has more obligations with the children/by nature we are more responsible with the children.” (MO-INT 4: 8 and 9).

“The man is not good for those things (school).” (MO-INT5: 21).

What all the parents do point out is that parenting in the host context is much more difficult than in their countries of origin due to fewer resources. Some mothers point out that the relationship with their children changes because they have less time for them.

“It is more difficult. One is more alone and knows fewer people.” (MO-INT6: 19).

“Parents almost do not know about the children’s life at school, but not because they do not want to, but because time does not allow it, the needs and that happens in any country, not only here with immigrants, also in Spain for example. Spanish parents if they don’t have a job, if they don’t have a stable life.” (MO-INT4: 12).

The language issue, economic difficulties, working hours, and lack of social support are other obstacles pointed out by the parents.

“We don’t have our mother-in-law here or our friend to stay with the child for me to go to a meeting and here when the strawberry is the owner is desperate/you have to work overtime and that’s it.” (MO-INT7: 18).

“You always have to work. I earn little with the house, because there are few hours of work and you have to look for many houses and I am always busy.” (MO-INT4: 10).

The parents emphasize that they do everything they can to help their sons and daughters, but, at the same time, they express that it may not be enough. Faced with this situation,

families react with resignation and, especially mothers, express their discomfort and frustration.

“I do everything I can. The studies and things like that, he doesn’t lack anything and that’s it.” (FA-INT1: 37).

“I try to do my best, although sometimes I feel that it is not enough and it makes me very sad.” (MO-INT 8: 22).

Nor do they expect the school or teachers to take actions to support them in that sense because the responsibility of watching over their children’s school adjustment is theirs.

“The solution could not be sought by them, because the solution would be for one to have more trust with people. I, for example, come to a meeting but I don’t know anyone, I come once and I get to know them, I come again and I get to know them and so, maybe, 1 day I will know everyone and I know how they think and then I can talk/little by little, you gain confidence with the group and the day will come when you will feel the same.” (MO-INT3: 25).

How do they try to favor the educational inclusion of their sons and daughters?

As mentioned above, parents focus their efforts on ensuring that their children have the needs covered to enable them to start and continue their studies. Access to school materials and sports clothing is, therefore, another of their main concerns. They recognize that, due to their economic difficulties, they cannot always meet all the demands of school and, therefore, prioritize compulsory and academic tasks. These circumstances sometimes generate tensions with their children, since they would like to participate in more recreational, cultural, and sports activities.

“The children have to have their books, sports shoes. The backpack has to be bought that’s why we work as much as possible” (MO-INT5: 7).

“The girl gets angry because she can’t go on outings or go out with her friends, but sometimes she can’t.” (MO-INT3: 16).

In order to favor the academic success of their sons and daughters, parents try to solve their children’s academic difficulties by supporting them – to the extent of their possibilities – with the homework they have to do at home.

In general, it is women who are responsible for organizing their children’s work and leisure time and for ensuring that homework is completed. However, when children have some difficulty or do not understand something, it is usually the fathers who help them to resolve their doubts, or their older siblings (MO-INT3; FA-INT8). The lower educational level of the mothers and lower command of Spanish seems to influence this.

“I help with almost everything, letters, numbers. Everything the teacher teaches her I tell her look at that’s how it is/Her mother doesn’t, she doesn’t know much. Her mother has studied little, she hasn’t studied much.” (FA-INT1: 37).

“The mother sometimes does not understand the language, but I always help my daughter. The boy is still very young and his mother takes care of him, but I help the girl.” (FA-INT2: 12).

This circumstance causes discomfort, fundamentally, in the Poland, Lithuania, Romania, and Ecuadorian mothers interviewed. They did exercise these functions in the country of origin and the fact of finding more obstacles and limitations in the host country causes them great uneasiness. In this regard, it should be noted that, despite the fact that almost all the parents defend a traditional model of organization, given the economic difficulties, mothers also work outside the home, having less time to devote to their children.

“And if you work half an hour more you don’t get paid and if you tell the boss why don’t you pay me? You don’t like it? Then get out. And that’s why I’m always nervous because I work half an hour more and more every day and I don’t get paid for what I work for? And that half hour I could be at home with my children/When I come home from the field I tell my son: “leave me a little, an hour or two and then we’ll talk”, because that way, when I’m nervous and tired, I can’t hear well what he wants to tell me and then I don’t know what I tell him.” (FA-INT8: 18).

Mothers, however, are the ones who mostly attend tutorials or meetings with school teachers. Only in Moroccan and Algerian parents are some differences detected. In these cases, it is the fathers who are in charge, although they do not always attend. Difficulties with the mothers’ language and cultural differences also play a role.

“My wife is more embarrassed and if I don’t come with her, she doesn’t want to come to school.” (FA-INT1: 56).

“The Moroccan educational system is very different from the Spanish educational system, especially the Spanish

one, and one of the fundamental points that has not yet been encouraged is active participation, they only have one objective: they only have to enroll them, end of the conversation, until the end of the course.” (MO-INT7: 8).

The parents comment that they do not usually participate in the school. Only the Moroccan mother with the highest level of education and, on occasion, the Ecuadorian mother, attend the meetings of the center parents’ association (MO-INT7; MO-INT4). In general, the mothers tend to adopt a passive attitude and come to the center when they are called by the tutor to talk about their children.

“I think what am I doing there, all Spaniards, me a Lithuanian?/And I say “I’d better go talk to the teacher directly and that’s it.” (MO-INT6: 14).

“When you don’t understand well you can’t talk to someone or ask where do I go if I don’t understand and I’m embarrassed? And I never go to school.” (MO-INT5: 18).

Parents usually feel more confident with their children’s tutor or teacher who teaches them Spanish at school. For this reason, they usually turn to them when they want to get information or comment on some aspect of their children and they take advantage of the moments of (FA-INT8; FA-INT1; MO-INT4). In general, they only meet with the teaching staff when they consider it really important.

“Man it has to be when you need it. If you don’t need it what’s it for? For nothing. For example, if the child misbehaves and has done something bad, you have to tell the father to say “look, he has done this.” (FA-INT1: 48).

One of the issues on which parents, and especially mothers, insist the most is to know how their sons and daughters feel at school, especially at the beginning of schooling. They are very concerned that their children will be rejected by other children or become the object of bullying because of their immigrant status. Parents want to know what their children’s relationship with their classmates and teachers is like. However, they do not usually ask the teachers about it, but go directly to their sons and daughters. The children, however, do not always express what is happening to them.

“We ask him when he comes out of school how he has been doing. And he tells us “I have done this, I have done that” and we go on the way and find out how he is doing, if he has had any problems.” (FA-INT 1: 38).

“The child does not want us to suffer anymore. He does not want us to worry. He doesn’t want us to be with more headache, no, really. He doesn’t tell us his stuff.” (MO8-INT: 17-18).

To avoid situations of rejection and conflict, families advise their children to obey their teachers, not to draw attention to themselves or get into trouble. They also try to ensure that their sons and daughters have a good attitude toward school and their teachers.

“I tell my daughter and son: you have a lot of respect for the teacher, and whatever he/she says, so be it, because he/she knows better/If the children tell you something, you don’t tell them.” (FA-INT8: 16).

In general, the parents are interested in the culture of the host society. They are in favor of their sons and daughters attending complementary and extracurricular activities and participating in their religious and cultural traditions.

“Of course, they are here and they have to learn, they can’t be like a stone without knowing anything about the people. On the contrary, they have to know everything about this European world” (FA-INT2: 7).

“Last Christmas we dressed him as a shepherd/He still wants to dress up” (FA-INT1: 41).

Most parents are also interested in local holidays and customs, compare them with their own and show them to their children. In some cases, they also adopt certain customs of the local community and gradually abandon others from their countries of origin.

“Sometimes on Sunday we invite some friends to the cafe at six o’clock, the snack as it is done here” (MO-INT4: 14).

“I can’t tell you [when the Muslim year begins] because I don’t remember/I don’t remember anymore. When I was studying it was 1,413. Now it will be many years.” (FA-INT1: 26).

The parents usually make constructive comparisons between their cultural patterns and those of the host country, although in some cases there is also incomprehension or rejection of some of them.

“The Romería can be a very happy party, but everyone just getting drunk. I don’t like it and I don’t go.” (MO-INT6: 7).

“Because to the child the teacher says: “why don’t you speak loudly?” Because we are not used to it. When I studied in my school when [the] children screamed, they tell him that he can’t scream, because otherwise they would be like animals. You need more slack.” (MO-INT5: 9).

The most closed attitudes and behaviors are observed in the Lithuanian mother and, above all, in the Polish mother. The latter, despite being the partner of a Spanish man, does not accept certain values and educational and cultural patterns of the host society. Her attitude toward them is one of rejection, experiencing frustration and discomfort in her relationship with others.

“It makes me angry because in Poland when you have young children you don’t go to any bar like here or you can go out in the evening. Poland is like a prison and I have learned from Poland and I don’t go anywhere here. Where I go, my baby goes with me and my older daughter goes with me. Of course I would like to go into a bar and order a coffee, but I don’t because I am Polish.” (MO-INT5: 8).

On other occasions, it is the older children who express discomfort and tension in their acculturation processes and they are closed to the possibility of their siblings incorporating the cultural patterns and habits of the native population.

“The boy says that he does not go to people’s houses because it is ugly, he is going to be uncomfortable and fights with the sister because she goes to a friend’s house and gets angry because she says that she is not ashamed to go to someone else’s house [The mother laughs]. And the girl, if she has to go to a birthday party, she asks me for the money for the gift, she goes to buy it, prepares everything and goes to the party. If I can, I give it to her.” (MO-INT3: 24).

Moroccan and Algerian fathers are the ones who are more open to friendly relations with Spanish and other immigrant families, although mothers are more reticent.

“I like everything mixed. They learn among themselves because each one teaches one thing and that is good/Before I used to go to the Romería, but not anymore. The woman came and I haven’t gone there anymore because she doesn’t want to go.” (FA-INT1: 43).

The rest of the families prefer to relate with Spanish families or families of another nationality rather than with Moroccan and Algerian families. Different prejudices toward them and especially toward men are detected.

“For example, [the] Moroccans I don’t like either, they say they smell bad too. They don’t wash, they don’t clean themselves.” (MO-INT 6: 7).

“I was working with three Moroccans and one tells me 1 day “Why don’t you talk to me?” I answered that the first year I was here I was crying for a month because I was afraid of the Moroccans, and I am not going to talk to you.” (MO-INT5: 10).

In fact, families report that neither they nor their children tend to have many friends. The families circumscribe their relationships to their fellow nationals, fundamentally, and in these cases they do not usually have many friends either.

“Friends, no friends, but they are all friends/Greet many people.” (FA-INT2: 14).

“Friends I can say no, acquaintances yes, but friends no/And from Lithuanians I have no friends either. I have very good acquaintances, but no friends.” (MO-INT6: 19).

What all the parents agree on, even those who are more closely related to the Spanish population (MO-INT3 and MO-INT5), is that they miss the relatives they left behind in their countries of origin. In their speeches, feelings of loneliness and sadness stand out. Most of the parents interviewed maintain links with relatives they left behind or emigrated to other countries thanks to new technologies. Despite this, they miss their homeland and the physical contact with their loved ones.

“I would like to go every year to my country, I miss my family and my traditions, but I can’t.” (MO-INT3: 12).

“I don’t know people or anything/I don’t go anywhere. And there are days when I don’t want to talk to anyone, I go home I sit and.” (MO-INT5: 21 and 22).

Discussion

Immigrant parents bring into play different resources and strategies to try to favor the educational inclusion of their children. The parental involvement of the immigrant families analyzed seems to be oriented, fundamentally, to the attainment of resources (Alcalde and Hernández, 2018). Their discourses and efforts are focused on guaranteeing access to school. Parents prioritize children’s schooling, access to school resources and materials and covering the basic needs of protection, care and

hygiene that make it possible for them to grow up healthy and to start and continue their studies. Likewise, parents try to support, within their means, their children's schoolwork in order to positively influence their academic success. Parents want their children to succeed in school, given that, in addition, this is one of the objectives of their own migration project (Lubián and Rosado, 2022). Moreover, as Bernardi and Cebolla (2014) explain, many of them have high or moderate expectations about their children's academic performance. However, they do not always manage to support them in the best possible way. High parental academic expectations without good educational support and follow-up can also lead to lower self-esteem in schoolchildren and higher rates of school failure (Terrén and Carrasco, 2007). In our study, parents are interested in their children's education and in knowing whether they are accepted and welcomed at school. Emotional support is a priority for them (Crozier and Davies, 2006; Dusi, 2008). However, they do not usually go to the school to ask about it, nor do they ask for advice on how to facilitate their children's school adjustment. Some mothers even report communication problems with their children due to the less time they have due to the work overload they face and their own work, economic or social problems. Dusi and González-Falcón (2019) point out that, on occasions, family roles are also reversed and, faced with the discomfort that the children themselves can observe in their fathers and mothers, they try to hide their own problems so as not to increase the frustration or discomfort of the family.

On the other hand, the parents interviewed try, to a lesser extent, to establish mechanisms that ensure a good reception, relationship and active participation of their children at school. Coinciding with Gomáriz et al. (2019) and Turney and Kao (2009), parents families do not usually collaborate the didactic activities organized by the teaching staff or other families in the school. Likewise, actions linked to favoring the cultural adjustment of their children or acculturation processes in the school environment and, therefore, of bringing the cultural keys of the native and immigrant population into dialogue, seem to have less weight in the actions or functions they perform. In fact, in their discourses, parents hardly mention the possibility of favoring intercultural encounters, families hardly mention the possibility of favoring intercultural encounters, understood as the exchange and interrelation of people from different cultural backgrounds from egalitarian and inclusive positions (Goenechea and Gallego-Noche, 2021). The strategies they put into play in this regard are oriented toward encouraging their sons and daughters to have a positive attitude toward school and teachers (McWayne et al., 2022). To this end, they implement various mechanisms such as showing their interest and participating in local festivals and traditions of the town or enabling their children to participate in cultural activities organized by the school. However, although these actions denote openness toward the social and educational community, in their discourse it seems that the intention of avoiding conflict and rejection (Berry et al., 2006) by the native population rather

than intercultural encounters is more prominent. Thus, parents advise their children not to stand out at school, to go unnoticed and to obey the teachers in order not to get into trouble. They try to ensure that their children are not rejected or harassed by their peers and, to this end, they try to encourage their assimilation into the community (Berry, 2005). In this sense, it also highlights the fact that many families abandon or leave behind part of their traditions and, especially, that they consider that the responsibility for facilitating a better cultural and school adjustment for their children falls solely on them. Parents do not expect any kind of action in this regard from the school.

Taking into account the strategies and model of action of immigrant families seem to be closer, therefore, to cultural assimilation than to integration or inclusion (Crul, 2016), although cases are also observed in which they do not share, or even reject, the ways of proceeding of the host society and school. In our study, the greatest tensions are detected on the part of some Polish and Lithuanian mothers. These women expressed great tension, loneliness and frustration in the relationship with the school or community. As Berry and Dasen (2019) indicate these behaviors may also be due to contexts of increased hostility toward the immigrant population. The research by González-Falcón (2021) rightly pointed out prejudices on the part of the native population of this region toward women from the East, considering that they all came with the intention of destroying marriages and marrying Spanish men. However, prejudices are also detected toward Moroccan men, although they seem to react in a more open manner. Individual differences in dealing with acculturation processes will therefore also influence the responses that parents bring into play in their relationship with their environment (Friedmann and Calderón-Grossenbacher, 2002).

In any case, cultural issues seem to affect families' relationships with the school and context and have an impact on the interactions within the family (Carrasco et al., 2009). In some families, fathers and mothers adopt different positions, such as those from North Africa. Women seem to respond conservatively and, in other cases, it is the older siblings who do not accept the "Spanish" behaviors of their younger siblings. As noted by Dusi (2008) and Crul (2016) in these cases there is a tendency to consider that the incorporation of practices and habits of the native population into the day-to-day life of the families is a betrayal of their own culture, country or relatives and friends they left behind. A great emotional conflict is pointed out that, if not resolved and adequately dealt with, can generate great distress and discomfort, increasing disputes and tensions in families (Dusi and González-Falcón, 2019).

Authors such as Wimmer and Schiller (2003) point out the importance of taking into account other factors linked to the processes of exclusion/inclusion of immigrant families and of not interpreting such processes from the monocultural and linear logic that is hidden in the configuration of "one state, one nation, one language, one culture." In this sense, they claim the need to consider culture or cultures from more dynamic

positions and the transnational experiences of migrants. In this regard, [Levitt and Schiller \(2004\)](#) also point out that the same individuals who showed little regard for a parental homeland and culture may activate their connections within a transnational field in search of spouses or values to teach to their children. Thus, the set of relationships linking parents who move and family and friends who stay behind in their places of origin and/or in other countries also influence the way they perceive and respond to different issues, including children's education. Migration, understood as a transnational experience, goes beyond a linear relationship between "the culture/s that should represent each of the countries or territories involved (origin/host)" and calls for the overlapping, interconnection, intersection of different elements in a simultaneous and changing way ([Levitt and Schiller, 2004](#)). In relation to the latter, our study also highlights other issues such as gender and social class, or the economic situation of families, in order to understand the role of immigrant parents in relation to the education of their children. Elements that approach the intersectional perspective of migration are highlighted, as it is understood that these variables also have an impact on the identity reconstruction processes of migrants and on the interdependencies that are generated between social structure, symbolic representations, and identity constructs ([Bürkner, 2012](#)).

As [Vatz et al. \(2008\)](#) establish, the migration process entails a redefinition of the roles of parents and a reorganization or adjustment in the way they try to respond to the challenges and challenges posed by the schooling of their children. Although the parents interviewed commented that their roles or responsibilities should be the same in the country of origin and the host country, they did observe changes in the way they proceed. In all cases, they also emphasize a greater difficulty in exercising their parental roles in the host context ([Garreta, 2009](#)), mainly due to the fewer economic, social and linguistic resources available to them.

One of the main obstacles reported by parents to support their children in their educational inclusion and participate in school is their economic condition ([Medaric and Zakelj, 2014](#); [Forbes and Sime, 2016](#); [González, 2022](#)). The economic needs of families affect the way they perceive and carry out their roles in the host society, prioritizing what is most urgent, basic and necessary. Authors such as [Hosnedlová \(2020\)](#) rightly identify that economic needs can even modify the expectations and objectives of the migration project. Thus, parents whose main aspiration was to improve their children's academic opportunities prioritize, in the host context and in the face of economic needs, the labor issue. The precariousness of the jobs to which they have access also has an impact on this ([González-Falcón, 2021](#)). In this sense, parents expect to be able to be more present in their children's lives and support them more when they can enjoy greater economic stability ([Medaric and Zakelj, 2014](#)).

In this context, housing becomes fundamental for them. As [González-Falcón \(2021\)](#) points out, housing symbolizes the space in which to build their future project and is also the scenario of encounter, intimacy, relationship, communication and affectivity in which to weave family ties. For immigrant parents, having a decent home near the school is fundamental, especially in the school context analyzed in this research, given that there is no school transport service outside the compulsory school hours and there is no public transport network connecting the strawberry fields with the town.

On the other hand, parents also have less family and social support. in the host context to reconcile different functions (work, home, school) and to ask for help, advice, counseling or support in relation to the school or cultural and educational keys of the host society. As [Bernhard et al. \(2005\)](#) and [Strasser et al. \(2009\)](#) indicate, when families migrate they lose social capital, as they have less help in the host country and are confronted with other cultural codes that, if not understood, can generate many misunderstandings, misunderstandings and tensions ([Garreta, 2009](#)). In our study, almost all of the parents reported feeling lonely and having few friends. When faced with doubts they tend to ask third parties or the teachers themselves, although the more introverted, insecure families or those with less command of Spanish tend to have more difficulties ([González-Falcón, 2021](#)).

In this sense, language proficiency is another of the key conditioning factors in the family school relationship and in the school support that parents, and especially women, can provide to their children. As [Turney and Kao \(2009\)](#), [García Coll and Marks \(2012\)](#), and [Arroyo-González et al. \(2021\)](#), among others, pointed out, language is a fundamental factor in the processes of educational inclusion of immigrant students and families. It is the element that makes communication possible or impossible and usually women, and especially Maghreb mothers, are the ones who are more limited in this regard ([Santos-Rego and Lorenzo-Moledo, 2009](#)).

The lower participation of parents in school and, in general, their more passive attitude is also conditioned by cultural differences ([García Coll and Marks, 2012](#); [Brown et al., 2022](#); [McWayne et al., 2022](#)). In this regard, the more traditional conceptions that, in general, parents have in this regard and the scarce tradition that, in some cases, is observed in terms of active participation, taking the initiative and horizontal collaboration of families in the school stand out. [Carrasco et al. \(2009\)](#) pointed this out, especially in the case of Maghreb parents, noting the differences they also observed in Maghreb mothers with a more passive role.

As mentioned above, migration does produce changes in the roles played by parents or other family members with respect to their countries of origin when it comes to supporting children in their adjustment to school. In some cases, fathers (or older siblings) take on new roles, such as when they support their children with homework because their mothers do not understand Spanish. In others, there is a

greater presence of Maghreb parents and women in the school compared to their countries of origin. According to Crozier and Davies (2006) families are gradually increasing their presence in the school, with women assuming a greater participation. Levitt and Schiller (2004) also point out the importance of taking into account the experiences, links and relationships that parents have with other parents who migrated previously, or to other places of origin, as their examples can also serve as a reference for shaping their educational roles and practices.

In general, and especially in the first years in Spain, there is less monitoring and accompaniment of their sons and daughters. Given the economic needs of families, mothers also have to work outside the home. As Consequently, they see an increase in their working hours inside and outside the home. However, they are the ones who, fundamentally, still have to take care of the younger children, domestic chores, the relationship with the school and the follow-up of the children (Lorenzo-Moledo et al., 2017). As pointed out by Dusi (2008) and González-Falcón (2021), they are also the ones who tend to ensure respect for the cultural codes of origin. However, they have fewer resources and less time to do so. The lesser monitoring by mothers of the completion of schoolwork and less support for the processes of self-regulation of studies by their children (Alcalde and Hernández, 2018) may also have an impact on higher dropout and school failure rates. All these processes generate great discomfort and distress in parents. Especially mothers (Bernhard et al., 2005; Lorenzo-Moledo et al., 2017) feel that they are not fulfilling their roles as they should and need more resources and support to face their own acculturation processes and the cultural and school adjustment of their sons and daughters.

Bürkner (2012) also explains that these processes have to do with the “temporal variability of inequality” (p.5) linked to the changes in the productive system fostered by neoliberal policy and the alteration of work functions – outside and inside the home – along gender lines. This is causing, for example, the problem of diverging productivities between care economies (traditionally taken care of by mothers) and the industrial production (with many migrant women and men now producing under precarious conditions). Similarly, it emphasizes how migrant parents are exposed to different material needs and constraints, creating a dependency on the context which, however, does not have linear consequences, but can vary depending on the setting (home, work, school) or over time and proving more or less bearable or intolerable situations (as we have seen in the case of some migrant mothers in their workplaces).

Conclusion

The research has highlighted the great fragility and vulnerability of immigrant families in carrying out their parental roles and facilitating the educational inclusion of their children.

In spite of their efforts, of doing everything possible and of trying to make the most of the available resources, the parents do not always reach everything and this generates great discomfort for them. Mothers seem to suffer the most from this, as the burden of caring for and educating their children falls on their shoulders and they have to dialogue with different cultures.

Immigrant parents would need more quality time to offer their children and to accompany them in their school adjustment. In this process some areas seem to need more attention, such as those linked to the promotion of welcoming, relationships, participation of their children in school and intercultural encounter. The collaborative and participatory processes of parents in the school should also be improved, in order to establish more links with the educational community, but from an intercultural perspective, and not an assimilationist one.

The school has a fundamental role in these processes. As González (2022) stresses, it is necessary to emphasize its social function in order to guarantee equal opportunities for each and every one of its students, including immigrant students. It should not be forgotten that in the face of declining student performance, immigrant families with school capital and support are better able to neutralize filial resistance (Alonso-Carmona and Martín-Criado, 2022). It is essential to attend to the needs of parents and offer responses from the school that enable their participation (López et al., 2001; Vatz et al., 2008). In this sense, the development of social and educational policies that help immigrant children and their families to have the basic resources (decent housing, food) that make access to school possible (support for schooling, etc.) is essential, school transportation for compulsory and voluntary activities, school materials, scholarships.). In this way, parents will be in a better position to attend to other processes linked to the educational inclusion of their sons and daughters, supporting academic tasks, their active participation and the promotion of intercultural education. To this end, the school must also offer measures that facilitate such functions, promoting, among others, Spanish classes for immigrant families and women, the detection and elimination of prejudices, the incorporation of intercultural content in the curriculum and different areas of the school. In other words, the school must be capable of managing diversity from an inclusive and intercultural approach. In short, it is a matter of establishing different actions that change the policies, culture and practices (Booth and Ainscow, 2015) of the school in order to ensure that all members of the educational community recognize themselves as fundamental and essential parts of it.

In the meeting with families, it is essential to give priority to counseling and dialogue with mothers. For this, key elements of the educational organization with which immigrant parents have a greater bond or proximity can be recovered: other families, tutors and Spanish teachers. In addition to encouraging the actions of other key agents for their role as a hinge

(González-Falcón et al., 2022) between the environment and the school: intercultural mediators, social educators or school counselors. As Igual-Calvo (2021, p. 260) indicates, there is a need for "methodologies and imaginative proposals to reinforce the accompaniment, presence and involvement of families. Knowing what is meant by increasing family participation is necessary, as is working and creating reciprocal expectations in the school context". It is especially important to advise parents on the process of acculturation. Identifying keys to better understand and respond to the cultural and educational reality of the host context will allow parents to have more tools and resources to support their children in their school adjustment and to reduce the insecurity and uneasiness that many of them experience. In working with immigrant students and parents, "guidance and counseling can support paths to self-sufficiency, better wellbeing and provide stability by addressing trauma, displacement and transitional readjustment, or simply opening up access to opportunities, and creating new ones" (Hughes et al., 2019, p. 33).

Although the results of this research must be limited to the ethnographic research conducted, and its findings cannot be generalized, we consider that it has allowed us to generate a series of reflections and final considerations, such as those presented, which have an impact on educational policy and the role of the school. In the face of greater vulnerability of families and their children, greater social and educational involvement and commitment is required. It is still necessary, in any case, to continue with new studies that delve into the role of immigrant mothers, in the acculturation processes of these mothers and their children and in the responses that schools offer to try to attend to, manage and celebrate cultural diversity.

The research carried out has highlighted the simultaneity of processes that intervene and influence the perceptions and experiences that immigrant parents have in relation to their role as caregivers and educators of their children. Factors such as social class or economic situation, gender, working conditions and relations with the school influence all of this. In this sense, the study opens up avenues for further research from an intersectional, interlevel and transnational perspective that delves into the changes and experiences of migrant parents in the new educational context according to different variables such as gender or social class and takes into account the influence that transnational links can have on all of this. In this sense, "it is more useful to think of the migrant experience as a kind of gauge which, while anchored, pivots between a new land and a transnational incorporation. Movement and attachment is not linear or sequential but capable of rotating back and forth and changing direction over time. The median point on this gauge is not full incorporation but rather simultaneity of connection" (Levitt and Schiller, 2004, p.10).

The analysis should also be oriented toward the strategies and resources that parents families, at the same time, can use to help their children and their families to cope with cultural

diversity. Despite the difficulties, they bring into play to favor the educational inclusion of their children. Exploring migration as the process of change and transformation that it is (Friedmann and Calderón-Grossenbacher, 2002), should also serve to value the resources of immigrant parents as a potential for innovation for the host society. In this regard, and as McWayne et al. (2022) conclude, a change of perspective is still necessary in order to recognize the positive elements that parents themselves can contribute to the school and inclusive processes of their children.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Author contributions

IG-F made the structure of the article, order the research data, and wrote the first version of the manuscript. MA-G did translation and editing work. IB-R reviewed the formal aspects and bibliographic update. PD reviewed the content coherence of the manuscript. All authors participated in data analysis and reviewed the first draft.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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