

## Article

# Teachers' Perceptions of Immigrant Students and Families: A Qualitative Study

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**Abstract:** The perception that teachers have of cultural diversity is essential when it comes to the educational attention given to immigrant students. The objective is to determine how teachers perceive students' cultural diversity and families' commitment with the education of their children, and if this perception can influence teachers' expectations regarding students and their families. This is qualitative research study based on hermeneutic phenomenology developed through semi-structured interviews, applied on an intentional sample of 16 Spanish primary school teachers. The results indicate that teachers need the assistance of educational specialists, training in cultural diversity, and intercultural communication skills. They also recognize the importance of enhancing collaboration with immigrant families. Hence, education must be rethought, bearing in mind the perceptions of teachers, empowering students and their families with new innovative formulas aimed at incorporating their cultural references in the curriculum, and providing culturally relevant teaching.

**Keywords:** teacher perception; immigrant student integration; immigrant families–school collaboration; cultural diversity; culturally relevant teaching



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## 1. Introduction

Present-day society, and more specifically the educational system, requires a change that accommodates all students, in which there is no exclusion and where diversity is understood not as a problem but as a learning opportunity [1–5]. This learning allows both immigrant and autochthonous students to enrich their culture by exchanging and incorporating new cultural elements, values, and attitudes while eliminating prejudices and encouraging situations of intercultural coexistence [6–10]. For this to be successful, not only does it depend on the teachers and students, but the participation of their families is also paramount [11,12]. On certain occasions, the perceptions of teachers towards immigrant students and immigrant families' perceptions of education become an obstacle. Therefore, we have set ourselves the objective of determining how centres, and more specifically teachers, perceive the cultural diversity of the students in their classrooms, and if this perception can influence the expectations of the teaching staff regarding immigrant students, and in the case of immigrant families, if the teachers perceive them as facilitators who are committed to the education of their children. This research can help fight inequality and injustice in the education field. It is exactly related to sustainable development objectives 4 and 10, since we intend to improve teacher training to guarantee inclusive, equitable, and quality education and promote learning opportunities, in addition to reducing educational inequalities of the most vulnerable populations, in this case immigrant students and their families in Spanish schools.

In a study, it was concluded that teachers' expectations influence student achievement, and these expectations were different depending on the student's ethnic group [13]. In another study with Latino students residing in the USA, it was evident that the teachers perceived the students' use of their mother tongue to communicate with one another

as something negative [14]. In the Chilean context, a study reported that teachers were not prepared to face an intercultural classroom and provide a high-quality educational response to students, and even perceived the presence of immigrant students as a factor that hindered teaching [15].

In the case of Spain, teachers have an optimal perception of cultural diversity and consider teacher training in intercultural communication a priority. On this issue, high-quality training experiences need to be created, where cultural difference is seen as enriching and fruitful, harnessing the growing diversity existing in classrooms for this purpose [16,17]. However, both studies evidenced the lack of teacher training in cultural diversity contents and in intercultural communicative skills.

Focusing on studies carried out in Andalusia, teachers highlight a series of perceptions about immigrant students. For example, the increase in immigrant students in the classroom and them not knowing the language meaning “extra” work; the impossibility of being able to balance the curricular levels between the immigrant and autochthonous students is perceived as an obstacle; and finally, the tendency of immigrant students to create ghettos [1,18,19]. This last statement is supported by another study [20] stating that teachers complain about the alleged obsession of students of Moroccan origin to form ghettos whilst among students of European or Latin-American origin, even though no such “*cultural differences*” exist.

In relation to perceptions of how cultural diversity is managed in the classroom, teachers adopt a passive and indirect stance when faced with incorporating immigrant students and perceive them as particular cases that must be dealt with by a specialist and by the corresponding administrative units. In reality, the approach to cultural diversity in the classroom revolves around certain activities, talks, or workshops focused on understanding other cultures, and in exceptional cases, some teachers include cooperative activities in their teaching contents, the objective of which is cultural exchange [21].

Faced with this situation, it is necessary to propose new educational models based on culturally relevant teaching [22–24]. These seek to empower students socially, intellectually, and emotionally using their cultural references in the classroom. They specify that if immigrant students are taught based on these cultural references, their academic success will be greater [25–27]. Unfortunately, teachers tend not to use their students’ culture to empower them, which makes it impossible to include their cultural references within educational practices.

According to the teachers’ perceptions of immigrant families, they see them as an obstacle to their offspring’s academic progress. They base this on the fact that they do not participate as much as autochthonous families, do not provide academic support or motivation, and do not understand the language of the host society, or have poor command of it [28,29]. To these criticisms, others are added, such as the cultural clash between the school models existing in the home and host country, distrust towards new and unknown education, or them being prevented from continuous school participation due to work insecurity or changes of residence [30].

In contrast, some studies show that immigrant families actively participate in schools and do not differ from autochthonous families [31–33], demonstrating that family participation does not depend on the family’s nationality [34–36].

This cooperation provides positive results such as improving academic performance and student motivation [37], reducing the school drop-out rate [38], optimizing the educational climate by eliminating intercultural coexistence problems [39], and achieving culturally relevant teaching. In short, immigrant family participation will depend on the reality of each school, on the persuasive mechanisms of teachers, on educational policies, and of course, on family training.

As for the last concept, family training, this is an essential instrument for them to participate in the schools. In this regard, it is proposed that families be trained to counteract those obstacles that hinder their participation, such as improving their knowledge of the host language, the introduction of cultural references, the acquisition of study techniques,

and motivation [40]. In the same way, it is necessary to propose a training prototype that enhances the encounter between families and teachers within the students' teaching–learning process. To this end, positive spaces for dialogue must be created where prejudices that hinder cooperation and collaboration between both parties are eliminated [39].

## 2. Methods

With the above objectives in mind, we have developed a qualitative research study based on hermeneutic phenomenology, as this allows for “*a coherent and rigorous approach for studying the ethical, relational, and practical dimensions of everyday pedagogical experience, which is difficult to achieve via the usual research approaches*” [41] (p. 4). It is a method that leads teachers to reflect on their personal and work experience and, in this way, they can analyse the most transcendental aspects of this experience, giving them meaning [42]. Thus, hermeneutic phenomenology helps one to understand the facts and educational realities, deepening the experiences of the educational agents who are part of the educational process, and more importantly, generating specific knowledge that allows the teacher to address the particular and unique situations of each student [43,44]. This method allows us to describe and interpret the lived experiences, recognizing the meaning and importance in pedagogy, psychology, and sociology according to the collected experience. This method allows us to access questions that other methods in qualitative research cannot. It also presents rigorous and coherent processes. The phases are clarification of assumptions; collecting the lived experience; reflecting on the lived experience or structural stage; and finally, writing/reflecting on the lived experience evidenced in individual physiognomy [45].

### 2.1. Participants

Selection was carried out through intentional sampling since we were interested in teachers working at the Primary Education stage who have more than four years of experience in schools with a high immigrant student ratio. The research sample consisted of eighteen Primary Education teachers from the province of Almeria ( $n = 16$ ), of whom ten were women and six were men (62.2% women and 37.5% men). Once data saturation was reached, we decided not to select any more participants.

The average age of the teachers was 37 years ( $SD = 3.1$ ) and their teaching experience ranged between 5 and 18 years, the average being 8.6 years ( $SD = 3.13$ ). Regarding the number of immigrant students in the classrooms, this ranged between 10 and 15, taking into account that the maximum per class is 25 students, whether they were immigrants and/or autochthonous. In this case, the average was 11.5 immigrant students per classroom ( $SD = 1.9$ ). Regarding the immigrant students in the classrooms of the teachers interviewed (see Table 1), they mainly came from Morocco (34%), Senegal (17%), South America (12.7%), Romania (12.7%), Eastern Europe (10.6%), Guinea (8.5%), and China (4.2%).

### 2.2. Instrument

Data collection was carried out via a semi-structured interview that was designed for the purpose. To prepare the questions, we relied upon various research and academic materials that deal with the issue [1,6,13,14,33,36–38]. Once the script for the questions had been written, we set out to apply the questions to three teachers in order to observe and take note of any difficulties or ambiguities that the interview might present. With the information provided, poorly formulated and confusing questions were eliminated. The resulting interview was subjected to an expert panel consisting of six people who evaluated each question according to a Likert Scale of 4 responses (1 = inadequate, 2 = barely adequate, 3 = adequate, and 4 = totally adequate). After four evaluation rounds, those questions that did not score 80% as adequate or totally adequate in content validity were also eliminated. In this way, we were able to determine the coherence, adequacy, and consistency of the questions in addition to their content validity [46].

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the participants.

Participants	Gender	Years of Service	Immigrant Students Per Classroom	Origin of Immigrant Students
Participant 1	Female	5 years	12 of 25	Morocco and Eastern Europe
Participant 2	Male	9 years	10 of 25	Morocco, Romania, and Guinea
Participant 3	Female	8 years	11 of 25	Morocco and China
Participant 4	Female	9 years	12 of 25	Morocco and Romania
Participant 5	Female	18 years	7 of 25	South America and Morocco
Participant 6	Female	5 years	15 of 25	Morocco and China
Participant 7	Female	12 years	12 of 25	Morocco, Senegal, Guinea, Romania, and South America
Participant 8	Female	9 years	10 of 25	Morocco, Guinea, and Romania
Participant 9	Male	6 years	11 of 25	Morocco, Senegal, Guinea, South America, and Romania
Participant 10	Female	7 years	12 of 25	Morocco and Romania
Participant 11	Male	10 years	14 of 25	Morocco and Senegal
Participant 12	Male	8 years	12 of 25	Morocco, Senegal, South America, and Eastern Europe
Participant 13	Male	6 years	10 of 25	Morocco, South America, and Senegal
Participant 14	Female	8 years	12 of 25	Morocco, Senegal, South America, and Eastern Europe
Participant 15	Female	8 years	14 of 25	Morocco, South America, and Eastern Europe
Participant 16	Male	10 years	10 of 25	Morocco, South America, and Eastern Europe

Thus, out of a total of 42 initial questions, our final interview ended up with 36 questions. These were posed following an order from the more general and easier to the more complex, delicate, and sensitive, and concluding with the closing questions. They were organized into four blocks: 1st—initial Questions; 2nd—immigrant students in the classroom; 3rd—cultural diversity as an educational challenge for the school; and 4th—immigrant families in the schools.

Source triangulation was used to obtain greater interpretative and analytical richness, and most importantly, greater credibility. With regard to the transferability of the results, we do not seek to generalize but rather to contribute to the knowledge of the issue and to establish future research guidelines. It is the reader who decides whether they can be applied to their context [47]. The data were also reviewed by different researchers for the independence of the results.

### 2.3. Process

#### 2.3.1. Data Collection

Prior to the interview, the participants were told about the purposes of the study. Their participation was ensured through informed consent, anonymity, voluntary participation, and permission for the recording of interviews. Another important aspect was to let them know that they were not obliged to answer all the questions and that they could leave the interview at any time. Throughout the process, we relied on the ethical principles enshrined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Data collection occurred during the 2022–23 academic year.

#### 2.3.2. Data Analysis

Once the interviews were transcribed, we proceeded to the open coding of the data, which allowed us to identify units of meaning, categorize them, and assign codes to them. Subsequently, the categories deduced were compared to find similarities, differences, and links between them. This process allowed us to create a category system consisting of three categories and ten codes (see Table 2), using the inductive content analysis method [47,48].

We used temporal data triangulation to compare the information obtained at different times and to ensure reliability. In particular, the stability of the data over time was verified through repeated measurements, and only the aspects remaining unaltered in a period were considered, thus complying with the dictates of diachronic reliability. If the results are repeated, reliability is assured. To this end, a 90% agreement rate among the experts was considered reliable. For the data analysis, ATLAS.ti v.22 qualitative research software was used.

**Table 2.** System of Categories and codification.

Category	Category Description	Codes	Frequency
1. Teachers' perception of immigrant students in the classroom	Opinions and beliefs based on their educational experiences concerning aspects that may favour or hinder the inclusion of immigrant students.	Teaching obstacles	45
		Social and curricular integration	40
		Cultural enrichment	
2. The school in the face of cultural diversity	The measures adopted by the educational institution to address diversity and the teachers' evaluation and perception of it.	Racism in the classrooms and mechanism of action	39
		Educational objectives	34
3. School-immigrant family collaboration	Educational actions to promote family participation in the schools.	Educational interventions to integrate diverse cultures	32
		Characteristics of the immigrant families	35
		Educational communication with the immigrant families	37
		Participation of the immigrant families in the classrooms	32
		Educational training of the immigrant families	26

### 3. Results

This section is divided into subheadings to provide a concise and precise description of the results, their interpretation, and the conclusions that can be drawn.

#### 3.1. The Teachers' Perception of Immigrant Students in the Classroom

In this category, we wanted to determine how the teachers perceive immigrant students in the classroom. In general, they consider migration and its presence in the classroom to be a source of enrichment for the educational community.

##### 3.1.1. Educational Obstacles

The teachers specify a number of difficulties faced in their teaching work. These fall into two groups. The first refers to the lack of teacher preparation for addressing multicultural educational situations and the scarcity of human resources and intercultural materials. The next group focuses on the students themselves, since they manifest a low level of academic training and present learning difficulties, and when they have not mastered the language, this prevents them from keeping up with the pace of the class. These obstacles require extra effort from the teachers, as one stated:

*"New adaptations. We have to adapt to what we find because these students requires a lot of attention [...] What I mean is that these students present difficulties in learning and, of course, you cannot teach the class at a normal pace, as you would in a "normal" school; rather, you have to do twice as much work because you have to adapt everything"* (Participant, 1).

##### 3.1.2. Social and Curricular Integration

However, most teachers specify that with effort and the use of pedagogical strategies, optimal integration of the immigrant students is achieved. Despite this, they state that integration does not occur in the same way with all the groups, pointing out that immigrant students from Morocco present greater resistance, and this is where most of their interventions are focused.

*"Over my years of experience, my efforts are always focused on Moroccan students; they are the ones who present the greatest obstacles to their integration. Sometimes, the language does not help much, together with other aspects such as the macho culture and other cultural references that they have that can clash with the customs here. However, with work and effort, it can be done"* (Participant, 4).

On the other hand, we have seen how some teachers say that there are usually situations in which the children create play groups by nationality, especially during recreation periods. The reasons given for this are that they do not share the same language:

*“... it is true that in the playground, you can see the little groups and who has more in common with whom. Among themselves, they try not to mix. Each of them hangs out with those they get along with, those who know each other and speak the same language stick together. We have seen this during playtime...”* (Participant, 6).

In addition to the educational integration of immigrant students, we were interested in knowing what curricular integration is like. The teachers point out that although at the beginning, it is possible to observe different curricular levels between the immigrant and autochthonous students, by applying educational interventions, they equalize. They mainly point to three types of interventions. The first is with the support of another professional to educate these students:

*“We have a host of resources in the school: we have a teacher of ATAL, another of PT and AL, a curricular support teacher, and a remedial teacher, all of whom help to equalize the levels. And all of this is support, the moment the student is not able, the support is channelled into that student. So, the group continues to function while this student receives support from the other professionals.”* (Participant, 2).

The next, the second, is the importance of adapting the curriculum and the way of teaching so that these students can advance along with their class group: “This could be achieved through many adapted activities, to change the assessment strategies, to take the course work into account and not only the exam” and the last, the third, is to learn Spanish, which is considered the best way to equalize these levels:

*“When they acquire the language, the levels equalize. Because their main problem is the language, and this means that all the problems they might have, are multiplied by 10. There are immigrant children who, as soon as they learn the language, are very smart, but... the base is the language”* (Participant, 10).

### 3.1.3. Cultural Enrichment

In general, the teachers point out that the presence of immigrant students is positive since there is cultural enrichment on both sides. They learn to comprehend the world from the standpoint of the problems faced by other cultures, and this means the autochthonous students develop values such as understanding, tolerance, and mutual support. However, there is also the negative side. There are autochthonous families who believe that the presence of immigrant students harms their children’s education because they reduce the pace of learning. One teacher states:

*“There have been years in which the parents of the autochthonous students have taken their children to other schools... that is also why there are a lot of immigrant students. This happened because, working with the minimum contents, the families of the autochthonous students said that having so many immigrant students slowed down the pace of their child’s education”* (Participant, 14).

### 3.1.4. Racism in the Classroom

All the teachers state that this problem does not exist in their classrooms. They point out that coexistence is optimal both in the classroom and in the school. They do admit that, on certain occasions, problems have arisen between immigrant and autochthonous students, and between the immigrant student groups themselves. One of the teachers told us that these problems do not usually occur in early-childhood education but rather appear at the primary and secondary education levels. In early-childhood education, students do not differentiate between the cultures and origins of their peers. It is at the primary education stage, and even more so at the secondary stage, when the process of socialization intensifies and they receive negative messages based on differences, which they incorporate

into their behaviours and attitudes. As evidence of this, one teacher states that, in the process of student socialization, certain families transmit negative opinions towards others.

*“I have always thought that students, whether immigrants or from here, hear things in their homes, in their families and their groups of friends. . . that make them have negative behaviours towards other cultures or certain cultures. Logically, if a girl hears at home that such boys are macho, that they do not value women. . . rejection attitudes are created. But I insist, negative messages are produced between all families, whether from one culture or another”* (Participant, 16).

Although teachers state that racism does not exist in their schools, they intervene educationally to prevent racist attitudes, behaviours, and language. Depending on the students' age and the course year they are attending, this is carried out in one way or another. In the first years of Primary Education, this is carried out through stories to subsequently move on to learning emotional skills. Of this, one of the teachers recounts:

*“Well, you always have to work on this so that such problems do not arise. We, in the school, work with intercultural stories. Sometimes, we invent these stories ourselves, basing them on the students' cultures, and they always have a happy ending. They are stories where we work on the values that are universal in all cultures such as respect, tolerance, equality, enriching ourselves with other cultures... their food, music. . .; and as they grow, we begin to work on emotional education and social and moral development, sometimes with published materials and other times with things we invent such as a play, cooperative games. . . ”* (Participant, 11).

One aspect on which the teachers agree is the need to intervene in these issues with the collaboration of the families. They consider this essential:

*“It is essential that families get involved in these issues and participate alongside us; this is the best way to eliminate or prevent these things; they have to support coexistence in the school. In addition, the students are here for only a few hours, but we don't know how they might behave outside the school. That is why it is so important for families to participate, so that together we can provide them with the strategies for positive coexistence”* (Participant, 15).

### 3.2. The School in the Face of Cultural Diversity

In this category, we have focused on the educational aims and the various educational interventions that are carried out to foster the integration of immigrant students.

#### 3.2.1. Educational Objectives

The teachers specify that one of the measures adopted when faced with cultural diversity are the school's educational objectives, which aim to enhance integration, equality, respect, tolerance, and empathy. These five objectives are considered the fundamental pillars for intercultural coexistence between immigrant and autochthonous students, their families, and of course with the teachers themselves. This is emphasized by one of the interviewees, who believes that integration enriches everyone:

*“The integration of the various cultures enriches everyone because they can offer us many things that we are not aware of. For this reason, education must be based on respect, tolerance. . . If we base it on these concepts, we will achieve only one end, intercultural coexistence, while also preventing other problems such as gender violence, bullying. . . ”* (Participant, 12).

#### 3.2.2. Educational Interventions to Integrate Diverse Cultures

With regard to how teachers intervene to integrate the various cultures present among the students, both in the classroom and in the school, they focus on organizing intercultural activities. These are developed by the tutors (rather than by the teaching staff as a whole), who intervene with the students. Both the activities developed for a student group in a

particular class and for the school students overall are based on conveying cultural topics such as food, clothing, etc. Some teachers consider it necessary to take a further step by not focusing on the teaching of cultural topics that might create negative stereotypes. Faced with this situation, they propose breaking with the conventional way of intervening in intercultural classrooms, and instead propose introducing other elements such as literature, history, and important people from the country. They also propose that these activities, and the introduction of cultural references, do not fall squarely on the shoulders of the tutor, but that all the teachers have the same responsibility to intervene interculturally. As one of the teachers states:

*“I have always thought about this, and I have been sharing this idea with my colleagues for years; we cannot always carry on in the same way. In other schools I have been in, we have worked on cultural diversity by organising Intercultural Days, which are positive, since we get to know the children and their families more deeply, even though they do not eradicate the problems of coexistence in society. I think their culture should be seen and valued from another perspective, for example, by introducing the country’s literature, history. . .”* (Participant, 8).

Activities are also carried out for immigrant students to learn about the culture in the host society. Basically, these activities focus on the immigrant students participating in the events and religious festivities of the host society. In this regard, we were able to examine how there are problems making Moroccan students aware of the autochthonous culture. One teacher expresses it in this way: *“We have to be careful, since they are usually very closed in their culture, especially on the subject of religion”* (Participant, 9), and another teacher goes even deeper:

*“On many occasions, we get them to participate in our culture, but we have to be careful with this because there are many Moroccans who cannot do it... because for example, if you are going to hold a Christmas festivity, you must avoid being too religious. For example, you must avoid dressing the Moroccan students as angels. The carol they are going to dance to cannot have religious connotations because, of course, they don’t participate in our religion...but well, it depends on the immigrant. What I want to say is that we have the most problems with the Moroccan students”* (Participant, 7).

### 3.3. Perception of the School’s Collaboration with Immigrant Families

#### 3.3.1. Characteristics of the Immigrant Families

We have grouped the family characteristics into six large subgroups: large families, unstructured families, precarious housing, sibling care, being left alone, and the economic situation. Most teachers place their students in several of the subgroups mentioned above, with being left alone the main drawback encountered with this issue. Being left alone and sibling care are intimately linked, as one depends on the other. We designate being left alone to those situations in which immigrant students are *“alone”* because their parents are working, and their care falls to their older siblings. One teacher expresses it thus: *“Because more and more families have both parents working, the burden of sibling care falls on the older brother or sister”* (Participant, 2). These children, as some teachers have told us, are *“labelled”* as *“street children”*:

*“There are many children who are alone a lot because their parents’ work. Last year I had an African boy who was alone all day, spending the entire day on the street because the parents were working all the time, so you have to give them a lot of affection because, in truth, these are children who raise themselves, who are street children...”* (Participant, 6).

On the other hand, the homes in which a few of them live are usually a little *“unusual”*:

*“The ones who are better off live in rented apartments, others live in rustic dwellings. . . there are some who have neither electricity nor water. . . well, they live in situations that are a little “unusual”. Furthermore, they comprise large families, “with at least 5 or*



*6 siblings” and, in some cases, unstructured: “often the families are unstructured because the mother is in the home country and the father is here” (Participant, 11).*

Regarding the economic situation, most families have economic difficulties, requiring financial, educational, and school meal support in some cases: *“The school material was subsidized, the computers were subsidized because their socioeconomic level was quite low. . .”* (Participant, 12). Another teacher points out that some students have their only healthy meal of the day at school, either at breakfast or at lunch:

*“Look, there are students who are alone all day, their families working. . . they may not have a healthy diet and if you add the bad economic conditions to this, everything is against them. Here, we make sure that at least they have a good breakfast and lunch”* (Participant, 14).

### 3.3.2. Educational Communication with the Immigrant Families

Regarding how teachers communicate with the families, we have grouped the responses based on two problems that were detected: language and limited communication. As for the language, this is the main obstacle that teachers face, since most families speak a different language, which makes it difficult to have a relationship: *“The main communication problem is the language because most of the family, especially the women, do not speak our language. . .”* (Participant, 13).

Faced with this language barrier between the school and the immigrant families, which hinders communication, teachers are forced to resort to the immigrant students themselves, to their neighbours, or to close relatives who can speak the language. The teachers point out that this communication is not objective, and they emphasize the need for interpreters in their school:

*“For example, the Moroccan family that I have, at the first meeting with them, the older brother came and he translated for the mother and so on. But I think that the brother was not as objective as possible when giving the information to the mother since he is a teenager and maybe the important things were not passed on. Therefore, I consider that it is best to have an interpreter, who is closer to us, to the teachers.” and “. . . we rely on an older daughter who knows the language, because they call her to translate for them but. . . it’s difficult. Or they usually come with a neighbour who. . . you don’t know if what she tells them is accurate, if this neighbour is really understanding you. . . also, on many occasions, it is this neighbour who answers”* (Participant, 9).

### 3.3.3. Participation of the Immigrant Families in the Classrooms

Linked to the linguistic problem, we find a low level of immigrant family participation, as stated by the teachers interviewed:

*“...look, based on my experience, the participation of immigrant families is usually quite low. They always excuse themselves because they are working, because of the language, or because they cannot come. On certain occasions, I get the impression that they do not know they can participate and talk to us, I think they see schools as closed institutions and the only option they have is to go along with our opinions. Sometimes, this has happened to me, and I explain that they can come, ask about their children, participate however they can. . .”* (Participant, 15).

In this regard, another teacher adds that *“Well, I understand that when a family emigrates, it has a series of priorities, such as food, housing, work and of course their child’s education, but they see this differently, as their children attending school and doing the homework, without considering other educational perspectives such as their own participation in the school”* (Participant, 11).

However, there are teachers who specify that despite the limited participation, immigrant families have a great deal of confidence in them. One teacher explains it like this:

*“I think that it is like I said before. . . because they value us a lot, and hold us in high esteem, they believe that their participation is not necessary. On the occasions that I*

*have spoken with them, they have respect for us, and they know that education is good in Spain. What they want is for the children to learn and learn things that help them to have a better life and be good people. They have always insisted on these things to me, to educate for tomorrow, to be good people and to work” (Participant, 14).*

In those cases where participation takes place, it is the mothers who come to the school. The teachers point out that because the mothers are part of the patriarchal cultural groups, the parental responsibility rests with them. On other occasions, it may be that the mother does not work and communicates more with the school, as specified by one teacher:

*“Normally it is the mothers who collaborate with us. The mothers are in charge of caring for the children, they belong to cultures that have such rules, and the families are usually very patriarchal. Added to this, on some occasions, they don’t work so they have more time.” (Participant, 8).*

#### 3.3.4. Educational Training of the Immigrant Families

The teachers interviewed stated that their school does not provide training to family members and consider this essential for increasing family participation. They propose several options such as Spanish language workshops and classroom interventions. These workshops are valued highly by the teachers, since in this way, immigrant families would help their children in their education, improve their respective language levels, and increase their school participation:

*“To improve this relationship, I would propose giving Spanish classes to the parents as well, those who want them, so they also learn the language alongside their children, and encourage their relationships with their children so that they see their parents are also learning, hence the children are motivated. Through workshops or courses related to Spanish classes, to the language” (Participant, 5).*

They also propose family involvement at the classroom level, so that the parents take part in the teaching of their children: *“What I would propose from the teachers at the classroom level, would be to have programmed activities in which these families could participate, so as to motivate them and encourage these meetings. The families must be considered a primary element in creating intercultural classrooms, offering us their experiences, resources and materials...” (Participant, 16).* The ways that they could be involved with the teachers in the classroom would be to share their cultural references, telling stories, organizing activities together with the teacher. . . In this way, immigrant students would perceive that their cultural references are valued, and the cultural hegemony of the majority cultural group over the ethnic cultural minority is broken.

## 4. Discussion

This discussion focuses on the teachers interviewed in this research. In general, teachers state that immigrant students do not present integration problems. However, they are contradictory, since they grade which immigrant students are easier, or present less difficulties than others. Thus, in the case of Eastern European and Latin American students, they are perceived as *“easier to integrate”*, whereas their opinion of Moroccan students is negative. In this way, from the start, the teachers are already conditioning and labelling students according to their culture, expecting more from one cultural group than from another [13,14]. In the same way, when they want to collaborate with immigrant families, they perceive more resistance from families of Moroccan origin on issues related to learning the cultural references of the autochthonous students.

In some cases, immigrant students have characteristics that prevent their families from actively participating in schools [49]. For example, their parents work, and they assume adult roles such as taking care of their siblings and watching over the home, and on other occasions, they are alone at home or on the street, without the care of an adult. Given this situation, it is necessary that other government agencies intervene along with teachers. In

this way and in alignment with other studies [13,50–52], we believe that students' education requires an interdisciplinary intervention.

As with other research, we have confirmed that there is a tendency amongst immigrant students to form groups by nationality, in other words, to create “ghettos” [1,18,20,53]. This usually occurs at playtime and when they do not speak the host language well. Once the language is acquired, the relationship between the autochthonous and immigrant students is positive and they exhibit inclusive and friendly attitudes, contradicting the results of other studies [1]. In addition, they consider that this relationship produces cultural enrichment for both groups. In cases where problems of intercultural coexistence arise, these are solved by teaching values and introducing cultural references in all subjects of the curriculum [54–57].

However, the educational reality is different, and cultural diversity intervention by the school and by the teachers themselves only consists of simple folkloric activities, cultural gastronomy days, and little else. In this way, teachers play a passive role in the management of cultural diversity [30].

Regarding the teachers' perception of immigrant students and their families, it is necessary to underline that there is a big difference between what they think and what they do [6,18,26,28]. The teachers interviewed have a positive perception of cultural diversity, but it does not correspond to adequate intercultural educational actions with their students. They admit that it is necessary to develop actions that favour the integration of immigrant students and the participation of parents; they know that these actions are positive for intercultural coexistence [40,51,58]. However, the teachers interviewed from the outset recognize a series of obstacles: they do not have a command of the language, they are unaware of the student's culture, they do not have intercultural resources and materials for the various cultural groups, they think that the students have poor previous academic knowledge acquired in their countries of origin, they have unusual obligations for their age, such as taking care of their siblings and the house, they spend too much time alone at home or on the street, they experience poverty at home...

This set of obstacles causes teachers to create a negative perception about the expectations and academic performance of students, that is, teachers start from the preconceived idea that these connotations will have a negative influence. Nor do they develop measures to remedy this situation [50,56]. To try to change this situation, teachers should reflect on this problem and try to find solutions, such as taking training courses, working in an interdisciplinary way with other government agencies, preparing educational materials adapted to cultural diversity, learning other languages...

To this situation, we must add the perceptions of immigrant families held by teachers. Something similar occurs in this situation. Teachers know that the participation of immigrant families in schools is essential, but they perceive them as disinterested in their children's education. Normally, the response of teachers is to do nothing and not try to find strategies that favour and increase the collaboration of families. This environment causes teachers to perceive that without the collaboration and support of families, children will have more difficulty success and academic performance [28,29,33,59,60]. In general, the teachers perceive the participation of immigrant families as inactive, mainly due to the impossibility of balancing time between work and school, as well as to the language barrier and the trust that the parents place in them. In this last aspect, we do not agree with the conclusions of a research study [39] that states that one of the reasons why immigrant families do not participate in education is because they do not have any confidence in it. Again, there is a gap between the importance of cultural diversity and what teachers actually do in the classroom. On occasions when families participate, it is usually the mothers who collaborate with the teachers. However, this participation is punctual, occasional, and is based on simple actions.

However, we have found that variations occur depending on the years of professional experience and chronological age; teachers who have fewer years of professional experience and who are younger show less distance between what they think and do in

their classrooms. These young teachers try to develop materials and commit to their own pedagogical training to provide an adequate educational response to immigrant students. In the case of teachers with more years of experience and age, there is a greater distance between both concepts.

From the point of view of teachers and without intending to generalize, it is true that there are no proposals from schools to create spaces for dissemination, participation, communication, and training. Neither the educational materials nor the communication offered by the schools is translated, so parents have to resort to relatives, neighbours, or even the immigrant students themselves to carry out the translations. These conclusions are similar to other research results [49]. Faced with this problem, educational policies are required to develop initiatives with immigrant families to increase their collaboration, offer them information in their mother tongue, and help them and train them in whatever they need, paying special attention to learning the host language [38,39]. Based on the research results and coinciding with similar studies [26,61–64], we propose teaching in a culturally relevant manner. This pedagogical concept uses the experiences, characteristics, perspectives, and customs of immigrant students as an instrument for better teaching at school [25,26,62,64].

## 5. Conclusions

In most cases, teachers have a positive perception of incorporating immigrant students in the classroom. However, their educational work is poorly developed due to the lack of teacher training in aspects related to cultural diversity. There is also ignorance regarding the immigrant students' culture, the introduction of inappropriate cultural elements, and the lack of intercultural communicative skills. Moreover, the teachers' own perception of certain cultures to which the immigrant students belong triggers low expectations towards them. Faced with this situation, the teaching collective justifies itself and transfers responsibility to the educational specialists and to the administrative educational units. In this way, they play a passive role in managing cultural diversity. Therefore, it is necessary to train teachers in these deficient aspects and to share responsibility with the educational specialists.

With regard to cultural references, the teaching collective must advance further and not get stuck in simple activities, workshops, or intercultural days that are traditionally carried out in schools. Other formulas need to be investigated based on educational innovation, and they should be incorporated into all subjects of the school curriculum, since attention to cultural diversity is the responsibility of all the teachers who interact with students and not exclusively that of the tutor. In addition to this, intercultural education must work along a temporal continuum as if it were another subject, or as a transversality, rather than being sporadic. Despite this, we consider that both teachers and schools show a positive attitude towards creating intercultural educational spaces. In the case of the schools, attention to diversity is reflected in their educational objectives and in the preparation of the various curricular documents. However, as we specified with the teachers, they must make more progress in the pedagogical aspects related to attention to diversity and not get stuck in the habitual ways of attending to cultural diversity.

The immigrant families play a key role, as they must socially and culturally empower their offspring in the schools. To this end, they should reflect attitudes of approachability and collaboration to lend their knowledge and cultural references to the schools. Immigrant students not only need the academic support of teachers, but also the emotional and social support of both the teachers and their own families, and one of the best ways is to empower them with their own cultural references. Nonetheless, immigrant family participation is low, and educational strategies should be pursued to increase it.

The reality is that this set of obstacles that we have described above results in the design and development of teaching models that are far from culturally relevant teaching. The main reasons are that the students are not socially, intellectually, and emotionally empowered and their cultural references are not introduced into the classroom. An immi-

grant student who attends this type of educational setting, disconnected from their culture, feels undervalued and excluded by the host society, and this can influence their academic performance, increase the likelihood of them dropping out of school, and decrease their motivation and self-esteem. To this situation, another negative aspect is added, such as the low participation of families.

Culturally relevant teaching defends the idea that collaboration between schools and immigrant families is essential to empower immigrant students, since families can provide teachers with cultural references and, of course, increase motivation in immigrant students, reduce failure in school, and improve their self-esteem. In our research, there is distance between the culture of the school and the culture of immigrant families, that is, between what is taught at school and the cultural baggage that immigrant students bring, due to the erroneous perception of teachers about the families.

The culture that is transmitted in schools and the culture that immigrant families possess. In the event that it does not occur and teachers do not seek strategies to increase this connection, school failure, ignorance of the student's culture, and even exclusion from the host society will increase. Therefore, it is necessary to organize culturally relevant teaching within the school curriculum with the participation and commitment of immigrant teachers and families. From our point of view, we must have a teaching that is sensitive to different cultures and we can find a great ally culturally relevant teaching. This teaching recognizes the existence of different cultures in the classroom, and this entails organizing an education that unites the culture of the school with the cultures of the students.

We can conclude that it is necessary to rethink education in such a way that takes into account the teachers' perception of cultural diversity, where immigrant families and students are empowered, and where their cultural references are introduced into the educational curricula. This would offer numerous benefits such as greater academic success amongst immigrant students, improved academic performance and motivation, less school failure, and the elimination and prevention of problems related to intercultural coexistence. In this way, we will obtain culturally relevant teaching, and of course, we believe that future educational policies should consider the teachers' perceptions evidenced in this study.

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