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UNLOCKING MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOMS: PREPRIMARY TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY IN SPAIN

Abstract. This study addresses the challenges faced by pre-primary teachers (specialists and non-specialists in additional languages) in multilingual settings, with a specific focus on attention to diversity. Nowadays, schools are becoming more diverse both linguistically (Robinson-Jones, Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2022) and through the inclusion of special educational needs (SEN) students (Ramberg & Watkins, 2020). This study aims to identify the teachers' needs in these contexts and to bring to light emergent topics on multilingualism and diversity. Ten focus groups were conducted for this purpose, and participants (pre-primary teachers) were asked to reflect on their competencies to address groups of young learners in multilingual settings. The participants originate from five different locations in Spain, characterized by different linguistic and social realities. The discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the software MAXQDA was used to facilitate the content analysis of the obtained data. Information was gathered from two perspectives: specialists and non-specialist teachers of additional languages. The findings reveal the complexity of adopting and incorporating the tailored approaches required by the increasingly linguistically diverse students and by those with special educational needs. Several key findings emerged, including the difficulties of the teachers when adapting to changing educational contexts, the lack of guidelines to facilitate teaching in multilingual contexts, and the teachers' concern about diverse students. The results of this research underscore the importance of providing pre-primary teachers in multilingual contexts with multifaceted support (specific legal framework, training sessions, and classroom assistants, among others) to facilitate the inclusiveness of diverse young learners. The research, embedded in a national research project on pre-primary teachers' competencies in multilingual contexts, contributes insights into teaching strategies in diverse multilingual settings.

Keywords: attention to diversity; early childhood education (ECE); inclusive education; multilingualism; pre-primary education.

Introduction

The contemporary educational landscape in early childhood education (ECE) has witnessed significant changes in recent years. Amidst these changes, there has been an increasing number of young learners with diverse multilingual backgrounds (Raud & Orehhova, 2020; Robinson Jones, Duarte,

Günther-van der Meij, 2022, among others). These children require acknowledgment and accommodation of their educational needs, such as flexible grouping, multilingual instructional materials, and integration of multicultural content in the curriculum to name but a few. Simultaneously, inclusive education policies have facilitated the incorporation of special educational needs (SEN) students at schools from their first formative years (Ramberg & Watkins, 2020). Understandably, both groups require their specific necessities to be addressed, but, when the two realities coincide, the complexity of tailoring educational approaches intensifies.

This study explores the intersection between special educational needs and multilingualism in the context of early childhood education and from pre-primary teachers' lens. To this end, 10 focus groups with pre-primary teachers were conducted. These teachers work in educational settings characterized by their diversity from linguistic, cultural, and social points of view. Taking into consideration that specialists in foreign languages and non-specialists or generalist pre-primary teachers work in early language education in Spain, the focus groups involved both profiles and were undertaken bearing the following research questions in mind:

RQ1: Is diversity a key issue for pre-primary teachers in multilingual contexts when they describe their current teaching practices?
RQ2: What obstacles do pre-primary teachers encounter when embracing diversity within multilingual educational settings?

The emergent themes obtained after the systematic coding and the categorization of their responses unveil the difficulties these teachers face in an unprecedented reality regarding attention to diversity (specifically, linguistic diversity and SEN students). This paper endeavors to shed light on the description of these environments and on the potential interventions and collaborative approaches that help facilitate the teaching-learning process of additional languages and a better management of the classroom languages in the current diverse pre-primary contexts.

Literature Review

In the theoretical framework, we will analyze the current situation of multilingualism in different pre-primary settings, highlighting the challenges and benefits of multilingualism for early childhood. The inclusion of SEN students, who are currently gaining more presence in multilingual school contexts globally, is also addressed to identify pre-primary teachers' concerns and needs.

Multilingual Education

Multilingualism encompasses the existence of various languages, whether they are recognized as official, co-official, native, foreign, or national/international. It also pertains to an individual's aptitude to communicate in multiple languages fluently and naturally. Nowadays, it is a very common phenomenon all over the world, due to globalization, the increased mobility of the population, and the spread of new technologies, which has resulted in a rapid growth of children raised multilingually and/or being instructed in a language that is not their first.

In the realm of language policy, governments worldwide have increasingly recognized the value of multilingualism and have begun to emphasize the necessity for individuals to acquire proficiency in multiple languages to thrive in a globalized society (European Council, 2019). It is also widely acknowledged that English has become a lingua franca. In this line, Edwards (2004) points out that speaking English can be necessary but "the ability to speak other languages nonetheless ensures a competitive edge" (p. 164). Also, as observed by Hélot et al. (2018), Mary and Young (2018), and Young (2018), among others, nowadays schools around the world are multilingual because many children come to the classroom speaking in a great variety of languages. Different languages, therefore, coexist in the same space, and they are not anymore considered watertight compartments. This poststructuralist approach implies educational research focuses on language practices and how the speakers interact with the environment rather than seeing languages as separate isolated subjects.

Despite monolingual teaching still being dominant in mainstream education, the advantages of multilingualism are on the rise. Various studies (e.g., Bialystok, 2000, 2009) have highlighted these benefits, leading to an increasing emphasis on the importance of a multilingual approach. Thus, the "Focus on Multilingualism" approach views multilingual speakers holistically and argues against the notion of languages being separate "mental boxes" (Cenoz & Gorter, 2010). Instead, it emphasizes the existence of a shared linguistic repertoire where languages are interconnected.

We will now analyze the benefits of multilingualism from a social perspective. Due to its inclusive nature, multilingual practices can better address the linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom. As Cenoz and Gorter (2020) highlight, they can also give immigrant students the opportunity to value their family languages and to use them in any language learning. Current research has demonstrated how multilingual diversity in the classroom allows multilingual children to feel both socially and emotionally supported (Rosiers et al., 2018; Strobbe et al., 2017).

Challenges of Multilingualism for Preschool and Primary Teachers

Despite the multiple benefits of multilingual education, the teacher's roles in multilingual classrooms (elementary and secondary) have not been examined thoroughly in European countries yet. Notwithstanding, a few recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses on multilingualism in schools (de Boer et al., 2018; Klassen & Kim, 2019; Vandenbroucke et al., 2018), indicate that teachers' experiences and attitudes are likely to play a critical role in the educational lives of the multilingual learners in Europe.

However, most teachers feel underprepared to teach in multilingual classrooms and to tackle new pedagogical challenges that have emerged due to pupils' linguistic and cultural diversity (Langeloo et al., 2019; Raud & Orehova, 2020). Along the same line, Meier (2016) states there are two main challenges, persisting: monolingual norms among language teachers and lack of teacher guidance. As for the former, Meier & Conteh (2014) have argued that to enact the multilingual turn in education, all learners should be

considered "as users of language in diverse ways, and as potential and emergent multilinguals" (p. 294), shifting from traditional monolingual education. As a response to this, several pedagogical approaches have been set up to ease the integration of regional, minority, and migrant languages into mainstream education (Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018) with the aim of improving equity, inclusion, and pupils' academic progress. Thus, current multilingual approaches to education should draw on learners' linguistic and cultural resources as bridges to new learning and promote the use of their full linguistic repertoires to raise learners' awareness about language and help them develop links between languages in a planned and systematic way (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). Regarding the lack of guidance, this is an issue emerging from teacher education, which would benefit from specific training on addressing multilingual classes. Thus, Robinson, Duarte, & Günther-van der Meij, (2022) observe how pre-service primary teachers in the Dutch context (n = 195) reported the inability to understand pupils' home languages. Regarding their self-perceived knowledge and skills, the content analysis shows that some pre-service primary teachers are aware of how to foster cooperation between multilingual pupils to involve their languages in their learning. Some efforts, notwithstanding, have also been made to give the topics of multilingualism and diversity an impactful place in initial teacher education (Robinson-Jones & Duarte, 2021), although they differ greatly from reality leading to early career teachers entering the sector without the level of knowledge and skills required to teach effectively in multilingual classrooms (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017).

The present scenario regarding early multilingual education deploys the complexity of the situation as well as the challenges that need to be addressed in a short period of time. Thus, although the ideal age to introduce several languages simultaneously is in infancy, few teachers have this preparation, especially if we are talking about early language awareness which, according to Hélot and Young (2006), "gives a place and a space to languages which are usually ignored in the mainstream classroom" (p. 79), meaning that coming in touch with many different languages helps to understand the way language works and the function it has in society. As an example, in the Austrian context, the great majority of teachers in Griva and Chostelidou's

(2012) study (n = 120, 72% of them being English teachers) also showed awareness of the merits of multilingualism, such as multilingual comprehension and openness to other people's languages and cultures. However, teachers report the following barriers when teaching in multilingual classrooms: too large groups, lack of adequate teaching materials, lack of time (in class), too time-consuming lesson planning, and lack of adequate teaching materials. Along the same line, Pérez Cañado (2016) extended the focus across Europe and polled CLIL teachers for their most urgent training needs regarding diversity, among which materials design and guidelines for diversity-sensitive methodologies were found.

Communication with families is another topic referred to by recent research. During the six-year project concerning emergent bilinguals in pre-school and primary in France conducted by Krüger, Thamin and Cambrone-Lasnes (2016), special emphasis was placed on constant communication between parents whose children did not speak French as a first language and the teachers. Another important aspect for emergent bilinguals is mastering the main language at school; however, the reality is that one-to-one communication between these students and teachers hardly ever takes place in the classroom mainly due to a lack of knowledge, awareness of multilingualism and the right tools and strategies to support these students. To develop an understanding of multilingual learners, according to Otwinowska (2014), "teachers should ideally be multilingual themselves" (p. 97) and possess plurilingual awareness.

Finally, a review study focusing on language teachers' beliefs and multilingual didactics conducted by Bredthauer and Engfer (2016) provides interesting insights related to this study. It presents a synthesis of 12 empirical studies from Germany and Austria and its main findings are summarised as follows: (1) teachers are positive towards the idea of a multilingual pedagogical approach and would like to implement it in their own practice; (2) teachers give a variety of reasons why they are not able to adopt such an approach, mainly highlighting the lack of relevant training, professional development courses and teaching resources; (3) teachers treat their heterogeneous student groups as if they were German first language speakers, lacking the advantages of preparing multilingual students.

In short, current research on SEN and multilingual diversity, although limited, focuses on aspects such as teachers' knowledge in both areas, self-perceived knowledge addressing diversity, rapport between teachers and parents, and lack of training, among the main topics.

Multilingualism for SEN

Multilingualism is a source of strength and opportunity for children diverse needs. It embodies our cultural diversity and encourages the exchange of views among children with diverse needs and children without diverse needs, the renewal of ideas and the broadening of the capacity of children with diverse needs to imagine. (Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General (UNESCO, 2017))

This idea, notwithstanding, is neglected in contexts where foreign language education continues to ignore diversity in the classroom, failing to incorporate students' linguistic resources (Busse et al., 2020), and being pedagogically sidelined.

Multilingual students with SEN are "individuals who have one or more disabilities that significantly limit their intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as documented in their Individualized Education Programs (IEP), and who are progressing toward English language proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding" (Christensen et al., 2018, p. 2). This encompasses a range of skills, implying that SEN children who present more difficulties in some areas could excel in other parts of the curriculum, increasing their motivation and interest in the subject. Most literature on SEN language learning does not address students with social, emotional, and mental health difficulties or with physical and sensory needs but instead addresses specific learning difficulties like dyslexia (e.g. Grosjean, 2019; Kormos & Csizér, 2010).

Students with learning difficulties, specific disorders, or disabilities might benefit from schooling in bilingual environments. Thus, for instance, bearing in mind the difficulty of interacting and communicating among ADHD students, foreign language classes provide many opportunities for them to develop social skills and interact with peers (Stevens & Marsh, 2005). In

addition, learning a foreign language might increase their intercultural awareness and support cross-curricular learning including a wide array of topics regarding history, geography, math, etc. Casas Pedrosa and Rascón Moreno (2021) conducted a study in Spain on teachers' and students' perspectives on attention to diversity with CLIL which reflects a positive view from learners' and teachers' perspectives on a repertoire of methods to address diversity reporting at the same time a lack of training of classroom layouts to cater for diversity.

The EU and its Member States have called for renewed efforts to prepare teachers for diversity and to lay the foundations for more inclusive societies through education (Council of the European Union and European Commission, 2015, p.13). But what is meant by inclusive education is related to access, participation, and students' achievements, with special emphasis on those who are at risk of being excluded or marginalized. This implies transforming culture, policies, and school practices to attend to the diversity of educational needs of all students (Ainscow, 2001; Booth, 2006; Echeita, 2006).

In general terms, institutions and teachers should work in line to adapt the curriculum for students with special needs in multilingual environments to create a conducive learning environment that fosters motivation.

Method

The methodological framework where this study is embedded in is the Grounded Theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967), characterized as being data-driven instead of theory-driven. Data gathering and analysis leading to the conclusions take place simultaneously, setting aside the researcher's preconceptions.

In the study, 10 focus groups (non-probability sampling) were utilized as the primary method for data collection. Data were imported to MAXQDA (frequently used software supporting Grounded Theory research); at the same time, through a thematic analysis approach, recurrent patterns and emergent themes derived from the participants' contributions were identified.

Participants

Convenience sampling was utilized in selecting the participants in the focus groups, comprising the total of 44 participants (N = 44), featuring a distribution of 39 females (84.8%) and 7 males (15.2%). The participating teachers work in public and charter schools from five different locations in Spain: Alicante (18.9%), Ceuta (16.9%), Madrid (21.6%), Málaga (23.8%) and Melilla (18.9%). Charter schools operate independently from the public school system, although they also receive government funding.

The locations are characterized by their different linguistic realities both from the official and social point of view. Thus, Madrid and Málaga are officially monolingual, while in Alicante there are two official languages (Valencian and Castilian Spanish). As for Ceuta and Melilla, 40% of the population of each city speak a language different from Spanish: Tamazight in Melilla, and Dariya or dialectal Arabic in Ceuta (Fernández García, 2015).

Procedure

The research procedure comprises a structured sequence of seven distinct steps, although steps 3 to 6 take place simultaneously according to the principles of the Grounded Theory. The seven steps are detailed as follows:

1. Focus group discussions led by a facilitator and a notetaker.
2. Import qualitative data into MAXQDA.
3. Coding segments.
4. Thematic analysis.
5. Data exploration.
6. Analysis and interpretation.
7. Generating reports.

The focus group discussions took place online between March and April of 2023 (Step 1) and lasted around 90 minutes each. Participants were asked about their current situation teaching pre-primary courses, as generalists or

specialists in foreign languages. The discussion was guided through general questions on challenges, resources, evaluation, and methodologies used in their lessons. All participants had previously signed a consent form. The discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim and the transcriptions (raw data) were imported into MAXQDA (Step 2).

In the pursuit of analysing the focus group data, codes were created by labelling the segments of texts corresponding to the topic *diversity*. Both research questions and the emerging themes were taken into consideration for the labelling (Step 3). Afterwards, different themes and patterns were compared across the focus groups (Steps 4-5). Through Steps 6 and 7, the key themes were illustrated and interpreted (see sections below in this respect).

Results and Discussion

Participants of the convened 10 focus groups developed a narrative based on the following topics: personality traits and competencies that characterize a pre-primary teacher in multilingual contexts, current challenges in their teaching, resources available in their schools, participation in national or international projects, and finally, evaluation and assessment in the pre-primary stage. Once codified, 671 segments covering all dimensions were identified. Out of these segments, those regarding special educational needs and those related to multilingualism were selected for analysis.

Special Educational Needs in Pre-Primary Classes

Out of the 671 segments codified from the transcripts, 59 segments were identified when participants specifically mentioned special educational needs. As for the mentioned themes, the coded segments indicate the educators' difficulties regarding the impossibility of paying attention to all students, the fact that these students are disruptive at times, and the complexity of adapting materials to their specific needs.

Remarkably, generalist teachers consistently reference special educational needs more frequently than their specialist counterparts across all contexts except for Ceuta, as illustrated in Figure 1. Thus, excluding

participants from Ceuta, statements referring to SEN students made by generalist teachers constitute 32.20% of the 19 segments, whereas specialist teachers' contributions (10 segments) amount to 16.94%. This finding is noteworthy, taking into consideration that generalist teachers rely on an additional teacher to provide support during their lessons, and can therefore share the workload. Specialist teachers, notwithstanding, lack this support as is frequently observed in the discussions.

The case of Ceuta presents two salient points for consideration: firstly, the notable disparity in the number of coded segments (Figure 2), and secondly, the proportion of coded segments within specialist focus groups, which surpasses that of generalist teachers by twofold, unlike the trend observed among other participants (16.94% generalist teachers and 33.89% specialists). One possible explanation for the former observation lies in the distinctive characteristics of the student demographic in Ceuta, where the economic, linguistic, and social challenges of many families might hinder early identification, care, and support for special needs. In this scenario, specialist teachers might observe more difficulties when facing this challenge and be therefore more sensitive to engage in the discussion when the topic SEN is addressed.

Figure 1

Generalist (GEN) and Specialist (SPE) Teachers' Interventions on SEN
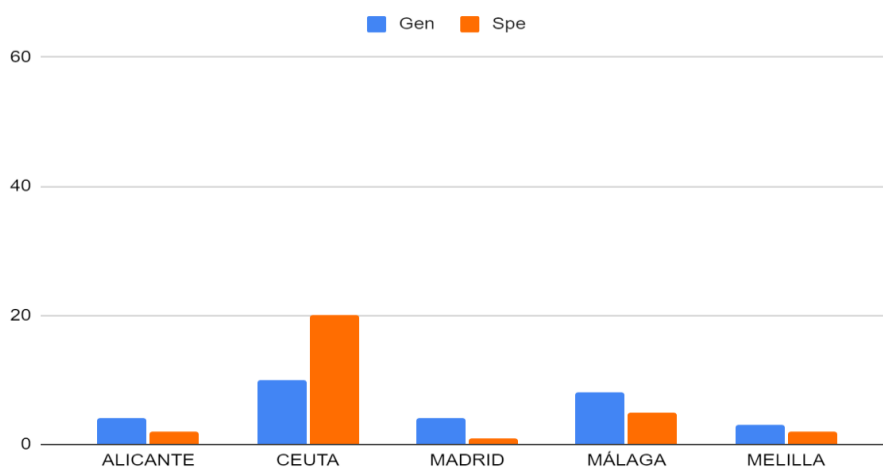
In particular, during the interventions aimed at addressing special needs, participants frequently generalize their approaches without providing details on specific learning difficulties, disorders, or disabilities (Figure 2). As can be observed, these general references to SEN are present in all groups except for specialist teachers in Melilla. Special needs are therefore considered as a collective issue, and both generalist and specialist teachers specifically signify challenges stemming from the specific needs these students have, such as insufficient training on SEN and lack of institutional support, which undoubtedly add complexity to their teaching. Notwithstanding, at other times, participants specify a special need they find in their classrooms more frequently. In this respect, autism (ASD), hearing deficit, and language delay are the most common special needs mentioned by both groups of teachers. Surprisingly, more common conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or dyslexia are not mentioned in the discussions.

Among the special needs discussed, autism is the most frequently mentioned, appearing in 22 segments (37.28% of the references). Language delay is addressed in 10 segments, representing 16.94% of the content related to special educational needs. Hearing deficits are mentioned in 6 segments, accounting for 10.16% of the references. This prominence can likely be attributed to the significant impact these conditions have on oral language, which is crucial in these settings since pre-primary lessons predominantly take place through oral communication.

As for the references to general or specific SENs across the five locations, the focus group of specialist teachers in Ceuta is particularly noteworthy. Their results reveal that they contribute to the discussion much more by addressing the diverse challenges faced by SEN students in general, with a specific emphasis on autistic children. The increasing prevalence of autism worldwide, combined with the fact that in Spain most diagnosed children attend mainstream rather than special schools, underscores the urgency of addressing this issue. In Ceuta, stakeholders (mainly families and educators) commonly demand increased economic support to better address the needs of students with ASD, due to the current limited resources available.

The groups of generalist teachers in Ceuta and Málaga exhibit similar results and are the only ones where all four topics are addressed. The reason

why generalist teachers, except for the teachers in Ceuta, tend to mention SEN more often might be attributed to the fact that generalist teachers spend more time in class with the students, whereas specialists typically teach one short lesson per day at the most.

Figure 2

References to SEN (in General) and to Hearing Deficits, Autism and Language Delay
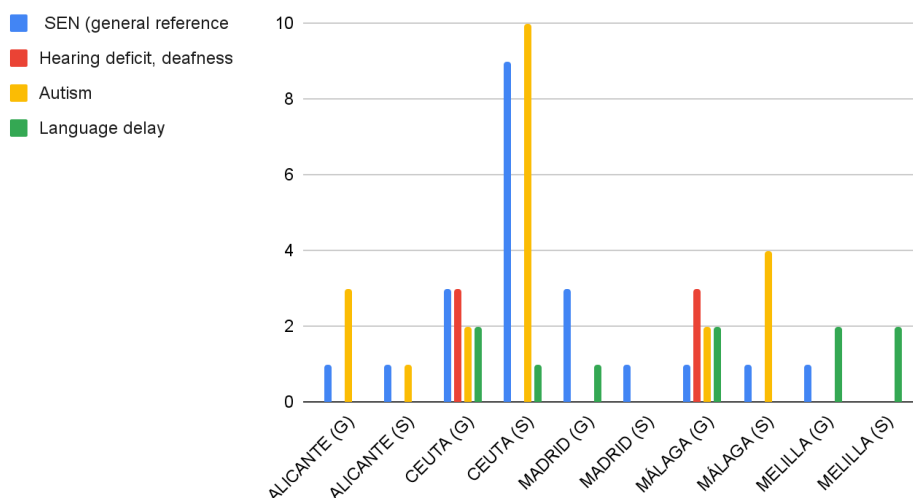
The 59 segments identified as references to SEN in the 10 focus groups represent 8% of the total segments, indicating a moderate concern about this issue among the participants. Nonetheless, the contributions regarding this topic reveal that teachers are uncertain about how to address SEN efficiently, consistent with findings by Casas Pedrosa and Rascón Moreno (2021). The teachers' demand for more resources could be met by initiatives such as incorporating more specialized units for SEN students (e.g. ASD units or "aulas TEA" in Spain) and increasing the presence of speech and language therapists in schools.

As shown, results indicate that teachers in pre-primary education are concerned about the necessities required by SEN students, particularly given the requirement for curriculum adaptation and other supportive measures (in line with Busse et al., 2020; Siepmann & Pérez-Cañado, 2022; and Stevens &

Marsh, 2005, among others). However, if this concern involves deprioritizing or overlooking these students' emerging multilingualism, there is a substantial risk of constraining their potential for multilingual development.

Linguistic and Cultural Diversity

In this study, the topics of language and cultural diversity are not examined concurrently. This consideration is also justified by the focus group participants, who discuss language and cultural aspects mostly in separate interventions and only occasionally simultaneously in their comments.

Out of the 671 segments codified from the transcripts, 122 segments were identified when participants specifically mentioned linguistic and/or cultural diversity (see Figure 3 for percentages). Generalist and specialist teachers reported on both kinds of diversity in their interventions in Melilla, Ceuta, and Alicante. However, in Madrid, specialist teachers do not refer to cultural diversity, and in Málaga, specialist teachers do not mention any of them either in the linguistic or cultural landscape of the class or as a challenge.

Melilla and Alicante both exhibit 28.7% of transcripts referring to language and culture. Specifically, regarding *language diversity*, Melilla demonstrates a prevalence of 24.6%, while Alicante shows 18%. In Melilla, there are frequent references to the use of Tamazight in and outside the school and concerns about how to address the challenges of multilingual classrooms. These results match those observed in earlier studies (Langeloo et al., 2019; Raud & Orehova, 2020). In contrast, in Alicante, the primary issue revolves around questioning the necessity of learning Valencian, which at times also turns into rejection.

Madrid and Málaga exhibit the lowest percentages of references to linguistic diversity. This may be attributed to the fact that both locations are officially monolingual, resulting in a weaker direct influence of other languages in classroom discourse. In contrast, locations such as Alicante, Melilla, and Ceuta experience significant linguistic diversity due to the presence of Valencian, Tamazight, and Dariya, respectively.

Teachers from Ceuta report on linguistic diversity in 18% of the total number of segments. Concerned about the use of Dariya in home contexts and

aware of the need for Spanish as the main vehicular language of the class. Potential communication breakdowns with the families are also mentioned, in line with Krüger, Thamin and Cambrone-Lasnes' work (2016).

Teachers from the five different locations mention linguistic diversity more frequently than cultural diversity. This trend may be attributed to the direct impact of multilingualism on lesson development in schools, whereas cultural aspects do not necessarily exert the same influence and are more often limited to home environments rather than to school contexts. Notably, teachers from Alicante lead in culture references, with generalist and specialist teachers each making 4.1% of such notes in the transcripts. Similar to linguistic diversity, cultural issues are less frequently mentioned in Madrid and Málaga. Ideally, in line with Cenoz and Gorter (2010), emphasizing the cultural diversity linked to multilingual contexts in the classroom would provide a safe environment mainly for migrant children with diverse cultural backgrounds and would also help develop cultural awareness in non-immigrant students.

**Figure 3**

Linguistic and Cultural Diversity
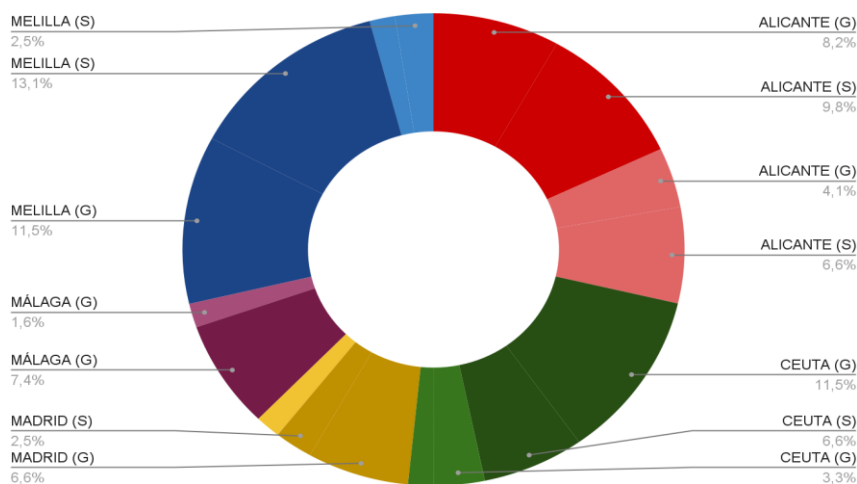
The results in these two sections address RQ1: Is diversity a key issue for pre-primary teachers in multilingual contexts when they describe their

current teaching practices? In short, both generalist and specialist teachers recognize classroom diversity regarding SEN and also language and culture. Some teachers highlight the enriching aspects of diversity, although cultural issues in all contexts are less frequently mentioned. Linguistic diversity is noted primarily for its challenges in pre-primary contexts due to limited linguistic productivity in pre-primary children and potential language barriers with families.

Challenges Stemming From Diversity

The second research question of this study (RQ2), "What obstacles do pre-primary teachers encounter when embracing diversity within multilingual educational settings?", addressed the identification of the main challenges faced by pre-primary teachers regarding their multilingual contexts. Figure 4 describes these challenges highlighted by generalist and specialist teachers by showing the interrelations between the different specific codes when the word challenge (code CHALLENGE) is mentioned. The width of the line represents the co-occurrence of segments referring to the topic.

Figure 4

Challenges Stemming from Diversity
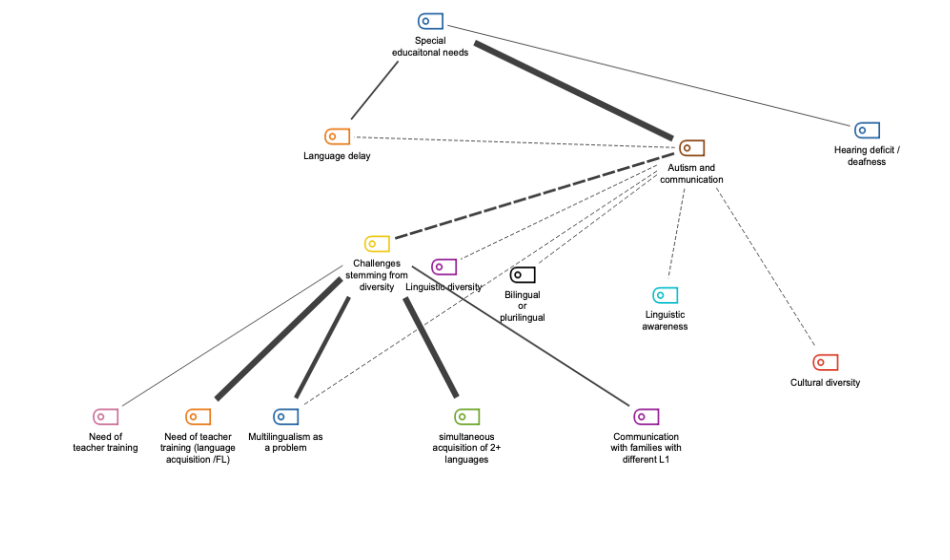
Thus, from CHALLENGES STEMMING FROM DIVERSITY, the following codes (topics) are highlighted by the teachers in order of co-occurrence (frequency):

1. Need for teacher training. In some cases, teacher training is mentioned as a general need, without specifying concrete needs or topics.

2. Need for teacher training regarding language acquisition or foreign language.

3. Simultaneous acquisition of two or more languages: derived from migration reasons or for situations of diglossia in the autonomous cities, the fact that the number of children acquiring several languages at the same time is perceived at times as complex regarding communication issues and the acquisition of content in the class.

4. Multilingualism is considered a problem in participants' contexts: generalist and specialist teachers report negative attitudes from families towards non-prestigious languages and co-official languages. Difficulties regarding understanding the children's needs or their understanding of key concepts in the lessons are also mentioned.

5. Breakdowns or lack of communication with families who have a different first language. This emergent topic is relevant since communication barriers with children's families might result in a diminished level of trust, complications in the supervision of student learning, and/or frequent instances of miscommunication.

6. Within the SENs, autism emerges as a salient topic. In this respect, the Confederation of Autism in Spain has drawn attention to the number of children suffering from autism (2022), indicating a prevalence of diagnoses increasing from 2012 to 2022 (+262.73%). As can be observed in Figure 4, from the code AUTISM other links stem towards special educational needs but also towards other key topics addressed in the focus groups (linguistic diversity, linguistic awareness, cultural diversity, and bilingual or plurilingual practices).

These six challenges have been identified as emergent themes and highlight the importance of addressing the unique needs of students with diverse backgrounds to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Conclusion and Limitations

The current study was set to identify the challenges and existing needs expressed by pre-primary teachers working in multilingual contexts in five different locations in Spain. Likewise, the second aim was to determine to what extent their classes were perceived as diverse in relation to language, culture, and special needs. The study yields valuable insights on this topic that has received scant attention in the literature.

The study has identified a uniform concern regarding the existing challenges derived from mobility and migration. The investigation has also shown different schoolscapes that are heavily dependent on geographical location and linguistic policies. It may serve as an alert to those stakeholders involved in multilingual education, particularly in contexts where students with special educational needs (SEN) are present. Safeguarding these students' rights to support and enhance their multilingual development is imperative and should not be neglected, as doing so may hinder their overall academic and cognitive growth, limiting their full participation in both educational and social environments.

Finally, in the study, both generalist and specialist pre-primary teachers have acknowledged the difficulties regarding SEN students, mainly when the special need is related to difficulties in communication. In this respect, contributions from pre-primary teachers in international contexts could help develop more effective approaches to address this issue.

The findings from the coded data also provide insights for a bottom-up approach to teacher training, i.e. training provided based on the teachers' needs. Both generalist and specialist teachers mention specifically their need for foreign language courses and managing multilingual groups, considering language awareness, simultaneous acquisition of two or more languages, etc.

Given the needs described by these participants, it seems essential to review and update existing teacher training programs to better align with the evolving social and academic contexts such as the one described in the study.

This research was carried out analysing the segments transcribed from 10 focus groups, therefore with such a small sample size results must be interpreted with caution. It also opens the possibility to do further research on this specific field with a wider number of participants.

The study was limited to five geographically and linguistically distinct Spanish contexts, and therefore the results are not always generalizable to other areas. Notwithstanding this limitation, the study addresses an understudied topic and offers valuable insights into linguistic diversity in pre-primary schools, which is gaining ground in the educational field worldwide. This should be a fruitful area for further work, as should the research to identify best practices for multilingual students with SEN. In doing so, the academic and educational communities will be better equipped to understand the potential of diversity in a more inclusive world.

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DAUGIAKALBIŲ KLASIŲ „ATRAKINIMAS": PRIEŠMOKYKLINIO UGDYMO MOKYTOJŲ POŽIŪRIS Į ĮTRAUKUJĮ UGDYMĄ ISPANIJOJE

Anotacija. Šiame tyrime nagrinėjami iššūkiai, su kuriais susiduria priešmokyklinio ugdymo mokytojai (ne gimtųjų kalbų mokytojai ir dalykų mokytojai) daugiakalbėje aplinkoje, ypatingas dėmesys skiriamas įvairovei. Šiais laikais mokyklos tampa vis įvairesnės tiek kalbine prasme (Robinson-Jones, Duarte ir Günther-van der Meij, 2022), tiek įtraukiant specialiųjų ugdymosi poreikių turinčius mokinius (Ramberg ir Watkins, 2020). Tad tyrimu siekiama nustatyti mokytojų poreikius šiame naujame kontekste bei atskleisti iškylančias daugiakalbystės ir įvairovės keliamas problemas. Tam buvo surinkta dešimt tikslinių grupių iš penkių skirtingų Ispanijos vietovių, kurioms būdingos skirtingos kalbinės ir socialinės realijos. Grupių dalyvių (priešmokyklinio ugdymo mokytojų) prašyta apmąstyti savo kompetencijas, reikalingas dirbant su šiomis mokinių grupėmis daugiakalbėje aplinkoje. Diskusijos buvo įrašytos ir stenografuotos pažodžiui, o gautų duomenų turinio analizei palengvinti naudota programinė įranga MAXQDA. Informacija buvo renkama iš dviejų perspektyvų: kalbų ir ne kalbų mokytojų požiūriu. Rezultatai atskleidė, kad taikyti ir integruoti specifinius mokymo metodus, atsižvelgiant į skirtingus mokinių poreikius klasėje, yra sudėtingas procesas, nes klasės tampa vis labiau įvairiakalbės, jose mokosi įvairių specialiųjų ugdymo poreikių turinys mokiniai. Išryškėjo ir kelios svarbiausios problemos, tokios kaip sunkumai prisitaikyti prie besikeičiančių švietimo kontekstų, gairės, kurios palengvintų mokymą daugiakalbėse aplinkose, mokytojų trūkumas ir susirūpinimas dėl vis didėjančios įvairovės klasėje. Šio tyrimo rezultatai pabrėžia, kaip svarbu priešmokyklinio ugdymo mokytojams teikti įvairiapusę paramą daugiakalbėse aplinkose (be kita ko, parengti specialią teisinę bazę, vykdyti mokytojų profesinio tobulinimo veiklas ir užtikrinti klasės asistentų atsiradimą klasėse), kad būtų užtikrintas įvairių besimokančiųjų jaunuolių įtraukusis ugdymas. Tyrimas kaip dalis nacionalinio mokslinių tyrimų projekto, skirto išanalizuoti priešmokyklinio ugdymo mokytojų kompetencijas daugiakalbėse aplinkose, prisideda savo įžvalgomis apie tai, kokių mokymo strategijų reikia darbui įvairiose daugiakalbėse aplinkose.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: dėmesys įvairovei; ikimokyklinis ugdymas; įtraukusis ugdymas; daugiakalbystė; priešmokyklinis ugdymas.

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DESCUBRIR LAS AULAS MULTILINGÜES: PERSPECTIVAS DE LOS MAESTROS DE EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL SOBRE LA PEDAGOGÍA INCLUSIVA EN ESPAÑA

Resumen. Este estudio aborda los retos a los que se enfrentan los profesores de infantil (especialistas en lenguas adicionales y generalistas) en entornos multilingües, centrándose específicamente en la atención a la diversidad. Hoy en día, las escuelas son cada vez más diversas tanto lingüísticamente (Robinson-Jones, Duarte & Günther-van der Meij 2022) como por la inclusión de alumnos con necesidades educativas especiales (NEE) (Ramberg & Watkins, 2020). Este estudio pretende identificar las necesidades de los profesores en estos contextos y sacar a la luz los temas emergentes relacionados con el multilingüismo y la diversidad. Para ello, se realizaron diez grupos focales y se pidió a los participantes (profesores de infantil) que reflexionaran sobre sus competencias para dirigirse a grupos de aprendices en edades tempranas en contextos multilingües. Los participantes procedían de cinco localidades distintas de España, caracterizadas por realidades lingüísticas y sociales diferentes. Los debates se grabaron y transcribieron literalmente, y se utilizó el programa MAXQDA para facilitar el análisis de contenido de los datos obtenidos. Se recogió información desde dos perspectivas: la de los especialistas en lenguas adicionales y la de los maestros generalistas. Los resultados revelan la complejidad de adoptar e incorporar los enfoques adaptados que requieren los alumnos cada vez más diversos desde el punto de vista lingüístico y los que tienen necesidades educativas especiales. Surgieron varias conclusiones clave, como las dificultades de los profesores a la hora de adaptarse a contextos educativos cambiantes, la falta de directrices para facilitar la enseñanza en contextos multilingües y la preocupación de los profesores por la diversidad de alumnado. Los resultados de esta investigación subrayan la importancia de proporcionar a los profesores de infantil en contextos multilingües un apoyo multidisciplinar (marco jurídico específico, sesiones de formación y asistentes de aula, entre otros) para facilitar la inclusión de alumnos jóvenes y diversos. La investigación, integrada en un proyecto de investigación nacional sobre las competencias de los profesores de infantil en contextos multilingües, arroja información sobre las estrategias de enseñanza en diversos entornos multilingües.

Palabras clave: atención a la diversidad; educación infantil; educación temprana; educación inclusiva; multilingüismo.