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Sociocultural Factors That Influence Migrant Students' Academic Performance in an English Language Teaching Program: Voices from Abroad

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Abstract

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Keywords

Migrant Students, Academic Performance, Family Support, Intercultural Adjustment, Academic Adaptation

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This qualitative research explains how sociocultural factors influence the academic performance of a group of migrant students enrolled in the English Language Teaching Program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. Three data collection techniques were implemented for the development of this project. First, a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was conducted for each participant. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed for analysis purposes. Before the interview, participants were delivered a consent form and a biodata format to be filled. Second, six participants were invited to write a week-long narrative describing their experiences in the target cultural scenario. Third, a focus group was set up with five students selected at random out of the thirteen participants. Major results indicate that students who perceive a higher level of family support are more likely to achieve their academic goals. Besides, migrant students who report fewer difficulties to adjust to the host culture, have greater opportunities to succeed academically. In addition, migrant students' previous academic experiences have an important impact on their adjustment process to the university context. This study concluded that migrant students' academic performance is a dialogical and reciprocal relationship among different sociocultural factors. Keywords: Migrant Students, Academic Performance, Family Support, Intercultural Adjustment, Academic Adaptation

Introduction

The demands imposed by an increasingly globalized world have caused continuous changes in social, political, economic and educational structures in many countries around the world. A need for mobility and intercultural exchange have come along with this globalization process. Consequently, a migration phenomenon from suburban areas to urban areas increases every day. In this regard, Benatuil and Laurito (2009) asserts that "In the last years, as a consequence of globalization, an increasing number of contact among people from different cultural contexts and nations has been observed" (p. 120). Migration of people to cosmopolitan cities in search of better life opportunities promotes the intensification of local happenings as a reciprocal response to global events (Giddens, 1990).

In addition, Vera, Gonzales, and Alejo (2011) point out that migrants' relationship with the new cultural reality involves not only the contact with new cultural values, customs and habits, but also the sociocultural recreation of the host culture dynamics. This interrelation involves new social participation alternatives, transformation of cultural identities, as well as communication codes that influence the interpretations of the world (Vera, Gonzales, & Alejo, 2011).

In Colombia, according to Romero (2010), internal migration has contributed to the dissemination of qualified people to the largest and most flourishing cities. Impoverished regions have contributed to increase the number of students who migrate as a strategy to cope

with the fewer educational opportunities usually found in rural areas (Romero, 2010). In contrast, Romero (2010) asserts, "There is a belief in Colombia that the population does not migrate through the national territory (…)" (p. 1), which is contradictory when, according to Romero (2010), 35.9 % of Colombians live in areas that are culturally different to their birthplace.

In this sense, university migration appears to be a social phenomenon that consolidates as the best alternative for those who want to get better job opportunities or wish to get higher incomes for their families. However, we consider that university migration needs to be studied from a holistic perspective that allows the integration of sociocultural factors. In this regard, De la Torre (as cited in Vera, Gonzales, & Alejo, 2011) suggests that talking about moving is talking about going through changes, involving several social, cultural, economic and political factors, which permeates individuals' behaviors, feelings and thoughts, that is, the way they perceive themselves and the world around them.

Regarding Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, a great number of migrant students have found this institution to be the place where they can pursue their professional degree, while away from their birthplace. Every semester, students from different regions of the country are accepted to different undergraduate programs. Concerning the English Language Teaching Program, migrant students represent 41.09% (information provided by the planning department from Universidad Católica Luis Amigó) of the total student population. In addition, migrant students' population grows every semester since the program is a high qualitative opportunity for students to reach their life project of becoming language teachers.

Literature Review

Research Antecedents

In our research we consider a detailed revision of the literature necessary to have a wide view of what has been done regarding not only the academic performance as such, but also the factors that affect it, especially those related to the sociocultural scheme. Academic performance has been an issue of special interest in the educational field. A great amount of research has been done in regard to the factors that influence students' academic success and failure (Aguilar-Rivera, 2007; Caso-Niebla & Hernández, 2007; Correa, 2004; De Gallardo & De Faría, 2006; Ferreyra, 2007; Giovagnoli, 2002; Montero, Villalobos, & Valverde, 2007; Torres & Rodríguez, 2006).

An initial glance at these studies reveals the increasing interest in overcoming an instrumental and narrowed perspective of academic performance, which usually focuses on results and numerical grades. These researchers take account of not only inner-related factors, but also some outer-related factors that influence students' learning processes and results. In relation to outer-related factors, Giovagnoli (2002) highlights the relevance of the learners' educational background, parents' educational level, and students' personal conditions. In the same thread, the studies conducted by Torres and Rodríguez (2006), and Ferreyra (2007) show the importance of the family context in the students' academic performance. Additionally, Aguilar-Rivera (2007) emphasizes how family support influences academic performance.

In this sense, Giovagnoli (2002) found that there is an increasing drop-out probability among students who must work and study at the same time, as well as among students who live with their families. In relation to this finding, Ferreyra (2007) asserts that there are certain conditions that can endanger students' performance in the academic process such as living with their parents, working and studying at the same time, and having a mother with less educational training. However, Torres and Rodríguez (2006) found that a positive relationship between the family context and the academic performance can promote academic achievement. In the same

line, Aguilar-Rivera (2007) concludes that family provides not only affective, but also economical support for students. From these studies, we understand the influential role family has on students' academic life. In addition, we acknowledge the relevant role of families in students' academic performance and motivation in elementary school as in high school, and advanced education.

Based on the previous research studies, we found there is an increasing interest to understand students' performance from a more socially constructed perspective. However, several factors that are more related to students' inherent individual characteristics have been also considered. In regard to inner-related factors, De Gallardo and De Faría (2006) address high and low social motivations in relation to academic performance. Furthermore, Caso-Niebla and Hernández (2007) explore the influence of study strategies and affective-motivational conditions in the students' academic achievement. Finally, Ferreyra (2007) also shows the relevance of students' personal characteristics in the academic performance.

De Gallardo and De Faría (2006) concluded that students' setting of high goals promotes a higher commitment and effort. In the same regard, Caso-Niebla and Hernández (2007) claim that students' academic success or failure depends on the kind of strategies they use as those strategies determine the time spent and the efforts made in the learning process. Moreover, Caso-Niebla and Hernández (2007) articulate studying strategies with affective-motivational conditions saying that successful academic results depend on the individuals' confidence on the ability to solve problems or perform tasks through the organization and execution of previous actions. Finally, personal characteristics were also considered as an influential factor in academic performance. Ferreyra (2007) found that factors such as gender, marital status, age, type of residence and type of school affect students' academic performance in the university. Given these conclusions, the last studies will be helpful to understand how students cope with academic demands, as well as to widen the concept of academic performance. Therefore, we currently confirm an increasing interest to understand students' performance from a more social perspective in which school contexts actively participate.

Within the outer-related factors, we found there are some studies more interested in the influence that the school-related variables have in students' academic performance. In this sense, Montero, Villalobos, and Valverde (2007) and Correa (2004) acknowledge the impact that institutional elements, as well as the relationships students establish with peers have on students' outcomes. Montero, Villalobos, and Valverde (2007) stand out the relevance of using participatory techniques for the enhancement of students' academic performance. Besides, Aguilar-Rivera (2007) suggests that peer and institutional support facilitates students' integration to a new context and the establishment of social relationships.

Following the aforementioned, Correa (2004) asserts that there are some institutions that offer better opportunities for the students to achieve better grades due to its quality and its ability to compensate social inequities. In relation to Correa's findings, Montero, Villalobos, and Valverde (2007) relate educational quality with teachers' attendance to updating activities which resulted in higher students' grades. In this line, Aguilar-Rivera (2007) concludes that institutional actions play an important role to facilitate students' social integration, which influence students' educational commitment. Aguilar-Rivera (2007) adds that this integration results harder for migrant students. Finally, we believe these research studies help us understand higher academic performances as the result of establishing accurate relationships with the alterity.

As seen in the previous research studies, academic performance does not encompass a single unidirectional factor. Academic performance involves a set of elements that allow for an integral understanding of students' learning not only in terms of results, but also in terms of processes. Therefore, considering aspects that go beyond students' inherent characteristics, as

well as those that result from social interactions becomes a way of transforming the instrumental conception of academic performance usually used for technical purposes.

Theoretical framework

Considering that migration is a sociocultural phenomenon that not only shape the adaptation process of migrant students, but also the way they academically perform in response to the university demands, we decided to address the following concepts and theories. These concepts and theories serve as the analytical basis for our research study.

Sociocultural theory

In the framework of *Sociocultural theory*, Vygotsky as cited in Scott and Palincsar (2013) suggest that there is a relationship between the development of higher individual mental functioning and the cultural, institutional and historical context in which he/she is immersed. This relationship is affected by social interactions where people undertake roles that influence their psychological development. From this perspective, Vygotsky explains the nature of the interconnection between the individual learning and development, and the social processes (Scott & Palincsar, 2013).

Wertsch (1993) found three major themes in Vygotsky's writings that reflect the nature of this relationship. The first theme refers to the individual development and its origins in social bases. The second theme refers to the use of physical or symbolic tools by individuals to express and interact with others, facilitating the construction and co-construction of knowledge. The third theme proposes that "Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and with his peers (…)" (p. 90). After presenting these three themes, Wertsch (1993) explains, in relation to the Vygotskian *Sociocultural theory*, that real learning results in mental development of emotions and developmental processes that cannot be separated from learning. The former means that learning is a multifactorial and multidimensional process shaped by social interactions aimed at developing all individual mental functions (Wertsch, 1993).

Ecological perspective

The ecological human development theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994) claims that "(…) human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving, biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate [ecological] environment" (1994, p. 38). This ecological environment is conceived "(…) as a set of nested structures, each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). The previous implies that human development takes place through interaction between human beings and all the elements that compose the different contexts in which someone is involved (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). Moreover, the author asserts that the transitions throughout different scenarios imply a transformation of behaviors and attitudes imposed by the setting or the situation.

Sociocultural adaptation

Savicki (2010) asserts that one person is successfully adapted when "(…) he or she knows how to behave according to the norms of the foreign culture in which they are living" (p. 205). In addition, Ward (as cited in Savicki, 2010) states that "(…) sociocultural adaptation is based on learning the skills and knowledge necessary to reduce the difficulties with the

foreignness of a different culture" (p. 205). Besides, several factors shape the processes of adaptation including the acculturative stress, the sociocultural stressors, the contributors to sociocultural adaptation and the variability of adaptation (Savicki, 2010)

Acculturative stress refers to the disorientation resulted of cross-cultural transitions (Sandhu & Asrabadi cited in Yakunina et al., 2013) in which a set of practical, cultural and social difficulties intervene (Yakunina et al., 2013). As students adjust to the host cultures, they may cope with confusing or exciting experiences, scenarios and situations that favor or refrain their adaptation process (Savicki, 2010). Savicki also states that cultural stressors such as social practices, beliefs and language issues are present in each individual experience.

The process of adaptation is also related to some contributors that may facilitate the sociocultural level of adjustment to a new culture, such as having friends from different backgrounds or having some previous travel experiences (Bennett as cited in Savicki, 2010). Savicki asserts that adaptation processes are not the same for everyone. In this sense, individual experiences and strategies are determinant in the variability of the adaptation process (2010).

Acculturation process

Acculturation refers to the social and psychological integration of second language learners with the target language community (Schumann, 1986). Acculturation levels of second language learners define the degree to which the target language is acquired "(…) on a continuum that ranges from social and psychological distance to social and psychological proximity" (Schumann, 1986, p. 379). In this sense, Schumann (1986) establishes a set of social and psychological variables that hinder or favor contact with the target group.

Moreover, these variables influence acculturation, and therefore, language acquisition. For our research project, we considered two specific variables: cultural congruence and ego permeability. First, cultural congruence refers to similarities found by learners in the target cultural scenario (Schumann, 1986). Second, ego permeability is the disinhibition and openness of learners to interact with the target group, and the target language (Schumann, 1986).

Regardless of the former theoretical approach to acculturation, we explicitly acknowledge that our study does not take account of language acquisition processes, but intercultural adjustment processes in terms of sociocultural factors that might influence the academic performance of migrant students undertaking the English Language Teaching Program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó. Hence, we find it necessary to broaden the perspective on the concept of acculturation, considering the importance of addressing it as a "(…) multidimensional and bidirectional process" (Albert, 2006, p. 12), in which the presence of cultural movements demands an analysis from their constitutive elements: distance, direction and velocity (Valdés 2002). Moreover, Aguirre (1997) addresses the acculturation concept as "the resulting process of direct and continuous contact between two cultures that derive themselves mutual cultural influences (sometimes of predominance), that involve reciprocal changes between the cultures in contact" (p. 260).

Intercultural adjustment

Matsumoto, Hirayama, and LeRoux (2005) conceptualize intercultural adjustment from the primary understanding of adaptation, which is defined as "(…) the process of altering one's behavior to fit in with a changed environment or circumstances, or as a response to social pressure" (pp. 383-384). Therefore, the concept of intercultural adjustment represents people's subjective experiences in relation not only to processes of adaptation, but also to the notion of well-being (Matsumoto et al., 2005). The aforementioned approach emerges as a widened perspective of intercultural adjustment in which it is assumed that living in a new and different

context requires a set of coping skills to deal with the stressful situations that the intercultural contact and change provoke (Ward as cited in Matsumoto et al., 2005) Thus, Matsumoto et al. (2003) review a group of psychological skills that enable adjustment to new cultural scenarios as follows, emotion regulation, openness, flexibility and critical thinking. First, emotion regulation is the main skill inasmuch as it favors the control, management and regulation of reactions related to stressful and conflictive intercultural situations (Matsumoto et al., 2003). Second, critical thinking supposes the creation of cultural, cognitive and behavioral schemes as a result of interaction (Matsumoto et al., 2003). Last, openness and flexibility appear as necessary skills to engage into processes of critical thinking and reorganization of cognitive frameworks, which promotes the expansion of individuals' response repertoire to situations lived in new environments. (Matsumoto et al., 2003) We consider openness and flexibility to be the most significant skills for our research project, as they strengthen and complement the psychological domain of the approach to acculturation presented some lines above. However, there is a need to further address the social domain of our research in order to extensively and accurately explore the relationship among subjects within social and school contexts.

Societal and school contexts

Within the framework of his Contextual Interaction Model, Cortés (1986) suggests that a more convincing analysis of the educational effort and achievement of language minority group students, requires the transition from confused, decontextualized and single-cause explanations to strong, contextualized and holistic explanations. The Contextual Interaction Model addresses the changing dynamic, interactive and historic relationship between the societal and the school contexts as the path to understand achievement or underachievement of minority group students (Cortés, 1986). In this sense, Cortés (1986) presents some non-school societal factors that influence school context, as well as create "[…] the societal context in which educational institutions function" (p. 34). The factors presented in the model that are significant for our research project are the following: family, culture, socioeconomic status and educational level. These factors help us understand academic performance from the reciprocal implications of the societal and the school contexts, which represents a wide and balanced approach to academic performance.

Academic performance

Navarro (2003) conceptualizes academic performance as "a construct susceptible of adopting quantitative and qualitative values, through which there is an approximation to the evidence and to the dimension of abilities, knowledge, attitudes and values" (pp. 12-13). According to Navarro, "In the academic life ability and effort are not synonyms; the effort does not guarantee success and the ability starts to gain more relevance" (p. 1).

Furthermore, the author also considers relevant certain issues such as the influence of peers, the classroom and the educational context when the individual performance is studied (Navarro, 2003).

Research Question

How do sociocultural factors influence migrant students' academic performance in the English Language Teaching Program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó?

Research objectives

General objective

To explain the influence sociocultural factors have on migrant students' academic performance in the English Language Teaching Program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó.

Specific objectives

- To identify the sociocultural factors influencing migrant students' academic performance.
- To describe the sociocultural factors influencing migrant students' academic performance.
- To analyze the sociocultural factors influencing migrant students' academic performance.

Methodology

Context

This research study arises from the need to understand and explain how social and cultural related factors influence the academic performance of a representative sample group of migrant students within the university context. From an integrated perspective, we have come to understand that not only cognitive and emotional processes are involved in the way we learn, but also sociocultural factors that influence the success or failure in different academic scenarios. We have observed that those students who originally come from other regions usually deal with several issues that entangles the effective response to academic demands, as mentioned by Matsumoto et al. (as cited in Savicki, 2010) "when students are dropped into a foreign culture to study and live for an extended period of time, they face a booming, buzzing, confusion of cultural clashes (…)" (p. 206).

As pre-service and in-service teachers of a research group in Cultural Studies from the English Teaching Program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó, we acknowledge the importance of developing research projects that not only help us understand our reality but transform it from a critical perspective. In this sense, Grossberg (1996) suggests that the theoretical contributions of Cultural Studies empower people to undertake actions that intervene contexts and power. So conducting a research on this issue is an opportunity not only to deepen into University school culture, but also to examine it in terms of social justice, equity and social responsibility.

Type of study

Given that our general objective is to explain how sociocultural factors influence migrant students' academic performance, this study follows a socio-critical paradigm and a qualitative methodological approach with an explanatory scope. In relation to socio-critical paradigm, Alvarado and García (2008) mention that its intention is to promote the transformation of the social relationships and their inherent problems by resorting to the community reflection and action. Furthermore, regarding qualitative research, Pita and Pértegas (2002) asserts that "Qualitative research aims at identifying the profound nature of realities, its system of relations, and its dynamic structure" (p. 1). In consistency with the type

of study, we have chosen three data collection techniques which are a semi-structure interview, a narrative and a focus group.

Data collection techniques and procedures

We applied three data collection techniques during the development of the research project. First, we conducted a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions on each of the 13 participants. As researchers, we administered, recorded and transcribed interviews. We recorded interviews, which lasted 23 minutes roughly, using personal cellphones. Moreover, it is important to highlight that before the interview we delivered a consent form and filled a biodata format with the personal information of the participants. Second, six participants developed a narrative in which they had to describe their experiences in the target cultural scenario. Participants wrote the narrative using a previously shared Google® Forms format where they found the instructions to complete it. Third, we conducted a focus group with five participants and the support of three co-researchers.

Participants

We selected the participants based on a non-probability sampling method called "typical or intensive samples" "(…) in which cases of similar profile are chosen, but that are considered representative of a segment of the population, community or culture (not in a statistical sense, but in a prototypical one)" (Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2014, p. 388). Participants of this study were 13 students (7 women and 6 men) from other regions of Colombia (outside Medellín's Metropolitan Area) such as San Andrés, Montería, Amalfi, Sopetrán and Andes. Moreover, the chosen participants were enrolled from third to ninth semester of the English Teaching Program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó.

Ethical considerations

Regarding the ethical considerations for this study, it important to highlight that as a research group we are to hand in a research project yearly to the Institutional Research Board to maintain the group open. Our permission to conduct the study was granted as they gave us the authorization to continue developing projects at the beginning of the academic period. As researchers, we followed a set of actions to ensure ethical research practices, that is, we protected participants' identities; the information collected was kept in privacy to ensure participants' confidentiality. They signed up a consent form where we explained our research purpose, procedures and risks. Furthermore, we explained to the participants their possibility to withdraw from the research at any moment. As for the analysis process, we decided to use an alphabetical code system to identify the information each participant provided during the research process. We were the only ones who had access to participants' information as well as we were the only ones who knew the code system. Finally, we used the same system to reveal data along the research paper and public presentations.

Data analysis

As for the data analysis, we followed the process proposed by Renner and Taylor-Powell (2003) to analyze text or narrative data. While we were collecting all the information, we started the analysis process by examining data and establishing the purposes of the examination. The former was followed by the reduction of information through the development of a categorization system, often referred to as coding scheme, which was used

to group data that provided similar types of information. We accomplished this by searching for words or phrases that appeared several times throughout the scripts. We used different color markers to arrange the emerging categories. After developing the categories, we proceeded to describe the main features or characteristics of the resulting categories from the coding of data. In the next stage, we connected and related the information gathered from the different data collection techniques. Finally, we moved on to the interpretations in which we connected theory with major findings and patterns in order to provide relatable explanations on the studied phenomenon. During this stage, we examined all the information collected looking for relationships, contradictions and similarities.

Triangulation

Regarding research trustworthiness, we applied three processes of triangulation as follows: data, theory and investigator triangulation. During the research process, we carried out the application of different data collection techniques to people from different places of the country, and at different times. As Yuni and Urbano (2006) mention triangulation of data "consists of comparing data obtained from different sources, referring to the same action or the same event" (p. 177) Furthermore, we used different theoretical approaches to analyze the information. This is what Yuni and Urbano (2006) refer to as theory triangulation, defined as the application of "(…) different theoretical models to a set of data (…)" (p. 178). Finally, we analyzed and interpreted data in cooperative sessions in which all the co-researchers participated with the purpose of validating every finding. In this regard, Guion, Diehl, and McDonald (2002) assert that "investigator triangulation involves using several different investigators in the analysis process" (p. 1).

Results

After an exhaustive data analysis process, three final categories or sociocultural factors emerged to let us explain the influences they have on migrant students' academic performance: family support, intercultural adjustment and academic adaptation. In regard to family support, we identified that factors such as family-related emotional support, income, health conditions and educational background have a major influence on migrant students' academic performance. Concerning the intercultural adjustment, we found that these adjustment processes were facilitated or hindered by a set of overlapping factors such as the acculturation process, the hosting culture, the acculturative stress and the sociocultural stressors, as well as some other factors that contributed to the sociocultural adjustment. Finally, we found that migrants' previous academic experiences at certain specific school contexts had an important impact on their experience of adapting to the new university context. Academic adaptation became a significant result for this study since it allowed us to observe the evolution of migrants' academic performance.

Family support

Considering that family emotional support refers to the caring assistance family members provide to students as they deal with academic life and intercultural adjustment difficulties, we found that family support played an important role when students started copying with academic and intercultural challenges. This was the case for participant (D) who claimed that "(…) well, when I came [to the city], some cousins already lived here, so I came to live with them; they already knew how to move around the city, (…) they helped me a lot

with the adaptation process and the accommodation (…)"[1] (interview excerpt) Therefore, migrant students' cultural and academic adjustment were shaped by the emotional support their families provided. Students were more likely to take academic challenges and risks as long as they felt emotionally supported.

The caring assistance was not limited to the emotional support. Families also provided economic support for students who moved away from their homes. Student (D) said: "Yes, my family provides me with all the economic support I need to live here in Medellin"[2] (interview excerpt). Nonetheless, the socio-economic level of our participants did not seem to have any direct influence on their academic performance. For instance, student (D) who counted with family economic support, also reported: "I failed the course because at the beginning I did not put a lot of effort"[3] (Interview excerpt). In this sense, having all the family economic support not always resulted in successful academic performance. There were some inner factors, such as effort and motivation that could interfere with the academic process.

However, the family economic stability seemed to have an influence on students' emotional and psychological well-being since the intercultural adjustment implied new economic demands. This was evidenced by student (C) who stated that "it is my mom who looks after me and she earns a minimum wage (…) so, my mother's job is something that concerns me a lot, because there is never enough for anything"[4] (interview excerpt). Hence, a steady family income reduced students' economic-related concerns, promoting an emotional and psychological well-being that helped them focus their attention and effort on academic achievements.

Furthermore, family members' health conditions emerged as another concern that took students' attention away from academic issues, affecting time management and academic tasks accomplishment. This could be evidenced by student (E) who said: "(…) however, once the class was finished, I had to go to the hospital to talk to the physician who was taking care of my dad, she wanted to talk to me. I could not complete the assignments because the only thing I could think of was seeing my dad"[5] (narrative excerpt). Consequently, relatives' health conditions as well as the strategies used to cope with these unexpected events, influenced migrant students' academic performance. Health concerns tended to discourage students and reduced their ability to respond to academic demands, while their copying strategies affected their academic performance in general.

On the other hand, we found that family's educational background influenced migrant students' academic performance in two ways: those migrant students whose families had little educational background tended to receive less support and become more independent within academic scenarios as it was evidenced with student (E) "(…) I never call her [sister]. In our family, we believe that those who go should prove it they can make it. I never call my sister for that [academic support]. Even, my mom did not finish high school, neither did my dad.

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[1] "(…) bueno cuando yo llegué, ya habían unos primos que vivían acá, yo me vine pues a vivir con ellos. Ellos ya sabían cómo transportarse aquí en la ciudad, ya conocían muchos lugares y entonces, ellos me ayudaron mucho en el proceso de adaptación, eh, acomodación."

[2] "Si, mi familia me ofrece todo el apoyo económico que yo tengo acá para vivir en Medellín."

[3] (…) reprobé el curso fue, primero porque en parte por mí porque al principio no me esforcé."

[4] "Mi mamá es la que tiene que responder por mí y ella gana un mínimo entonces siempre es como si ella se queda sin trabajo eso puede incidir muchísimo en mi educación porque no tendría con qué pagar la universidad, entonces, el trabajo de mi mamá es algo que siempre me mantiene preocupada porque no siempre le alcanza para todo"

[5] "(…) sin embargo al salir de clase tuve que ir al hospital urgente porque la doctora que estaba atendiendo a mi papá quería dialogar. Los trabajos que tenía no los hice ya que lo único que pasaba por mi mente era ver a mi papá."

Only my sister and I are the ones struggling (…)"[6] (interview excerpt). While those whose families had a wider educational background tended to ask for and receive more support from their families as for the accomplishment of their academic tasks. For instance, student (H) asserted: "Usually, when I have any doubts about something, I ask them [parents and siblings], if they know, they helped me with the answers or they suggest some other resources, so I go on and do some research"[7] (interview excerpt). It can be said then, that migrant students learned to cope with academic life using the values and attitudes cultivated in their original homes.

Intercultural adjustment

We found that migrant students who reported fewer difficulties adjusting to the target culture, had greater possibilities to succeed within academic scenarios. For instance, when we asked student (J) if she/he had failed any subject during the time at the university, she/he answered "No, not so far"[8] (interview excerpt). This migrant student mentioned that "[it took me] one month and a half to get used to everything (…)"[9] (interview excerpt), in addition, he/she considers his/her adjustment to the city as "(…) a satisfactory process because when one learns the basic things such as taking the bus, asking for directions, taking the Metro, (…) it is stick out in the mind like yes, now I know, I can perform that task, I am able to do it."[10] (Interview excerpt). In this sense, migrant students' sustained academic performance was related to their ability to cope with daily life challenges in a new city. In this case, the success depends on the relationship given between the quality of the difficulties encountered and the time needed to overcome those difficulties.

Students who found mismatches between their own and the foreign cultural scenario had fewer chances to acculturate and; therefore, to timely adjust to the target cultural context. As student (L) mentioned "(…) we have different ways of thinking, living, different lifestyles, including the way we dress, what we eat, everything. Then it was a little difficult [at the beginning]"[11] (interview excerpt). Furthermore, she/he added in relation to her/his process of adjustment that "I can say that I am still in the [adaptation] process, the hardest thing to overcome happened during the first year"[12] (interview excerpt) In this sense, the time spent in the process of adjustment, is related to the cultural congruence students found at the moment of adjusting to the new culture.

In addition, the openness to cultural exchange and social interaction could favor or hinder the acculturation process as a step forward to achieve intercultural adjustment. As an example, student (I), talking about his/her adjustment process, said "I think not that much, just a little time [to adjust] because of my personality; I am very sociable and extrovert so, it was not difficult to make friends"[13] (interview excerpt). Hence, migrant students with a high ego

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[6] "(…) yo no la llamo para nada, nosotros creemos en que pues nuestra ideología o cosmovisión, es que salga y demuestre que usted puede. Sí, yo no llamo a mi hermana para nada, incluso mi mamá no terminó el bachiller, mi papá tampoco. Solo somos mi hermana y yo que estamos luchando (…)"

[7] "(…) por lo general cuando tengo pues algunas dudas si, obvio, les pregunto. Pues si ellos saben me responden o pues me sugieren otros sitios para ir a investigar."

[8] "No, hasta el momento no"

[9] "Mes y medio, acostumbrarme a todo (…)"

[10] "Considero que fue un proceso satisfactorio porque cuando uno ya aprende las cosas básicas como tomar el bus, preguntar direcciones, tomar el metro (…) uno como que le queda en la mente como que ¡sí! Ya sé, ya puedo desempeñarme, soy capaz."

[11] "(…) tenemos diferentes formas de pensar, de vivir, diferentes estilos de vida, inclusive, en la forma pues de, de nosotros vestir, de comer, de todo. Entonces siempre fue un poquito difícil."

[12] "Yo digo que todavía estoy en proceso pero yo creo que así como, lo que superé como más fuerte fue el primer año"

[13] "Pues yo creo que nada, pues muy poquito tiempo porque mi forma de ser es digamos muy amigable, muy extrovertida, entonces para encontrar amigos no fue muy difícil."

permeability can have more opportunities to adjust themselves to the new culture and sort the challenges imposed by the multiple cultural incongruences they might find. In other words, migrant students' intercultural adjustment process depended on the quality of social and psychological integration to the target culture.

On the other hand, we found that migrant students' intercultural adjustment could be influenced by the cultural reception they receive and perceive from the host culture. As student (A) said "Well, when I arrived here I used to live with a lady who guided me (…) because I did not know how to get around"[14] (Interview excerpt). Therefore, migrant students who found a fostering cultural reception faced fewer cultural clashes in relation to the contextual ways of being, living and interpreting the world.

In spite of the aforementioned, some students with fostering cultural receptivity went through long processes of adjustment. As student (H) said, "(…) people from here [the university] helped me a lot, especially during the first semester, they supported me, they helped me, and I met good friends and classmates"[15] (interview excerpt). Besides, this student went through a long adjustment, "For real, [it took to me] one year… In general, I am not very sociable, then it has been very difficult for me (…)"[16] (interview excerpt). In this sense, cultural fostering accompanied by irregular processes of socialization with the target group members, provoked the intercultural adjustment delay.

Furthermore, we found that cultural fostering represented in constant support from university agents favored a more successful academic life. As student (C) said, "(…) some people, in some aspects of my life, have welcomed me in a very good way, while there are some others who have not. Here at the university, I have been doing well because my teachers have welcomed me well"[17] (interview excerpt). Hence, as long as migrant students felt culturally accepted and academically supported within university scenarios, there were more probabilities to get successful academic performances.

We also found that migrant students faced a set of stressful situations that hindered the adjustment process length, such as the establishment of effective communication and the familiarization with the city. For instance, student (L) asserted that "At the beginning, it was difficult to make myself understand to other people"[18] (Interview excerpt). Besides that, he/she added, "I can say that I am still in the [adaptation] process, the hardest thing to overcome happened during the first year"[19] On the other hand, student (D) claimed that "I would not be able to say specifically how much time [it took me to get used to the new culture], but it was around one year. It was difficult, in the sense that, well, first it is a big city, I come from a town, and the change was abrupt, because well, here you need buses, everything is bigger, the city noise, buildings, everything, eh, and besides, the culture"[20] (Interview excerpt). In this sense, the time consumed during the intercultural adjustment process involved the overcoming of

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[14] "Bueno, cuando llegué aquí pues vivía con una señora que era la que me guiaba aquí, porque como no conocía"

[15] "(…) la gente de acá me ayudó mucho, especialmente con el primer semestre, me apoyaron, me ayudaron, y pues conocí buenos amigos y compañeros."

[16] "La verdad un año porque…yo por lo general no soy muy sociable, entonces para mí se me dificulto mucho (…)"

[17] "(…) algunas personas en algunos aspectos pues de mi vida me han recibido bien, como hay algunas que no lo han hecho; acá en la universidad me ha ido muy bien porque los profesores me han acogido bien"

[18] "Digamos que lo de entenderme con las otras personas al principio si fue difícil"

[19] "Yo digo que todavía estoy en proceso pero yo creo que así como, lo que superé como más fuerte fue el primer año"

[20] "No te sabría decir específicamente cuánto tiempo, pero si alrededor de un año, un año y medio, eh, fue un poco difícil, en el sentido de que, bueno, primero una ciudad grande, pues yo vengo de un pueblo, y el cambio fue brusco porque, bueno, acá tú necesitas buses, todo es más grande, el ruido de la ciudad, edificios, todo, eh, y aparte pues la cultura."

stressful and unexpected situations encountered by migrant students as they found their own way out.

Students who had started their migration experiences at early ages for schooling purposes tended to undergo fewer difficulties within the host culture. For instance, student (B) said, "(…) I moved from Zaragoza, where I was born, to Jericó in order to pursuit my secondary studies"[21] (focus group excerpt). She/ he reported to have had a quick adjustment to the city. As she/he also mentioned when referring to taking public transport in the city, "it was not that complex"[22] (interview excerpt) because "I had already come many times [to Medellín]"[23] (interview excerpt) Thus, the combination of having visited the city before and having had academic experiences out of the birthplace might contribute to the process of adjustment.

We have evidenced that migrant students' openness and flexibility also had an influence in the way students cope with the multiple stressors. We bring up the case of student (I) who said that "When you start to interact with people, you start to make friends, you make up groups, and then you start to be [with them]"[24] (focus group excerpt), he/she also showed a satisfactory response to cultural challenges. As the same student mentioned, "I tried to do my best to get home, not to get lost, to avoid danger"[25] (Interview excerpt) what this demonstrates is that students' active insertion in the target cultural dynamics promotes a process of cultural schemes re-adaptation. That is to say, the acquisition of skills to face the challenges of new scenarios.

Academic adaptation

We could identify that academic and educational background had a direct influence on migrants' academic performance. Participants who came from high schools where the English proficiency level was poor, experienced more difficulties to cope with academic demands. That is the case of student (I) who said "(…) I finished high school with a very basic linguistic level [English], (…) that's why I cancelled the course, not because of the course itself, but because of my linguistic level"[26] (focus group excerpt). The former means that, students with limited academic previous experiences had fewer opportunities to adapt successfully to the new university academic demands.

We also found that students who came from rural areas and public institutions were less proficient in the language use than urban students. For instance, student (I) said that "(…) In regard to the difficulties I went through, let's say it was during the first semesters that I had a shock, especially because I came from a village school that wasn't very good, I came with no English at all. So, I had to learn English here at the university."[27] (focus group excerpt) In this sense, students who came from distant and rural areas felt and were in disadvantaged compared to urban students.

Being immersed in a culture away from their homes, makes migrant students develop new copying strategies as they get culturally impregnated by the school culture. As student (A) suggests "(…) I know I have to try harder and be more committed to my responsibilities in

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[21] "Yo de Zaragoza que fue donde nací, me fui a estudiar a Jericó."

[22] "No fue tan complejo."

[23] "Ya había venido muchas veces."

[24] "(…) ya después de que uno interactúa con la gente uno empieza a conseguir amistades, se forman los grupos, entonces uno comienza a andar con [ellos]"

[25] "Trataba como de hacer todo lo posible para llegar a mi casa y no perderme y no me pasara nada"

[26] "Salí con un nivel muy, muy básico, prácticamente nulo del colegio, (…) Por eso cancelé el curso, pero fue por el nivel lingüístico no digámoslo por la materia pero por mi nivel lingüístico."

[27]"(…) en cuanto a la dificultad que tuve, digámoslo, fue como en los primeros semestres, digámoslo en cuanto a mi nivel lingüístico cuando viene de un colegio público -en especial de un pueblo- no era muy bueno, entonces llegué prácticamente nulo, entonces tuve un choque muy grande y vine a aprender el idioma fue acá en la universidad"

order to academically perform better. I feel happy and proud of my academic achievements."[28] (Narrative excerpt). The cultural differences students found as they responded to the academic demands represented more a challenge rather than a difficulty to overcome and bring them to experience feelings of self-accomplishment.

In regard to the support perceived from peers and teachers, results evidenced that unstable student-teacher rapport might have an influence on migrant students' academic performance. In this sense, student (B), who failed a subject, said "(…) I had an issue with my teacher and I still don't understand why or what it was that I did wrong (…) I think it was something more personal"[29] (Interview excerpt). Considering the aforementioned, it can be said that an emotional balanced environment and healthy interactions with colleagues and teachers (social and academic integration) benefited academic life.

Discussion

Regarding family support, those students who move from one context to another and have positive family relationships are more likely to successfully adjust to the new challenges and demands they face. These positive relationships instill them with confidence to take risk and adventure not only within the target culture, but also within the academic life. In this sense, Aguilar-Rivera (2007) found that, "students who have a high perception of family support set better relationships with peers and teachers; and furthermore, they are more focused on achieving their academic goals" (p. 4). The steady perception of high emotional balance in which family becomes crucial, results in successful academic performance.

Concerning the socioeconomic level, we could acknowledge that the socio-economic level has an influence on students' outcomes. Migrant students with less economic difficulties can focus their attention on school duties. This is consistent with what Naylor and Smith (as cited in Ferreyra, 2007) found, "students' socio-economic level shape their chance of having a successful academic life" (p. 19). Therefore, having an economic stability help students to avoid economic-related distractions and apprehensions when they move away from their parenting place. In the same thread, learning to manage their own income is another learning issue students go through as they adjust to their new life.

Moreover, family health conditions appear as another factor that has a significant impact on students' academic performance. Migrant students' attention and well-being is affected in a negative way when a relative is under bad health conditions. We consider important to take this into account since our evidence reveals that relatives' health conditions can discourage students; it can affect their attention and motivation to the point that influence their academic performance.

In relation to family educational background, our findings reveal that students' families with wider educational background tend to get more involved in students' academic life events. Consistently, Giovagnoli (2002) states that "(…) the more formal education parents have incorporated, the more value they give to more years of study" (p. 20). Thus, parents' involvement in students' academic life provide better opportunities for the students to solve and cope with the demands encountered when they migrate to a different educational scenario.

In relation to the intercultural adjustment, the influence of the sociocultural factors on migrant students' academic performance is related to their ability to adjust to the host culture. The ways students experience their adaptation processes to the new culture would affect the

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[28] "(…) sé que con más empeño y dedicación las voy a lograr. Reacciono feliz y orgullosa de mis avances que he tenido."

[29] "Ahí fue donde tuve la dificultad con el docente y esta es la hora y todavía como que no logro entender por qué o qué, no sé. (…) creo que fue algo más bien personal"

way they deal with academic demands. This is consistent with what Nasir (2012) found, "students with inadequate cultural adjustment may find academic tasks more difficult and show poor academic performance" (p. 101). Nonetheless, some students with smooth intercultural adjustment processes might find academic difficulties inasmuch as some other factors such as student-teacher relationship, academic burden and teachers' methodology can have an influence on students' academic dynamics.

Migrant students who find several similarities between their own culture and the foreign cultural scenario, as well as those who openly involve into practices of socialization, have greater chances to acculturate and, therefore, to adjust to the cultural context. In this regard, Basabe and Bobowik (2013) suggest that the permeability of the boundaries established by two cultural groups, as well as the interconnection between those cultures depend on a higher relative likeliness between them. Furthermore, new cultural scenarios challenge students to develop strategies such as keeping in contact with the culture in itself and with the target group members, with the purpose of dealing with stressful situations.

Migrant students' face fewer cultural clashes when they receive and perceive fostering cultural receptivity. In this sense, Benatuil and Laurito (2009) affirms, "(…) it is important for the host country to have characteristics of cultural diversity, and to be a society based on an open and receptive culture with low levels of xenophobia" (p. 129). Even though having a fostering cultural receptivity might influence the intercultural adjustment, it does not guarantee short adjustment processes inasmuch as it is necessary to get involved into regular processes of socialization. However, cultural fostering does promote improved or successful academic performances from migrant students.

The familiarization with the city as well as the establishment of effective communication become stressful and challenging situations for migrant students. Although those situations help delay the adjustment process time, it is possible to have a successful academic performance within a long process of adjustment since it also depends on the quality of the difficulties encountered; academic performance also depends on the relationship between intercultural adjustment quality and time. In addition, the multiple stressors migrant students usually find can be overcome with the help of previous travel experiences, as well as with the help of students' openness and flexibility.

Finally, those students who have previously visited the target city with academic purposes develop more strategies to cope with the challenges imposed by the new context. Furthermore, migrant students' openness and flexibility become sociocultural contributors to cope with the cultural challenges and difficulties. In this sense, migrants' ongoing and flexible contact with the target culture, promotes a cultural re-adaptation in which it is evident the acquisition of skills to face a new cultural context. In this regard, Benatuil and Laurito (2009) say, talking about the achievement of bicultural identities, that in this process "(…) it has great relevance the personality characteristics, the age, the flexibility, the ability to establish bounds with the local subjects, the level of cultural sensitivity and the openness degree to experience" (p. 129).

Regarding academic adaptation, results helped us explain that the academic adaptation to the university context is influenced by students' previous academic experiences. Ferreyra (2007) found that "(…) average grades obtained in secondary school were a relevant element to explain university performance in all cases." (p. 5). We could observe, for example, the difficulties rural students experienced compared to urban students. As it was evidenced with acquisition of the language, where urban students were more knowledgeable of English than rural students. This let us notice the big gap produced between urban and rural education as well as private and public education in terms of quality and opportunities.

However, the academic adaptation is closely related to the social adjustment migrant students achieve. That is, as students get familiar with the host culture and university context,

they start to establish bonds and relations that help them settle down and respond to the academic and cultural demands. According to Aguilar-Rivera (2007) "Social integration emerges as a compatibility and understanding of the university community, with special focus on the relations and bonds with the teachers and classmates" (p. 3). Thus, the cultural opportunities offered by the host context, challenge students for the acquisition of new copying strategies while they impregnate and get impregnated with the new cultural scenario.

From a democratic perspective, we believe that when rural and urban students are given opportunities to work collaboratively in academic tasks, they learn democratic values that result in better academic performance. According to Burke and Short (1991) collaboration is characterized by the ways in which group members think and work together (p. 24). She also mentions that "as socio-affective human beings, we actively seek relations with others. Our emotional, intellectual and physical wellbeing is invested in others because it is as social beings that our worlds becomes multidimensional" (p. 14) Collaboration strategies contribute to promote more democratic interactions as students learn about themselves, the others and the host culture in general.

Drawing on the results obtained and the discussion developed in this study, we assert that migrant students' academic performance is the process and result in which family-related factors, intercultural adjustment processes and academic adaptation are involved in a dialogical and reciprocal relationship. Thus academic performance becomes a multidimensional concept in which values, attitudes and knowledge are interwoven in an intersubjective construction where students develop a self-perception of their own limitations, capabilities and achievements. Academic performance is better explained from a holistic perspective where not only inner-related factors interfere, but also sociocultural factors become determining as students migrate to new cultural scenarios.

Recommendations

Considering the previous conclusions, we suggest to the university a set of strategies to be considered as the path to promote inclusive, equitable and fair pedagogical practices. First, migrant students should be offered an introductory program during the first year. This program could be helpful to enhance migrants' adjustment processes not only to the university life, but also to the cultural dynamics.

Consistently, it is important for teachers to examine how students' cultural backgrounds enter the class to provide them with opportunities that enable the expression of cultural diversity within the classroom. In this sense, teachers should aim at transforming classes in time and spaces for students to express who they are and how they live in the world. From a socio-critical perspective and in terms of social justice and equity, we believe that sociocultural differences should represent an opportunity for the English Teaching Program to integrate to the curriculum issues related to cultural diversity, otherness and alterity.

In addition, we suggest developing a big brother and sister program in which migrant students get the necessary assistance from experienced peers. In that way, students learn to deal with the stressors they usually find as long as they deal with different cultural and academic demands. This program could be accompanied by a cultural fair in which students can present their cultural lifestyle and how different or similar they perceive and interpret the world.

For further research projects, we suggest the exploration of issues that promote democracy, inclusion and diversity in university contexts. We believe it would be very beneficial for the learning and teaching processes to research topics related to minority groups such as African-Colombian students, student single mothers and LGBTI population. The prior would facilitate the construction of an intercultural perspective on education in which class learning becomes useful for life.

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