

**Challenges and Impacts on Student Integration  
and Educational Sustainability in Multicultural and  
Multilingual Settings - Insights from a Teacher Training Program**

**(Retos e impactos en la integración de los estudiantes y la  
sostenibilidad educativa en entornos multiculturales y  
multilingües - Perspectivas de un programa de formación docente)**

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**Abstract:** The Autonomous Community of Valencia, through the regional Department of Education, Universities and Employment and Centres for Training, Innovation and Educational Resources of the Valencian Community (CEFIRE, *Centros de Formación, Innovación y Recursos Educativos*, in Spanish), provides training programs for teachers designed to meet the specific needs of schools in the region. This article presents the preliminary findings of a study conducted between 2022 and 2024 on the training experiences of teachers in Alicante regarding the linguistic inclusion of immigrant students in several schools located in the province of Alicante. In this context, the training focused

on teaching Spanish as a lingua franca to facilitate the integration of immigrant students. During the training sessions, several challenges impacting the effective inclusion of these students in classrooms were identified. Those challenges have negative consequences for the social integration of children and their families, as well as for achieving the objectives of the school curriculum, making them highly relevant for this research. The research method employed was contextual observation of teachers' insights during training sessions, using official data provided by the regional Department of Education (*Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura, Universitats i Ocupació*) as a reference and development point. Results showed that different school circumstances can hinder students' successful integration into multicultural and multilingual contexts, which may have an immediate impact on the sustainability of the educational and social systems. These findings represent a turning point for studying other schools in the Valencia region and potentially extrapolating them to other Spanish autonomous communities.

**Keywords:** Teacher training. Multiculturalism and Multilingualism. Early Childhood and Primary Education. Integration. Sustainable Development.

**Resumen:** La Comunidad Valenciana, a través de la Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura, Universitats i Ocupació y los Centros de Formación, Innovación y Recursos Educativos de la Comunidad Valenciana (CEFIRE), ofrece programas de formación para profesores diseñados para satisfacer las necesidades específicas de los centros educativos de la región. Este artículo presenta las conclusiones preliminares de un estudio desarrollado entre 2022-2024 sobre las experiencias formativas de un grupo de docentes en relación con la inclusión lingüística de alumnos inmigrantes en algunos centros educativos de la provincia de Alicante. En este contexto, la formación demandada se centró en la enseñanza del español como lengua franca para la integración de estudiantes extranjeros. Durante las sesiones se encontraron cuestiones que podían afectar a la inclusión efectiva del alumnado extranjero. Estos temas tienen consecuencias negativas tanto para la integración social de los niños y sus familias, como para alcanzar los objetivos del plan de estudios escolar y por eso, se consideraron relevantes para esta investigación. El método utilizado en el estudio fue observacional basado en la participación de los docentes durante la formación y se apoyó, como referencia y punto de desarrollo, en los datos oficiales ofrecidos por la Conselleria d'Educació mencionada. Los resultados mostraron que distintas circunstancias de los centros pueden dificultar el éxito de la integración en contextos multiculturales y multilingües, lo que puede tener un impacto inmediato en la sostenibilidad del sistema educativo y social. Los resultados obtenidos son un

punto de inflexión para estudiar otros centros educativos de la Comunidad Valenciana y extrapolarlos a otras autonomías.

**Palabras clave:** Formación docente. Multiculturalismo y multilingüismo. Educación Infantil y Primaria. Integración. Desarrollo sostenible.

## 1. Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a comprehensive action plan to benefit people, the planet, and prosperity by promoting world peace and ensuring access to justice. Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, this study focuses on two of them: quality education (SGD4) and reducing inequality (SGD10). The primary objective of these goals is to promote social inclusion and reduce disparities, especially for vulnerable groups. Education must aim to equip students with knowledge and skills that are not only academic but also personal, with the ultimate goal of facilitating effective integration and minimizing socio-cultural differences. To achieve this objective, it is crucial to ensure that teachers receive both initial and continuing professional development to enable them to adapt to the current multi-lingual and multicultural school environment.

Plurilingual competence (or plurilingualism), as explained in section 1.3 of the *Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)* (2001), involves the ability to flexibly use an interrelated, irregular and plurilingual language repertoire to, among others, mediate between individuals who do not share a common language (or dialect or linguistic variety), even in situations where there is limited shared knowledge. This concept was further strengthened in the *CEFR Companion Volume* (2018). However, the notion of pluriculturalism is still underdeveloped in the Framework. Furthermore, there are currently no guidelines that explain how these two concepts are embedded in school curricula. Consequently, educators must refer to the *Guide for the Development and Implementation of Curricula for Plurilingual and Intercultural Education* (2016) for information that connects the *CEFR* conceptualizations to school settings.

In this guide, integrating language learning in schools by implementing plurilingual and intercultural education is another way to develop the curricula. This process begins by aligning the foreign language teaching/learning goals with those of the school language of instruction or the language taught as a school subject. It is important to pay special attention to the cognitive processes involved in language-related activities, various types of text, language varieties (including the language used for instruction), and the different strategies for using

these languages. Similarly, when teaching a new language, it is crucial to build on the foundation laid by the language of instruction, while highlighting any differences that exist between the two languages.

Teacher's awareness of the connections between all the languages skills in the plurilingual language repertoire contributes to expanding and consolidating language learning. Therefore, when teaching languages at school, it is essential to consider cross-curricular intercultural skills, especially the ability *to know how to learn* and *to commit oneself*. Furthermore, promoting student autonomy, encouraging reflection on the objectives attained, linguistic and (inter)cultural experiences, progress, and critical observation is indispensable.

In short, to meet the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals in Early Childhood and Primary Education, students must learn a language of instruction that promotes effective communication and facilitates the development of the academic curriculum, considering the learner's cultural and linguistic knowledge. Such a perspective is crucial for the successful integration and inclusion of non-national students in both schools and society.

The Spanish Organic Law (*Ley Orgánica*) on the Improvement of the Quality of Education (LOMCE in Spanish, 2013) stipulated that Spanish is the common language of education statewide, together with other co-official languages in the respective Autonomous Communities in accordance with their regional Statutes and applicable regulations. However, the Organic Law amending the law on Organic Education (*Ley Orgánica, LOMLOE* in Spanish 2020), removed all the references to Spanish as a language of communication. The law establishes that the vehicular language is determined according to the provisions of the different Autonomous Communities.

This serves as an introduction to the study presented here, which followed an observational research method focused on the actions and ideas shared by teachers in various schools in the province of Alicante, specifically in Primary and Early Childhood Education. These observations took place during a language training course organized by the *Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura, Universitats i Ocupació* of the Valencia Region. The primary aim of these courses is to equip teachers with the necessary tools for teaching additional languages, thereby promoting the effective integration and inclusion of non-national students. It is hoped that these efforts will help establish sustainable schools that align with the goals of the 2030 Agenda and the European Union.

The main objective of this research was to analyse information gathered in schools regarding integration and linguistic diversity during training sessions and, subsequently, to examine the official documents and data provided by the autonomous community. The information obtained highlights the actions taken

by each school, its principal, and the teaching staff, underscoring the significance of this study. Official reports provide objective data that facilitate the drawing of conclusions and results. This work aims to highlight the unique challenges teachers face in implementing language training and integrating all students, regardless of their language, culture, or background.

The findings indicate that the multicultural and multilingual circumstances within the schools make achieving full and rapid integration difficult despite the dedicated efforts of teachers. This situation has an immediate impact on the sustainability of the education system in both the medium and long term, as well as on the social integration of children and their families.

For future research, this study could be expanded to include other areas and centres in the province and the Valencia region. This will enable comparisons with other autonomous communities in Spain to observe the real impact and sustainability of migration within the Spanish education system and its implications for society.

Below, some issues relevant to the study are reviewed.

#### *1.1. Socio-cultural and Educational Context of the Autonomous Community of Valencia (Spain)*

According to the World Migration Report of 2022 from the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 1951), the number of immigrants living in Europe has significantly increased since 2015. The report states that the total number of international immigrants living in European territories reached nearly 87 million in 2020, which is a 16% increase compared to the 2015 data.

In Spain, as per the data from the National Statistics Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, INE, in Spanish) (2023), the resident population increased by 135,186 people in the second quarter of 2023, reaching 48,345,223 residents as of July 1, 2023. Such an increase represents the highest value in the historical series, with an annual estimated population growth of 537,611 people. The number of non-nationals also increased by 100,394 in the second quarter, reaching 6,335,419 as of July 1, 2023. As a result, the Spanish population increased by 34,792 people.

Regarding the Spanish population by region and cities, during the third quarter of 2023, it is estimated that it increased in all the Autonomous Communities, including the Autonomous Cities of Ceuta and Melilla. However, the most significant relative increases were observed in the Balearic Islands (0.45%), Valencia (0.45%), and Madrid (0.42%).

A study by Asti (2023) —a pastoral body of the Diocese of Orihuela-Alicante for the reception, promotion and integration of immigrants in Spain—, has

shown that the United Kingdom, Germany, and Colombia are the nationalities that have most increased their presence in Alicante. Based on data extracted from the Spanish National Institute of Statistics in January 2022, the report confirms that the United Kingdom (19.9%) is the nationality with the highest representation in Alicante, followed by Morocco (12%), Romania (6.3%), Colombia (5.4%), and Russia (4.4%). In other words, almost one in five immigrants in the province of Alicante is of British origin. It is also worth noting that 60.4% of the newly arrived residents of this region come from mainland Europe. Even though their data is not included in official statistics, their presence is increasingly growing in schools.

The province of Alicante is home to several municipalities with a large immigrant population. Alicante City has the highest number of newly arrived residents (13%), followed by Torrevieja (8.7%), Orihuela (7.2%), Elche (6.9%), and Benidorm (5.3%). The website of the Regional Government of Alicante (*Diputación de Alicante*) provides detailed reports on the foreign population in each municipality, highlighting the increase experienced in recent years. These reports offer insight into the multicultural and plurilingual environment of schools in the province, where a wide range of nationalities have already settled permanently.

### *1.2. Previous Experiences and Work related to the Study*

This study is part of a research project that began in 2022, focusing on the training experiences of teachers working in Early Childhood and Primary schools located in Alicante (Del Olmo Ibañez 2022; Villarrubia Zúñiga 2022). In the Valencian Community, there are professional development initiatives for teachers working in these learning stages with the objective of promoting the integration of immigrant students. These initiatives are conducted within the framework of Welcome Plans implemented in schools that receive such profiles of student populations.

Previous studies have focused on pre-service university students' perceptions of their teaching competence regarding multiculturalism and multilingualism (Del Olmo and Cremades 2019; Del Olmo et al. 2022). The research aimed to determine whether the educational system is adequately preparing future teachers to address the linguistic and cultural diversity found in schools. Ongoing research (Del Olmo et al. 2023a; Del Olmo et al. 2023b) has also explored linguistic and cultural diversity in the current school context from regional, national, and international perspectives, both theoretically and practically.

The analysis presented here pertains to the training program for teachers in four schools offering Early Childhood and Primary Education in 2022-2024 by the Valencian Community in Alicante. The insights gained from this experience

are crucial for understanding the state of education in achieving effective educational integration and inclusion, as they threaten the continuity of basic educational levels necessary to advance to secondary education, university-track paths and other types of vocational education and training.

### *1.3. The Importance of Learning the Language of Instruction for Inclusive Education*

Considering the experiences of teacher trainers in schools in Alicante, it has become apparent that specific measures need to be implemented to encourage the acquisition of the dominant language. This will facilitate the establishment of a common language for communication and interaction in a plurilingual environment such as the one found in Alicante, thereby enabling inclusive education.

In this city, two official languages coexist: Spanish, Spain's official language, and Valencian, the co-official language of the Autonomous Community of Valencia. A study conducted in 2021 by the Service of Research and Sociolinguistic Studies of the Department of Culture from the Autonomous Community of Valencia (*Conocimiento y uso social del valenciano, Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura, Universitats i Ocupació 2021*) confirms that in regions such as Vega Baja and the high and middle Vinalopó, Spanish is predominantly spoken. Furthermore, statistical data on language use indicate that Spanish serves as the primary vehicular language across all sociocultural contexts, even in Valencian-speaking areas. These results highlight the necessity for a lingua franca in schools to facilitate communication within speech communities where several languages coexist within a single school.

A vehicular language or lingua franca is a crucial tool for enabling communication in the classroom and improving understanding of different messages, especially at initial levels. It acts as a means of comprehension and expression in the classroom, allowing students to follow the teachers' instructions, ask questions, and resolve doubts. In addition, we cannot forget that a lingua franca plays a key role in the students' expression of identity and affectivity, both in communicative exchanges in the classroom and in the self-regulation of the learning process, as well as in the reduction of anxiety and mental block.

## **2. Literature review**

To find studies conducted in the Spanish territory about this topic, we relied on the DIALNET search engine since it is an interdisciplinary bibliographic website created to give visibility to the scientific literature from the Spanish-speaking world. The search only considered books, book chapters, and journal

articles, and it was limited to papers published between 2018 and 2024. We used the Boolean operator (and) to combine the fundamental terms of this research ('Spanish', 'inclusion', 'schools', 'Early childhood education', 'Primary education', and 'vehicular language') and to limit and define the results.

The search based on the above-mentioned words included different combinations. For the search combination of 'educational inclusion' and 'vehicular language', we obtained 19 results. However, within the range of years, we were interested in, there were only two book chapters (Asensio and Medina 2023) and four journal articles (Medina 2018; Zamudio 2021; Querol-Bataller 2022; Boussif et al. 2024) published in Spain. The combination of 'linguistic integration' and 'case study' yielded only seven matches, from which one result was for a book (Pacheco Costa et al. 2020) and six for journal articles (Pozuelos and Travé 2018; Lapresta et al. 2019; Álvarez-Sotomayor and Gómez-Parra 2020; Alfonso-Bello 2020; Nikleva and Reche 2020; Soria and Palo 2023).

A similar search was unsuccessful using the Web of Sciences (WOS) database. However, in Scopus, and for the same terms, we found 273 results, from which only a couple corresponded with our interests. One is the work of Rodríguez-Izquierdo et al. (2020), which focuses on Spanish as a second language for the inclusion of immigrant students. Another one is the study of Wasse and Hawrylak (2021), which analyses the rise of immigration and its direct impact on schools. As is the case of our research, both emphasise case studies that explore the experiences of immigrant children at schools or how educators and schools in Spain are responding to new demographic changes.

In Scopus, we also found other related studies but conducted outside Spain. For instance, Vogel (2019) focuses on the didactics of Slovenian as a first language, and Parmigiani et al. (2023) provide pedagogical strategies for the integration of Ukrainian students in three phases (reception, inclusion, and learning).

Regarding studies based on a search of the terms 'case study' and 'linguistic integration', we found 11 results in Scopus, of which only two articles were of interest to our research. The work of Álvarez-Sotomayor and Gómez-Parra (2020) deserves a mention here. Despite its focus on high school students, it is a relevant case study of the social and educational integration of immigrant children in Spain, combining the learning of Spanish and the learning/maintenance of the mother tongue. Results from this research call for the need to implement new institutional strategies to promote multilingualism among the children of migrants.

The study of Pozuelos-Estrada et al. (2018), like the previous one, is also closely related to our investigation. This study employs an observational and



narrative research methodology, whose objective is to analyse a didactic approach for linguistic and curricular integration. Moreover, as in our case, the informants are members of a teaching team through whom the authors wanted to identify the main achievements and difficulties educators face in the teaching process.

To complete the search in Scopus, we added the terms ‘multilingualism’ and ‘multiculturalism’ to the terms ‘linguistic’ and ‘integration’. However, there were no results for the period 2018-2024. Results yielded on Scopus were concentrated in journals of social sciences and education such as *Teaching and Teaching Education*, *International Journal of Educational Research*, *Journal Language Cultural Education*, and *International Journal of Educational Research Open*.

Finally, we also consulted Google Scholar. However, given that it is a broad academic database, we did not consider websites, PhD or master’s theses, final degree projects or newspapers. Thus, matches were reduced from 2,020 to 1,220 documents.

The most relevant articles selected for this research from our bibliographical search are as follows: Olmos Alcaraz and Lastres Aguilar (2022) conducted a holistic study on the educational attention to students from immigrant backgrounds in Spain since the 1990s, focusing on ‘integration’. Both Olmos Alcaraz and Lastres Aguilar (2022) and Arroyo-González and Berzosa-Ramos (2021) are significant due to their emphasis on the vehicular language. González Monteagudo and Zamora-Serrato (2019) focused on migrations in Spain, as well as training and educational policies. Espinosa Barrero (2023) and Fernández López (2022) addressed classroom tools and resources for inclusion. Additionally, González-Falcón et al. (2022), Querol-Bataller (2022), Shershneva and Alkorta (2023), Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2022), Da Mata (2020), Abad Quintanal (2022), and Níkleva and Contreras-Izquierdo (2020) analysed the challenges and achievements of inclusion. Lastly, Níkleva and Viñolo (2023) focused on teacher training to support them in various ways.

The articles mentioned above explore various aspects of integrating students from migrant backgrounds in Spain. They emphasize the significance of multilingualism and multiculturalism within the school environment, highlighting the crucial roles of vehicular language and teacher training in the integration process. Furthermore, they reflect ongoing concerns regarding this issue, which has been relevant since the 1990s, as noted by Olmos Alcaraz and Lastres Aguilar (2022).

### 3. Methodology

This study draws on the observational and narrative research methods (Anguera 1997; Clandinin 2006; Blanco 2011; Ruíz Olabuenaga 2012;

Domínguez de la Ossa and Herrero 2013; Rodríguez Ortiz 2020; Hernández and Zaragoza 2020; Suárez 2021; Mas-Alcolea and Torres-Purroy 2021). Mas-Alcolea and Torres-Purroy (2021) highlight the benefits of combining the researcher's direct, first-hand experience with participants' accounts of their own experiences. They stress the importance of not solely relying on participants' self-reports but also incorporating other reports about the phenomena being studied.

According to Rodríguez Ortiz (2020), the narrative methodology has prompted reflections on its suitability for reliably analysing, interpreting, and understanding social phenomena within the social sciences. Pedagogy is no exception, leading to the pursuit of methodologies that enable researchers to construct scientific knowledge that captures the nuances and significances inherent in classroom discourses, which reflect teaching and learning processes. Rodríguez advocates for the narrative method as a robust epistemological tool for articulating and underpinning constructive knowledge within pedagogy research. Due to its proven efficacy, this method has been selected as the core analytical framework for this study.

Regarding the role of the researcher in group studies, Ciesielska et al. (2017) suggest that a researcher conducting non-participant observation adopts the position of an outsider, striving to distance themselves from taken-for-granted categorizations and evaluations. This approach aligns with the methodology of the present study. During the training courses, data were collected through teachers' questions and reflections on teaching and learning situations involving migrants. An external distance was maintained to ensure an objective evaluation, free from prior assumptions based on previously observed or documented cases.

On the other hand, observational research (Hernández-Sampieri et al. 2003; García Sánchez et al. 2010), a further cornerstone of this study, entails a direct and structured examination of a phenomenon within its natural context. This research approach, centred on gathering data without interference, that is, through the observation of authentic scenarios, facilitates the documentation of information generated in the teacher training sessions.

As García Sánchez et al. (2010) explain, in a professional development context, obtaining information would be virtually impossible without incorporating some form of observation. Thus, they assert that observation can either serve as the foundational scientific method (observational methodology) or function as a technique (observational techniques) in the service of other methods, in this instance the narrative research method. Both methods enable the combination of observing a phenomenon to gather information and understanding it through the narrative produced and collected via interaction

with the participants. In this particular study, both research methods complement each other and provide insightful perspectives on various aspects.

Taking the observational and narrative methods as a starting point, we followed a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews (Hernández-Sampieri et al. 2003) for the data collection. In contrast to formal interviews, we used a flexible format focusing on students' linguistic integration within the context of a professional development course for teachers in four public schools for Early Childhood and Primary Education.

Drawing on Hernandez-Sampieri and Mendoza Torres (2020), we replicated their model of semi-structured interviews to explore the topics addressed in the training course, which aimed to enhance education integration of immigrant students in schools, facilitating resources and tools for it. As recommended by these authors, the interviewer (the teacher trainer in this case) had total freedom to introduce different topics to obtain more information and clarify concepts.

Engaging with teachers during the training course served as a mechanism for qualitative data collection. Instead of directly observing the subject matter under study, teachers acted as informants, providing insights into the situations within their schools. This approach facilitated a condensed compilation of information from at least five years of teachers' experience in Early Childhood and Primary education. These descriptive-qualitative data enable the portrayal of a genuine version of their educational experiences (Sandoval 2013).

The multicultural and plurilingual analysis of the situation of those schools facilitates a detailed description and interpretation of the topic at hand, allowing for a deeper understanding of the context through the observation of teachers' experiences.

In short, the study employs an observational methodology, focusing on recognising actions and ideas within the educational contexts of Early Childhood and Primary education. It consists of different phases: data collection, description and narration, and finally, analysis of results and conclusions. Thus, following Tamayo (2004), this research is characterised by the recording, analysis, and interpretation of various educational situations, as well as the ideas and interests of schools and their staff regarding the integration of immigrant students. The qualitative approach allows for a combination of detailed contextual descriptions and experiential narratives obtained from teachers attending training courses in Spanish as an additional language for school integration.

This methodology was used to explore how teachers in schools understand and make sense of their experiences in multilingual and multicultural environments through experiential storytelling. By systematically observing and documenting interactions and experiences with teachers from various schools,

valuable insights into the cases studied were gained. Finally, the data collected through this process were analysed alongside general information from the schools, as referenced in the aforementioned CEFIRE documents.

### 3.1. Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to improve the integration of immigrant students' and their families' linguistic needs within the multicultural and plurilingual school environment, with the goal of achieving sustainable development and educational quality. Additionally, we also pursue the following specific objectives:

- Analyse the student ratio of local and immigrant students per class within the Community of Valencia.
- Acknowledge the presence of multiculturalism and multilingualism across the Community of Valencia, in the Alicante area and, particularly, in the four selected schools where the study was conducted.
- Document the academic impact of multiculturalism and plurilingualism in schools for sustainable education.
- Evaluate the performance of the chosen schools, focusing on their educational support and the facilities available for integration.

### 3.2. Data collection procedure

According to the methodology detailed in section 3, several steps have been followed. First, we examined the contributions of teachers and the resources available to them for facilitating the educational management of allocations for immigrant students and their families. Second, we considered the specific roles of teachers in enhancing the organisation and operation of the school from an intercultural and plurilingual perspective. In this context, we also addressed the educational level of immigrant students within general classrooms as compared to their counterparts in PASE classrooms<sup>1</sup> (Program for Welcoming Students into the Educational System) (*Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura, Universitats i Ocupació*), which serves as a support mechanism for students unfamiliar with the school's language of instruction. Additionally, we evaluated the Educational Compensation Program<sup>2</sup> (*Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura, Universitats i Ocupació*), designed to cater to the broader immigrant student population by allocating

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed at: <https://ceice.gva.es/va/web/innovacion-calidad/programa-de-acogida-al-sistema-educativo-pase->

<sup>2</sup> Accessed at: <https://ceice.gva.es/va/web/inclusioeducativa/identificacio-de-necessitats-de-compensacio-de-desigualtats>

personal and material resources in line with each school's specific plan, tailored to the unique educational needs of their students, as outlined by the Regional Ministry of Education on its website.

Third, and in alignment with the previous point, we delved into curricular matters pertaining to language learning planning within the School Curriculum Plan (PCC in Spanish). Fourth, we explored teachers' interventions to integrate local (Spanish) and immigrant students, with the aim of promoting school coexistence, intercultural relations, and sociocultural inclusion within and beyond the school environment. Fifth, we addressed issues related to teacher training and competences in plurilingualism and multiculturalism. Sixth, we examined students' profiles regarding their origins, emphasising the role of family support in facilitating linguistic and school integration. Finally, we inquired about the external institutional support received by the school in implementing linguistic and cultural integration initiatives.

### 3.3. Participating schools

The study was conducted in Costa Blanca (Spain), encompassing four schools in different municipalities: Javea, Calpe, Orihuela Costa, and Torrevieja. These educational institutions cater to a diverse student body, with Spanish students constituting a comparatively smaller proportion.

To maintain the confidentiality of all stakeholders (schools, teachers, and students), the paper will use the names School 1 (Javea), School 2 (Calpe), School 3 (Orihuela Costa), and School 4 (Torrevieja) for the participating schools. The information presented herein was retrieved in 2024 from the schools' websites and the Valencia Regional Ministry of Education (*Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura, Universitats i Ocupació, Comunitat Valenciana*). All these schools offer education at both Early Childhood and Primary stages.

School	Education Support	Facilities	Diversity
School 1 (Javea)	The curriculum includes a specialised language and communication classroom designed to assist students with special needs.	It is well-equipped with various facilities: classrooms with digital whiteboards, computer rooms with internet access, a gym, a dining hall, and a library.	Approximately 60% of its students (around 500) are of foreign origin. The school fosters a multicultural setting that promotes acceptance and understanding of diverse cultures.
School 2 (Calpe)	It offers various support programmes and resources for its students. This multilingual public	It is equipped with various facilities to enhance learning and student well-being. All classrooms feature	This is an inclusive institution that embraces students from diverse nationalities and cultures, creating a

	<p>school has three lines in Early Childhood and Primary Education, as well as specific classrooms to cater to students with special educational needs (SEN) and a Communication and Language classroom (CIL).</p> <p>The school focuses on providing an inclusive and supportive environment, ensuring that all students receive the attention and necessary resources for their academic and personal development.</p> <p>Additionally, the school organises activities and events that encourage family and community participation in the educational process.</p>	<p>digital whiteboards and internet access. The gym provides ample space for sports and physical activities. The library promotes reading habits among students, while the outdoor playground and recreational areas offer spaces for children to play and socialize during breaks.</p>	<p>multicultural environment that enriches the educational experience and promotes respect and tolerance. The school is dedicated to integrating students with special educational needs, ensuring that all children receive the necessary support for their academic and personal growth.</p> <p>Located in Calpe, the school has approximately 450 students, with around 40% being immigrant students. This cultural diversity enhances the learning environment and reinforces the values of respect and tolerance.</p>
<p>School 3 (Orihuela Costa)</p>	<p>The curriculum includes core subjects such as mathematics, language, natural and social sciences, as well as physical education, music, and art. The school also implements support programs for students with special educational needs and offers extracurricular activities to foster the overall development of students.</p>	<p>The school provides various facilities to support learning and student well-being. All classrooms are equipped with digital whiteboards and internet access. The gym is a spacious area for sports and physical activities. The library is well-stocked, encouraging reading habits among students.</p> <p>The outdoor playground and recreational areas offer ample space for children to play and socialize during breaks.</p>	<p>This is an inclusive school that welcomes students from various nationalities and cultures, creating a multicultural environment that enriches the educational experience and promotes values of respect and tolerance. The school also focuses on integrating students with special educational needs, ensuring that all children receive the necessary support for their academic and personal development.</p> <p>With approximately 525 students in total more</p>

			than 50% are immigrant students, representing over 50 different nationalities.
School 4 (Torrevieja)	It offers a range of educational support services to ensure that all students receive the necessary assistance for their academic and personal development, including bilingual education in Spanish and Valencian to help students become proficient in both languages, specific programmes and resources to support students with special educational needs, various extracurricular activities that complement the academic curriculum and support the holistic development of students, and active participation from parents and guardians to foster a collaborative environment for the benefit of the students.	The school offers various facilities to support learning and student well-being. All classrooms are equipped with digital whiteboards and internet access. The gym provides a spacious area for sports and physical activities. The school has a library that encourages reading habits among students as well as playgrounds and recreational areas for outdoor activities. The school cafeteria offers a dining service with balanced menus tailored to the nutritional needs of children.	This is an inclusive school that welcomes students from various nationalities and cultures. A diverse environment that enriches the educational experience and promotes values of respect and tolerance. The school also focuses on integrating students with special educational needs, ensuring that all children receive the necessary support for their academic and personal development. Currently, the school has approximately 476 students. Of these, 65,3% are of immigrant origin, reflecting the school diversity and multicultural situation.

Table 1. Participating schools' profile

The data presented in Table 1, obtained from the official website of the Valencia Community, indicate that the schools are quite heterogeneous in terms of education support and facilities. Such diversity is also evident in the linguistic integration of Spanish, Valencian, and English as the primary languages of instruction. This finding aligns with the common guidelines set by the *Conselleria* and reflects the similarities within the school populations in the coastal areas of Alicante.

Linguistic integration occurs through both traditional classes, as outlined in the stage curriculum, and in PASS (language support classes) classrooms offered

by each school which are tailored to its specific project, characteristics, and resources. Notably, the primary distinction among the schools examined in Table 1 lies in the cultural diversity of their students and the varying ratios of students from different origins, particularly in relation to the number of native speakers of Spanish or Valencian, the two co-official languages of the region.

The integration of non-Spanish students is ultimately supported through a trilingual education system and educational assistance organized by the school board and teachers according to students’ needs. However, there is a lack of specific official data regarding additional integration and diversity programs, which can only be obtained through on-site research, such as the study presented here. The efforts to promote inclusion and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity vary from school to school. Therefore, research like this is essential. It is evident that there is a need for careful observation in each school, open dialogue with teachers, and analysis of case studies in different contexts to understand what is happening with integration and inclusion Early Childhood and Primary education.

#### 4. Case Study

We used the work of Suárez Relinque et al. (2013) as a reference point for organising and presenting the qualitative information, which required the description of the data collection procedure (see 3.2). Below there is information provided by the *Conselleria d'Educació de la Comunitat Valenciana* (Valencian Regional Ministry of Education) and the schools’ websites referring to the 2022-2024 academic year regarding immigrant students. Table 2 presents data on the total number of students and the percentage of immigrant and Spanish students, offering a clear overview of the situation analysed in this study.

School	% Spanish students	% Immigrant students	Total number students
School 1	40	60	500
School 2	60	40	450
School 3	50	50	525
School 4	35	65	476
<b>Total</b>			<b>1951</b>

Table 2. Number of total students and percentage of Spanish/immigrant students as of July 2024

The data for these schools have been revised to reflect the educational context in the Community of Valencia, particularly in Alicante. This includes the ratio of native to immigrant students per classroom and the languages taught and used.



All this information contributes to an understanding of the impact of the data presented in Table 2.

The *Informe sobre la situación del sistema educativo en la Comunidad Valenciana (2019-2020)*<sup>3</sup> provides insights into student-teacher ratios, helping us understand the situation in schools.

In the province of Alicante, the overall student-teacher ratio varies based on the language of instruction and type of school. For education in Valencian, public schools have approximately 10.6 students per teacher, although this figure may vary slightly depending on students' educational level and the specific location of the school. For education in Spanish, the student-teacher ratio in public schools is approximately 10.6, whereas in private schools, it may be slightly higher at about 12.9. Regarding foreign languages, which focus mainly on English, bilingual, or international programs, the ratio may be lower due to the need for more personalised attention, averaging around 9.8 students per teacher in public schools. These ratios reflect efforts to maintain a manageable number of students per teacher, facilitating more personalised and effective education.

In the Valencian Community, the student-teacher ratio in Early Childhood is below the state average, with 17.55 students per unit compared to the state average of 20.6. When broken down by province for Early Childhood Education, Alicante has the highest ratio in public schools at 19.5%, compared to Castellón at 17.7% and Valencia at 17%. In Primary Education, public schools in Alicante have a ratio of 22.3%, compared to 20.9% in Castellón and 20.7% in Valencia.

However, the study does not consider the number of immigrant students within the ratio, which is essential for the analysis. The most recent data on this group of students can be found in the *Informe sobre la Integración de los Estudiantes Extranjeros en el Sistema Educativo Español*<sup>4</sup> (2022) (*Report on the Integration of Foreign Students in the Spanish Education System*) by the Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration. According to the report, in the 2021-2022 academic year, there were 882,814 foreign students, representing 11% of the total student population in the Valencia region. This is about 15% of the total student population. However, this percentage may vary slightly depending on students' educational level and the specific location of the school.

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<sup>3</sup> Accessed at:  
<https://ceice.gva.es/documents/161862976/175011476/INFORME+CAST+2019-2020.pdf/8285003a-705c-45e6-34cf-23088c09a821?t=1658907509510>

<sup>4</sup> Accessed at:  
[https://www.inclusion.gob.es/oberaxe/ficheros/ejes/analisis/Pres\\_integracion\\_sistemaeducativo71022.pdf](https://www.inclusion.gob.es/oberaxe/ficheros/ejes/analisis/Pres_integracion_sistemaeducativo71022.pdf)

By educational level, except for vocational and university education, the proportion of immigrant students attending public schools is higher than that of Spanish students at all stages, being around 80% in all of them. In contrast, the proportion is lower in the initial stages of education compared to the advanced stages.

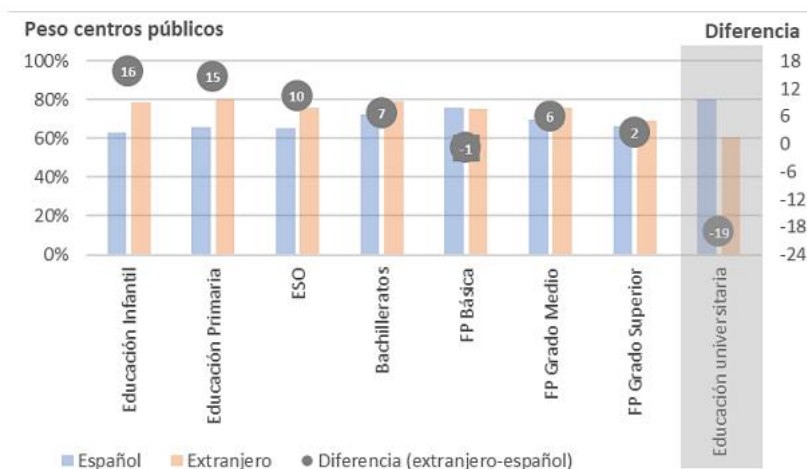


Figure 1. Source: *Informe sobre la Integración de los Estudiantes Extranjeros en el Sistema Educativo Español* (2022) (Report on the Integration of Foreign Students in the Spanish Education System, p. 16)

Regarding academic performance, the report (pp. 18-20) indicates significant variation between immigrant students with parents born abroad and children born in Spain of immigrant parents. The former group tends to have lower academic results compared to the latter.

It is important to note that the Valencian Community has two co-official languages (Spanish and Valencian), and their usage varies by area, influencing where immigrant students receive their education. According to the 2023 *Barómetro de Usos Lingüísticos de 2023*<sup>5</sup> (2023 Barometer of Linguistic Uses), Valencian is more commonly spoken in central regions, such as the Alcoi-Gandia area, where 71.6% of inhabitants use Valencian with friends as much or more than

<sup>5</sup> Accessed at:

[https://ceice.gva.es/documents/161863132/354107748/indicadors\\_web.pdf/5b9354e6-0332-9b00-3231-bb56a1b05f63?t=1680522134343](https://ceice.gva.es/documents/161863132/354107748/indicadors_web.pdf/5b9354e6-0332-9b00-3231-bb56a1b05f63?t=1680522134343)

Spanish. In the city of Valencia, only 15% of the population regularly speaks Valencian, while in the metropolitan area, this percentage rises to 34.8%.

Spanish remains the predominant language in most urban areas and formal and administrative contexts. In the city of Valencia, 30.5% of citizens speak Spanish more frequently than Valencian. These languages coexist with English, which is commonly used as a language of study, and with the vehicular languages of the students (French, German, Arabic, Chinese, and Romanian), which vary by area. In the schools where the study was conducted, the results are the following:

School	Number of nationalities in the school
School 1 (Javea)	60 nationalities
School 2 (Calpe)	20 nationalities
School 3 (Orihuela costa)	58 nationalities
School 4 (Torrevieja)	47 nationalities

Table 3. Nationalities of the schools  
(Languages studied: Spanish, Valencian and English)

Specifically, the programs for multilingual and intercultural education, as outlined in the Spanish Law 4/2018 and documented on the *Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura, Universitats i Ocupació* website, are as follows for each of the schools described:<sup>6</sup>

PROGRAMA LINGÜÍSTICO			
Programa de educación plurilingüe e intercultural (Ley 4/2018)	% VALENCIANO	% CASTELLANO	% LENGUA EXTRANJERA
Educación Infantil	65	25	11
Educación Primaria	46	39	16
* Proporción de las lenguas vehiculares ofrecida por el centro			

Figure 2. School 1 (Jávea). Source: *Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura, Universitats i Ocupació* - GVA (September 2024)

<sup>6</sup> Accessed at: <https://ceice.gva.es/es/web/centros-docentes/consulta-general>

**PROGRAMA LINGÜÍSTICO**

Programa de educación plurilingüe e intercultural (Ley 4/2018)	% VALENCIANO	% CASTELLANO	% LENGUA EXTRANJERA
Educación Infantil	65	25	10
Educación Primaria	59	26	16

\* Proporción de las lenguas vehiculares ofrecida por el centro

Figure 3. School 2 (Calpe). Source: *Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura, Universitats i Ocupació* - GVA (September 2024)

**PROGRAMA LINGÜÍSTICO**

Programa de educación plurilingüe e intercultural (Ley 4/2018)	% VALENCIANO	% CASTELLANO	% LENGUA EXTRANJERA
Educación Infantil	28	61	12
Educación Primaria	31	54	17

\* Proporción de las lenguas vehiculares ofrecida por el centro

Figure 4. School 3 (Orihuela). Source: *Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura, Universitats i Ocupació* - GVA (September 2024)

**PROGRAMA LINGÜÍSTICO**

Programa de educación plurilingüe e intercultural (Ley 4/2018)	% VALENCIANO	% CASTELLANO	% LENGUA EXTRANJERA
Educación Infantil	26	65	11
Educación Primaria	22	62	17

\* Proporción de las lenguas vehiculares ofrecida por el centro

Figure 5. School 4 (Torrevieja). Source: *Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura, Universitats i Ocupació* - GVA (Septiembre 2024)

#### 4. Results

The information provided by the reports consulted and the data obtained during the training sessions led to several interesting results.

Firstly, the student-teacher ratio in schools in the Valencian Community appears to be below the national average. These figures reflect the education authorities' efforts to reduce class sizes, aiming to improve the quality of education and ensure more personalised attention for students. However, in some of the schools studied, this ratio has been exceeded, causing challenges to the quality of teaching.

Secondly, the ratio of immigrant students reveals several trends:

- Preference for public schools. Immigrant students tend to attend public schools in significantly higher proportions than Spanish students. This

preference could be attributed to factors such as affordability, geographic location, and the inclusive policies of public schools.

- Distribution by educational stages. The proportion of Spanish students in public schools is lower at the initial stages (Early and Primary education) and increases at the advanced stages (Secondary education). This trend may indicate that Spanish families are more likely to choose private education in the early stages and transition to public education in later stages, possibly due to perceived quality or resource availability.

- Impact on diversity. The high proportion of immigrant students in public schools contributes to greater cultural and linguistic diversity. While this diversity can enrich the educational environment, it also poses challenges in terms of integration and curriculum adaptation.

- Inclusion policies. The tendency of immigrant students to attend public schools suggests that these institutions play a crucial role in educational inclusion. Specific support policies and programs for immigrant students are essential to ensure their academic and social success.

The results regarding academic performance are also significant:

- Speaking Spanish at home reduces the gap with native speakers by about 35% in reading proficiency. These differences are partly explained by the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the students' families.

- Academic performance varies according to the language used at home. Immigrant students with migrant parents tend to perform worse academically, although there is a noticeable trend of improvement in this group compared to native children of migrant parents.

Finally, we observed the number of immigrant and native speakers in each selected centre. All schools teach the co-official languages of the Valencian Community, along with English, and always consider the vehicular languages of students, although the methods are not explicitly detailed. This reflects a highly multicultural and diverse educational environment, encompassing many races, languages, religions, and cultures. On the one hand, this diversity enriches the learning experience by exposing students to multiple cultures and languages, promoting values of tolerance, inclusion, and respect, and preparing students for a globalised world. On the other hand, it presents challenges, as the school may be the only place where students speak Spanish or Valencian. Additionally, interaction with families can be complex, making vehicular languages less effective in fostering contact and learning.

These results underscore the importance of continuously developing and enhancing inclusion and support policies in public schools to adequately serve a diverse student population. As highlighted, the integration of these immigrant

students is a key aspect of educational plans. Teachers and schools implement various strategies to ensure the inclusion of those students and their families, as well as their academic success.

Overall, the analysis of the four Early Childhood and Primary education schools in Alicante (Costa Blanca, Spain) reveals a similar situation across all institutions. Each has a high ratio of immigrant students, unique linguistic and cultural contexts, and similar challenges related to inclusion and integration. However, as discussed and reflected during the training courses, it is also evident that teachers are actively engaging in various actions and initiatives to promote the inclusion and integration of immigrant students, including the following:

- Adaptation of materials and resources: tailoring educational materials to different levels of linguistic and cultural competence.
- Inclusive teaching strategies: employing methods such as Project-Based Learning<sup>7</sup> (PBL) and Universal Design for Learning<sup>8</sup> (UDL), allowing for personalised instruction based on each student's needs.
- Providing training courses to enhance the methodology of teaching foreign languages.
- Organizing activities to promote respect and empathy among students.
- Active participation of families: increasing parental involvement through meetings, workshops, and events that promote cultural and social integration.
- Use of inclusive technology: incorporating technological tools that facilitate learning for all students, regardless of their background.
- Individualised support: providing additional support to students in need through tutors, mentoring programs, and specific resources.

These actions aim not only to improve the academic performance of immigrant students but also to create a more inclusive and respectful school environment and sociocultural context.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

The study presented here depicts the circumstances of four public schools in a coastal area of the Alicante region, which enrol immigrant students from a diverse array of backgrounds, languages, and cultures. However, this is not an

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<sup>7</sup> PBL is an educational methodology where students acquire skills and knowledge by engaging in relevant and meaningful projects. These projects can vary in duration and form, but they always share a common design based on real-world situations to encourage participation and motivation in their development.

<sup>8</sup> UDL is an educational approach that seeks to create an inclusive learning environment that meets the diverse needs of all students. It is based on the principles of accessibility and integration, with the main objective of removing barriers to learning and providing different ways for students to participate and express themselves.

isolated case, as similar conditions exist in other public schools studied within the Autonomous Community of Valencia. Considering the number of immigrant students in schools, we believe that learning Spanish/Valencian as a vehicular language is crucial for the integration of immigrants, which also requires ongoing professional development for teachers to ensure quality education.

Additionally, the highly culturally diverse student population requires to take into consideration an intercultural perspective. As Leiva-Olivencia (2019) and Leiva-Olivencia and Bracons (2019) posit, intercultural education is much more than pedagogical response to the evolving construction of inclusive educational institutions. He conceptualizes multiculturalism as an ethical, social, and educational framework aimed at fostering the inclusion and recognition of diverse identities existing within Spain. Intercultural education, according to Leiva-Olivencia (2019), serves as a tool for enhancing coexistence and promoting a culture of diversity, thereby contributing to reflective and critical citizenship education. He emphasizes the need for specialized support in school contexts to provide an intercultural perspective grounded in an environment of trust, which helps to mitigate inequalities and reduce vulnerabilities in educational settings.

For this reason, intercultural and plurilingual inclusion must be prioritized as a pedagogical objective to enhance enrichment and coexistence within the school context. While teachers' efforts are evident in the organization, management, and implementation of initiatives to promote inclusion, these actions alone are insufficient for achieving optimal outcomes. Therefore, the focus of improvement must extend beyond school management and teaching staff. It requires the systematic support from other institutions to achieve significant progress. Key actions include:

- Translating school documents into the primary languages of the students.
- Designing a welcome plan for families for care, advice, and guidance based on their socio-cultural knowledge.
- Developing an ongoing professional development plan for teachers.
- Creating an inclusion plan for multiculturalism and plurilingualism within the PCC.
- Acquiring and organizing resources and tools for learning the vehicular language (e.g., library resources).
- Expanding human and material resources.

The achievement of these objectives would substantially improve several key areas, enabling us to:

- Manage diversity from an open, flexible, and dynamic perspective.
- Address the needs of students and their families effectively.
- Encourage the active participation of families alongside teaching staff.

- Advocate for integration through interculturality, fostering a culture of coexistence.
- Facilitate the learning of the vehicular language.

In short, this study provides insights into four schools whose circumstances and characteristics are far from unique. The findings underscore an urgent need to equip schools with additional human and material resources. This investment will facilitate the creation of inclusive, plurilingual and intercultural schools, following a model that caters to the interests and needs of students and their families. Such a model should be situated within the framework of a shared educational project that ensures school success for the majority.

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