

INTERCULTURAL AND DIASPORIC EDUCATION IN RURAL SCHOOLS: NARRATIVES AND DRAWINGS ON MIGRATION AND BELONGING

José Javier Luis Tello, Ana Gracia Gil, Alfonso Burgos Risco,
Estefanía Monforte García, & Jennifer Moreno Moreno
Universidad de Zaragoza (Spain)

Abstract

This study examines the integration of diasporic and intercultural education in rural primary schools in Spain, focusing on how students represent migration and cultural diversity through narratives, drawings, and audiovisual production. Using Grounded Theory and a participatory ethnographic approach, it involved 56 sixth-grade students from two schools in Aragón, together with teachers, migrant families, and the school community (Hernández Carrera, 2014; Balcázar, 2003; Gholami, 2025). The study combined artistic production and pedagogical intervention. Students created narratives and drawings on migration and interculturality, analyzed through content analysis and used to develop an animated short film. Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations complemented these materials, exploring integration processes and belonging. Findings show that diasporic education fosters empathy, participation, and intercultural learning while transfer Ming classroom dynamics and curricular practices (Gholami, 2023; Nieto, 2017; Banks, 2013). Students' drawings and the audiovisual project enabled emotional expression, identity construction, and reflection on migration (Fernández-Labayen et al., 2022; Macleroy & Shamsad, 2020). The study also identifies challenges such as linguistic and cultural barriers, peer grouping by cultural affinity, and limited teacher training. Although policy frameworks promote inclusion, implementation remains uneven, highlighting the need for stronger curricular and pedagogical integration of interculturality (Gholami & Costantini, 2025; Vidal Prado, 2023).

Keywords: *Intercultural education, diasporic education, migration, drawings, belonging.*

1. Introduction

In developed countries, school systems face challenges in responding to the needs of children and young people from ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities, resulting in persistent patterns of educational inequality. Spain is no exception: both urban and rural schools have experienced a significant increase in cultural and linguistic diversity, particularly due to the arrival of migrant families from Morocco, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. This study explores how intercultural education can be enhanced through artistic and narrative expression in primary schools located in low-population-density areas, connecting local findings with international debates on diasporic education and creative pedagogy to address racism, social exclusion, and marginalization of minority students (Gholami & Costantini, 2025; Banks, 2013).

Diasporic education recognizes the transnational identities and cultural ties of minorities as educational resources, fostering more diverse, creative, and inclusive classrooms (Gholami, 2025). Traditional materials—such as posters or activities focused on food and clothing—are limited and often represent minority students in a static or “exotic” manner (Gholami & Costantini, 2025). Moreover, previous research primarily focuses on teacher-led interventions, without exploring the perceptions and narratives of the children themselves.

This study centers on how students perceive and represent migration through interviews, written narratives, and drawings, generating transmedia narratives that combine multiple expressive languages (Scolari, 2013). Graphic productions play a key role as a means of expression to convey emotions, relationships, and experiences that complement verbal discourse and enrich the understanding of diversity and intercultural coexistence in the classroom.

The research is guided by three questions:

1. How does the concept of diasporic education help interpret these narratives and inform more inclusive teaching practices?

2. How do primary school students in low-population-density areas of Spain perceive and represent migration through written stories and drawings?

3. How can children's artistic productions be incorporated into pedagogical strategies for intercultural education?

Through these questions, the article examines students' narratives and artistic productions and discusses how the findings contribute to the development of inclusive pedagogical strategies inspired by diasporic education, establishing connections between theory and educational practice in diverse school contexts.

2. Literature review

Migration has historically shaped societies through cultural diversity and changing forms of social cohesion (Matos & Permisian, 2016). The concept of diaspora has evolved from the dispersion of people maintaining homeland ties (Safran, 1991; Sheffer, 2013) to include transnationality, hybridity, and multiple belongings that influence host societies (Hall, 1990; Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993; Gholami, 2017, 2025).

In Europe, migration patterns shifted after the postwar period and the fall of communist regimes (Faa et al., 2014). Countries such as Chile, Argentina, and Spain have become immigration contexts (Martínez Rojas et al., 2021; Jiménez Bautista, 2006). In Spain, foreigners represented 11.6% of the population in 2022, mainly from Morocco and Romania (INE, 2023; OPI, 2024; Statista, 2023), while Catalonia has seen growing numbers of immigrant-origin students (Badía Martín & Devant Cerezo, 2024). Migration has also helped revitalize depopulated rural areas (Gracia Bernal et al., 2022; Pinyol-Jiménez et al., 2020).

Migratory and diasporic experiences influence identity construction and classroom coexistence, making intercultural education central to inclusion and diversity policies (Gholami, 2025; UNESCO, 2006; Council of Europe, 2010; United Nations, 2015; Ley Orgánica 3/2020, 2020; Orden ECD/794/2022, 2022). Literature on intercultural and diasporic education highlights its role in supporting migrant student integration and coexistence in diverse societies.

2.1. Intercultural education

Multicultural and intercultural education differ in focus. Multicultural education aims to reduce inequalities and recognize cultural diversity in schools (Banks, 2013; Nieto, 2017), whereas intercultural education promotes dialogue, inclusion, intercultural competence, and social justice through interaction among cultural groups (Martínez Rojas et al., 2021; Deardorff, 2006; Chibici-Revneanu, 2020; Faa et al., 2014). However, it is often reduced to superficial recognition of diversity without addressing structural inequalities (Coulby, 2006; Conti, 2025; Gholami & Costantini, 2025). Diasporic education complements this approach by incorporating transnational identities and minority experiences.

2.2. Diasporic education

Diasporic education includes practices developed with diasporic communities that challenge dominant curricula and educational models (Gholami, 2017, 2025). It seeks to support the integration of diasporic children by recognizing their multiple identities and transnational connections (Gholami, 2023, 2025). This approach also examines how social and political forces shape education, questioning nationalist perspectives and fixed ethnic or religious identities (Coulby, 2006; Nieto, 2017; Gholami, 2017, 2023).

Creative expression through narratives, art, and audiovisual media is central to diasporic education, as it validates migrant identities, challenges hegemonic discourses, and promotes empathy and intercultural understanding (Nieto, 2017; Fernández-Labayen et al., 2022; Gholami, 2023, 2025).

2.3. Creative and narrative expression in intercultural and diasporic education

Narrative and artistic expression are key tools in intercultural and diasporic education, as they give visibility to students' experiences, promote empathy, and challenge dominant discourses (Nieto, 2017; D'Amore & Díaz, 2020). Personal narratives support identity construction, social justice, and the integration of migrant students within host communities.

Research highlights the educational value of storytelling and creative practices. Gholami (2025) showed how theater workshops based on migration stories fostered empathy and historical understanding, while Chibici-Revneanu (2020) used expressive writing to validate diasporic identities and question hegemonic narratives. Audiovisual projects also enable students to share life stories and cultural memories, strengthening intercultural learning (Fernández-Labayen et al., 2022). Drawings and other artistic productions complement oral and written narratives by expressing emotions and migration experiences through visual language (Gholami, 2023; Fernández-Labayen et al., 2022).

Similarly, activities involving letters, songs, dances, and migrant students' life experiences promote teacher awareness, empathetic inclusion, and a stronger sense of belonging and inclusive citizenship (Parejo-Llanos et al., 2020; Badía Martín & Devant Cerezo, 2024; Gholami, 2017, 2023).

2.4. Participatory and visual arts in intercultural education

Artistic and audiovisual practices are important tools for intercultural learning, enabling students to explore identity, negotiate hybrid belongings, and connect their cultures of origin with their everyday contexts (Gholami, 2017; Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993). Audiovisual workshops and projects such as Critical Connections encourage migrant students to represent their migration experiences through theater, media production, and storytelling, promoting intercultural understanding and validating their cultural backgrounds (Fernández-Labayen et al., 2022; Macleroy & Shamsad, 2020).

Artistic techniques such as photography, collage, animation, and drawing foster critical reflection on migration and diversity while challenging traditional perspectives (Serber, 2021; Oliver-Barceló & Ferrer-Ribot, 2022). In particular, drawings allow students to visually communicate emotions and diasporic identities, complementing oral and written narratives and strengthening empathy and intercultural understanding (Fernández-Labayen et al., 2022; Gholami, 2017). Audiovisual works such as *Pequeñas voces* (Carrillo, 2010), *Persepolis* (Satrapi & Paronnaud, 2007), and *Flee* (Rasmussen, 2021) further serve as educational references for reflecting on migration, conflict, and cultural diversity.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study design

This study used a qualitative ethnographic and participatory design to analyze how children represent migration and interculturality through narratives and drawings. Framed within Grounded Theory, it developed findings from empirical data without prior hypotheses (Hernández Carrera, 2014). A case study and Participatory Action Research approach were applied, following principles of diasporic education (Gholami, 2025; Balcázar, 2003). The sample included 50 students aged 11–12 from two rural schools in Aragón with culturally diverse populations. The study was structured around two dimensions:

- Artistic material production: Students created written narratives and drawings about migration and interculturality, analyzed through content analysis to identify explicit and latent meanings (Krippendorff, 1980; López-Aranguren, 1984). These materials were later used to produce an animated short film narrated by the students.

- Pedagogical intervention: Semi-structured interviews with teachers, migrant families, and school community members, together with classroom observations, were conducted to examine intercultural interactions and integration processes (Hernández Carrera, 2014; Balcázar, 2003).

Data collection combined narratives, drawings, interviews, and participant observation.

3.2. Research process

The research was carried out in eight phases, focusing on the active participation of students, teachers, and families, and on the creation of visual materials:

1. Coordination with schools: Meetings were held with school principals and teachers to present the project and recruit volunteer staff, receiving their commitment to active participation.

2. Communication with families: An informative letter explaining the objectives and requesting consent was sent. In Teruel, all families agreed to participate, while in Caspe some did not authorize their children's participation.

3. Work with students: A total of 56 sixth-grade students participated (20 in Teruel and 36 in Caspe). During reflection sessions on migration and interculturality, students expressed their experiences through written narratives and drawings, which were later explored in individual interviews.

4. Interviews with the school community: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four teachers and members of the school community of migrant origin to understand integration and intercultural dynamics.

5. Systematic data collection: Narratives, drawings, and interviews were organized and categorized for qualitative analysis.

6. Data processing: The collected materials were analyzed to structure conclusions and prepare the audiovisual production phase.

7. Short film production: Students' illustrations and narratives served as the basis for the animation and production of a short film by Fine Arts students in Teruel, creatively capturing children's perspectives on migration and intercultural coexistence.

8. Community feedback: The short film was presented to participants and families, returning results and sharing study conclusions, strengthening participation and community learning.

The data were analyzed using thematic coding and content analysis, identifying patterns in how students and teachers conceptualize migration and cultural diversity. The short film was used as an educational resource to promote intercultural education in the region, incorporating teachers' suggestions (Gholami, 2023, 2025).

4. Results

The application of diasporic education was analyzed from two main dimensions (Gholami, 2025):

- Diasporisation of the educational space: Migrant students' presence influenced classroom dynamics and curriculum, integrating their cultural perspectives. Their narratives and drawings made visible emotional and symbolic dimensions that enrich intercultural learning.

- Identity and belonging: Participation through drawings and written/oral narratives supported the construction of belonging. Visual productions allowed students to express emotions, relationships, and migration experiences, complementing verbal accounts.

In Caspe and Teruel, migrant students reshaped classroom interactions, generating new narratives that challenge traditional structures and reveal segregation dynamics (Huarte González et al., 2022; Goenechea, 2016). Their experiences of discrimination and adaptation were expressed through interviews, writing, and drawings, where visual elements (colors, shapes, spatial organization) conveyed emotions and social relations. These productions deepen understanding of intercultural coexistence.

Educational adaptations included curricular adjustments and inclusive practices (e.g., non-denominational rituals or student language mediation), though these depend largely on individual schools due to the lack of explicit curricular inclusion of migration (Orden ECD/866/2024, 2024; Vidal Prado, 2023).

Regarding belonging, students reflected emotional processes of adaptation, including loneliness, language barriers, and nostalgia, alongside strategies such as language learning and participation in shared activities (Banks, 2013; Gholami, 2025). While many report a strong sense of school belonging (Martin et al., 2023), grouping by cultural origin persists in some contexts (Labrador Fernández & Blanco Puga, 2007; Pinyol-Jiménez et al., 2020).

Overall, integrating artistic production enhances empathy, participation, and intercultural understanding. Drawings function as a key visual language that reveals both explicit and latent meanings, allowing deeper insight into how children perceive migration, diversity, and their place in the school context.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The study highlights the impact of artistic narration and diasporic education on the teaching of migration and cultural diversity. Students' narratives and drawings reveal understandings of migration linked to uprooting, family, and belonging, while also showing how schools support integration despite persistent linguistic and cultural barriers affecting peer group formation (Nieto, 2017; Banks, 2013).

The short film based on students' productions proved effective in fostering motivation, reflection, and intercultural empathy, confirming the value of audiovisual tools in intercultural learning (Fernández-Labayen et al., 2022; Macleroy & Shamsad, 2020). This process enabled active student participation in learning construction. Narratives also reflect Brah's (1996) "homing desire," combining family attachment with school belonging and multiple identities (Gholami, 2023, 2025).

Tensions persist between cultural clustering among students and school efforts toward integration. Teacher-led initiatives (language support, inclusive rituals, tutoring) reflect intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006; Theeuwes et al., 2025; Hagenaaars et al., 2025), though their implementation depends on context and training. Although similar practices exist in Ibero-American contexts (Fernández-Labayen et al., 2022; Oliver-Barceló & Ferrer-Ribot, 2022; Serber, 2021; Torrelles Montanuy et al., 2022), transnational dimensions of minority communities remain underdeveloped (Coulby, 2006; Gholami, 2023). Combining audiovisual production with interviews represents a methodological advance aligned with transformative intercultural education (Conti, 2025).

However, these practices remain limited without structural change. Intercultural policies are often disconnected from school realities, and curricular rigidity and segregation persist in Spain (Gholami & Costantini, 2025; Coulby, 2006; Fernández Peña & Filigrana García, 2019; Vidal Prado, 2023). Despite existing frameworks (LO 3/2020; Orden ECD/794/2022; regional plans), implementation is fragmented and uneven (Gobierno de Aragón, 2022; Comarca Bajo Aragón-Caspe, 2023–2026).

Overall, combining narratives, drawings, and audiovisual production enables a participatory and empathetic approach to learning, but its transformative potential depends on deeper curricular and policy integration.

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