

Mother tongue, culture and performance in a multicultural context of Early Childhood Education

Lengua materna, cultura y rendimiento en un contexto multicultural de Educación Infantil

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the differences in performance due to the different languages and cultures in the multicultural society. The problem of linguistic disadvantage distorts educational performance causing a decrease for those students whose mother tongue and culture does not match the official one. To know these differences, a sample of 501 students of the third year of Early Childhood Education was used, to which the degree of acquisition of the competence aspects of the areas of communication and language, social and motor was measured. The results show how the mother tongue is a factor of differentiation of the performance in this period. These differences, found in all areas, are greater in the area of communication and language than in the social and motor field. It is verified that differences are established between the students of culture of Christian and Muslim origin.

Resumen

Este trabajo analiza las diferencias de rendimiento debidas a las diversas lenguas y culturas en la sociedad multicultural. El problema de la desventaja lingüística distorsiona el rendimiento educativo provocando una disminución para aquel alumnado cuya lengua materna y cultura no coincide con la oficial. Para conocer estas diferencias se utilizó una muestra de 501 alumnos del tercer curso de Educación Infantil, a los que se midió el grado de adquisición de los aspectos competenciales de las áreas de comunicación y lenguaje, social y motriz. Los resultados demuestran como la lengua materna es un factor de diferenciación del rendimiento en este periodo. Estas diferencias, constatadas en todas las áreas, son mayores en el área de comunicación y lenguaje que en el ámbito social y motriz. Se verifica que se establecen diferencias entre el alumnado de cultura de origen cristiano y musulmán

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Introduction

Nowadays, human mobility makes it necessary to acquire new intercultural competences to face these new situations (Spitzberg & Chamgon, 2009). Nevertheless, acquiring knowledge on different cultures to the greatest extent is a complex process due to the fact that cultures are very diverse and interconnected (Velasco, 2003). This heterogeneity is present in the classrooms (García & Moreno, 2014) and results in a series of discrepancies that coexist among the students, uncovering different learning styles that are also linked to already different cultural groups (Ramírez & Castañeda, 1974).

From the outset, in the context of formal education system of children's schools, the complexity of the factors that condition the students' learning progress is noted (Olmedo, 2017). In these schools, direct relationships determined by gender, cultural origin, family, language use and intercultural friendship (Sanhueza & Cardona, 2009) are promoted, and this may have an impact on academic performance (Goñi, Ros & Fernández-Lasarte, 2018). All of them have points in common regarding language evolution; therefore, language development is an essential resource for the integration of new fields (Piaget, q. Maier, 2000) and educational progress, communication thus becomes an essential reference of multicultural education (Hall, 1999).

On the other hand, the foundations that will determine the learning models to get an understanding of the world start to be laid at this stage in the family context (Berry, 1997) and they are powerful predictors of academic performance (Bruner & Elacque, 2003; Esping-Andersen, 2004). The nuclear family is also one cornerstone for their development (Arranz, 2004) and determines the role of a cultural model that may condition the evolution in the motor, personal, affective social, cognitive and linguistic spheres (De-la-Peña, Parra & Fernández, 2018). This is reflected in language, generally associated

to cultural identity, creating a cultural hybrid that mediates the acquisition of the mother tongue, which may be different from the official language in which school learning takes place (Latorre, Mateos, Olmedo & Esteban, 2018). The mother tongue handed down in the family context becomes a cultural identity that can condition the linguistic attitudes and favourable integration in other communities (Gardner, 1973). Nevertheless, such integration is a difficult problem to resolve when the family culture model is different to culture at school.

The different processes of children's learning establish, on one hand, an internal relationship to get an understanding of the world. This ability effectively assists in language acquisition (Chomsky, 1968), motor development and social and affective progress (Bowlby, 1993). On the other hand, they establish the external relationship linked to the context and its characteristics (Wild, 2011). The combination of both processes promotes the diversity of the multicultural sphere (Brunner, 1997), as well as other associated factors, such as the level of parental education and their support and involvement in the educational process (Vygotsky, 1978).

Family culture plays a key role when it comes to interpret the reality shared with the peer group (Bernal, 2003). The mother, a repository of this culture, highlights this process and notably school success or failure, especially when such language, conveys all this dynamics, is different to the language used at school.

This article aims at verifying that having a mother tongue that is different to the official language (school) conditions the performance of the students of Early Childhood Education in a multicultural context, and at verifying to which extent the conditions prior to formal education are defined by culture and the environment, varying from one student to the other. Such differences may have an impact on subsequent learning (Mora, 2013), making this socio-cultural factors very variable and determining academic performance (Álvaro, Bueno &

Calleja, 1990; Tejedor & García-Valcárcel, 2006; Ruiz-de-Miguel, 2009).

Method

This research, of a transversal and descriptive nature, has been conducted just measuring the performance of the students of the sample, which was explained to interpret the different variations in their academic performance without analysing their causes in depth.

Participants

The probability-type sample was selected in 14 state schools and 5 state-subsidised schools in the Autonomous City of Ceuta. The population amounts to 1,277 students of year 3 of second cycle of Early Childhood Education, whose representative group amounted to 501 students ($1-\alpha=0.95$, $e=3,2\%$, $p=.50$), aged between 4 and 5, 54.76% were boys and 45.24% were girls. 36.12% have Spanish as their mother tongue and 63.88 % have Darija as their mother tongue.

The coexistence of different languages and dialects is one of the most significant peculiarities of Ceuta's cultural and linguistic diversity. In this sense, in addition to Spanish as the official language, Haketia and Sindhi coexist in the city. Ceuta's Muslim population speaks and communicates in Spanish and Arabic (Darija), switching from one language to the other relatively often in the same conversation, although there is a certain diglossia in favour of Spanish. Darija is one of the dialects of Arabic that is most frequently used nowadays.

Instrument

The instrument used to assess performance was specifically created for this study, is made up of 55 items answered using a Likert-type scale of 4 categories (1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=always) that include the level of acquisition of competence aspects that measure different

variables ranging areas of communication and language (reading, speaking, writing, phonemic awareness and mathematical language) made up of 30 items; social (emotional development, attitude towards his/her peers, attitude towards work, playing, and habits) that includes 19 items and motor area in last place, which includes 11 items.

The results of a pilot study were taking into account when preparing this study: its design, validity and the materials selected, based on the contributions made by education law and the analysis of standardised instruments such as the WISC, Merrill Palmer R (Roid & Sampers, 2011) and pedagogic graduation tests. The instrument's reliability, taking into account the amount of items and different answers (Domínguez-Lara y Merino-Soto, 2015), was obtained through Cronbach alpha statistical calculation, one of the psychometric studies most frequently used (Maroco & García-Marques, 2013), which showed an internal consistency of 0.96, 0.96 in the language scale, .79 in social skills and 0.87 in motor skills; the results are considered excellent (George & Mallery, 2003). The content's validity was obtained with the assistance of 25 experts, 92% of which agreed on keeping the original dimensions and items that make up the communication and language dimensions, social and motor skills (Mateos & Olmedo, 2018.).

Procedure

The questionnaires were handed over to the teachers, who were previously informed in order to avoid any doubts that may arise on filling them out. The statistical package SPSS 22.0 was used to analyse the data, and descriptive analyses were performed to identify the sample's characteristics, as well as inferential analysis (ANOVA) where performance was the dependent variable and mother tongue was the independent variable, and factor analysis by mother tongue was also performed.

Results

In order to achieve the first objective of our work, the results of the variation analysis for the first dimension under analysis are shown in table 1.

The results show that there are performance differences in all spheres (100% of the variables) of communication and language. There is one exception in terms of being distracted: the

mean of those students who have Darija as their mother tongue and Muslim culture is higher ($p < .001$), in other words, they are distracted more often. With regard to all the aspects that make up communication and language, when calculating the differences between the means of each group, we find that the most significant performance differences between those students who have Spanish and Darija as their mother tongue arise in the field of speaking, when assessing the ability to describe a picture

Table 1.
Mother tongue and performance in terms of communication and language

Communication and language	Mean		F
	Spanish	Darija	
He/she listens to stories.	3.68	3.29	26.65***
He/she is distracted	2.16	2.52	15.24**
Follow and remember the story	3.53	3.17	20.49***
Precise vocabulary	3.71	3.17	50.41***
Understandable productions	3.71	3.31	29.79***
Uses imagination	3.56	3.04	38.34***
Ends stories	3.55	3.07	32.44***
Describe pictures	3.78	3.15	60.04***
Follows dialogue	3.75	3.34	30.87***
Writes the dictation	3.49	3.07	22.60***
Identifies differences in words	3.46	3.05	20.60***
Drawing-word relationship	3.55	3.04	32.14***
Organises sentences	3.12	2.69	18.19***
Upper case lower case	3.80	3.52	17.90***
Divides word sound	3.58	3.19	19.47***
Same vowels	3.43	2.94	22.47***
Number quantities	3.79	3.60	9.52**
Organises by number	3.82	3.61	13.07***
Copies triangles	3.88	3.71	10.06**
Adds vertically horizontally	3.58	3.29	11.73**
Close open lines	3.84	3.56	19.88***
Straight curved lines	3.86	3.59	21.69***
Far near concepts	3.84	3.58	18.28***
Objectifies time	3.51	3.19	14.93***

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

($p < .001$), to use specific language ($p < .001$), to use imagination to tell stories ($p < .001$) and to gather drawings and establish relationships with words ($p < .001$), which corresponds to writing.

With regard to the second dimension, made up by the variables that make up social skills (emotions, attitudes, habits) and motor skills (table 2), are significantly different only in 50% of the cases. In the field of emotions, sharing feelings in groups ($p < .001$) and identifying emotions ($p < .001$) make up the dimension with more significant differences between both groups.

Collaboration in group tasks ($p < .01$) and accepting work rules ($p < .001$) are noteworthy with regard to attitudes. With regard to motor skills, the variable that shows more significant differences between the means is making

balanced movements ($p < .001$) and identifying the left and the right part of their own body ($p < .001$).

In the field of emotions, sharing feelings in groups ($p < .001$) and identifying emotions ($p < .001$) make up the dimension with more significant differences between both groups.

In order to achieve the second objective, factor analyses of each one of the areas previously analysed: communication and language, social and motor skills, comparing the results of Spanish-speaking students and Darija-speaking students, namely, participants having Christian and Muslim cultures. In the first area, upon verifying that the sample's adequacy indexes are relevant (KMO=. 89, $p < .001$, for the group of Spanish-speaking students, KMO=0. 95, $p < .000$, for the group of Darija-speaking students), a three-factor structure is obtained that explains 66.75% of variation in the case of students with Spanish as their mother tongue and 78.9% in the case of students with Darija as their mother tongue.

Table 2.
Mother tongue and performance in social and motor skills

	Mean		F
	Spanish	Darija	
Identifies emotions	3.83	3.49	30.58***
Shares feelings	3.80	3.41	34.65***
Links classmates	3.70	3.51	9.30**
Collaborates in tasks	3.91	3.34	27.68***
Accepts work rules	3.70	3.30	16.33***
Work pace	3.62	3.29	9.23**
Finishes task	3.64	3.41	10.56**
Has initiative	2.91	2.63	6.71*
Accepts game rules	3.34	3.10	12.482***
Handles material carefully	3.51	3.21	15.43***
Right left	3.35	3.02	8.69**
Walks down stairs	3.80	3.62	46.44***
Balanced movements	2.24	3.06	11.85**
Names body positions	3.84	3.64	10.74**
Bodily sensations	3.82	3.63	10.45**

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

As shown in table 3, the first factor, in the case of students with Spanish as their mother tongue, has 6 variables (47.65% of variation), the structure of this factor reflects the speaking dimension of language. The students who work using the school's official language, namely their mother tongue, easily understand and focus their learning dynamics on the speaking dimension of language. According to table 3, the factor has the following variables: ending a story (.845) and following a dialogue (.838), which have a greater impact, together with the one that has a lesser impact: making understandable (.769), confirm this point.

In the case of students with Darija as their mother tongue, the factor has 8 variables (64.9% of variation) and its structure reflects the listening dimension of language. Given the fact that their mother tongue is different to the official language used at their school, understanding

Table 3.

Language and communication factor: Spanish and Darija as mother tongue

MOTHER TONGUE SPANISH	Component			MOTHER TONGUE DARIJA	Component		
	1	2	3		1	2	3
Ends stories	.845			Drawing-word relationship	.847		
Follows dialogue	.838			Identifies differences words	.817		
Describe pictures	.799			Organises sentences	.794		
Uses imagination	.780			Writes the dictation	.793		
Precise vocabulary	.769			Divides word sound	.751		
Understandable productions	.769			Same vowels	.706		
Drawing-word relationship		.874		Upper case lower case	.635		
Identifies difference-wordswords		.855		Follow and remember the story	.520		
Writes the dictation		.843		Understandable productions		.850	
Organises sentences		.751		Follows dialogue		.837	
Upper case lower case		.674		Ends stories		.817	
Divides word sound		.578		Precise vocabulary		.812	
Same vowels		.511		Uses imagination		.804	
He/she listens to stories.			.675	Describe pictures		.749	
Follow & remember-nar. story			.582	Listens-storiesstories.			.605

the language is the main priority. The variables of this factor are defined by the understanding load they represent: drawing-word relationship (.847) and identifying differences (.817), which have a greater impact, together with following and remembering (.520), which has a lesser impact.

In the case of Spanish-speaking students, the second factor has 7 variables (12.2% of variation), which make up the understanding dimension of language. In the case of Darija-speaking students, the second factor has 6 variables (7.4% of variation), which are the same that structure the first factor for Spanish speaking students, which constitutes orderly distribution of the speaking dimension of language. Although, as shown in table 3, variables progressively have a lesser impact as they generate more abstract dynamics (uses imagination .804).

In the case of students who have Spanish as their mother tongue, the third factor has 2 variables (6.9% of variation) and is a schematic summary of communication, the abilities to understand and express, is complete in the case of this group and incomplete in the case of students who have Darija as their mother tongue, as their factor (6.6% of variation) has one only variable that -precisely- corresponds to understanding.

With regard to social skills, the results also confirm the adequacy to the model (KMO=.800, $p < .000$, for the group of Spanish-speaking students, KMO=.874. $p < .000$ for the group of Darija-speaking students), structured with 5 factors that explain 66.09% and 66.7% of variations of students with Spanish and Darija as their mother tongue, respectively. In the case of Spanish-speaking students, the first factor

Table 4.
Social skills factor: Spanish as mother tongue

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Work pace	.855				
Handles material carefully	.812				
Organises	.810				
Perfectionist	.771				
Finishes task	.769				
Accepts work rules	.605				
Gets dressed	.602				
Shares feelings		.812			
Links classmates		.670			
Identifies emotions		.652			
Dominant independent			.782		
Has initiative			.632		
Accepts game rules				.672	
Gets dirty				.669	
Collaborates in tasks				.552	
Barely plays					.826
Quiet organised					.622

Table 5.
Social skills factor: Darija as mother tongue

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Finishes task	.848				
Perfectionist	.813				
Work pace	.811				
Handles material carefully	.809				
Organises	.790				
Accepts work rules	.562				
Shares feelings		.858			
Identifies emotions		.821			
Links classmates		.670			
Collaborates in tasks		.640			
Accepts consequences		.539			
Dominant independent			.822		
Has initiative			.601		
Accepts game rules			.599		
Quiet organised				.731	
Barely plays				.691	
Gets dressed					.702
Gets dirty					.692

has 7 variables (26.4% of variation). They are the organised distribution related to habits and attitude towards work (table 4), where the variables with a greater impact are referred to work pace, careful use of materials and the order reflected in their attitude towards classroom work, which is different in the case of Darija-speaking students (table 5), whose factor has 6 variables (33.5% of variation) that reflect an scheme based on one attitude not only towards work but also towards some kind of competitiveness derived from finishing the task and the perfectionism that is instilled in their family context.

With regard to the second factor, in the case of Spanish-speaking students (table 4), it has variables (11.2% of variation), which reflects the

impact of the emotional sphere on their relationships with their peers. In the other group, the structure focuses on the relationships and the collaboration with their peers, a singular aspect of Muslim culture. This is also reflected in the third factor, where the structure of the attitude towards the dynamics of playing comes together with the concern about rules, in the case of Darija-speaking students. In the case of Spanish-speaking students, this attitude towards their peers comes together when playing games and collaborating in tasks, in addition to the appearance of dirtiness or cleanness that mediates the relationships between peers. In the case of Darija-speaking students, this cleanness aspect appears in the fifth factor (table 5) as a habit that is directly linked to the rules of their family culture. As for Spanish-speaking students, this

Tabla 6.
Factorial de Motricidad: lengua materna castellana y darija

MOTHER TONGUE SPANISH	Component		MOTHER TONGUE DARIJA	Component	
	1	2		1	2
Names body positions	.846		Command of upper case letters	.818	
Bodily sensations	.843		Regular trace	.793	
Walks down stairs	.692		Uses pencil correctly	.749	
Uses pencil correctly	.605		Cut accuracy	.738	
Cut accuracy		.775	Right left	.731	
Regular trace		.722	Ball control	.568	
Right left		.706	Walks down stairs	.519	
Command of upper case letters		.640	Breathing rate		.787
Balanced movements		.636	Bodily sensations		.777
Ball control		.578	Names body positions		.775
Breathing rate		.568	Balanced movements		.647

fifth factor is organised with low participation in playing.

Similarly, the results referring to motor skills match the sample's adequacy indexes (KMO = .863, $p < .000$, & KMO = .880, $p < .000$ for Spanish-speaking and Darija-speaking students, respectively) and explain a variation of 60.08% for the first group and 63.8 % for the second.

In the model of Spanish-speaking students, the first factor has 4 variables (table 6), basing motor learning in aspects related to knowledge on the body and movement coordination. In the case of Darija-speaking students, this factor has 7 variables that organise fine and gross motor coordination, as well as laterality.

As for Spanish-speaking students, the second factor has 7 variables that structure the same aspects as the first factor in the case of Darija-speaking students, fine and gross motor coordination, laterality and command of breathing rate. With regard to Darija-speaking students, this factor with 4 variables schematises the structure of command of knowledge, body control and coordinated movements.

Conclusions

The most significant differences in terms of performance affect the communication and language dimensions, especially speaking, an issue that can be linked to deficits that have a direct impact on the final behaviour of the effort of learning a new language, as in the case of Darija-speaking students. This situation is caused by the encounter between the school language, which is official, and the cultural language, conditioned by the use in the family context of a dialect that is inherent to their cultural identity (Olmedo, 2017) and affects language structure (Vygostky, 1993). Phonetic awareness is another barrier for Darija-speaking students to improve their language development, as it is directly linked to communicative progress, and the latter is in turn linked to the ability to learn. Therefore, phonetic discrimination is not only a driver to develop phonetic awareness, but it is also a foundation to learn written texts and a basic psycho-linguistic skill that requires a basic level at this stage (Querejeta, 2017). The communicative progress and the lower levels of written language of Darija-speaking students can be related to a deficit in the main basis of the devel-

opment of oral language, thus limiting graphic and phonic correspondence.

This stage contains plenty of universal basic concepts and students have to recode and adapt the expression in their cultural mother tongue to a limited working-official vocabulary that required further work. We thus find the entrenchment of values linked to the lack of attention and concentration of those students identified as speakers of a mother tongue that is different to the official language. On the contrary, the universal nature of mathematical language (Russell, 1956) makes these two groups more homogeneous, as it is an ability that does not rely on the subjectivity of language because it is a representation of reality supported by abstraction and objective symbolism. For this reason, there are very few differences in the field of mathematical language.

Differences in terms of social skills are also favourable to Spanish-speaking students, which shows that Darija-speaking students endeavour to fit, which also consists on learning new patterns that may contravene their family traditions, following rules that may not be in line with their knowledge bases. For this reason, the greatest difference is related to the attitude towards their peers and the emotional state of those students who have to learn, as the school follows a cultural model (Goffman, 1973) that is linked to the model of Spanish-speaking students in this case. Nevertheless, playing is a way to share and exchange other kind of more general principles that make it easier for students to interact with each other. Therefore, there are fewer differences in this field.

There are fewer differences in terms of motor skills, and we find the impact of consciously internalising laterality: in the case of Darija-speaking students, left-right orientation is the reference axis thereof, which is contrary to that of Spanish-speaking students and affects the evolution of this type of knowledge at this stage of early childhood.

As for Darija-speaking students, the communication and language sphere is a more interesting factor related to listening. This structure is the cornerstone for the knowledge building process of these students, aimed at communicating orally in a proper way. Nevertheless, in the case of Spanish-speaking students, speaking is the structure that is presented in the first place because it is their main concern as they feel in their natural environment. Interest in habits and attitudes towards the tasks singles out Spanish-speaking students. Darija-speaking students are more concerned about work well done, a message conveyed in their family context seeking for a good reputation of children at school. They are also more interested in rules and collaborating with their classmates, a living example of their traditional cooperation and solidarity between them (Amador, Mateos & Esteban, 2017); Spanish-speaking students are less involved in playing. There are also differences between Spanish-speaking students and Darija-speaking students in terms of motor skills, as the former rely on knowledge on the body and movement coordination and the latter rely on coordination and laterality.

The results confirm the influence of the mother tongue in development at this stage, conditioning the learning styles linked to culture. The difference between the groups inferred based on performance relies on language (Vygotsky, 1978) and therefore a sequential language development is presented parallel to the evolutionary progress of Spanish-speaking students, abilities acquired at a normal level of development and that promote improvement in other areas. On the contrary, this pattern is different among Darija-speaking students, as they establish a language hierarchy linked to deficits conditioned by a non-structured dialect (Darija) that interferes in this process, but this dynamics does not exist in the mathematical language.

Considering that language is an instrument to code language, it has huge implications in the individual's cognitive development, as it is part of the progress of superior mental abilities

involved in learning processes (Luria, 1980), it should be advisable to highlight the value of teaching a language in Early Childhood Education to withdraw disparities related to the use of different language codes linked to cultural diversity (Turner & Cross, 2016).

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