

# Stefania Szczurkowska

---

## Multiculturalism in education in Spain

---

Studia z Teorii Wychowania 6/4 (13), 109-125

---

2015

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

**Stefania Szczurkowska**

Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna w Warszawie

## Multiculturalism in education in Spain

### Social spectrum – general remarks

Contemporary Spain is home to 46 507 760 inhabitants who mainly live in big cities (78% urbanization). The composition of the population at 1st January 2014 showed the total number of 41 831 739 Spaniards and 4 676 022 foreign nationals. Foreigners amounted to 10.1% of the total and they decreased from 12.2% that was reported in 2010. Foreign population according to nationality gives a broad spectrum of countries, among which Romania, Morocco, United Kingdom, Ecuador and Italy are mostly represented. The incomers from Colombia, China, Germany, Bulgaria and Bolivia are placed right after. Lower in numbers are the citizens of Portugal, France, Peru, Ukraine and Argentina. The migration flow abroad has increased in 2013. Thus, a total of 291 041 persons from abroad set up residence in Spain. At the same time, 547 890 people left Spain bound for a foreign country. In relative terms, between 2012 and 2013 immigration diminished by 4.3%, whereas emigration registered a 22.7% growth<sup>1</sup>.

The Spanish society is traditionally composed by diverse ethnic groups with the predominant 74.4% of Castilian Spaniards who are followed by 16.9% of Catalan, 6.4% of Galician and 1.6% of Basque, meanwhile other ethnic groups contribute by 0.7%, among which Gypsies are significant in numbers. The composition of languages that are spoken is also rich and it comprises: Spanish, Catalan, Galician and Basque (Euskera). As regards religious affiliation of the society, the distribution is, as follows: Roman

---

<sup>1</sup> *Population Figures at 1 January 2014 Migration Statistics...*, Press Release, Instituto Nacional de Estadística [www.ine.es/en/prensa/np854\\_en.pdf](http://www.ine.es/en/prensa/np854_en.pdf) (accessed 22.11.2015).

Catholics – 66.7%, Muslim – 1.2%, Protestant – 0.5%, other religions – 3.3% and non-religious – 28.3%<sup>2</sup>.

Spain is a country in which intercultural families produce one of the most relevant phenomena in terms of the social impact. They consist of the so-called mixed marriages or intercultural marriages. In the past decades, the country used to present the predominant model of a traditional mononuclear, Catholic family, but nowadays one can observe a huge variety of family models with their diverse configurations, including amplified families, one-parent families or immigrant ones. Between 2000 and 2008, in some cities almost half of the total number of marriages were mixed, for example in Melilla, an autonomous Spanish city on the Moroccan coast they reached 46.7%. In other principal metropolitan centres, like Madrid, Barcelona, Málaga, Valencia, an average rate of mixed marriages amounts to 14.4%. In fact the statistics are higher if we take into consideration families or couples living together without any official document. The census of 2001 reported just only 4.8% of Spanish couples cohabiting together without legal marriage, while the statistics for mixed couples showed 25%<sup>3</sup>. Given the size of the phenomenon, the integration of mixed or intercultural marriages and couples in the community and an outlook of their quality of life, are issues of significant importance. Moreover that, there are signs of dissatisfaction of intercultural families in respect of their formal support from the part of social services. There is also expressed a strong internal demand for mutual support that is strictly connected with cultural differences. The discussion is open in terms of the access to education for children from intercultural families, their social inclusion or discrimination.

The integration of foreign alumni in primary and secondary schools is a huge challenge in Spain today and it presents the immigration related diversity in compulsory education. This stage of instruction is from 6 to 16 years of age and it consists of primary education (*colegios de educación primaria*) – 6-12 years, divided in 3 periods of 2 years each, and of obligatory secondary education (*educación secundaria obligatoria, ESO*) – 12-16 years, divided in 2 periods of 2 years each. The participation of immigrant students in the Spanish educational system has constantly increased since the beginning of 2000s and it has recently reached over 15% in some communities,

---

<sup>2</sup> *Spain: general data – Population statistics*, [www.populstat.info/Europe/Spaing.htm](http://www.populstat.info/Europe/Spaing.htm) (accessed 22.11.2015).

<sup>3</sup> G. Moscato, *Familias interculturales en España: análisis de la satisfacción vital*, <http://rabida.uhu.es/dspace/handle/10272/5914> (accessed: 20.11.2015).

with particularly high numbers in primary and lower secondary stages of instruction. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports, they usually have lower achievement than Spaniards, even though a large proportion of immigrants of about 50% originate from Latin America and their local language communication skills should help them to be fast in catching up with native students. In fact, this initial linguistic advantage is not useful, at all. The rate of improvement shows that immigrant pupils who have ever since had permanent residence in Spain, and who stay almost all their lives there, still perform significantly worse than natives in all domains. In addition to that, the achievement gap might well be rooted in the social segregation of students across schools. Most of the gap can be justified by individual and family characteristics, meanwhile much less of it can be attributed to differential school attendance<sup>4</sup>.

### **Legal framework for education**

Spain is cosignatory of a number of crucial international instruments that provide the right to education in a direct or indirect way: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCRs), the Convention for the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, the Convention for the elimination of racist discrimination. In 1989 the CRC launched a new perspective of the right to the development of respect for cultural identity, language and values. The above context was also raised by the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights of 1996 put into effect in Barcelona after a long debate among various institutions and nongovernmental organizations. Being a state party of the ICESCRs, the country has three kinds of obligations concerning the right to education: “(...) ‘the obligation to respect’ oriented to avoid any measure by the Spanish government that could preclude the enjoyment of this right, (...) ‘the obligation to protect’ means that the government should adopt measures in order to prevent third parties from interfering in the enjoyment of this right, (...) ‘the obligation to fulfill’ which is divided in two dimensions. On the one hand, the obligation to facilitate, in the sense of taking positive measures to ensure that education is culturally appropriate for minorities, of special relevance in the case of all the language minorities in Spanish

---

<sup>4</sup> N. Zinovyeva, F. Felgueroso, P. Vazquez, *Immigration and student achievement in Spain: evidence from PISA*, in: *SERIEs*, 2014, no. 5, p. 25-50. [link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s13209-013-0101-7.pdf](http://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s13209-013-0101-7.pdf) (accessed 22.11.2015).

territory and the conflicts that could create. On the other hand, there is an obligation to provide the necessary resources to create educative means adaptable enough to the changing circumstances, such as the increasing level of cultural diversity”<sup>5</sup>.

Spanish Constitution of 1978 guarantees everyone the right to education and recognizes freedom of instruction (art. 27. 1). The art. 27. 2 stresses the principal objective of education that is “the full development of the human personality in respect for the democratic principles of coexistence and the basic rights and liberties”<sup>6</sup>. The art. 27. 4 says that the public authorities shall inspect and standardize the educational system in order to ensure compliance with the laws. The Organic Law of General Order of Educative System 1/1990 in its art. 1. b puts forward the objectives of education which should be provided in the respect of the fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as in the exercise of tolerance and freedom in the light of democratic principles of cohabitation. The same document in its art. 1. a, 1. b and 1. c describes the quality principles of the educative system in the following order: “(...) Equity, which guarantees an equality of qualified opportunities, for the full development of the personality through education, the respect to democratic principles and to the fundamental rights and freedoms. (...) The capacity to translate values that favours the personal freedom, the social responsibility, the cohesion and improvement of societies, and the equality of rights between men and women, that help to overpass discrimination, as well as the practice of solidarity, through the impulse of the civic participation of the students in activities of volunteering. (...) The capacity to act as compensatory element of personal and social inequalities”<sup>7</sup>.

Spanish Constitution of 1978 gives emphasis to the freedom of conscience and religion in its three articles: art. 27. 3, art. 16. 1 and art. 16. 3, respectively: “(...) Public authorities guarantee the right of parents to choose according to their own convictions and moral values the religious and moral education that they want for their children. (...) Freedom of ideology, religion, and cult of individual and communities. (...) No religion shall have a state character. The public powers shall take into account the religious beliefs of Spanish society and maintain the appropriate relations of cooperation, with

---

<sup>5</sup> A. Azkunaga Asencor, *Intercultural education in Spanish schools: a first multicultural generation in a monocultural educative tradition*, European Master’s Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation, Academic Year 2006/2007, [www.fd.unl.pt/anexos/european\\_master\\_degree.pdf](http://www.fd.unl.pt/anexos/european_master_degree.pdf), p. 15, 16 (accessed 24.11.2015).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem.*, 4. *Anex, Box 1: The Right to Education*, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem.*

the Catholic Church and other religions”<sup>8</sup>. The Organic Law 1/1990 in its art. 52. 2 gives particular importance to the freedom of conscience and, in the art. 52. 3, it states that every confessional practice will have voluntary character. The Royal Decree 1513/2016 that establishes the minimum curriculum requirements for primary education tells about the optional character of the subject of religion and it gives a say to parents in this regard. They have a role in the choice and the organization of the curriculum, according to the treaties with different religious confessions.

## Spanish education system versus multiculturalism

### General remarks

Educational challenges as one of the consequences of immigration need to be examined within the perspective of the institutional framework that was built in Spain during the transition to democracy. Education became one of the crucial issues that required political and social acceptance. On the one hand, the mainstream of the debate was driven by the argument how to de-monopolize education from the Catholic Church. On the other hand, the discussion was focused on how to manage the emerging cultural diversity related to minority nations, including gypsies, with their languages, their own history and specific societal culture. The term societal culture that is adopted in this context means “(...) a territorially-concentrated culture, centered on a shared language which is used in a wide range of societal institutions, in both public and private life (schools, media, law, economy, government, etc.)”<sup>9</sup>. The principal message of the expression societal culture is to draw attention to the involvement of a common language and social institutions in the first place, whereas common religious beliefs, family habits and personal lifestyles are less taken into consideration.

The issue of secularization of education is strongly related with the composition of the educational system that consists of public and private schools plus the so-called *escuelas concertadas* – schools financed partly from the state budget and partly by the Catholic Church. The last one had in fact the monopoly over education during the dictatorship of general Francisco Franco. That is why *escuelas concertadas* were brought into life as an outcome of the political negotiation effort that occurred during the transition period

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, 4. *Anex, Box 2: The Freedom of Conscience and Religion*, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> R. Zapata-Barrero, N. de Witte, *Spanish approaches to the management of cultural diversity in compulsory education*, [www.upf.edu/gritim/\\_pdf/griip-emilie\\_wp3.pdf](http://www.upf.edu/gritim/_pdf/griip-emilie_wp3.pdf), p. 4. (accessed 24.11.2015).

aimed at democratic order. The statistics report that the majority of approximately 80% of immigrant pupils are enrolled in public schools, while the rest of approximately 20% attend either private schools or *escuelas concertadas*. This situation has two kinds of background. Firstly, there exist inequalities between public and private schools, because alumni from minority groups tend to have lower academic performance than their Spanish peers. At the same time, the politically driven question of segregation of immigrant children and youngsters is frequently raised. Secondly, no matter that the hegemony of the Church diminished in power, religion remains on the list of compulsory courses at the primary and secondary school level. In practice, it must be offered by educational institutions, but pupils are free to take it as an option, which means that they may choose it on a voluntary basis. The presence of immigrant pupils whose beliefs are other than Catholic gives reason to the demands for the instruction of other religions.

### **Inequalities in education**

The most vital problem of inequalities in education refers to the accumulation of immigrant children in public schools. In 2004, as many as 79.3% of foreign pupils in compulsory secondary education attended public schools. It needs to be stressed that *centros concertados* may adopt the selection procedure and refuse to accept students with improper behaviour or those with low learning achievement. In the autonomous regions in Spain, in which great numbers of private schools are in operation and in which high immigrant rates are reported, the majority of children from immigrant groups attend public schools. This is the case of Catalonia, Andalusia and Valencia. In the capital city of Madrid, for every ten pupils no more than two are taken into *centros concertados*. This situation applies mainly to children who come from immigrant families of workers of low incomes, whose home countries are in Latin America and North Africa.

A rapid increase of the number of immigrant students in the Spanish education system who land in public schools leads to enormous lack of equilibrium in some regions and districts, and in some cases creates ghettos and exclusion. In addition to that, the probability of social exclusion becomes even stronger because of a tendency to reject ethnic minority pupils by private schools. A paradox occurs when *centros concertados* refuse to accept a group of children from immigrant families and, at the same time, they actively defend the parental freedom of the school choice. The ghetto phenomenon, due to the accumulation of minority children in public schools, brings as a result not only the exclusion from education, but it also negatively

affects pupils from Spanish families. The latter suffer because of low standards and poor quality level of instruction. They are also treated as participants of the education process of a low prestige and reputation, which may affect exclusion on further stages of education. Segregation is depressing both for foreign children who attend public schools in which the level of instruction is decreasing, and for pupils from Spanish families who stayed in public schools, because both groups risk conflicts and stigmatization. In the long run, the school ghettos, when reflecting the specific peculiarities of the school environment with children from different social backgrounds, take part in the process of social stratification. Within this kind of perspective, education becomes one of the factors aimed at the reproduction of socio-economic status from parents to children. It also shows the way to social exclusion of individuals who originate from lower social strata, including the majority of unprivileged immigrant groups<sup>10</sup>.

### **Immigrant students' achievement after the PISA evidence**

As it has already been mentioned, the data from 2003, 2006 and 2009 collected for the purpose of the PISA reports evidently show that immigrant students tend to perform worse than their Spanish peers. The average difference between immigrant and native students is estimated as of approximately 0.7 of the standard deviation of scores in the country and it is rising over time. Immigrant children and youngsters progress more slowly at all stages of schooling and they are more likely to drop from the education system. Their deficient achievement can only be partially attributed to the lower educational level, in general, or caused by the immigrant background of their parents. So far, research has not provided evidence of the analysis whether the achievement gap between immigrants and Spaniards diminishes over time that incomers live in Spain. However, the PISA findings prove that immigrant students make a progress in their performance the longer they stay in Spain, which on the global scale does not give them any advantage, as they still have lower achievement rates than their Spanish schoolmates. There is no evidence "(...) supporting the hypothesis that native language proficiency helps immigrant students from Latin America to catch up faster. (...) This suggests that children of immigrants now arriving in Spain will

---

<sup>10</sup> T. Gmerek, *Edukacja i nierówności społeczne. Studium porównawcze na przykładzie Anglii, Hiszpanii i Rosji*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2011, p. 284-286.



probably only partially close the performance gap with native students by the end of their compulsory education”<sup>11</sup>.

The Spanish educational system might be affected in the years to come by the following factors: crucial demographic changes, quick immigration flows and continuously increasing segregation of incoming students in schools. Demography experienced the lowest fertility rates in the world, which brought as a result the decline of students by approximately 1.5 million in the nineties of the 20th century. Schools had received over 400,000 children and youngsters by the year 2007, since fertility rates grew in small stages and immigrants’ inflow massively went up. The PISA evidence states that “since 1998-1999, there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of students in upper secondary school with the overall number of students dropping by 35.7%. In primary schools and lower secondary education, the current number of students is practically the same as it was a decade ago. At the same time, the number of students in pre-primary education has increased by around 45%. The number of immigrant students has also multiplied by 8-9 times in pre-primary, primary and secondary level of education”<sup>12</sup>.

It is important to stress that, in geographical terms, the distribution of immigrant students has always been heterogeneous across the Autonomous Communities. The highest percentage fell on La Rioja, Madrid, Catalonia and Balearic Islands with the share of above 15% of foreigners in secondary schools, while Asturias, Galicia, Extremadura and Andalusia recorded no more than 7% of incomers. The spectrum of immigrant students is not homogeneous, because different definitions are being adopted. There coexist immigrants of only foreign nationality, of foreign or double nationality, as well as there are students whose both parents have foreign nationality. In addition to that, data might be sometimes undervalued, because the majority of children between 0 and 5 years of age whose parents are foreigners already have Spanish nationality. This happens due to legal procedure saying that children born in Spain can obtain Spanish nationality after one year of residence in this country. For example, in 2008 no more than 60 % of children between 0 and 5 years of age born from foreign parents had a foreign nationality<sup>13</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> N. Zinovyeva, F. Felgueroso, P. Vazquez, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

Largely public education in Spain and free of charge, compulsory up to the age of 16 since 1992 (previously 14 years of age), coexists with private schools or semi-private institutions called *centros concertados* that are supported with public funding and are obliged to follow identical guidelines as public educational institutions. Just only a few private schools do not benefit from public funds at all. In spite of the fact that students should be selected for the school admission on the basis of residential criteria, it appears that the factor of different housing locations is not predominant. Segregation of foreign students is rooted at early stage of pre-primary education that in most regions did not use to be free of charge. That is why children whose parents have paid for admittance to this early stage are given priority, when applying for primary education at the same school. It means that the socio-economic background of children and youngsters in *centros concertados* places them at a privileged position when compared with students in public schools. In general terms, the participation of Spaniards in public schools significantly went down during the last decade and their diminishing numbers were substantially reported in pre-primary education and moderately at primary and secondary levels. This state of developments is symptomatic and it will probably continue to rise at all stages of schooling. It is worth mentioning that, on the one hand, private schools in Spain have a better quality of educational resources of computers or audio-visual equipment, but, on the other hand "(...) contrary to most of the member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a peculiar characteristic of Spanish private schools is that the ratios of students to teaching staff are higher than in the public sector. (...) At the lower secondary level in Spain there are 16 students per teacher in private institutions compared with only 11 in public institutions. These differences only partially reflect the differences in class size, which are 24 and 26 students per class in the public and in the private sector, respectively"<sup>14</sup>. The above diverse proportions are the outcome of lower teaching loads in public schools due to a very strong protection of public sector teachers from the part of trade unions.

Summarizing the educational outcomes presented by the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), it needs to be stated that Spanish students of 15 years of age perform significantly below the average in all areas. In mathematics and reading they reveal approximately 20% of a standard deviation lower scores in comparison with the OECD countries. In science, the gap reaches between 10% and 15%. Northern regions usually

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 32.

get better results than Southern communities. Castile and León, as well as La Rioja reflect the level of Korea, Germany and United Kingdom, whereas Andalusia appears to be at the level of Greece. The average achievements of immigrant students in Spain is as low as in Mexico and Turkey<sup>15</sup>. It is a matter of concern that in the 2003, 2006 and 2009 waves of PISA assessment “(...) on average, the gap between immigrant and native students is about a half of the standard deviation of scores in OECD and in some regions it is above 80% of the standard deviation. The gap increases over time in all domains”<sup>16</sup>. The PISA assessment of 2012 confirmed the declining tendency. On the one hand, the educational reality faces the problem of the academic underachievement of immigrant students who in high numbers either fail to complete compulsory schooling or do not continue education in post-mandatory levels. The driving force of such a state of affairs is rooted in the interrelated socio-economic, cultural and pedagogic factors.

### **Linguistic pluralism**

Since the promulgation of the Spanish Constitution in 1978 that declared the parliamentary monarchy system of government, several regions of the country have been granted political and administrative competences. In consequence, the education system was undergoing changes that in its nature gradually transferred services and resources from the central power to the Autonomous Communities. As regards cultural issues, it needs to be stressed that the linguistic pluralism of the Spanish society was differently perceived in the course of history. At the time of the Second Republic in the thirties of the 20th century, the linguistic pluralism of Catalonia and the Basque Provinces was admitted. Those territories received political autonomy in 1933 and 1936, respectively. Later on under Franco's domination the political uniformity and one Castilian language were in force.

The situation changed in 1983 when the Laws of Linguistic Normalization were put into effect by formal proclamation giving Catalan, Basque and Galician an official status in their territories. Catalan is a co-official language spoken by 17% of the total Spanish population in Catalonia, the Balearic

---

<sup>15</sup> PISA 2006, Informe Español, Programa para la Evaluación Internacional de Alumnos de la OECD, Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia. Secretaría general de educación, Instituto de Evaluación (2006);

PISA 2009, Informe Español, Programa para la Evaluación Internacional de Alumnos de la OECD, Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia. Secretaría general de educación, Instituto de Evaluación (2010).

<sup>16</sup> N. Zinovyeva, F. Felgueroso, P. Vazquez, op. cit., p. 34.

Islands and, as a distinct variant – Valencian – in the Valencian community. It is recognized, but not official in Aragon (*La Franja*) and it is also spoken without official recognition in the municipality of Carche, Murcia. Basque is a co-official language spoken in the Basque Country and northern Navarre by 2% of the inhabitants. Basque is the only non-Romance language with an official status in mainland Spain. Galician is a co-official language spoken by 7% of all Spaniards in Galicia. It is also spoken in the adjacent western parts of the Principality of Asturias and Castile and León. The status of a language co-existing with Castilian was also attributed to Aranese that is used in the Lérida region of the Arán Valley in north-western Catalonia<sup>17</sup>.

Regional authorities were provided with decentralized control over the education system and with local power to develop bilingual programmes of instruction. In Catalonia and the Basque Provinces “(...) the authorities consequently started a process of ‘normalization’ of Catalan and Euskara. While in most Autonomous Communities, the education system is monolingual, in Catalonia education is bilingual and in Basque country the principle of separation of languages has been applied. In Catalonia children therefore are taught in both official languages and the educational system also expects that pupils at the end of compulsory schooling should be able to use both languages. In Basque country (...) there is a choice between three types of schools, each with different levels of attention to the teaching of Euskara: schools that provide all education in Euskara (...), schools where almost all education is given in Castilian (...), and schools that are situated in-between these two extremes (...). Although the two situated in-between these two extremes (...). Although the two minority nations have thus developed different policies for the normalization of Catalan and Euskara respectively, the decreasing knowledge of Euskara in Basque country has made the Basque government reconsider their language policy, and currently proposals seem to direct toward the Catalan model<sup>18</sup>. The outcome of the undertaken measures showed that in both regions of Catalonia and the Basque Provinces respective linguistic departments enforced legislative decisions that placed the national language on an equal position with Spanish. The approach was significantly important, as it embraced compulsory schooling.

---

<sup>17</sup> T. Gmerek, op. cit., p. 282, 283;

<sup>18</sup> S. Szczurkowska, *System edukacji w Hiszpanii*, in: *Systemy edukacji w krajach europejskich* (ed. by E. Potulicka, D. Hildebrandt-Wypych, C. Czech-Włodarczyk), Oficyna Wydawnicza «Impuls», Kraków 2012, p. 278.

<sup>18</sup> R. Zapata-Barrero, N. de Witte, op. cit, p. 4, 5.

### **Legislation and policy versus cultural diversity**

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 in its art. 3. 2. and 3. 3. puts clearly the idea that other languages of Spain together with the Castilian mother tongue will also be official in each autonomous community, in accordance with their statutes. The fundamental political principles on which the state is governed focuses on the richness of diverse linguistic modalities in the country that being a cultural patrimony should be the object of particular respect and protection. The above approach is also expressed and developed by the Organic Law of General Order of Educative System 1/1990 in the articles: 1 e, 1 g and 63. They subsequently admit that education needs to be provided in the respect of the linguistic and cultural pluralism of Spain, education should serve for the peace, cooperation and solidarity between the cities and towns, and, finally, it has the obligation to compensate social inequalities. The Organic Law of the Quality of Education 10/2002 in its art. 6. 1. goes into more details when it says that “(...) the state, in collaboration with the Autonomous Communities, will promote programmes of territorial cooperation oriented to educative objectives of general interest. These programmes will (...) aim, depending on their different modalities, to favour the knowledge and assessment of the cultural enrichment of Spain from the part of all their students, as well as to contribute to interterritorial solidarity”<sup>19</sup>. The art. 42 1. of the same Law gives emphasis to the incorporation of foreign students (at the age of compulsory schooling, in particular) within the education system. Education authorities and administrators are obliged to develop specific learning support for those foreigners who do not know the Spanish language and culture in order to facilitate their integration with peer groups in the classroom. The further Organic Law on Education of 2006 remains in the same stream of statements. The Royal Decree 1513/2016 that establishes the minimum curriculum requirements for primary education continues the idea of the recognition of cultural diversity, the increasing pluralism of the Spanish society, the development of social and civic competences preparing for the identity with the local community and global society <sup>20</sup>.

The Spanish immigration law presents a transparent interpretation that foreigners under the age of 18 have the right and obligation to be provided with school instruction under the same conditions as their Spanish peers. In accordance with art. 9 of the Constitutional Law 4/2000 , it means unconstrained access to free and compulsory primary and secondary education.

---

<sup>19</sup> A. Azkunaga Asencor, op. cit., 4. *Anex*, Box 3: *Acceptance of cultural diversity*, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

Attention should be drawn to the fact that education in this country is understood as a universal good that is guaranteed independently of the formal status of citizens or non-citizens. The provision goes even further saying that the access to education is guaranteed independently of the administratively documented or undocumented status of the immigrant. The above approach is in accordance with basic human rights disregarding other legal assumptions. It is important to mention in this place that "(...) the theory of goods applied to policies for managing immigration (...) says that the properties of education are symbolic, collective and heterogeneous. We can say that the symbolic and collective properties are followed in Spain, but that the heterogeneity of the good is still on the political and social agendas. The homogeneity/heterogeneity depends on the interpretation. A good is homogeneous when there is no discussion about its value, and a good is heterogeneous when not everybody values the primary good in the same way"<sup>21</sup>.

It appears that the idea of equal opportunities opens the door to the promotion of education that foreign students need in order to successfully develop their social integration that is performed with respect for their diverse cultural identity. Since 1990, a series of measures have been introduced with the aim to compensate inequalities that should be seriously taken into consideration by the state from the position of central government and by the Autonomous Communities from the local perspective. In addition to that, the Constitutional Law for the Quality of Education of 2002 postulates equal rights of education for foreigners, together with postulates equal rights of education for foreigners, together with the so-called norms of *convivencia*, which means a proper co-existence in educational institutions plus the necessity of developing language assistance and support. The Spanish term *convivencia* does not have a direct translation into English, as it is not exactly a semantic connotation of co-existence, but it rather refers to something positive translated as peaceful co-existence. It is important to focus on the idea that "(...) the Agreements of the State with the Evangelic, Jewish and Islamic communities in Spain establish some religious rights in the educational sphere, like the right of religious education, the provision of *halal* meat in school canteens and the right of religious holidays"<sup>22</sup>.

It is worth stressing that a lively debate on the presence of religious symbols in the public space advocated by the socialist government disclosed a series of discrepancies showing opinions that are "(...) divided among those

---

<sup>21</sup> R. Zapata-Barrero N. de Witte, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

who defend religious symbols as part of religious liberty and those who would like to see the prohibition of religious signs in the public sphere in the name of liberal-republican values”<sup>23</sup>. There are no laws or policies on the issue of wearing the veil (*hiyab*) by Muslim girls or using the Muslim headscarf in public schools. Even though about 60% of the Spanish population declares to be against it, the issue has never been as tough and controversial as in other European countries. Because of the absence of official regulations regarding religious symbols, incidents that happen in schools either demand arguments for the prohibition of all elements of discrimination or for the acceptance of the right to education above religious symbols.

It is interesting to mention that before immigration demonstrated its dynamism as a social phenomenon in the nineties of the 20th century Spain, the issue of cultural diversity was highlighted by the gypsy minority. The gypsies residing in the country gave evidence of the differences in academic achievements between social groups. Periodically excluded and segregated within the so-called “bridge” schools, they were later admitted into regular classrooms with the support of compensatory programmes that were originally addressed to individuals who were disfavoured by economic capacity, social level or place of residence. As cultural diversity was not considered in terms of inequality, those programmes focused on the types of actions in favour of the enrolment of children, their appropriate school attendance and the avoidance of early drop out. In contrast with compensatory programmes aimed at marginalized social groups in general, including ethnic groups, “(...) the so-called *aulas de acogida* (insertion classes) are directed specifically at immigrants and consist of separate classes for immigrants who enter to learn the language and forms of conduct in school. These insertion classes should be understood in the context of a political orientation that has been directed at what Spanish policy makers call *normalización* (normalization), the aim of incorporating immigrants within the mainstream of society, avoiding whatever direct/indirect segregationist effect”<sup>24</sup>. It often happens that students in secondary instruction level are placed in the class a year below their age. The purpose of this practice is to give them better opportunities to learn the language and to cope with the school work demands. In addition to that, a number of schools hire the so-called “cultural mediators”. They are especially trained teacher whose role is to facilitate immigrant children and

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 6, 7.

parents the process of integration within the local education system, as well as to soften conflicts resulting from language difficulties or cultural unlikeness.

### Final comments

The Spanish multicultural society is not a theoretical concept, but a social reality beyond the debate. Recently, the term multiculturalism has been frequently used and sometimes abused in the academic language of social sciences, including educational areas. Since Spain cannot be regarded as a homogeneous territory in terms of culture, in order to reflect the issue of its diversity, one can easily adopt the definition saying that “(...) a state is multicultural if its members either belong to different nations (a multi-nation state), or have emigrated from different nations (a poly-ethnic state), and if this fact is an important aspect of personal identity and political life”<sup>25</sup>.

Multiple diversity exists in the educational world in which actions are performed in a decentralized school system: the cases of Catalonia, Basque Country and Galicia – the Autonomous Communities where a second official language is raised to an important status. However, the idea of education for equal opportunities or in favour of differences remains within the responsibility of individual schools and their teachers. Those efforts are hardly acknowledged by the government bodies and policy-makers, if recognized at all.

The influence of the Catholic Church on education, with its powerful historical background and long-standing tradition, produced a composition of circumstances leading to cultural predominance. However, the instruction of Catholic religion is optional, but it is provided in the public school sector. Simultaneously, and in spite of a pressure of certain milieus being against, a new subject named “education for citizenship” was incorporated into the curriculum. Still, the instruction of minority religions for Jewish alumni, Muslims or Protestants is almost neglected.

The multicultural model of integration is often perceived in the context of segregation and social marginalization. That is why the concept of citizenship as a new condition for integration can be addressed to both immigrants and natives. From a broader perspective, the most desirable approach should give emphasis to the education of values that make life in *convivencia* – understood as a peaceful coexistence – really possible.

---

<sup>25</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural citizenship. A liberal theory of minority rights*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1995, p. 18. After X. Bonal, X. Rambla, *Splintered multiculturalism. Three theses on the multi-nation and the poly-ethnic state in the Spanish education policy*, [www.geps-uab.cat/sites/default/Splintered Multiculturalism in Spain. pdf](http://www.geps-uab.cat/sites/default/Splintered%20Multiculturalism%20in%20Spain.pdf) (accessed 15.08.2015).



## Bibliography

- Azkunaga Asencor, A., *Intercultural education in Spanish schools: a first multicultural generation in a monocultural educative tradition*, European Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation, Academic Year 2006/2007, [www.fd.unl.pt/anexos/european\\_master\\_degree.pdf](http://www.fd.unl.pt/anexos/european_master_degree.pdf) (accessed 24.11.2015).
- Bonal, X., Rambla, X., *Splintered multiculturalism. Three theses on the multi-nation and the poly-ethnic state in the Spanish education policy*, [www.geps-uab.cat/sites/default/files/publications-adjunts/Splintered Multiculturalism in Spain.pdf](http://www.geps-uab.cat/sites/default/files/publications-adjunts/Splintered%20Multiculturalism%20in%20Spain.pdf) (accessed 15.08.2015).
- Gmerek, T., *Edukacja i nierówności społeczne. Studium porównawcze na przykładzie Anglii, Hiszpanii i Rosji*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2011.
- Grzybowski, P., P., *Edukacja międzykulturowa – konteksty. Od tożsamości po język międzynarodowy*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2012.
- Integrating immigrant children into schools in Europe*, European Commission, Brussels 2009.
- Moscato, G., *Familias interculturales en España: análisis de la satisfacción vital*, <http://rabida.uhu.es/dspace/handle/10272/5914> (accessed 20.11.2015).
- PISA 2006. *Informe español, Programa para la Evaluación Internacional de Alumnos de la OCDE*, Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia. Secretaría general de educación, Instituto de Evaluación, 2006.
- PISA 2009. *Informe español, Programa para la Evaluación Internacional de Alumnos de la OCDE*, Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia. Secretaría general de educación, Instituto de Evaluación, 2010.
- Population figures at 1 January 2014 migration statistics...*, Press Release, Instituto Nacional de Estadística, [www.ine.es/en/prensa/np854\\_en.pdf](http://www.ine.es/en/prensa/np854_en.pdf) (accessed 28.11.2015).
- Spain: general data – population statistics*, [www.populstat.info/Europe/Spain.htm](http://www.populstat.info/Europe/Spain.htm) (accessed 22.11.2015).
- Szczurkowska, S., *System edukacji w Hiszpanii*, in: *Systemy edukacji w krajach europejskich* (ed. by E. Potulicka, D. Hildebrandt-Wypych, C. Czech-Włodarczyk), Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2012.
- Zapata-Barrero, R., de Witte, N., *Spanish approaches to the management of cultural diversity in compulsory education*, [www.upf.edu/gritim\\_pdf/griip-emilie\\_wp3.pdf](http://www.upf.edu/gritim_pdf/griip-emilie_wp3.pdf) (accessed 24.11.2015).
- Zinovyeva, N., Felgueroso, F., Vazquez, P., *Immigration and student achievement in Spain: evidence from PISA*, SERIEs, no. 5, p. 25-60, [link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s13209-013-0101-7.pdf](http://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s13209-013-0101-7.pdf) (accessed 22.11.2015).

## **Multiculturalism in education in Spain**

The article addresses the multifaceted issues of cultural diversity in contemporary Spain. Multiculturalism is perceived from the perspective of ethnic minorities and immigrant students in, mainly, compulsory schooling. Legal framework for the school system is followed by the description of inequalities in education. The aspect of segregation or even marginalization of immigrant alumni and their significantly lower achievement (after PISA reports), when compared to native peers, is strongly emphasized. A section dedicated to linguistic pluralism in the Autonomous Communities of Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia, gives the way to the country's legal background, as regards cultural diversity. There are also considered the aspects of support through compensatory programs in the classroom in the light of the policy of normalization.