

Facilitators and barriers for retention of migrant students in Chile: experiences of four schools in Valparaíso

Facilitadores y obstaculizadores de la retención escolar de estudiantes migrantes en Chile: experiencias de cuatro escuelas de Valparaíso

Facilitadores e dificultadores da retenção escolar de estudantes migrantes em Chile: experiências de quatro escolas em Valparaíso

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ABSTRACT: The increase in the migrant population in Chilean schools has posed significant challenges for the education system. Although policies for promoting their integration have made progress, these students present a higher dropout rate than their local peers. This study aims to define the socioeducational facilitators and barriers involved in the completion of compulsory schooling by migrant students from the perspective of educational agents. For this purpose, using a qualitative methodology, 47 interviews were conducted with the management staff, support professionals and teachers from 4 schools in the Valparaíso region (Chile). The results indicate the existence of factors at the individual, social and family, and educational community levels that influence the retention of the migrant students from the Chilean schools studied. As a conclusion, despite several protective factors, this population is more vulnerable and prone to school dropout. Therefore, the design and implementation of new and better education policies that cater to their needs is vital.

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<p>PALABRAS CLAVE: Retención escolar; deserción escolar; estudiantes migrantes; sistema educacional chileno; investigación cualitativa.</p>	<p>RESUMEN: El aumento de la población migrante en las escuelas chilenas ha significado grandes desafíos para el sistema educativo. Si bien hay avances en cuanto a las políticas que favorecen su inserción, estos estudiantes presentan mayor tasa de deserción en comparación con los nativos. El objetivo del estudio fue comprender cuáles son los facilitadores y obstaculizadores socioeducativos para el término de la escolaridad obligatoria de alumnos(as) migrantes, desde la perspectiva de los(las) agentes educativos(as). A partir de una metodología cualitativa, se realizaron un total de 47 entrevistas a directivos, profesionales de apoyo y docentes de 4 escuelas de la Región de Valparaíso (Chile). Los resultados dan cuenta de que existen factores a nivel individual, sociofamiliar y propios de las comunidades educativas que influyen en la retención de los y las estudiantes migrantes de las escuelas chilenas estudiadas. Se concluye que esta población, a pesar de contar con varios factores protectores, resultan más vulnerables y propensos a abandonar la escuela, por lo cual se vuelven indispensables el diseño e implementación de nuevas y mejores políticas educativas ajustadas a sus necesidades.</p>
<p>PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Retenção escolar; abandono escolar; estudantes migrantes; sistema educativo chileno; investigação qualitativa.</p>	<p>RESUMO: O aumento da população migrante nas escolas chilenas tem colocado grandes desafios ao sistema educativo. Embora tenha havido progressos em termos de políticas que favorecem a sua inserção, estes estudantes têm uma taxa de abandono escolar mais elevada do que os estudantes nativos. O objectivo do estudo era compreender os facilitadores sócio-educativos e os obstáculos à conclusão da escolaridade obrigatória dos estudantes migrantes, do ponto de vista dos agentes educativos. Para este efeito, utilizando uma metodologia qualitativa, foram realizadas 47 entrevistas com directores, profissionais de apoio e professores de 4 escolas da Região de Valparaíso (Chile). Os resultados mostram que existem factores a nível individual, sócio-familiar e comunitário educativo que influenciam a retenção de estudantes migrantes nas escolas chilenas estudadas. Conclui-se que esta população, apesar de ter vários factores de protecção, é mais vulnerável e propensa a abandonar a escola, tornando essencial a concepção e implementação de novas e melhores políticas educativas adaptadas às suas necessidades.</p>

Introduction

The exponential growth of migration is a problem affecting a large part of the countries in the world. According to a report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021), in 2020, the migrant population reached 281 million people, which equals 3.6% of the world's population. In the case of Latin America, increased interregional mobility has been observed, with Chile becoming—in recent years—an attractive destination due to its good political and economic stability (Aninat & Vergara, 2019). In fact, data revealed that, by the end of 2020, the foreign population in Chile reached 1,462,103 people, which implies a 12.4% increase compared to 2018. The three foreigner groups most present in the country are Venezuelans (30.7%), Peruvians (16.3%) and Haitians (12.5%) (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas [INE]; Departamento de Extranjería y Migración [DEM], 2021).

In addition, census data indicates that most of the migrant population corresponds to children and adolescents of school age, as migration to Chile includes the whole family group (INE, 2018). In this line, between 2020 and 2021, a significant increase was observed in the number of foreign students enrolled in the education system (7.95%) (Ministerio de Educación [MINEDUC], 2021). Most of them are concentrated on the public sector, which comprises municipal education centers and institutions

administratively dependent on the Local Education Services (in Spanish, SLEP) (MINEDUC, 2021). In general, migrant students enroll in free-of-charge schools with high vulnerability indexes and poor academic performance, which is partly explained by the availability of vacancies due to low demand (Eyzaguirre *et al.*, 2019).

To tackle these migratory flows and the need for better education (Galaz *et al.*, 2017), the Ministry of Education of Chile created the 2018-2022 *National Policy for Foreign Students* (in Spanish, Política Nacional de Estudiantes extranjeros 2018-2022) (MINEDUC, 2018), in order to ensure “the access, continuity and educational trajectories of foreign students in the Chilean educational system” (p. 25), regardless of their parents' migratory condition. Meanwhile, in 2021, the Migrations and Immigration Law was passed (Law No.21325, 2021), which legally and formally recognizes the right to education of migrant students in Chile. Despite this significant effort, migrant students—compared to the rest of the population—present higher school dropout rates (INE, 2018). Concretely, the results of the 2017 census indicate that the magnitude of school dropout (prevalence rate) increases in students who have stayed less time in the country compared to students who arrived in 2007 (MINEDUC, 2020).

However, official data reveal that some education institutions defy these indicators, since despite their high school vulnerability indexes (IVE) (Junta

Nacional de Auxilio Escolar y Becas [JUNAEB], n.d.) and large number of migrant students, they present percentages equal or superior to the national average for the student retention index (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2019).

These data show that, despite the adversity, there are exceptions that can become positive models not only to understand the factors influencing student retention, but also to improve the quality of the educational trajectories of migrant population. Nevertheless, thus far, there are no studies in Chile that depict the situation of the migrant population settled in the country. On the contrary, a great part of the research in student retention and dropout rates does not differentiate between native and migrant populations, ignoring the specific needs and challenges the latter faces in the Chilean education system.

Problem Statement and Objectives

Student retention, according to Fowler and Luna (2009), corresponds to the “continuous study of students until their successful graduation” (p. 70). It also comprises the set of strategies for reducing the effects of school dropout on the educational trajectories of students (Román, 2013). In turn, school dropout, despite not having a single definition (González *et al.*, 2019; Márquez *et al.*, 2016), is mostly understood as a “situation in which students voluntarily opt out their studies and school before the expected age” (Symeou *et al.*, 2014, p. 115).

Similarly, there is some consensus in that dropout is understood as a phenomenon determined by social, economic, family, and educational factors (González *et al.*, 2019). One of the most widespread theories to address it was proposed by Singh and Mukherjee (2018), who define three triggering factors: (1) push factors, located within school system (e.g., lack of resources and academic support); (2) pull factors, located on the outside (e.g., need of paid work), and (3) opted-out factors, which correspond to attitudes and behaviors of the students themselves and that lead them to decide not to attend school (e.g., lack of interest and school commitment).

Unfortunately, developing countries are more affected by this educational problem (UNESCO, 2015), especially groups in conditions of poverty, vulnerability, social exclusion, and migrant status (Free & Križ, 2022; Fritsch *et al.*, 2019; Van Der Bergue *et al.*, 2022). However, the last group has not been paid enough attention, as most studies do not focus on understanding the factors favoring or hindering student retention in the migrant population but rather analyze them indistinctively, mixed with native population (Archambault *et al.*,

2017). Nevertheless, some studies have reported on the influencing factors for migrant students.

For example, migrant students have been observed to be more motivated and committed, showing high academic aspirations (Tseng 2006). Cunningham *et al.* (2008) and Rumbaut (2004) have denominated this phenomenon “the immigrant paradox,” since—contrary to what might be expected—migrant students (especially first-generation ones) are very enthusiastic about their educational process. This, in the words of Urdan (2004), may be due to the fact that migrant students do not want to disappoint their parents, but positively contribute to the family’s migration project.

In turn, the literature has revealed that migrant students often have parents who support their academic performance, have high expectations about what they might achieve and highly value education (Bauer & Riphahn, 2007; García & Marks, 2012). For Kao and Tienda (1995), this is known as “migrant optimism,” and is based on the idea that migrant parents see the education of their children as the opportunity for a better future, therefore transmitting enthusiasm to them, which translates into students being more motivated and involved in their studies. In this same line, Herrera *et al.* (2022) and Sharkey (2013) suggest that migrant families and students are more resilient in situations of poverty than their native counterparts, and thus face with more fortitude the challenges of receiving education in a context different from that of their own countries.

Conversely, regarding retention barriers, there is consensus on the exclusion scenarios faced by migrants, among which are poverty and vulnerability (Archambault *et al.*, 2017; Free *et al.*, 2014), discrimination practices, stigmatization, and racism (Caqueo *et al.*, 2019; Céspedes *et al.*, 2019; Pavez *et al.*, 2019; Segovia & Rendón, 2020), in addition to administrative and bureaucratic problems that not only hamper their access to educational establishments but also the granting of some benefits such as food aid and scholarships (Joiko, 2019; Poblete & Galaz, 2017; Summers *et al.*, 2022), among others.

Undoubtedly, focusing efforts on the consolidation of the school trajectories of migrant students is an important indicator of socio-educative equality and integration (Martínez *et al.*, 2017), regarding which education systems, and especially the Chilean one, face great challenges. In fact, principals, teachers, and support professionals of schools are responsible for achieving the retention of all their students (Mughal, 2020); consequently, the comprehension of how migrant students conceive and act with respect to school dropout may be vital not only to first approximate a scarcely

studied phenomenon at the national level, but also to nurture (with relevant information) new and better education policies. Therefore, the objective of this work was to understand, from the perspective of educational agents, the socioeducational facilitators and barriers for the completion of compulsory education by migrant students.

To understand the methodological design of this study, it should be noted that this is part of a larger study on student retention that does not address the migrant population within educational establishments in its initial objectives. However, as a part of the field strategy, participant schools that had an important number of enrolled migrant students were identified. This information was significant to the research team, as educational institutions also showed good student retention indicators, which contradicted the data from the most recent census that revealed high school dropout rates in this sector. Altogether, a genuine interest arose in how these schools faced the student retention of all their students, although the focus was shifted to the understanding of the factors that promote or hinder it in migrant population.

The methodology for addressing the objective of this study is qualitative, as this is necessary to understand not only the meanings but also the context and processes associated with the object of study (Maxwell, 2019), which is the retention of migrant students in this case. Furthermore, this perspective has been successfully used to study other phenomena related to the challenge of migration (Herrera *et al.*, 2022; Free *et al.*, 2014). Although some quantitative research analyzes the connection between migratory status and school dropout rates (García & Friz, 2019; Archambault *et al.*, 2017), little is known about the phenomenon from the perspective of principals, teachers, and support professionals. Therefore, the scope of this study is exploratory (Ramos, 2020).

Participants

The Valparaíso region was selected because it is the second region (after the Metropolitan region) with the highest school dropout rates in Chile (MINEDUC, 2019). Likewise, it was decided to analyze a local context instead of the capital of the country. Since this study is part of a larger work, the selection of educational communities within the Valparaíso region considered the same criteria of the main project, namely: (1) municipal or private-subsidized schools, (2) with a school vulnerability index (IVE) above 75%, (3) a student retention scores equal or above the national average, and (4) with declared actions against school dropout. These four criteria together allow the

identification of educational establishments with students at high risk of dropout but that, despite the circumstances, are retained in the educational system. From these criteria and with the support of the Public Education Local Service of Valparaíso (in Spanish, SLEP), four educational centers agreed to participate. Given the exploratory nature of the study, information about the enrollment numbers of the establishments revealed, as commented at the beginning of this section, that all had high percentages of migrant students. With this contextual information, a fifth criterion emerged that refers to (5) the presence of migrants, which defines the objective of this study.

In each establishment, a sampling based on key roles was conducted: (1) management staff, (2) teachers, and (3) support professionals such as psychologists and social workers. Each school provided a list of the staff in those roles so they could be reached out to by the research team. To ensure voluntary participation, each person received an informed consent in which the objectives and scope of the study were specified, as well as the commitment of researchers to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of their interventions. In total, 47 people agreed to participate (37 women and 10 men), as shown in Table 1. This final number varied depending on the interest in participating (as participation is voluntary), signing the informed consent and the theoretical saturation criterion (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Instruments

Data was collected through interviews, as they allow researchers to approach through a conversation in which they ask, listen to people and delve into their answers (Kvale, 2011). A semi-structured interview script was employed (Tonon, 2012), which revolved around general aspects of student retention and dropout rates considered in the theoretical framework previously created for the main study to which this study belongs. In addition, the script addressed the factors influencing the retention of migrant students, for which the researchers had to explore new theoretical and/or conceptual aspects to understand how this phenomenon manifests in the migrant population. Likewise, this script comprised questions aimed at characterizing migrant students in terms of enrollment, nationality, and age, among others.

Procedures

Interviews were conducted individually between September 2021 and April 2022, and lasted 50 minutes on average. They were conducted and

School	Role			Sex	
	Management	Teachers	Support professionals	Men	Women
School 1	3	2	1	2	4
School 2	2	9	5	4	12
School 3	2	5	3	1	9
School 4	4	5	6	3	12
Total	11	21	15	10	37

Note: Created by the authors (2023).

recorded by the researchers themselves, who made sure that each participant had signed the informed consent prior to the interview. Although interviews were the main source of information, transcriptions require a second abstraction in which some probably valuable aspects like tone of voice may be lost (Kvale, 2011). In this case, exact transcriptions were made in terms of preserving repetitions, exclamations, and idioms, among others; in addition, analytical memos were used, recording ideas or conclusions that emerged during the analysis (Gil & Cano, 2010). This analysis was complemented with field notes to record impressions and other elements hard to grasp through audio recording.

It should be mentioned that to transcribe the audio, reliability protocols were established, which subscribe to the ethical principles suggested by National Research and Development Agency (ANID), the funding body of this study, and the ethics committee of the university to which the main researcher belongs.

Data analysis technique

With all this information, a content analysis was performed, as this was the most suitable technique to interpret the information available (Sánchez *et al.*, 2021). With this purpose, using the ATLAS.ti (version 9) software, a general reading of the information was conducted as a data familiarization process (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Afterwards, through reflective meetings among researchers, it was discovered that the discourse of the interviewees was centered on emerging codes that corresponded to factors that facilitated and hindered student retention in their schools. To ensure the internal reliability of the process, discussions and triangulation between judges were employed (Martínez, 2006), after which coding rules were aligned and a final code book was created. These actions gave rise to three categories that correspond to three factor

levels or groups, namely individual, socio-family and educational institutions.

Results

The interviewees recognize facilitators and barriers that influence the retention of migrant students. These factors are spread across three levels: (1) individual, (2) socio-family, and (3) institutional and pedagogical. Table 2 shows the main categories and codes associated. Below that, the main findings are presented:

Factors at the individual level

The first level recognized by different educational agents corresponds to the personal characteristics and situations that influence the successful graduation of immigrants. The first elements that would favor this process are the academic capacities of the student. In fact, while some participants perceive that migrant students are lagging behind compared to native students, others indicate that they have exceptional knowledge and capacities and even “more cultural capital.” Nevertheless, despite attributing it to the socioeconomic stability of the country of origin, this perception depends on the subjective experience interviewees have had with migrant students.

“Students who arrive from Colombia are much better prepared than students in Chile. It’s unbelievable [...] other students come from under the line of poverty, Bolivia I could say, we also had some Ecuadorians arriving and these are lagging behind to some extent” (Management team, School 4).

In turn, management team members, teachers and support professionals agree that the motivations and personal attitudes of migrant students act as facilitators for student retention. A leading attitude would be resilience, understood as the capacity to move on despite the difficulties in the environment

Table 2: Distribution of participants per educational establishment

Category and codes	Category description
Factors at the individual level Facilitators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic capacity - Motivation and personal attitudes (resilience and curiosity) Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mother tongue different from Spanish - Difficulty in understanding Chilean Spanish - Irregular migratory situation 	Personal factors of the migrant student that facilitate or hinder his educational continuity.
Factors at the socio-family level Facilitators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Migrant family commitment - Favorable attitude towards education - High expectations for children Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Illegal migratory status - Socioeconomic precariousness - New migratory experience 	Family and social factors of the migrant student that facilitate or hinder his educational permanence.
Factors at the institutional and pedagogical level Facilitators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support to learn Spanish. - Academic performance follow-up - Economic support for families - Strengthening of sense of belonging - Didactic strategies for adapting the curriculum Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of support from the Ministry 	Educational institution and teacher factors of the migrant student that facilitate or hinder his educational permanence.
Note: Created by the authors (2023).	

(Mohamed *et al.*, 2023). The life trajectories of migrant students often are portrayed as challenging, but educational communities underscore the inner strength they have to continue with their studies “despite” some factors.

“I believe that they have suffered so much in their countries that the only thing they want is to succeed. The only thing they want is to succeed and finish their studies, to have a profession” (Teacher, School 1).

A second element, in turn, is curiosity, which is understood as a cognitive trait that motivates the desire for learning more (Román, 2017). Although this trait is not exclusive to migrant people, participants believe that despite the different barriers faced, these students have an increasing interest in acquiring new knowledge to finish their studies. This tendency even translates into specific behaviors in the classroom, such as more participation or better academic performance than their native peers.

“The last time we had an end-of-school-year presentation, of the forty children that had the top grades, thirty-eight were migrants. Immigrants are getting better grades and behave better than native students” (Principal, School 4).

Regardless of their personal capacities, participants agree that these characteristics are inevitably in conflict with Chilean culture. In fact, participants indicate language as a relevant aspect, as many migrant children and adolescents do not speak Spanish as their mother tongue. This is clearly perceived as a barrier for the learning of subjects that highly rely on language (e.g., History) versus other subjects in which language can be compensated through other means (e.g., Physical Education). According to the educational agents interviewed, these obstacles would lead to a loss of motivation to pursue studies.

It is noteworthy that, according to the participants, this is a problem that even migrants from Spanish-speaking countries face, since Chilean Spanish, in practice, is perceived as complex due to its multiplicity of idioms, and phonetic and phonologic variations.

“This particular student had a hard time understanding the way we speak, because in Chile, in general, we don’t pronounce Spanish properly, so it was difficult for him to integrate with his peers, he had a cultural shock” (Teacher, School 4).

Another barrier is migratory status. Although some have legalized their stay in the country,

others are in process, which implies a double barrier. First, this can force them to skip school to handle immigration procedures, encouraging absenteeism; second, an irregular migratory status gives students less access to the benefits offered by the state of Chile to promote student retention, which implies not being granted these resources despite their vulnerability.

“In administrative terms as well [...] I think it has to do with what can affect it or also when they have no visa [...], because they lose a lot of benefits from the state” (Support professional, School 1).

In summary, there is a series of elements at the individual level that act as facilitators or barriers of the retention of migrant students. While barriers correspond to situations that these students experience due to their migratory status and language difficulties, facilitators are related to positive dispositions toward learning. However, these are not the only factors at play in student retention.

Factors at a socio-family level

When addressing the retention of migrant students, the family and social contexts cannot be left aside. As a facilitator of student retention, participants indicate, in general, migrant families are committed to the education of their children, which is reflected in their constant preoccupation about the education they received and the everyday events at school. This seems to be more evident when compared to families of native people, in which participants do not observe the same level of commitment. For participants, this phenomenon corresponds to the interest of migrant families in integrating into the country of arrival and validate themselves in the educational community.

“In general, foreign guardians are very engaged in their child’s education. This is also related to the fact that they’re in some sort of validation process, or obtaining their ID card, but until now I’ve seen people very committed and concerned about the students” (Teacher, School 1).

An example of the above is when guardians are called for a meeting with the school staff. Specifically, local families not only show a low level of willingness to attend, and also display a negative attitude during the meeting, as they consider it a reprimand rather than a collaborative space for solving problems. Conversely, migrant families are open to attend and are receptive about the information delivered. According to

the participants, this attitude is attributed to the vulnerability contexts of the families, i.e., their complex life stories make them more aware of and grateful for the actions of the schools.

In turn, from the perspective of educational agents, the high expectations that migrant families have for the results their children may achieve positively influences student retention. This would be noticeable not only in the attention they pay to the educational processes, but also in the requirement of a good academic performance, which undoubtedly is a success indicator. This concern about scores makes students more motivated about their studies (on an individual level), which indeed favors their continuity.

“Parents demand this from them, so children complete their studies, seem motivated to work and study [...] which is not the case with Chileans, or not with all of them” (Teacher, School 3).

However, despite their good attitude, families may encounter problems related to their legal status, especially when they are undocumented, which leads them to go unnoticed and not actively participate in school. If this is connected to the individual level, legal status may be presented as a factor that hinders not only the attendance of migrant students but also the involvement of their parents.

“They’re very affected by their migratory status [...] many without a contract, the parents, I mean, and that implies being in the shadows somehow” (Support professional, School 4).

In some cases, migratory status implies that parents or guardians have access to low paid jobs, which results in poverty conditions that affect the successful graduation of students. For example, poverty may force students to work, increasing the chances that they drop their studies to work more hours and increase the income of the family.

“Yes, absolutely, I mean, the economic situation, is absolutely the most important thing. Many migrants, I mean, if my Chilean students have poor economic situations, migrant student’s situation is even worse” (Support professional, School 2).

“Most our students are foreigners, so all these children coming from abroad have to help their families and look for a job. And because of this, some of them tend to be absent, until they drop out, because work will help their families” (Teacher, School 3).

Likewise, there are some elements linked to the migrant condition that are beyond the

aspects above, and that are related to the family decisions and dynamics when migrating, in which pursuing a better future may disrupt their educational trajectories. In fact, the decision for this new journey may imply, in many cases, interrupting or effectively abandoning school. In these circumstances, educational communities try to retain students by underscoring the value of finishing school; however, this is a factor outside the range of action of schools.

“It’s happened that some foreign children go somewhere else with their families, to other regions of the country, even to other countries, and then we lose them. It is very difficult to know if they will continue in the system if they go to another country, but also if they stay in Chile, because some of them have not legalized their migratory status and we cannot do much about it” (Management team member, School 1).

In conclusion, facilitators of student retention in migrant students correspond to internal strengths of the family nucleus, whereas barriers overlap with socioeconomic precarity and possible new migrations, all of which are perceived as a threat to the completion of their studies by participants.

Factors at the institutional and pedagogical level

A third level identified in the discourses of the participants is related to factors at the institutional and pedagogical level that promote the retention of migrant students.

The first factor is the command of the national language (Spanish). To tackle this obstacle, schools and particularly teachers make modifications such that all students graduate. It is noteworthy that aspects like this are managed differently in each establishment according to the resources available, revealing that they depend on their own efforts rather than on systematic state supports. For example, only one establishment received support from a regional body (nonprofit) to cover the salary of a Haitian professional that goes around the different classrooms to support both students from Haiti and the different subject teachers. The other three schools, in contrast, do not have this type of support, and therefore have managed these contingencies with their own resources.

“There are teachers giving classes to Haitian students, in French, because the teacher could speak French” (Teacher, School 3).

Other measures are the follow-up of the performance of migrant students. To this end,

each subject teacher should give the lead teacher a brief monthly report on the academic performance of students, with special attention to those having more difficulties. This allows for monitoring different cases and, if necessary, implementing tutoring in specific subjects for both migrant and native students. Although this follow-up, formally speaking, focuses on academic performance, for educational institutions it is hard to ignore the socioemotional problems affecting their students, as these certainly impact their performance and permanence in the system.

“Here we’re constantly concerned with the performance of our students, whether they’re foreigners or not, and I think that helps a lot to detect situations with a risk of school dropout. Lead and subject teachers should constantly report on this to take measures” (Principal, School 2).

In turn, participants identified another factor that, from an administrative and logistics point of view, contributes to the educational retention of the migrant population. This is related to support in the legal recognition of their previous studies, for which educational institutions implement leveling actions such as learning opportunities to take tests for succeeding in this process, as well as the provision of information about them.

“Look, the high school here is concerned with helping studies to obtain the legal recognition of their studies, from an informative and practical perspective, I mean, reviewing curriculum content and all actions necessary for them to be in their corresponding class here” (Support professional, School 3).

Likewise, the educational agents acknowledge that the provision of economic and material aids from both institutional and personal initiatives (from the management team, teachers and support professionals) can benefit the retention of local and migrant students. Additionally, although it may be deduced that these actions contribute to their permanence in school, participants do not directly report that these actions are designed exclusively with this purpose.

“We had to help them with our own money, with things, because they had no jobs...before the pandemic they had a small crisis, basically at the subsistence level” (Teacher, School 1).

“We did a fundraiser, I mean, the principal, the head of the teaching technical unit, teachers and everyone else. We collected some money and distributed it among students we knew were in need of it. Most of

it went to a Haitian family that has three children in this high school” (Teacher, School 3).

Furthermore, educational institutions create opportunities that seek to show the presence of migrant students within schools to thereby contribute to their integration and the strengthening of their sense of belonging. These are, for example, celebrations of the Chilean customs for which adaptations have been made to showcase the different cultures in the establishments and foster multiculturalism. However, opinions differ, as some participants criticize these actions as they believe it is easy to “folklorize” the migrant population.

“You’re a migrant. Show me your flag and put on your traditional outfit. This has nothing intercultural. That is a folklorization that is negative” (Support professional, School 4).

Finally, among the facilitators of student retention, the participants of this study highlight teachers, and particularly their didactic strategies for integrating everyone’s life story, as there are differences that become evident in some subjects like History, in which the national curriculum addresses, of course, the local context. In this sense, adaptations are necessary in the class, not only with a practical objective but to favor the inclusion of migrant students in the school and the culture of the country, promoting their sense of belonging and with this, their permanence in the school system.

“When we have to address the History of Chile, they don’t understand anything. Then, in that case, my adaptation, for example, if we’re studying Chile’s Independence, is ‘tell me the Independence process of your country’” (Teacher, School 4).

Regarding the barriers of student retention, an element common to all interviewees is the lack of human and economic resources from the central education system. Although all the management staff, teachers and support professionals acknowledge that, in recent years, the Ministry of Education of Chile has injected a series of economic resources to prevent school dropout (e.g., the Pro Retention Program), these are not enough to satisfy the specific needs of the migrant population. In this sense, they believe that these initiatives do not cover, for example, the language inclusion of students whose mother tongue is not Spanish, or the training of teachers to adequately serve them.

“The money that comes is always barely enough and therefore can’t be spent on random items,

for example, paying several translators to assist classes with Haitians or give teachers the minimal training to communicate with them” (Member of the management team, School 2).

“As an institution, we try to allocate resources well, but if we start thinking what to consider a difficulty, or how it makes it hard for me if students leave school or not, I think I’d say the lack of support from the Ministry. There’s nothing specific for them. We actually do what we can” (Principal, School 1).

As observed above, the factors promoting retention are related, from the perspective of the management team, teachers and support professionals, to the group of strategies deployed by schools at the institutional and pedagogical level. Although these actions are not systematic practices with the ultimate goal of retaining migrant students, they still are genuine efforts as they come from their own initiatives and are based on the need identified, without necessarily aligning with central guidelines from entities like the Ministry of Education of Chile.

Discussion and Conclusions

The objective of this study was to understand from the perspective of the management team, teachers, and support professionals the socioeducational facilitators and barriers for the completion of compulsory schooling by migrant students. As a conclusion, several points can be drawn. In the case of facilitators, the “motivation” of migrant students and their families to finish compulsory education is a unifying element at all levels. Therefore, at the individual level, resilience, and motivation to learn more are identified as factors (Cunningham *et al.*, 2008; Herrera *et al.*, 2022; Rumbaut, 2004; Sharkey, 2013; Tseng, 2006). At the social and family level, this positive disposition is understood as an affective commitment to the learning of the family’s children (Bauer y Riphahn, 2007; García & Marks, 2012; Kao & Tienda, 1995). Finally, at the educational institution level, the factors are related to the practice of actions promoting student retention (Faas *et al.*, 2015), which do not necessarily correspond to the requests of the central government. Although the literature already described the role played by individual attitudes (Makarova & Herzog, 2013; Caqueo *et al.*, 2021), the involvement of the family (Lea, 2012) and the actions that the school may take in the education of migrant students (Faas, *et al.*, 2015), the findings of this study indicate that educational institutions not only are aware of their strengths but also that these are fundamental to retain students.

However, after highlighting the disposition of students, families and establishments, it is curious that educational institutions did not mention measures such as the Provisional School Identifier (in Spanish, IPE), which corresponds to a single number provided by the Ministry of Education of Chile that allows migrant students—with illegal status—to access the school system and have the same rights as national students (Summers *et al.*, 2022). In other words, the discourse of the four studied schools emphasizes disposition, as the state and specifically the Ministry of Education would not provide the necessary, and mostly effective, support to protect migrant children and adolescents. Perhaps this is why, at the barrier level, elements of a structural nature are relevant, such as the poverty, vulnerability and illegal status that affect this population. Although some of these elements are already mentioned in the literature (Free *et al.*, 2014; Archambault *et al.*, 2017), the findings of this study reveal that this is a serious problem for educational institutions. For example, in the case of legal or migratory status, Chile has established measures such as the assignment of a follow-up code for students, which has not been enough to solve the problems that may arise inside schools (Summers *et al.*, 2022). In this scenario, it is the same educational communities that implement their measures, and as observed, they do not have retention as their main goal but seek to solve problems at the level of school integration.

Another main finding is what may be denominated “the retention paradox”, which is in line with the “immigrant paradox” proposed by Cunningham *et al.* (2008) and Rumbaut (2004). In this sense, there seems to be a duality in the perception of participants regarding the fact that school migrant population has more protective factors (due to their own individual characteristics) but higher risk of dropout compared with the local population. This is similar to the paradox found by Muñoz and Mendoza (2021) about the academic results of migrant students, who despite having protective factors like self-esteem obtain lower scores.

Nevertheless, this “retention paradox” could be partly influenced by the characteristics of the studied educational institutions. In connection, the fact that the four participating schools have an average equal to or above the student retention index implies that the percentage of migrant and native student permanence is higher than in other educational institutions with similar characteristics at the socioeconomic status and social vulnerability levels (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2019). This trait, despite being positive, as it shows that schools are adequately

managing the educational trajectories of students, presents a narrow view of what really occurs in Chile, as the migrant population exhibits higher rates of school dropout, as stated in the problem statement section of this study (INE, 2018). Nevertheless, knowing some of the realities of migrant students and their families from the perspective of educational agents may shed important light into other institutions that also want to improve their migrant student retention index. Therefore, it is imperative that educational institutions work on the retention of these students, as results may not be as expected despite their individual characteristics, which tend to favor their educational trajectories. Consequently, and considering that education is part of the migrant family project and that for migrant families, it implies the possibility of a better future (Rodríguez, 2011), it is fundamental that educational institutions and the education system in general develop suitable initiatives to tackle this problem.

Finally, it should be noted that this study, as it derived from an emerging scenario observed in the field, only considered the opinions of the management team, teachers and support professionals. This methodological decision, as indicated in previous sections, is a first approach to the phenomenon under study. Future research should include the perspective of migrant students and their families not only because they are the leading characters of this story but also because their opinions may reveal—with more objectivity—the inherently institutional and pedagogical barriers that push migrant students out of the system (Singh & Mukherjee, 2018). In this line, the interventions of participants indicate that barriers would be mainly related to the actions of the Ministry of Education of Chile rather than to the institutional responsibility they have as educational institutions with a high migrant population.

Finally, future studies could make quantitative approximations to the migrant phenomenon (in terms of school dropout) in order to establish or rule out the existence of significant differences compared to the native population. Likewise, considering the data on actions taken by the educational institutions under study, more research on the execution of these actions could be conducted. This could include observations at the management level of schools, moving towards, for example, a disaggregated reading of retention indicators to identify possible profiles that allow for deeper knowledge of the educational reality of migrant children and adolescents in Chile.

Contributions

Contributions	Authors
Conception and design of work	Author 1
Documentary search	Author 1, 2, 3, 4
Data collect	Author 2, 3, 4
Analysis and critical interpretation of data	Author 1, 2, 3
Review and approval of versions	Author 1

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Conflict interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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