
Impact of training on the intercultural competencies of professionals working with migrant children

Impacto de la formación en las competencias interculturales de los profesionales que intervienen con infancia migrante

培训对从事移民儿童工作的专业人员跨文化能力的影响

Влияние обучения на межкультурную компетентность специалистов, работающих с детьми-мигрантами

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Abstract

Introduction: Intercultural competences facilitate the understanding between diverse people facilitating the educational intervention. This paper analyzes the level of intercultural competences of a group of Social Education professionals working with migrant children before and after specific training.

Method: A quantitative methodology was used comparing two groups with pretest-posttest measurement. A total of 224 professionals from different parts of Spain participated and were divided into an experimental group and a control group.

Results: The results obtained showed that intercultural competencies increased significantly in the experimental group once the training was carried out while no significant changes were obtained in the control group.

Conclusions: The training in intercultural competencies aimed at professionals working with migrant children, increased the level in the different areas that were worked, in addition, the results obtained prior to the training, demonstrated the need for specific training that Social Education professionals have, especially in areas related to intercultural education.

Keywords: Intercultural competences, migrant children, Social Education, Centers for the protection of minors.

Resumen

Introducción: Las competencias interculturales permiten la comprensión entre personas diversas, facilitando la intervención educativa. El presente trabajo analiza el nivel de competencias interculturales de un grupo de profesionales de la Educación Social que trabajan con infancia migrante antes y después de realizar una formación específica.

Método: Se utilizó una metodología cuantitativa comparando dos grupos con medición pretest-postest. Participaron un total de 224 profesionales de diferentes puntos del territorio español, divididos en un grupo experimental y un grupo control.

Resultados: Los resultados obtenidos mostraron que las competencias interculturales aumentaron de manera significativa en el grupo experimental una vez realizada la formación, mientras que en el grupo control no se obtuvieron cambios significativos.

Conclusiones: La formación en competencias interculturales dirigida a profesionales que trabajan con infancia migrante, aumentó el nivel en las diferentes áreas que se trabajaron. Además, los resultados obtenidos previos a la formación demostraron la necesidad de la misma que tienen los profesionales de la Educación Social, sobre todo en las áreas relacionadas con la educación intercultural

Palabras clave: Competencias interculturales, infancia migrante, Educación Social, Centros de protección de menores.

摘要

导言: 跨文化能力能够促进不同人群之间的理解, 有利于教育干预。本文对一组从事移民儿童工作的社会教育专业人员在接受特定培训前后的跨文化能力水平进行了分析。

方法: 采用定量方法, 对两组人员进行前后测试比较。共有来自西班牙不同地区的 224 名专业人员参加, 分为实验组和对照组。

结果: 结果显示, 实验组的跨文化能力在培训后有显著提高, 而对照组则没有明显变化。

结论: 对从事移民儿童工作的专业人员进行跨文化能力培训, 提高了他们在不同工作领域的水平。此外, 培训前获得的结果表明, 社会教育专业人员有必要接受培训, 尤其是在与跨文化教育相关的领域。

关键词: 跨文化能力、移民儿童、社会教育、未成年人保护中心。

Аннотация

Введение: Межкультурные компетенции способствуют взаимопониманию между разными людьми, облегчая образовательное вмешательство. В данной статье анализируется уровень межкультурной компетенции группы специалистов по социальному воспитанию, работающих с детьми-мигрантами, до и после специального обучения.

Метод: Использовалась количественная методология, в которой сравнивались две группы с помощью предтестового и посттестового измерения. В исследовании приняли участие 224 специалиста из разных регионов Испании, которые были разделены на экспериментальную и контрольную группы.

Результаты: Полученные результаты показали, что межкультурная компетенция значительно возросла в экспериментальной группе после проведения тренинга, в то время как в контрольной группе значительных изменений не произошло.

Выводы: Тренинг межкультурных компетенций, предназначенный для специалистов, работающих с детьми-мигрантами, повысил их уровень в различных сферах деятельности. Кроме того, результаты, полученные до тренинга, продемонстрировали необходимость специальной подготовки специалистов в области социального образования, особенно в сферах, связанных с межкультурным образованием.

Ключевые слова: Межкультурные компетенции, дети-мигранты, социальное образование, центры по защите несовершеннолетних.

Introduction

Intercultural competencies enable proactive interaction in today's diverse environments (García-Vita et al., 2021; Pareja de Vicente et al., 2021; Unesco, 2020). Different authors have been betting for decades on developing intercultural competencies through information and communication technology (ICT; Garrote et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2015). According to González-Plasencia (2022), intercultural competence develops a certain symbolic capacity that allows interaction among people with different codes.

In this sense, social education professionals often intervene with people with heterogeneous characteristics, and faced with this challenge, their training should be oriented to achieve coherent professional development and be adjusted to socio-educational trends and needs (Chamseddine, 2015; Garrote et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2015). However, Eslava et al. (2021) analysed learning by competencies in all the universities in Spain where a degree in social education is offered, concluding that these are not sufficient to carry out a quality socio-educational intervention. Therefore, it is necessary to reinforce continuous training. Similarly, Conde-Lacarcel et al. (2020) concluded in their research that social education professionals present needs in the intervention with minors, such as, for example, a lack of working intercultural content, a lack of continuous follow-up or scarce participation in the planning of actions.

According to Essomba (2014), competencies are a set of behaviours that are organised in an individual's mental structure and which remain stable or may vary. Other authors, such as Escarbajal and Leiva (2017), have defined competencies as the ability to apply the skills, knowledge and attitudes acquired through training, thereby highlighting the importance of professional training for those who work in the social field. Following Pantoja and Villanueva (2015), it is necessary to promote common spaces for the interaction of the ideas of people from different parts of the world since diversity generates wealth.

Intercultural competencies are acquired through intercultural education, which favours the generation of ideas that promote the wellbeing of all people as a whole (Cernadas et al., 2021). In addition, they develop cultural identity (Leiva et al., 2022). According to Chamorro (2022), intercultural and multicultural education are terms with independent characteristics, although they can be confused. Interculturality, as opposed to multiculturalism, implies cultural dialogues about learning and awareness of differences in order to resolve conflicts (de la Cruz-Estudillo & Peña-García, 2023). Aguado (2019) considers intercultural pedagogy essential to further a cultural transformation and construction.

In this paper, we will briefly review the literature on migrant children in care, describe the institutional reception of the child protection system in Spain, establish the objective of the study and present the methodological framework. In the final sections, we will present the results and the corresponding discussion and conclusion.

Migrant children under guardianship in Spain

Spain has been considered a receiving country for migrant children under guardianship for more than three decades; reception is regulated by European and Spanish legislation that is linked to international agreements (Bravo & Santos-González, 2017). The number of fostered minors is difficult to estimate because the existing statistics

are very diverse (Gómez-Vicario et al., 2023) since there are different ways of entering the country, and this complicates the quantification (Jiménez, 2022). However, the State Attorney General's Office recorded in 2021 the arrival by sea of a total of 3,048 unaccompanied minors, with a total of 9,294 people accounted for in the Registry of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (MENA) Register. Most of the minors had been born in Morocco, although some had been born in other African countries. These figures have been decreasing as a result of situations such as the 2007–2008 crisis or the pandemic caused by COVID-19; however, the flows have not ceased at any time (Gutiérrez et al., 2023).

The legal term used to refer to migrant children in the Council of Europe Resolution of 26 June 1997, Article 1, is unaccompanied foreign minor (UFM), which is defined in the Resolution as:

A foreigner under eighteen years of age who arrives in Spanish territory unaccompanied by an adult responsible for him/her, either legally or according to custom, where there is a risk of unprotection of the minor, as long as such responsible adult has not effectively taken charge of the minor, as well as any foreign minor who, once in Spain, finds him/herself in such a situation.

In the light of the above definition, a minor who undertakes a trip to another country without the accompaniment of an adult reference person faces situations of vulnerability. Authors, such as Arce (2018), Crea et al. (2017), Marco (2017) and Rinaldi (2019), have analysed the risk factors for minors during their transit from their countries of origin to receiving countries and found that many minors put their lives at risk by starting the journey as a stowaway on a boat, a passenger on a patera or under a truck (Gómez et al., 2023; Jiménez, 2011; Olmos- Gómez et al., 2020; Quiroga Raimúndez & Soria, 2010; Rinaldi, 2019). In this sense, the profile of migrant children arriving in Spain has remained stable over the years, and their general characteristics are that they are primarily male, arrive with no knowledge of the language, have previously worked in their countries of origin, have expectations that are far removed from the reality they find and come from Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa (Martínez-Martínez, 2011; Quiroga Raimúndez et al., 2023).

Institutional Reception of the System for the Protection of Minors in Spain

When a minor arrives in Spain, the local authorities responsible for children in each autonomous community assume guardianship, and the minor is placed in a child protection centre (Senovilla, 2014). The fact that each autonomous community assumes responsibility within its territory entails inequalities in childcare in Spain, which may be accentuated by geographical proximity (Gimeno-Monterde & Gutiérrez- Sánchez, 2019). In 2022, Andalusia was the autonomous community with the highest number of migrant children (Sevillano & Gonzalez, 2022), and in 2023, it was surpassed by the Canary Islands, followed by Andalusia, Catalonia and the Valencian Community (Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, 2023).

Despite the differences between receiving territories, Spain has had for three decades the Organic Law 1/1996 of 15 January 1996 on the Legal Protection of Minors, subsequently updated by Law 26/2015 of 28 July 2015 on the modification of the system for the protection of children and adolescents, which in its Article 21, states that the competent public entity for the protection of minors should carry out the inspection and supervision of the centres and services every six months and whenever circumstances so require. However, authors such as Gómez-Vicario and Gutiérrez-Sánchez

(2023) stated that inspections are not conducted on a regular basis and a more exhaustive follow-up is needed to guarantee quality educational care. This may be one of the reasons many minors are disappointed with the foster care system, as they are not offered what they had expected (Gimeno-Monterde & Gutiérrez-Sánchez, 2020; Jiménez, 2011; Olmos et al., 2020; Rinaldi, 2019), sometimes leading them to risky behaviours (Plessz et al., 2020). This could be improved through compliance with the recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Spain and with the existence of a legal framework with greater harmony between state and regional regulations (Jiménez, 2011; Ortiz, 2021; Quiroga Raimúndez & Soria, 2010; Senovilla, 2014).

In spite of this, Article 3 of Organic Law 5/2000 of 12 January 2000, which regulates the criminal responsibility of minors, states that for minors under 14 years of age, the Public Prosecutor's Office must send the testimony of the particulars that it considers necessary with regard to the minor to the public entity for the protection of minors so that it can evaluate the minor's situation and promote the protection measures appropriate to the circumstances of the minor. The purpose of the protocol is to establish the coordination guidelines for the processes of identification and determination of the age of minors as well as to make the guidelines available to the public entity for the protection of minors and achieve the proper functioning of the MENA, in accordance with Article 215 of the Regulations of Organic Law 4/2000 of 11 January 2000. All of this is done with a focus on guaranteeing the best interests of the child.

In contrast to the required coordination, a complex scenario exists because despite the existence of a legal framework that ensures the welfare of migrant children, there are situations that cause conflicts between professionals at the centres and migrant children (Roje-Dapic et al., 2020). In addition, for the integration of migrant children, the implementation of socio-educational plans aimed at autonomy is necessary (Epelde, 2017), since care must be extended once they have reached the age of majority (McDonald, 2016). There is also an emerging need to alleviate complaints about malpractice in age determination procedures, foster care, administrative processes, the saturation of centres, the lack of qualified professionals and the non-existence of the intercultural mediator (Aguilar, 2004; García-Vita et al., 2017; Gómez & Gutiérrez, 2023).

Based on the stated arguments, this study was conducted to identify whether the level of intercultural competencies of professionals working with migrant children in care increased, decreased or remained the same after the implementation of a treatment.

Methods

Participants

In the present investigation, a total of 224 (122 in the control group and 122 in the experimental group) social education professionals who were working in centres for the protection of minors in different parts of Spain participated. Of the total number of participants, 142 were women and 82 were men, ranging in age from 22 to 57 years. The selection of participants was made by convenience to try to have an equitable representation within the Spanish territory, with 26 professionals from the Canary Islands, 35 from Andalusia, 32 from Catalonia, 24 from the Valencian Community, 11 from Castilla y León, 12 from the Balearic Islands, 12 from the Basque Country, five

from Galicia, 19 from Madrid, six from Extremadura, 11 from Ceuta, 13 from Melilla, six from Asturias, five from the Region of Murcia and seven from Navarre.

Design

To analyse the effects of the specific training programme on migrant children on the level of the intercultural competencies of social education professionals, a group comparison design with pretest–post-test measurements was used with an experimental group and a control group.

Instruments

The questionnaire 'Intercultural competencies in the intervention with migrant minors without family references' (Jiménez, 2011) was used to evaluate the level of competencies. This instrument consists of a four-option Likert scale (1 'never', 2 'sometimes', 3 'frequently' and 4 'always') distributed within eight factors: factor 1 has 11 items and analyses skills in the intervention with migrant minors. Factor 2 is made up of six items and its objective is to determine the degree of knowledge that professionals have about migration. Factor 3 also consists of six items and assesses knowledge related to migrant children. Factor 4 is composed of six items and analyses whether professionals consider the preferences of migrant children. Factor 5 is made up of five items and measures the degree of empathy of the professionals. Factor 6 has four items and seeks to determine the knowledge about the experiences of migrant minors in the receiving country. Factor 7 is composed of four items and measures knowledge about cultural aspects of migrant children. Finally, factor 8 has four items and evaluates pedagogical knowledge for intervention with migrant children.

Half of the items are positively worded, and half are negatively worded. For its correction, the scores of the items negatively stated must be inverted and the score of all the items must be added together to obtain a score ranging from 0 to 100 points. Cronbach's alpha test was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, and a value of .769 was obtained. Validity was tested by factor analysis with Bartlett's sphericity test 19854.490 with a significance of .000 as well as the sample adequacy measure KMO, which gave a value of .509, which confirmed the confidence of the instrument to obtain results that respond to the object of study. These tests indicated that the scale used is valid and reliable to respond to the objective of the study.

Procedure

The first step was to select the professionals who would participate in the research. To this end, we contacted the people in charge of different centres for the protection of minors located in different parts of Spain in order to offer a training course entitled 'Professional competencies for educational intervention', which was aimed at social education professionals working with migrant children. A total of 224 professionals were selected, of which 112 (41 men and 71 women) were assigned to the control group and 112 (41 men and 71 women) to the experimental group. Once the groups were formed, we proceeded to the pretest evaluation of the level of intercultural competencies through the application of the questionnaire. The experimental group was then divided into four small subgroups of 28 persons each. One month later, the programme was administered to the experimental subgroups. It consisted of developing

14 key competencies when intervening migrant children: 1 – Learn to take care of ourselves professionally; 2 – Manage the first reception; 3 – Know the migratory profiles; 4 – Know the contributions of the migrant child: analysis of the different dimensions; 5 – Manage migratory grief. 6 – Manage religious practice. 7 –Manage community work for the prevention of conflicts in multicultural contexts. 8 – Manage vocational, academic and professional orientation. Preparing for autonomous living. 9 –Know the regulation of the legislation on children and foreigners. 10 – Know the role of women in other cultures and manage gender equality. 11 – Know the habits and customs in other cultures; 12 – Know the verbal and non-verbal codes in other cultures; 13 – Promote good treatment and resilience; and 14 – Compose and coordinate the professional team. Five three-hour training sessions were held in each group. Fifteen days after the end of the training, the post-test evaluation was carried out.

All research participants were informed of the objective of the study and were asked for their written consent to use the data obtained, guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity. The study was conducted from March 2022 to November 2023.

Results

The statistical software SPSS version 29.0 for Mac was used to conduct the analyses for this study based on the study objective.

Table 1 shows the means and frequencies by pretest and post-test percentages for the control and experimental groups for each of the factors. As can be seen, the level of competencies measured with the frequencies considerably improved in the experimental group after the training, while no significant differences were observed in the control group. In factors F6 and F7, the differences are in favour of the control since in this case, the items have negative values and, therefore, the results are reversed.

Table 1
Means and frequencies in percentages by factors

	Pretest				Post-test			
	F% Control	\bar{X} Control	F% Experimental	\bar{X} Experimental	F% Control	\bar{X} Control	F% Experimental	\bar{X} Experimental
F.1	35.31	2.47	32.35	2.46	38.12	2.49	51.28	2.61
F.2	19.2	3.03	18.66	3.01	18.9	3.03	41.17	4.75
F.3	15.77	2.21	15.45	2.19	16.12	2.25	39.33	3.11
F.4	51.2	1.53	56.65	1.72	52.31	1.50	62.52	1.51
F.5	50.91	3.22	51	3.47	49.82	3.21	64.77	3.45
F.6	28.21	2.73	27.46	2.75	31.23	2.76	44.6	2.71
F.7	32.8	1.95	33.15	1.86	33.12	1.93	50.91	1.66
F.8	11.3	2.07	10.93	2.04	12.32	2.06	32.76	2.56

Factor 1 deals with skills in intervention with migrant minors, an issue considered to be of great value to professionals. Table 2 shows those results with differences in the means and frequencies of positive responses in the post-test with respect to the pre-

test. In all items, an increase in positive responses can be seen in the post-test, therefore, an improvement in the skills for intervention with migrant minors is observed, as shown below in detail item by item in Table 2.

Table 2
Skills in intervention with migrant minors

	Pretest			Post-test		
	F % men	F % women	\bar{X}	F% men	F% women	\bar{X}
1.I usually simulate job interviews with the migrant children, pretending to be an employer who needs to hire a specific professional profile	12.02	14.07	2.22	36.03	35.08	2.97
2.Working with migrant children active job search techniques	21.6	21.3	2.51	48.1	47.7	3.26
3.I meet with the teachers at the school or training centre to exchange the information necessary for the academic and formative progress of the migrant child	27.9	29.5	2.64	58.4	60.7	3.36
4.Before communicating an educational sanction, I think it over calmly so that its effects will have the greatest possible benefit for the sanctioned child	35.8	32.5	3.01	63.7	65.9	3.55
5.I carry out activities with the migrant children concerning affective and sexual education	22.9	23.1	2.66	48.3	48.1	3.18

In item 1—*I usually simulate job interviews with migrant children, pretending to be an employer who needs to hire a specific professional profile*—the affirmative responses by men increased by 24.01% and in women by 21.01%, representing three times the number of responses in both cases.

In item 2—*Working with migrant children on active job search techniques*—both men and women doubled the number of affirmative responses after the training. The difference was 26.5% in men and 26.4% in women.

Factor 2 deals with migration knowledge, which also significantly increased the level of competencies after completion of the training. Table 3 shows the differences in means and frequencies of positive responses in the pretest and post-test.

The migration knowledge of the professionals who participated in the study almost doubled for both men and women after the training.

Table 3
Migration knowledge

	Pretest			Post-test		
	F % men	F % women	\bar{X}	F% men	F% women	\bar{X}
1.I have general knowledge of the migration phenomenon	18.5	19.1	2.88	32.9	31.2	3.23
2.I communicate with the child migrant using some words or phrases from their language, which is different from mine	9.4	10.1	2.28	39.00	42.00	3.12
3.I carry out activities to improve coexistence intercultural among migrant minors	25	24.3	2.77	53.3	55	3.38
4.I carry out activities to improve the intercultural coexistence between migrant minors and the rest of the citizens of the community environment in which it is located located in the reception centre	19.9	17.9	2.50	47.00	48.02	3.28
5.I usually perform with the child a explanatory diagram of the steps necessary to achieve the objectives proposed in its migration project	12.8	11.9	2.42	40.04	41	3.10

In item 2—*I communicate with the migrant child using some words or phrases of his or her language, which is different from mine*—there were more than three times as many affirmative responses from both men and women after the training was completed.

In item 5—*I usually carry out with the minor an explanatory scheme of the necessary steps to achieve the objectives proposed in their migration project*—the affirmative answers increased in men by 27.24% and in women by 29.1%.

For factor 3, which deals with knowledge related to migrant children, the competencies increased significantly in all items. Table 4 shows the differences in means and frequencies of positive responses in the pretest and post-test.

Table 4
Knowledge related to migrant minors

	Pretest			Post-test		
	F % men	F % women	\bar{X}	F% men	F% women	\bar{X}
1. I have updated information on the procedure required to obtain guardianship	11.03	12.1	1.96	36.5	42.00	3.07
2.I have up-to-date information on the procedure required for obtaining a residence permit for a migrant child	15.03	14.08	2.18	36.1	36.3	3.07
3.I have information on public or private resources for migrant children who have reached the age of majority	20.04	19.01	2.45	45.4	44.9	3.19

In item 1—*I have updated information on the procedure necessary to obtain guardianship*—the affirmative answers of men increased from 11.03% to 42% after the training was completed. In the case of women, affirmative answers increased from 12.1% to 42%.

For factor 4, which analyses opinions on migrant children, the differences in means and negative responses in the pretest and post-test are shown in Table 5.

In this factor, significant responses were also obtained, with an increase in negative responses to item 1—*I think that migrant children respect male professionals more than female professionals*—of 19.9% in males and 20.4% in females.

Table 5
Opinions on migrant minors

	Pretest			Post-test		
	F % men	F % women	\bar{X}	F% men	F% women	\bar{X}
1.I think that migrant children respect male professionals more than female professionals Female	22.7	21.9	2.16	42.6	42.3	1.77

Factor 5 addresses the interest in migrant children. Table 6 shows the difference in means and frequencies of positive responses in the pretest and post-test.

In item 1—I consider myself an adult reference for the migrant minors with whom I work, therefore, a role model for them—the affirmative responses increased by 18% in men and 17% in women.

Interest in migrant children was also a factor that increased once the training was received.

Table 6
Interest in migrant minors

	Pretest			Post-test		
	F % men	F % women	\bar{X}	F% men	F% women	\bar{X}
1.I consider myself an adult reference for the migrant children I work with, and therefore a role model for them	23.1	22.9	2.72	41.1	39.9	3.18
2. I try to help the migrant child to regain a sense of belonging	41.9	42.2	3.21	63.4	65	3.53

In item 2—I try to help the migrant child to regain a sense of belonging—positive responses increased by more than 20% in both men and women.

Factor 6 analyses the knowledge about the experiences of migrant children in the receiving country. Table 7 shows the differences between means and the frequencies of negative responses in the pretest and post-test.

In item 1—I do not know the main concerns during the first days, presents a minor migrant in the new country—the negative responses increased more than threefold in both men and women.

Knowledge about the experiences of migrant children in the receiving country and about cultural aspects were the factors that showed the greatest differences between the pretest and the post-test, and considerably increased after the training was completed.

Table 7
Knowledge about the experiences of migrant minors in the receiving country

	Pretest			Post-test		
	F % men	F % women	\bar{X}	F% men	F% women	\bar{X}
1.I do not know the main concerns during the first few months of days, has a lower migrant in the new country	8.1	7.9	2.32	33.6	41.2	2.03

Factor 7 analyses the knowledge about the cultural aspects of migrant children. Table 8 shows the differences in means and frequencies of negative responses between the pretest and the post-test, which shows a considerable increase in the knowledge of men and women after the training.

Table 8
Knowledge about the cultural aspects of migrant minors

	Pretest			Post-test		
	F % men	F % women	\bar{X}	F% men	F% women	\bar{X}
1. I am unaware of aspects of the cultures of children with whom I work 6.	8.3	9.5	2.25	20.03	22.3	2.08
2. If, when faced with a professional's verbal reprimand, a migrant minor tilts his head down without looking him in the eye, it is because he is not paying attention.	58	57.7	1.47	81.8	80.3	1.25

Factor 8 studies the pedagogical knowledge for intervention with migrant minors. Table 9 shows the differences between the means and frequencies of positive responses between the pretest and the post-test. The results show that in all items, there was a considerable increase in the knowledge of both men and women.

Table 9
Pedagogical knowledge for intervention with migrant minors

	F % men	F % women	\bar{X}	F% men	F% women	\bar{X}
1.I know what the keys are appropriate methodologies to perform a successful with a migrant child	4.1	3.9	1.89	24.6	24.1	3.02
2.I am unaware of the type of activities that are appropriate for improving the intercultural coexistence among minors	22.2	22.4	2.02	47.1	48	1.71
3.I have knowledge of specifics on how to intervene in a conflict situation among migrant minors	6.5	5.9	2.23	26.6	27.2	2.97

As can be seen in the tables, there are no significant differences in the responses in terms of gender, with similar percentages before and after the training.

Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of the present study was to verify whether the level of intercultural competencies of social education professionals working with migrant children was maintained or varied after the implementation of a specific training programme.

The analysis of the results showed that the level of intercultural competencies of the professionals undergoing training considerably increased in the experimental group, as opposed to the control group, in which the level of competencies remained stable. Therefore, we support Montes et al. (2016) in that the training of social education professionals should be ongoing. However, Cernadas et al. (2021) stated in his study that intercultural education focuses on school and teacher training but did not mention social education professionals.

Regarding skills in intervention with migrant minors, the level increased by 18.93% after the training was conducted, which makes us agree with Chamseddine (2015), Garrote et al. (2018) and Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2015), in which training is key when it comes to professional development. In the results obtained in relation to previous knowledge about migration, only 18.66% of the professionals were shown to possess it, which highlights the idea of Pantoja and Villanueva (2015) since the approach to other cultures generates necessary knowledge when intervening with migrant children. In turn, knowledge related to migrant minors was even lower, with 15.45% of professionals possessing this knowledge. The cultural aspects of migrant minors was another section in which the professionals showed the greatest lack of knowledge with 0.92% of them defining the aspects.

If we focus on the analysis prior to training, in both groups (experimental and control), the level of competencies was low, obtaining the highest percentages in the opinions about migrant children with 56.65%, followed by interest in migrants with 51%; however, in the essential aspects, such as intervention skills, pedagogical knowledge or knowledge about the culture, the level of competencies did not reach 20%.

Once the training was completed, the level of competencies considerably increased in all factors by an average of 20%, which translates into the need for specific training for professionals. Intercultural competencies can also be enhanced through the use of technology (Leiva et al., 2022), solving conflicts generated by different social realities (Alcocer-Sánchez, 2023), using communication as the central axis of any intervention (Monserrat & Melero, 2017) and analysing reality from an integrative and interdisciplinary perspective (Navarro et al., 2014) because the care received by migrant children also contributes to resilience processes (Schofield et al., 2017).

In conclusion, the training in intercultural competencies aimed at professionals working with migrant children increased the level of competencies in the different areas that were targeted, specifically, intervention skills, knowledge about migration, knowledge about the cultures of the countries of origin of migrant children and their lives within them, pedagogical knowledge and all the knowledge detailed in the factors. In addition, the results obtained prior to the training demonstrated the need for specific training of social education professionals, above all, in the areas related to intercultural education. Therefore, these results may be of interest to different organisations in regard to educational policies, working for the improvement of educational intervention and the reception of migrant minors with a reality in the receiving countries that is not what they expect.

The main limitation of this study is the difference in number between male and female participants, with a greater presence of women; however, all the centres that participated also had a greater number of female professionals working in them.

Future research could focus on assessing other types of competencies to detect needs with the objective of creating a digital recommendation system to support social education professionals working with migrant children.

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