Integration of Migrants in Higher Education Institutions: The Case of Haitians in Mexicali, B. C.

Integración de migrantes en instituciones de educación superior: El caso de los haitianos en Mexicali, B. C.

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ABSTRACT

This article documents the integration actions of Haitian migrants in Mexicali, B. C. into local Higher Education Institutions (HEI). The qualitative method is used through documentary analysis and fieldwork. Through a literature review, indicators are defined to establish lines of action aimed at the optimal insertion of migrants in HEIs in Mexico. In the fieldwork, in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with Haitian university students, and their experience within the HEI is measured by grouping the indicators into three dimensions: institutional, cultural, and structural. Successful integration actions are identified, most of which are internal strategies corresponding to HEIs, although there are no special programs to attend to migrant groups. Likewise, their limitations are shown, and recommendations are made.

Keywords: 1. integration, 2. universities, 3. migrants, 4. Haiti, 5. Baja California.

RESUMEN

En este artículo se documentan las acciones de integración de los migrantes haitianos en Mexicali, B. C. a las Instituciones de Educación Superior (IES) de la localidad. Se utiliza el método cualitativo a través del análisis documental y el trabajo de campo. Por medio de la revisión de la literatura, se definen indicadores para el establecimiento de líneas de acción dirigidas a una inserción óptima de los migrantes en las IES en México. En el trabajo de campo se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas a profundidad con estudiantes universitarios haitianos y se midió su experiencia dentro de las IES agrupando los indicadores en tres dimensiones: institucionales, culturales y estructurales. Se identifican las acciones de integración exitosas, que en su mayoría son estrategias internas por parte de las IES, a pesar de que no se poseen programas especiales para atender a los colectivos migrantes. Así mismo, se evidencian las limitaciones de las IES y se realizan recomendaciones.

Palabras clave: 1. integración, 2. universidades, 3. migrantes, 4. Haití, 5. Baja California.

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INTRODUCTION

The Arrival and Establishment of the Haitian Community in Mexicali

The arrival of Haitian migrants to the city of Mexicali is the result of a migratory flow of people who originally aspired to reach the United States, to benefit from the Temporary Protected Status program. After the earthquake in Port-au-Prince, the U.S. government granted humanitarian visas as long as applicants met certain guidelines and justified why they needed such support. In this regard, Alarcón Acosta and Ortiz Esquivel reported that "it is not easy to access this benefit, since it can only be granted to people who have suffered persecution or find themselves in a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular group or by political opinion" (2017, p. 173).

In the face of the U.S. presidential transition of late 2016, and with the racist and anti-immigrant discourse of the Republican candidate and former U.S. President Donald Trump, an atmosphere of uncertainty arose among people from the countries that benefited from the Temporary Protected Status program. That is why a large part of the Haitian community began a journey to the United States with the hope of obtaining a humanitarian visa. However, upon arriving in Mexico, their aspirations were cut short due to the cancellation of said program.

The Unit for Migration Policy, Registration, and Identity of Persons (Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas) of the Ministry of the Interior in Mexico (Secretaría de Gobernación en México), in its statistics up to April 2017, reported that 17 930 people of Haitian nationality entered the country (París-Pombo, 2018). The migratory flow became noticeable in May 2016, specifically in the cities of Mexicali and Tijuana, where an increase in the arrival of people from various countries in Europe, Africa, and South America to request asylum in the United States was detected. Migrants from Africa stood out in this flow.[3] In this regard, Paris-Pombo (2018) documented that the National Migration Institute (INM, acronym in Spanish for Instituto Nacional de Migración) registered around 15 000 foreign migrants who entered Mexico through the Tapachula, Chiapas border in September 2016; of the aforementioned figure, 50% requested protection after having crossed into the United States and 3 400 remained in Baja California: about 75% in Tijuana and 25% in Mexicali.

From February 2017, Mexican authorities began to issue forms to regularize the stay of Haitian citizens who wanted to reside in the country, so that they could have a formal job since most of them have mid-higher-level studies or have technical training that allows them to work in other areas; some even have master's degrees. According to the study carried out by the Government of the State of Baja California et al. (2016), of the migrants who arrived in Mexicali that year, 22.3% had completed high school and 16.8% had undergraduate studies. Both values make up 39.1% and, although these data are general, it is very likely for a significant percentage of school enrolling to

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[3] Particularly, those Haitians who arrived in Mexico in the first caravan of 2016 declared themselves African, given the lack of diplomatic representation in Mexico of some countries of that continent. Migrants perceived that deportation and/or refusal to enter the country were more likely if they declared themselves Haitian.

take place at the middle-higher and higher levels due to the immigration flow of Haitians. This piece of information is also documented by Coulange Méroné and Castillo (2020) who, with information from the Unit for Migration Policy, Registration and Identity of Persons, reported that in the first wave of 2016 and 2017, the majority of Haitians had secondary or higher levels of education. The foregoing represents an advantage for Haitians so that they can position themselves in better-paid labor sectors and at the same time have greater opportunities to be accepted into technical or higher education institutions.

In 2017, the INM delegate in Baja California, Rodulfo Figueroa Pacheco, announced two regularization options for Haitians to stay in Mexico: "as visitors for humanitarian reasons, with a one-year stay permit with the possibility of renewal; and for humanitarian reasons as refugees, valid for four years"[4] (La Jornada Baja California, 2017). From 2017 to the first two months of 2021, according to data from the Unit for Migration Policy, Registration and Identity of Persons (2021), Haitians who obtained temporary residence in the state (9 in 2017; 1 068 in 2018; 559 in 2019; 250 in 2020; and 45 in 2021) can already have access to a Unique Population Registry Code (CURP, acronym in Spanish for Clave Única de Registro de Población) and the Federal Taxpayer Registry (RFC, Registro Federal de Contribuyentes); however, those who do not yet have this immigration status are limited in that regard. Likewise, in December 2017 it was possible to expand the access to the benefits offered by the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS, acronym in Spanish for Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social) to migrants so that they are not only considered for medical care but can also have the right to benefits such as disabilities or housing procedures (Gallego, 2017).

As for the insertion of Haitians in the labor field, this has taken place both in formal jobs and in the informal sector, depending on the date of their arrival at the state: the first to arrive sought, above all, employers willing to register with the National Migration Institute and to grant them a job letter, for them to obtain legal status. The first employers to show this flexibility were those in the maquiladora industry, thanks to the openness and the facilities granted by the INM and the IMSS, which allowed them to quickly hire Haitians and offer them labor and legal certainty. In addition to the push by business owners to hire Haitian labor, employability in this sector increased because migrants, by means of their own networks, attracted family, friends, and acquaintances to these jobs (Coulange Méroné & Castillo, 2020).

Despite this readiness of the manufacturing and maquiladora sector, labor insertion has not been easy for Haitians, since not all of them were able to access a formal job that would allow them to obtain a job letter from an employer registered with the INM. This situation has resulted in labor

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[4] For the purposes of this research, the term migrant will be understood as synonymous with visitor for humanitarian reasons, given that the Mexican government implemented the Temporary Immigrant Regularization Program (Programa Temporal de Regularización Migratoria), which privileged Haitians by granting them access to said visa for one year. Most Haitians adhered to this option as the processes to obtain refugee status were slower, since the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR, after its name in Spanish, Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda al Refugiado) does not have a permanent representative office in Mexicali, B. C.

and migratory precariousness, as well as in informal employability without access to basic social benefits. In this regard, Ramos and Sosa highlighted that "the lack of quality employment for ordinary Haitian workers is easily verifiable if we observe the precarious wages they receive and the signing of different types of contracts that violate employment stability" (2020, p. 11). The labor integration of Haitians takes place in formal labor platforms, especially in the manufacturing sector. In contrast, there are still others who remain in the ranks of informality, and under uncertainty about their immigration status.

When it comes to linguistic integration, no defined action routes have been established by government institutions in Mexico so that Haitian migrants who reside permanently in the country can acquire better skills in the Spanish language. In this sense, both in Tijuana and Mexicali initiatives by civil society groups and volunteers to teach Spanish have been documented (Ramírez, 2020; Toledo & García-Landa, 2018). Volunteers began to teach Spanish classes in the shelters themselves upon the arrival of the first wave of Haitians, however, over time these initiatives faded due to a lack of financial resources and stopped despite having been fruitful.

Despite the limitations to migratory regularization, a significant number of Haitians applied to enroll in the fall-winter semester of 2020 at the Autonomous University of Baja California (UABC, acronym in Spanish for Universidad Autónoma de Baja California), the main higher education institution in the state. According to our interviewee, only less than ten had done so and three managed to pass the admission exam; another one was accepted at the Polytechnic University of Baja California (UPBC, acronym in Spanish for Universidad Politécnica de Baja California) and yet another managed to be accepted in the Foreign Trade School (ESCOMEX, after its name in Spanish, Escuela de Comercio Exterior), a private university[5] (JN, personal communication, March 15, 2021).

The elements limiting the access of Haitians to higher education institutions are mainly institutional and cultural. On the other hand, the elements limiting their migratory regularization are rather structural. According to Joseph, "most of them are heavily concerned due to the instability of their immigration status; a significant number of Haitians are still under the visitor for humanitarian reasons modality since 2018 and 2020." For its part, the Directorate for Migration Planning and Promotion (Dirección de Planeación y Promoción Migratoria, 2020), reported that 623 Haitians processed the visitor for humanitarian reasons card (extended validity and replacement), and only 148 were accredited as refugee applicants (personal communication, June 20, 2019). This shows that a large number of Haitians still have a non-permanent immigration status and are required to appear before immigration authorities to renew their documents.

Conceptualizing the Educational Integration of Migrants

In a context in which people migrate to and from all regions of the world, there is a challenge both for migrants and receiving societies. This process of mutual adjustment is known as migrant

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[5] This student had to drop out from the private university due to lack of economic resources, and was therefore not taken into account as field work evidence for this article.

integration. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines integration at two levels: the first describes the process of introducing immigrants into the new, receiving society. The term is also used to refer to the incorporation process of people from different racial, ethnic or cultural groups in an equal and unrestricted societal association (International Organization for Migration, 2006).

The abovementioned body identifies six areas that serve as indicators to measure the success of integration policies. The first is language, as an essential element for any interaction within society. The second indicator is integration into the educational system, which allows children of immigrants to integrate into society, and can even open the doors for immigrants to economic integration; this indicator is also a mechanism of social mobility, for the acquisition and reinforcement of skills in the face of a changing and competitive labor market, as well as an incentive to settle permanently in the receiving cities. The third indicator is social integration, taking into account the well-being and participation of immigrants in the receiving society.

A fourth variable is political integration, which is linked to participation in democratic life and social involvement in issues on the public agenda.

In the same sense, the Glossary of Immigrant Integration Terms (Gabinet d'Estudis Socials et al., 2007) explains that this is a bidirectional and continuous adjustment process in which both migrants and residents participate; in it, immigrants have rights and responsibilities in the host country regardless of their gender or age, and for its part, the receiving society must create opportunities for the full participation of immigrants in all spheres (economic, social, cultural, political, etc.).

In this context, integration does not only happen through individual efforts but is also a collective and bidirectional process. Educational institutions can be seen as instruments to stimulate inclusion through "a set of processes aimed at eliminating or minimizing the barriers that limit the learning and participation of all students" (Ainscow & Booth, 2000, p. 9).

The importance of education lies in the incorporation and integration of those who come from other entities or places, valuing their both social and academic contributions in the host society. Therefore, "the school is often the first institution migrants reach to when they arrive in a country, which assumes an important role in their settlement, ensuring recognition of and access to rights" (Díaz, 2017, p. 23). Similarly, education is acknowledged as a fundamental tool for the inclusion of migrants; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2018) states that although diversity in the classroom represents a challenge for teachers, it can also help foster respect for diversity and is an opportunity to build stronger and more resilient communities.

From an intercultural perspective, the path towards the integration of migrants in educational institutions has been investigated and proposed as a desirable process to promote integration as a transversal axis to the rest of the objectives of the public and private higher education system. In this sense, there is consensus among various authors on the fact that in the integration processes of migrants in receiving societies, interculturalism in educational institutions is strengthened by a multiplicity of actors, as recognized by Fernández (2004), Fernandez-Castillo (2010), Ruiz-

Valdivia et al. (2012), and Salas et al. (2017). Therefore, intercultural education processes, in addition to being multi-actor, must be implicit in all areas of higher education institutions, not only within the study plans but also in teaching methods, extracurricular activities, follow-up programs, school support, the participation of representation, and decision-making groups, and in access to financing.

DIMENSIONS OF IMMIGRANT EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION

Institutional Dimension

It has to do with the internal capacity of HEIs to achieve the academic inclusion of immigrants by adapting their already established programs and processes, but also by means of establishing complementary strategies; one of the most important refers to the scholarships that HEIs can offer. The lack of financing is one of the main limitations to accessing and successfully pursuing a university career since the cost of it is not limited to the payment of tuition, but also includes the cost of study materials (books, photocopies, computers, internet), health insurance, food, transportation, and other expenses that must be taken into account (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018). Due to these factors, financing may consist of economic or in-kind support to cover the direct costs of accessing and staying in higher education (Habesha Project, 2019; Habesha Project & Canada Fund, 2020). There are external incentives or scholarships that may or may not be of a governmental nature, and HEIs are responsible for promoting and managing these supports so that students can obtain them. In this regard, we aimed at measuring equity, access to information, and the ease of access that immigrant students have when carrying out the procedures before the corresponding university channel.

On the other hand, we found that academic support is essential so that students do not interrupt their projects. Having a guide, a tutor, or a mentor in the HEI can be decisive for successful integration to and the conclusion of their university studies. Various actors in the educational process may be involved in this accompaniment, such as tutors, teachers, classmates, student societies, members of the psycho-pedagogical department, among others. It has been documented that "the creation of Student Committees can play a fundamental role in accompanying this adaptation process. Similarly, universities can assign a tutor from among the professors to keep abreast of the student's progress" (Habesha Project & Canada Fund, 2020, p. 12). Likewise, the foregoing confirms that the tutor or mentor teacher can contribute to the integration process of migrant and refugee students, by creating the educational system-institution-migrant bridge, thus supporting the decision-making of students when it comes to successfully structuring their professional projects. It is essential for this decision-making to be bilateral (student-tutor) and that there is a process of constant communication where "the tutor must provide a realistic perspective on the pros and cons of each choice, so as to expand the range of possibilities in order to overcome the limitations that cultural and social stereotypes can impose" (Fernández, 2004, p. 42). This is also acknowledged by Fernández-Castillo (2010) when pointing out that these educational reinforcement strategies must be included full-scope in multicultural teaching environments.

Immigrants can also access educational and/or vocational guidance and psychological care programs. These programs are a way of complementing the academic accompaniment, by not only focusing on directing the curricular project and the social integration of students but also contributing to the follow-up in the psychosocial and affective areas, as well as in the detection of potential problems that may impact the academic performance of students. For this reason, "it is essential that university education programs for refugees take into account the psychosocial support angle" (Habesha Project & Canada Fund, 2020, p. 12).

Thus, the reception process of immigrant students by the university community is yet another of the fundamental indicators that must be taken into account to guarantee such bidirectional integration process. In this regard, Vargas states that "a school culture favorable to school integration would allow the acknowledgment of cultural diversity, opening to it as an advantage, and valuing the experiences and abilities of students" (2018, p. 4).

Curriculum flexibility is a no less essential element contributing to the optimal inclusion of migrant groups within HEIs, as it aims at favoring students by means of lighter academic workloads, or at ensuring that they can have various forms of accreditation that allow for them to complement their education with different courses and learning modalities. Fernández (2004) states that within the context of multicultural education "curriculums must have the greatest possible openness and flexibility, such a principle having particular expression in compensatory education, aimed at students under peculiar development conditions" (p. 41).

As an example of this, it has been identified that online education is a useful tool since it provides opportunities to low-income migrants and refugees (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018).

Cultural Dimension

Those indicators that affect the integration of young Haitian students into the educational context in which they develop are included here. The role of HEIs is highlighted as a fundamental element for the cultural aspect to materialize in favor of migrant integration for those who wish to start or continue higher-level studies.

Not mastering the language of the host country is an aspect that constitutes an educational disadvantage or barrier, as it hinders the insertion process in universities (Goldberg, 2020; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018), also hindering socialization, which would help establishing relationships and acquiring a feeling of belonging to HEIs. Likewise, Fernández-Castillo (2010) points out that not mastering the language is one of the elements that distorts the social and contextual adaptation of immigrant students, being perhaps the most important obstacle in relation to educational performance under the ordinary curriculum.

To address the barriers in the integration process of migrants, the most outstanding actions relate to their involvement in cultural activities of the student community. This opening of multicultural spaces is essential to ensure that inclusion is triggered by participation, promotion, and dissemination.

When it comes to daily educational practices that do not adhere to the curricular content, those related to the hidden curriculum come to the front (Vargas, 2018). These are practices that transcend the explicit intentions of the educational environment, wherein students participate in socialization processes involving different values and attitudes (Díaz, 2006). The intercultural pedagogy tools provided by the teacher take on a key role, communicating students that they are welcome in educational inclusion, that they have equal opportunities, that they can overcome discriminatory acts, and that coexistence in diversity is understood (Leiva 2011; Vargas, 2018).

According to Fernández-Castillo (2010), educational curricular proposals with multicultural content have been explored in terms of hidden curriculum dynamics, aimed at promoting mutual cultural knowledge, various social alternatives, customs, art, among others, yet staying within the educational content of the ordinary curriculum. However, it is difficult to promote this endless content within the courses already offered without risking saturation, and it is therefore recommended that such content be introduced in special subjects or transversally in complementary activities.

On the other hand, the support networks that originate at the onset of the migration process can serve as a bridge between the host societies and those of origin. At such starting point, those support networks related to the procedures and processes of the HEIs migrants are interested in also emerge (González, 2008). These social networks play a fundamental role as they allow students to adapt to the new educational context in a friendlier and faster way.

Structural Dimension

Structural indicators, also known as "administrative and economic" (Vargas, 2018, p. 2) indicators, pertain related causes that could act for the benefit of and/or, under certain circumstances, as barriers to the integration of migrants into HEIs.

When migrants wish to continue or begin university studies, the validation of studies constitutes "a complex and expensive process" (Vargas, 2018, p. 2). According to Wolf (2019), this is due to the lack of empathy on the part of the authorities to speed up immigration procedures. Both aspects have implications that limit the migrants' access opportunities to HEIs, due to the scarcity of resources for the legalization or validation of documents, and the obstruction by the corresponding authorities (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018).

In addition to the legal and administrative barriers that migrants face, there is also the potential discrimination referred to by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2018). So, in the school and academic context, migrant students might face discriminatory events caused by classmates, as the Habesha Project and Canada Fund (2020) found. In this regard, Suárez and Gairín (2014) pointed out that "these groups (...) usually remain invisible within institutions themselves despite having achieved entry" (p. 36). For his part, Fernández-Castillo (2010), emphasizes that prejudiced, racist, and xenophobic attitudes and manifestations that are sometimes observed in childhood and adolescence deserve special attention and that they should be emphatically targeted for intervention among the entire school population.

METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a qualitative methodological strategy (Erickson, 1985) made up of two elements that allowed the collection of educational experiences of integration into HEIs: documentary analysis and fieldwork. In the bibliographic review, the main indicators generated from the concept of educational integration are analyzed.

In the section of this article where the educational integration of migrants is conceptualized, the elements that serve as a basis to determine the necessary indicators able to confirm that migrants are actually integrated within HEIs were configured, also determining which of these elements are part of the internal structure of HEIs and which of them are structural, as well as the actors partaking of this integration.

Once these elements were identified, a battery of questions was implemented to document vividly the experiences of Haitian migrants pursuing a university degree in the city of Mexicali, Baja California. The interview was divided into three blocks: institutional integration factors that document internal and own strategies of HEIs; cultural factors that account for barriers in terms of language, social constructs, values, and attitudes that hinder integration into HEIs; and structural factors that group the issues related to migratory regularization and bureaucratic procedures that can eventually cause difficulties for an optimal integration into HEIs.

The semi-structured in-depth interview was chosen, characterized as it is by collecting assorted topics in a broad manner throughout its development (González, 2008; López-Roldán & Fachelli, 2015; Robles, 2011). The case selection method was a combination of deliberate selection and snowballing (Baltar & Gorjup, 2012; Goldberg, 2020). A total of four students were interviewed [three of them enrolled at the Autonomous University of Baja California (UABC) and the fourth at the Polytechnic University of Baja California (UPBC)], which make up 100% of individuals of Haitian origin who are pursuing a university degree in Mexicali. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic contingency and the general recommendations for social distancing (Banerjee & Nayak, 2020), the interviews were conducted through electronic video call platforms during June and July 2020; they were recorded with prior authorization, then transcribed and processed in the ATLAS.ti software to obtain codes and relationships, and to measure the indicators obtained from the literature review (Varguillas, 2006).

Table 1. Characteristics of Interviewees

Identifier	Age	Interview Date	Immigration Status	Educational & Employment Status
WDY	30	June 24, 2020	Temporary resident	Sociology undergraduate student at UABC. Works alternating part time and full time as a driver for the DIDI and UBER platforms.
JDE	26	July 1, 2020	Refuge process in progress	International Business undergraduate student at UABC. Works part time in a greengrocer.
JN	24	July 2, 2020 and March 15, 2021	Temporary resident	Mechatronics Engineering undergraduate student at UABC. Works giving remedial courses at the university.
WSL	32	July 6, 2020	Temporary resident	Manufacturing Technology Engineering undergraduate student at UPBC. Works part-time in a Telcel service module.

Source: Own elaboration based on the testimonies of JDE (personal communication, July 1, 2020), JN (personal communication, July 2, 2020 and March 15, 2021), WDY (personal communication, June 24, 2020) and WSL (personal communication, July 6, 2020).

RESULTS ANALYSIS

Institutional Dimension Results

The four interviewees reported stable legal status; three of them have temporary residence obtained by means of a job offer, and only one of them has a refugee process in progress.

It should be noted that none of the interviewees have obtained any institutional or government scholarship for their studies, but instead pay for them with their own resources obtained from having jobs, mostly part-time. Only one student receives support in kind called "food scholarship," which consists of a coupon to receive one meal a day in the faculty's cafeteria. In this regard, JN (personal communication, July 2, 2020) mentioned that "it was not difficult to obtain this scholarship, since if you have good grades and a letter from your job you can have it, I can say that there is equality, it does not matter if you are Mexican or not."

As for academic support, 100% of the interviewees confirmed having it for the time they have been studying at the university. In the case of tutoring session, they stated that they only attend at the beginning of the semester, to carry out registration and validation procedures for the courses they will take. The interviewees stated that they do not require the support of tutors given that their academic performance is not low; however, they do not know what exactly the role of the tutor is in the academic life of a student, since they have not sought themselves information on the responsibilities of tutors and the functions they must perform, nor has the institution provided them with any guidance in this regard.

According to the regulations, tutors at UABC must fulfill the following functions:

a) Summoning tutees in all modalities to the sessions established by the academic unit throughout the school year;

b) Establishing communication and obtaining general information from tutees, in order to know their academic project;

c) Identifying the specific needs of tutees, and guiding or channeling them;

d) Periodically consulting the Institutional Tutoring System (SIT, acronym in Spanish for Sistema Institucional de Tutorías) to monitor the academic progress of their tutees;

e) Motivating tutees to make the right decisions and successfully advance their academic career;

f) Providing additional information on the structure and organization of the curriculum, pertinent university regulations, learning modalities and ways of obtaining credits, academic support services, and extracurricular activities;

g) Enabling learning units in the SIT for re-enrollment purposes (Gaceta Universitaria, 2012, p. 14).

For its part, the UPBC regulations define the function of a tutor as:

> the support and verification of the student's school journey by a teacher who will be assigned to him throughout his career at the Polytechnic University of Baja California, with the following purposes: a) offering specialized care to students through tutors, with the purpose of facilitating their incorporation into the university and academic environment; b) monitoring the student's academic and professional development; c) raising the quality of the educational process (Polytechnic University of Baja California, 2020, p. 17).

As derived from the above, the tutor has a wide range of functions that can contribute to the integration of migrants into HEIs, not only following up when they have problems in their qualifications, or when they require advice for the re-enrollment process, but also guiding their entire university education journey. Therefore, the potential of the tutor lies in "having the opportunity to keep constant and direct communication with the student, its fundamental purpose is to support students in their adaptation process at the beginning of their undergraduate studies" (Rosiles et al., 2013, p. 106).

The interviewees were also asked if as part of the academic support they had required support in mental health or psycho-pedagogical issues, to which 100% answered no. However, they stated that even without requesting it, those in charge of these departments had constantly kept abreast

of their needs: "Although I don't ask them for help, they always approach me asking, don't you need anything? some information?" (WDY, personal communication, June 24, 2020).

It is important to highlight that tutoring should not be limited only to academic-institutional support, but also address integration from the field of interpersonal relationships. In this sense, Fernández-Castillo (2010) documented other social network initiatives within the classroom that favor integration. For example, the assistant student, help among equals, student mediators in the solution of conflicts and aggression, and group or cooperative work systems. This shows that classmates are a quite important support for students, both to improve their performance in subjects that are difficult for them, and the preparation of group work and presentations. Thus, these social networks within the classroom prove to be essential, since contact with their classmates is the closest and most daily thing migrant students experience. Only one interviewee stated that he had been supported by the student society in issues related to administrative procedures within his faculty, being subsequently invited to be part of the work team.

Carrying out cultural dissemination activities is essential to succeed in the integration process, by promoting the rapprochement of native students from the host country with those who come from abroad, thus contributing to the school system not reproducing patterns of exclusion and inequality.

In this sense, interviewees were asked if their university or faculty had any department in charge of informing on the issue of Haitian migration in Baja California. The UPBC student said he did not know if there was any initiative within his institution, and that he had not been invited to participate in such outside of it either. For their part, the UABC students commented that they have indeed participated in initiatives of this type both within their faculties and others of the same university and that they have even been invited to institutional media outlets such as Radio UABC to tell their story.

As for flexible educational modalities, the interviewed students have made use of the semi-school system, open education, and distance education. All of them have had access to and have partaken of the latter. Even so, there are conflicting opinions regarding the benefit that these modalities have contributed to their education. On the one hand, these students are used to distance education as it is a common practice within their study programs (especially since the start of the health contingency due to COVID-19), which has allowed them to have more options in terms of managing their time as students and workers. Yet they comment that it seemed to them a disadvantage in the sense that within the Haitian educational system there is not so much dependence on information technologies, and so they used their brains more there; therefore this system seemed strange to them.

In this sense, JN (personal communication, July 2, 2020) stated that since his career requires more practical elements, he does not consider online subjects the most appropriate. He went on stating that this way learning is incomplete for the subjects involving more exercises that must be fed back face-to-face with the teacher. JDE (personal communication, July 1, 2020) stated that since he does not own a personal computer with internet access, it was not feasible for him to benefit from these modalities. WDY (personal communication, June 24, 2020), who is pursuing a

degree in the semi-school modality, said that such a system represents great advantages since he can organize his work schedule around school, much of his education being online. It is noteworthy that the actual use of flexible modalities needs to be promoted, since, for example, in the case of the UABC, about 20 options are admitted for obtaining credits (Autonomous University of Baja California, 2018), and in the specific case of Haitian students only two of them are being used. In the case of the UPBC, its regulations and operating manual also include flexible schooling models (Administrative Secretariat, n.d.). At least three of these modalities were identified as available to obtain credits, of which the interviewed Haitian student stated having only used one because he is in the initial stage of his career and not yet in time to make use of the other two.

Cultural Dimension Results

Upon arrival in Mexicali, the young Haitians encountered a language different from their native language; this can undoubtedly represent a limitation for students, from their arrival to achieve a successful admission process and then till the conclusion of their academic project. However, despite the importance of addressing this indicator within HEIs, the interviewees stated not having received courses at school to improve their Spanish, instead improving their language skills on their own accounts. In this regard, two students commented that in Haiti they received a Spanish course that gave them some notions on the language, but even so, communication in daily life was complicated for all of them at the time of their arrival in Baja California. Each one learned Spanish on their own through various means, by acquiring materials to learn Spanish, internet resources, reading, daily practice through interaction with different people, and immersion in the context.

Regarding admission to HEIs, specifically to UABC, two young students commented that at first, it was difficult to request information at the university and carry out the procedures, due to the lack of command of the language. One of them explained that since the content was in Spanish, it was difficult for him to understand some parts. He told us that "if that exam had been in French, maybe I would have done well" (JN, personal communication, July 2, 2020). He took the admission exam to the UABC twice.

Two students at UABC attended a course prior to taking the admission exam at that institution, which allowed them to reinforce their knowledge and become familiar with the general structure of the exam and its writing in Spanish. These experiences underline the importance of teaching general knowledge and preparatory courses or workshops in the Spanish language.

Language and school performance are aspects that showed a certain correlation. Two students have been identified who had difficulties being admitted in the UABC due to language, one of whom commented that "language is very important, more than anything my career is reading and writing, reading and producing" (WDY, personal communication, June 24, 2020). Accordingly, in some subjects, if the work did not meet the spelling requirements, it was not graded, or points were deducted. The linguistic challenge that young people face is nonetheless also positively assumed as a challenge to improve upon since despite the language difficulties Haitian students show an optimistic attitude towards improving in their studies and perfecting their command of the Spanish language.

When addressing the issue of their knowledge of the educational system, two students stated that they had no complications, while the rest did; especially at the beginning, since in Haiti they do not focus so much on the use of computers and individual effort is more appreciated, as stated by JDE (personal communication, July 1, 2020).

In relation to cultural activities, the students had different perceptions based on their involvement in the events carried out both in their faculty, as well as in others where they were given the opportunity to participate, such as book presentations, and sports and artistic activities, which are promoted by the institutional educational model and are part of the transversal axes that include foreign language, sports, and culture.

As for multicultural spaces, three students have had various participations. JDE (personal communication, July 1, 2020) gave a conference that dealt with the integration of migrants and the participation of Haitians in the economy of Mexicali, organized by the International Business major at the School of Administrative Sciences. JN gives talks about his experiences, at the School of Social and Political Sciences; he comments: "sometimes I talk about overcoming, what I have always done (...) I try to advise my Mexican brothers" (personal communication, July 2, 2020). JN has also participated in Radio UABC, with CETYS University, and with other institutions. In turn, WDY (personal communication, June 24, 2020) gave a talk on the subject of Introduction to Social Sciences. The university acknowledges the need to sensitize students to the presence of a multiplicity of ethnic, racial, linguistic, and cultural groups in the region. Gómez (2018) stresses that comprehensive education allows forging new skills and promotes new ways of relating in society.

When it comes to the hidden curriculum, all students mentioned that teachers indeed carry out activities involving all students and encourage integration. One student mentioned that although "some teachers carry out integration activities, those activities are not daily; but they do happen in the classroom" (JDE, personal communication, July 1, 2020); this student added that respect and equal treatment are promoted, matching with the commitment of the school to foster in students the fundamental values of the university community through the subject being taught, as established in the Code of Ethics of the Autonomous University of Baja California (2014).

The intercultural pedagogical tools that teachers employ vary depending on the university and the school. These can range from debates, face-to-face or online forums, talks on specific subjects, to personal contributions, and classroom presentations. According to the Bylaws of Academic Staff of the Autonomous University of Baja California (2014), academic staff must carry out teaching practices concerning cultural preservation and dissemination by means of transparent pedagogical tools that acknowledge and favor the value of social and cultural diversity (Autonomous University of Baja California, 2014). The foregoing goes hand in hand with what UPBC pursues in its model, which focuses on being, knowing, knowing-how and knowing-how-to-coexist, contributing to an all-encompassing education of the individual (Polytechnic University of Baja California, 2020).

Family, friends, neighbors, and other people students meet during their stay in Mexicali serve as support networks; that is to say, they serve as fundamental support prior to being admitted to

the university. The UABC students mentioned three teachers, mainly one academic from the School of Social and Political Sciences, who supported and guided them to carry out paperwork and procedures at said university. A young man highlighted that "they are always attentive, offering their assistance or asking if you need something" (JN, personal communication, July 2, 2020). It is worth mentioning that JN was the first Haitian in the mentioned house of studies, and who supported JDE throughout the admission process. Therefore, support networks appear both in the educational field and in the migration process to regularize their stay in the country.

Structural Dimension Results

All the students interviewed had to carry out revalidation procedures for their high school studies before the Ministry of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública). They all agreed that the process was not long or bureaucratic; however, the biggest problem was solving the cost of translations before the notary and the waiting time for the delivery of said documents, since some even chose to send them to translate to the city of Guadalajara because the cost there is much lower than in Mexicali, and that made the wait very long.

Regarding immigration procedures, migrant students were questioned about their perception regarding the time and agility of the authorities and officials in charge of them, all of them agreeing that the information provided by the people at the INM offices was contradictory; in the repeated appointments they attended, they were asked for different requirements depending on the official who served them on each occasion, this causing applicants to make mistakes when submitting documents or filling out forms, in turn making the process bureaucratic. We also asked them if they suffered any type of discrimination during the completion of these immigration procedures; three students answered that they or some of their countrymen were discriminated against. When inquiring about what these acts consisted of, we were informed that:

> At the beginning when I did the immigration procedures, I did suffer discrimination: the other foreigners were allowed to wait inside, and we had to wait outside, while everyone else were served first even though they arrived later; [also] I could see other people who were not treated the same and such, and I say that it is due to stress from both sides, the person does not speak Spanish very well and so they begin saying words in Spanish and words in Creole (JDE, personal communication, July 1, 2020).

With this testimony, cultural and language differences can be confirmed as continuing to be important barriers in the process of consolidating integration, and these discriminatory acts by immigration authorities in Mexico are not just anecdotal but have been documented by institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos) and the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), as stated in the National Survey of Migrants in Transit through Mexico (Encuesta nacional de personas migrantes en tránsito por México) (National Human Rights Commission, 2018).

In this sense, of the four students interviewed, only one stated having suffered discrimination within the university during the time he has been studying. It should be noted that the only one

who answered affirmatively was also the first Haitian admitted in the University of Mexicali, which suggests that his presence served to pave the way for the rest of the students who stated not having faced events of this kind.

CLOSING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Higher education institutions have internal management, research, and outreach structure, whose main focus is student-centered education according to the competency-based educational model. These elements are tools that contribute to the integration of migrant groups, which increasingly insert themselves into these institutions. However, sometimes institutions are not prepared to receive people of different nationalities, languages, cultures, values and aptitudes in their classrooms, people who may come from conflictive contexts or who have left their countries for reasons of persecution, instability, insecurity, lack of employment, and not only for seeking an improvement in their academic project (exchange or postgraduate studies).

Yet, as we were able to observe in the analysis of the results, once reviewing the regulations and the operative structures of HEIs, and the testimonies provided in the interviews, indeed some elements of the internal structures of HEIs favor a partial integration of these groups despite not having been designed for such.

Regarding academic support, in the case of the tutoring program it was observed that despite the fact that the function of the tutor has not been fully potentiated before students, there is a positive perception of the role that it plays in their academic training. Likewise, it is noteworthy that psycho-pedagogical departments indeed reach out to learn first-hand about the needs of migrant students, which are clearly different from those of students of Mexican origin. This is positive, as it happens even without being requested by students; yet this did not happen in all the cases documented in this article, and so enhancing the service provided by these departments to foreign students may be an area of opportunity for the HEIs studied here, so as to promote a closer and more dynamic approach and, above all, to closely monitor the situation of individuals throughout their university experience.

The same happens with student societies. The students who make up these work teams are leaders who contribute to the integration of Haitian students, since they are the ones who interact closely with university authorities and are spokespersons for the needs of students, and can promote support programs.

It is worth highlighting the favorable work of UABC in contributing to the dissemination of information on Haitian migration in Baja California among students and the general public since it allows young students to tell of their experiences directly, by organizing events, giving conferences, or in talks in classrooms.

It was observed that students remain unaware of the scholarship programs available and accessible to them in their universities. All of them pointed out that up to now they have not obtained any scholarship nor have been offered financial support, yet neither have they approached

to inquire about such. This leaves the question open as to how effective the flow of information within HEIs regarding scholarships is.

When it comes to language, it should be considered that Haitian students have learned Spanish in self-taught ways and by their own resources and that their admission in HEIs has not been easy due to their lack of command of Spanish, which has also affected their academic performance. For now, few are the cases of foreign students in which Spanish is not their native language, however, it is likely that in the near future young migrants with similar characteristics will be integrated, to whom HEIs must pay attention so as to provide them with means to learn or strengthen academic Spanish.

Regarding their knowledge of the educational system, migrant students expressed that they consider it somewhat complex since they are not clear about the basic aspects of its conformation, the educational levels, or about characteristics such as its secularism, its free and mandatory nature, and its quality. On this, HEIs can provide guidance at the time of admission of young people, as part of the immersion experience in the educational context, so that they can better understand the system and thus plan their professional education.

As part of the comprehensive training of students in HEIs, activities and cultural spaces are promoted, created, and disseminated in a recurring and differentiated manner depending on the university and school in which Haitian students are enrolled. In the case of UABC, these activities figure in its educational model as essential for the comprehensive education of the student, whereas in the case of UPBC they are not explicitly stated so. For this reason, it becomes necessary to ensure that the activities of HEIs, or, where appropriate, the cultural spaces, are extendedly open so that those students whose schools offer little space for participation can join them, thus contributing to their comprehensive education.

The role of teachers is fundamental in the immersion and integration of Haitian students in the educational context since their actions stimulate the growth and professional training of students based on values that are reflected in daily educational practice. Therefore, their job is to prevent and avoid any action that detracts from the participation of foreign students, or any discriminatory act.

We were able to verify the relevance of support networks in the migration process and the incorporation of Haitian students into HEIs. The support of academics proved to be of great value since they provided accurate information and timely attention to concerns on university admission and immigration issues. These networks, which were not created formally but rather were initiatives of teachers and academics, make it possible to detect areas of opportunity that HEIs can take advantage of so as to develop rapprochement and support channels or mechanisms.

Immigration procedures are elements that HEIs cannot control, but that directly affect the admission and permanence of migrant students in educational institutions. The case of young Haitians illustrates this, as they did not come specifically looking after an academic project when they left their country, and have had to look for mechanisms that allow them to regularize their immigration status along the way. In this matter, HEIs can help make the admission processes for these students more flexible, by establishing some quotas or spaces destined for a certain number

of people under these conditions, and by entering into agreements with national and international organizations.

Finally, the issue of discrimination in classrooms must be addressed. Although only a single case of student discrimination was documented, this implies that it is necessary to implement awareness-raising actions that foster tolerance in multicultural environments and promote the inclusion of these students in institutional decision-making bodies.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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