

# U.S. Students in Mexican Schools, Gaps and Challenges for Inclusion. Ethnographic Contributions from Oaxaca, Mexico

## Estudiantes estadounidenses en escuelas mexicanas: brechas y desafíos para la inclusión. Contribuciones etnográficas de Oaxaca, México

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the enrollment of U.S.-born minors of Mexican origin in schools in the state of Oaxaca, one of the Mexican states most affected by the return of Mexican migrants due to the Trump administration's tightened immigration policy. The results presented in this study have been obtained through a qualitative methodology using the techniques of participant and non-participant observation, interviews, discussion groups, and documentary analysis. The target population is made up of U.S. students between 12 and 17 years of age enrolled in middle and high schools. The findings show the presence of different elements of exclusion such as the absence of diagnostic tests and programs for teaching Spanish and for leveling study content learning. This means that these children go through differentiated school trajectories due to their immigration status, which causes social and educational exclusion and has important consequences for their present and future lives.

**Key words:** migrant childhood, exclusion, school, differentiated school circuits, United States, Mexico.

### RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza a las minorías nacidas en Estados Unidos de origen mexicano una vez que han regresado a inscribirse en escuelas del estado de Oaxaca, uno de los más afectados por el retorno de migrantes debido al endurecimiento de la política migratoria de la administración de Trump. Los resultados que se presentan en este estudio se han obtenido usando una metodología cualitativa por medio de técnicas de observación participante y no participante, entrevistas, grupos de discusión y análisis documental. La población muestra se obtuvo de estudiantes estadounidenses entre los doce y los diecisiete años de edad inscritos en escuelas de enseñanza media y preparatoria. Los hallazgos muestran la presencia de diversos elementos de exclusión,

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como la ausencia de exámenes diagnósticos, programas para enseñar español y para atender la nivelación del aprendizaje. Esto significa que esos jóvenes tendrán trayectorias escolares diferenciadas debido a su estatus migratorio, lo que causa exclusión educacional y tiene importantes consecuencias en sus vidas presentes y futuras.

**Palabras clave:** niñez migrante, exclusión, escuela, circuitos escolares diferenciados, Estados Unidos, México.

## INTRODUCTION

The toughening of U.S. immigration policy during the Trump administration (2017-present), accompanied by an openly nativist and anti-immigrant discourse that specifically attacks Mexicans, encourages the dynamics of Mexicans' return from the United States to their country of origin (Aguilar, 2017; INM, 2017, 2018). While the return is a multi-causal phenomenon (Valdéz et al., 2018: 8) involving economic crisis, lack of documentation to live or work in the United States, the militarization of borders, reunification, and deportation, at present, deportation and the risk of experiencing it are among the main causes of the return of the Mexican population (Aguilar, 2017; Jacobo and Cárdenas, 2018).

The state of Oaxaca, located in southwestern Mexico and one of the traditional sources of migrants to the United States, is one of the most affected by forced return. In the cases studied, the reasons for this return lead us to speak of the United States in its current context for immigrants as a country of expulsion and flight. Forced returns by deportation, as shown here, make the United States a country of expulsion. Our ethnographic records show that these deportations have been mainly due to document irregularity, whereby the immigration police intercept the subjects in the workplace or even at home due to the infraction of a law, mainly the one prohibiting drunk driving and/or without the corresponding license and with a minor aboard.

Although the highest rates of forced returns of Mexicans were recorded during Obama's administration (2009-2017), according to figures from the National Migration Institute, under Trump forced returns increased between 2017 and 2018. The available figures indicate that 190,277 Mexicans were deported from the United States in 2018, 18 502 of whom were migrants from Oaxaca. This places Oaxaca in second place at the national level, trailing only the state of Guerrero, which recorded 21 379 deportations for the same year (INM, 2018).

On the other hand, the returns recorded for fear of deportation lead us to speak of the United States as a country of flight. In the cases studied, the situation of documentary irregularity has precipitated returns for fear of being deported, as well as for the

fear of the consequences that deportation has for migrants. Among them are the dis-possession of all material goods and the express prohibition of entering the United States for a period of up to 10 years. Therefore, this type of return is also involuntary.

But, in addition to its magnitude and the involuntary nature of most returns, what makes the current return flow different is the prevalence of children and youth (Jacobo, 2014: 77-78). It is, therefore, a transgenerational return in which migrants do not return alone to their country of origin, but do so with their children (Durand, 2004: 105). The children of these returned migrants may have two types of migratory status, and they cross two different educational itineraries to develop their inclusion in the society of destination and return, respectively, through the school (Ocampo, 2014; Zúñiga, 2013; Zúñiga and Hamann, 2006; Zúñiga, Hamann, and Sánchez, 2008). In the first place are those who were born and began their schooling in Oaxaca and then migrated with their parents to the United States, where they went to a new school, and have now returned to Oaxaca, where they try to continue their education. These are returned minors. In contrast, some children have taken a path that, while not new, is emerging as a consequence of this toughening of U.S. immigration policy: children with Mexican parents born in the United States, where they began their schooling and who, following their returned parents, then try to continue it in Oaxaca. These children are not actually returning to Mexico, but are U.S. Americans who have migrated and entered Mexico for the first time.

This article focuses mainly on the children of Mexican parents born in the United States because their return is an important, emerging, complex phenomenon, especially regarding the process of school inclusion in Oaxaca and the mechanisms of exclusion. My objective is to explore and analyze the characteristics of the school itineraries that these children follow in the state of Oaxaca, show how their parents' forced return directly impacts them, causing a "forced school insertion" in Mexico, and to examine its consequences. I hope that this study will make their situation more visible and contribute to its improvement.

After this introduction, I describe my methodology, examine the theoretical debates and concepts used as background to my study, present my results, and finish by drawing conclusions.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is inscribed in the socio-anthropological tradition of school ethnography (Velasco and Díaz, 1997), which is constructed as a form of representation through a set of strategies, methods, and research techniques (Velasco and Díaz, 1997: 73). The ethnography

developed here was based on the researcher's participation in the life of selected school institutions and that of their socio-educational actors "observing what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2005: 15).

The ethnographic results I present come out of field work done between 2018 and 2019 in the region of the Central Valleys of the state of Oaxaca.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the research locus was educational centers in the city of Tlacolula de Matamoros and San Francisco Lachigoló, a town belonging to the homonymous municipality of Tlacolula. These enclaves, located in the center of the state, are recognized as having had one of the greatest movements of migrants from Oaxaca to the United States, who are now returning with their young children because of the Trump administration's toughening anti-immigrant policy.



Source: Developed by the author from Google Maps.

The ethnography in Tlacolula was carried out in the Technology, Industrial, and Services Studies Center 124 (CETIS) and at Technical Middle School 48; and the San Francisco Lachigoló ethnography was developed in the extension unit of CETIS 124 in Tlacolula. The educational CETIS centers both in Tlacolula and San Francisco Lachigoló provide higher secondary education to 428 and 88 students, respectively, aged 15 to 17. Technical Middle School 48 is responsible for teaching middle education to 800 students between the ages of 12 and 14. Forty-two U.S. American students are enrolled in these educational institutions, who come from Chicago, Illinois; Ensenada, New

<sup>1</sup>These are part of the postdoctoral project "Migration and return of migrant childhood from United States to Mexico in the Trump era. Processes and experiences of school (re)insertion in Oaxaca, Mexico," Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, UNAM.

Mexico; Harvard, Massachusetts; Las Vegas, Nevada; Los Angeles, California; San Bernardino, California; Santa Monica, California; and Phoenix, Arizona.

Until the moment of their parents' forced return, these students attended U.S. public schools, where they had studied entirely in English. Outside of school, their lives were fully developed within the linguistic, social, and cultural dynamics of the cities and neighborhoods where they lived. The fact that their parents are from the designated municipalities and communities of Oaxaca has determined the choice of Oaxaca as a place of return. Specifically, the existence of family networks in these places has had a special weight in this choice, since their support is essential for deported adults to initiate multiple reintegration processes in Mexico, mainly work and social.

I developed a qualitative methodology to obtain data in the field, integrating ethnographic research techniques, such as documentary analysis, participant and non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and discussion groups. The documentary analysis was applied to the books and school materials the students work with in educational institutions in order to examine their content and detect mechanisms of exclusion. Both participant and non-participant observation followed a structured script aimed at recording exclusionary elements and practices that are integrated in the differentiated school trajectories the migrant minors from the United States go through.

The interviews and discussion groups were based on previously designed questionnaires applied to the research subjects grouped by category (school principals, teachers, and students), with the purpose of analyzing how these subjects live, explain, and interpret their reality. I conducted 55 interviews (3 with principals, 10 with teachers, and 42 with students) and organized five discussion groups (2 with teachers and 3 with students). I complemented the data obtained in the field and contrasted it with an analysis of the specialized literature.

It must be underlined that the application of these techniques has given priority to the voice of migrant minors, subjects usually silenced and invisible in an important migratory phenomenon that is taking place within an international situation as delicate as the current one between United States and Mexico.

## MIGRANT CHILDHOOD, EXCLUSION, AND SCHOOL

Various studies show that in migratory contexts the best path for childhood insertion in the society is education (Gairín, Rodríguez-Gómez, and Castro, 2012; Gandini et al., 2015; Montoya and González, 2015). It is especially important to have adequate access to education and an educational system prepared for the real inclusion

of this population, and one that avoids inequalities. As Pàmies points out (2011), we must not lose sight of the fact that the educational success of migrant children will depend to a large extent on the structure of opportunities presented to them through teaching strategies aimed at their academic progress and an appropriate transition between their previous and current experiences to promote their progressive incorporation into new educational contexts. Frequently, however, research shows that the access migrant students have to school occurs in conditions of inequality, leading to serious exclusion that confers serious disadvantages compared to the non-migrant majority (Bustos, 2016; Castillo, Santa-Cruz, and Vega, 2018; Garreta, 2011; Jacobo, 2014; Jiménez, 2013; Novaro, Díez, and Martínez, 2017; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Valdéz, Rivera, and López, 2018).

Several studies point out the different strategies deployed by educational institutions to deal with migrant students (Castillo, Santa-Cruz, and Vega, 2018; Colectivo Ioé, 1999, 2002; Giménez and Malgesini, 2000). In the first of these strategies, the school rejects those considered different, denying access to migrants and hindering their schooling, a direct act of rejection and exclusion (Jiménez, 2013). A second strategy allows migrants access to school, but ignores them by treating them as if they were not culturally and linguistically different and as if they were not in a position of socio-educational inequality (Giménez and Malgesini, 2000). In the third strategy, the school develops compensatory programs and special plans for migrants with the aim of leveling the starting situation of those who, due to their social and cultural condition, are at a disadvantage regarding the acquisition of the social, cultural, and linguistic tools that will allow them to understand and to develop in the society to which they have come. These plans and programs are often only transitional instruments aimed at assimilating these students (Essomba, 2008; Jiménez, 2013), but implying renouncing what Cook (1992), Moll (1997), and Esteban-Guitart and Saubich (2013) call the knowledge, practices, and skills banks, that is, the set of knowledge and experiences acquired during their previous school and life experiences. The fourth strategy involves an approach aimed at promoting a pluralistic education and introduces the cultural contributions of the different migrant groups into the curriculum in what is known as a multiculturalist educational model (Banks, 1995; Díez, 2004; Santos, 2009). Finally, the fifth strategy is based on intercultural education, which draws on the approaches of the pluralistic educational model and links them to the position of unfavorable power in which migrant minorities find themselves (Giménez and Malgesini, 2000). This strategy is aimed at including cultural particularities and suppressing social and power inequalities that affect migrants and other ethnic, social, and cultural minorities (Castillo, Santa-Cruz, and Vega, 2018; Colectivo Ioé, 1999, 2002; Giménez and Malgesini, 2000).

Of the strategies mentioned, the educational institutions studied in Oaxaca apply the second. As explained, it is based on the acceptance of migrants' access to school, but also on ignoring their linguistic, social, and cultural differences and the needs derived from them (Giménez and Malgesini, 2000). This is what Gentili (2007, 2009) calls inclusive exclusion, defined by the author as the process

whereby the mechanisms of educational exclusion are recreated and assume new physiognomies, within the framework of inclusion dynamics or institutional insertion that ends up being insufficient or, in some cases, innocuous in reverting the processes of isolation, marginalization, and denial of rights that are involved in any process of social segregation, inside and outside educational institutions. (2009: 33)

The mechanisms of exclusion have recently been reformulated and camouflaged behind presumably inclusive policies that, in theory, advocate for the universalization of the right to education, as well as for its free and compulsory character, but in practice these policies continue to cause the exclusion of diversity in general, and of migrant children in particular. Exclusion can be understood as Gentili does in his analysis of the multidimensionality of exclusion processes in the educational field (2009: 34-35), that is, as a social relationship and not a position occupied in the institutional structure of a given society, so that "those excluded from the right to education not only stay out of school, but also are part of a set of relationships and circumstances that distance them from this right, denying it or attributing it to them in a restricted, conditioned, or subordinate manner" (Gentili, 2009: 34-35).

It should also be stressed that the universality of the right to education can lead to the false conclusion that, if access to education is a right that is already universalized, then failure in school is an individual failure and not a failure of the education system, which, in this case, is not prepared to accommodate a growing migrant population from the United States. This also hides the unwritten rule that, in view of the system's inability to include and not exclude migrant students, it is the students who must adapt to the school and not the school to them.

Mexico's Constitution (Art. 30, 1917) recognizes that everyone has the right to receive compulsory education—from basic education to high school—, but is the right to education fulfilled by simple access to a school? I agree with Torres (2006) when she states that the right to education implies the right to a good education. This means taking into account the conditions, pedagogical models, and elements that are part of the teaching-learning processes for all students. Torres also emphasizes that the right to education is not access only to education, but to learning; the challenge is "to build learning societies, in which the basic learning needs of all its members are met

and expanded" (Torres, 2006) and not just the needs of the majority versus those of a minority.

Access to schooling therefore does not guarantee the right to education (Tomaševski, 2004; Torres, 2006). We have to see what happens in a school that receives the students unequally, based on certain attributes, such as, for example, their immigration status. As Gentili notes, more opportunities exist today to access schools than decades ago, but "the forms of educational exclusion and the denial of school opportunities to those who, being within the system continue to have their right to education denied, have become more complex and diffuse" (2009: 44).

The rhetorical and politically correct discourse of diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities used in public policies, educational systems, and schools is not a guarantee of their effective exercise. On the contrary, compared to the level of discourse, practice reveals the serious difficulties of inclusion and the strong exclusion processes facing migrant students, even when they are "inside" the system. This is what Novaro (2015, 2016) and others (Hecht et al., 2015; Novaro and Diez, 2011) call "subordinate inclusion," which rests on the exclusion of migrant children from particular ways of being "inside" the educational system. To reverse this logic of exclusion, we must begin by recognizing and making visible the practices that lead those particular ways of being "outside" while being "inside," which leads me to agree with Sinisi (2010: 14) that we have to be attentive to the ways these minors experience everyday discrimination and marginalization at school, thus becoming "excluded from within."

One of the clearest concrete forms of the subordinated inclusion of migrant students—and the object of study of this research—is their transit through differentiated school circuits. These circuits are parallel to those traveled by the non-migrant majority in the same institution. They are lower quality circuits (Novaro and Diez, 2015: 316; Novaro, 2015: 80), characterized by a lack of attention to the needs and particularities of migrant students, pedagogical discrimination, curricular injustice, and differentiation in the educational progress due to their condition as migrants and unequal school performance (Gentili, 2009: 45-46), that lead migrant children to inequality of opportunities for school success and, therefore, to greater exclusion.

The differentiated school circuits that migrant children access in Oaxacan schools are found in the lack of Spanish taught to them, when their mother tongue is English; a lack of knowledge about their previous trajectories of school and life and about their condition as migrants and binational citizens;<sup>2</sup> low expectations for their school performance; an absence of transitional processes between the methodologies, models,

<sup>2</sup> These minors obtain U.S. nationality by the legal principle of *ius solis* (law of the soil) and Mexican nationality by the *ius sanguinis* (law of blood).

and pedagogical contents of their schools of origin and destination; and their absolute invisibility and isolation, and the self-isolation to which they are subjected and subject themselves to as different because of the mandate to integrate into Mexican nationalism.

Recognizing that the educational system takes students through “the circuits that best adapt to the marks or stigmas that define the size of their rights and opportunities” (Gentili, 2009: 45), are these ways of being “inside” the educational system a sufficient condition from which to speak of the right to education, inclusion, and equal opportunities, or are these ways of being “inside” in conditions of inequality and the exclusion of the “other” migrants?

## DIFFERENTIATED SCHOOL CIRCUITS AND THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF EXCLUSION

Next, we will analyze three of the main elements that make up the differentiated school circuits experienced by students from the United States in Oaxacan schools, how exclusion mechanisms operate through them, and their consequences. As will be seen, a close link exists between each of these elements, making these circuits complex processes that place students in strong positions of inequality within the educational system, pushing them to situations of exclusion with decisive repercussions for their present and future educational processes. We must bear in mind that, within these circuits, migrant children experience unique formative experiences of teaching that can mark their later trajectory (Sinisi, 2013).

### The Language of Teaching and Learning

One of the main problems migrant children face in Oaxaca schools is a lack of knowledge of Spanish. Almost all the migrant students speak English as their mother tongue, since they were born in the United States, and migrated to Oaxaca mainly between the ages of 8 and 14, although 15-year-old students have also been registered. While most speak Spanish as transmitted to them by their parents at home while in the United States, they cannot read it or, above all, write it. Some registered students do not speak, read, or write Spanish, which makes their teaching-learning process even more difficult and puts them at greater risk of exclusion.

There are no learning programs for these students. Despite this, the lack of knowledge of Spanish in any of its competences –mainly spoken, read, and written– is interpreted as a deficit in the migrant students, thus obviating their starting situation

and exempting from responsibilities an educational system that is not prepared to receive the growing number of U.S. American students. During the interviews and discussion groups, numerous students pointed out the multiple difficulties they experience with the Spanish language in their formative process, which have been corroborated through participant observation: "I'm forced to learn Spanish" (Ana); "Nobody teaches me" (Pedro); "I answer in English, everything I write I do in English" (Edwin); "It gets complicated for me because I mix the words in English and Spanish when I write" (Rosa); "I do work that has nothing to do with what teachers ask for" (Mario); "I don't speak or do anything because I don't understand" (Aidé).<sup>3</sup> All this translates into difficulties in writing, listening, reading, and communicating, as some of the teachers interviewed corroborated: "They're blocked; they have difficulty writing and in comprehending what they read. Many read, [but] don't understand what they read. Others don't know anything [do not read, speak, or write in Spanish]. Children don't talk, don't understand their teachers, don't understand what their teachers teach them; they have difficulty understanding everything" (Maria).

These difficulties in the educational process due to ignorance of the language of instruction led many teachers to point out these students' slowness in their school performance and the time the teachers would need to invest in them, thus increasing their workload. These statements often question migrant students' learning capacity, ignoring the fact that they are being taught in a language that they don't speak and that has never been formally taught to them in an academic setting. This is revealed by the fact that these students were very bright at school in the United States, where they developed in their mother tongue, English, but fail resoundingly in the schools of Oaxaca, where they don't know the language of instruction, Spanish. In fact, studies like Olmedo's (2017) show that children who are educated and learn in their mother tongue are more self-confident, better integrated, and perform better academically.

A clear example of the importance of training in their own language was recorded during a classroom observation in which a student who had arrived at school only a few months ago didn't know Spanish at all. The various mechanisms of exclusion, including not teaching Spanish, took him to a level of isolation and self-isolation that came to the attention of one of his teachers. Although the teacher didn't know English, he asked the student to present a scheduled exercise for the subject in his mother tongue, which he did with ease and perfection, as corroborated through observation. This reveals that these minors don't present deficits or have less learning capacity; the problem lies in the requirement that their academic performance be measured in a language they do not speak or understand.

<sup>3</sup> In order to respect the subjects' anonymity, their real names have been changed.

## Study Content. Mexico vs. the U.S.

Along with the difficulties of writing, reading comprehension, and communication due to a lack of a knowledge of Spanish, the schools also impart nationalizing contents that are completely unrelated to those the children studied in the United States and have thus integrated as a basis for their sociocultural identity and their experiential worlds in the United States. The study content has a strong nationalizing character, both in the United States and in the Mexican educational system, and is oriented toward knowledge of the respective countries, mainly in the subjects of history and geography, although it has been ethnographically verified that, at least in Mexico, the nationalizing tendency acquires a certain transversality in the other subjects, such as language and literature, mathematics, and the social and natural sciences.

Here, it is important to highlight the disparity of teaching content between the countries of origin and destination, as the students' statements confirm. These underline their extensive knowledge of the content learned in the United States and their absolute ignorance about content referring to Mexico and Oaxaca in subjects such as history and geography. This was expressed by Pedro, who said, "I don't know anything about these things, I only know about the 13 colonies that started when [U.S.] America started and all that, and now they're telling me about . . . these countries and . . . no, nothing, nothing. I don't understand anything." Ana's story is also illustrative: "It's very difficult. My marks are not very good compared to when I was in the United States. Because I don't know anything about history, geography. . . . Then . . . because the way they teach you things is also different from the United States."

In spite of the above, many teachers demand that these students master knowledge of the history and geography of Mexico and Oaxaca on the same terms as the non-migrant students, who began and have done all their schooling in Oaxaca. This demand commonly corresponds to the stereotyped overestimation of the school experience in United States: it is understood that the U.S. educational system is of higher quality than the Mexico's, so these minors must have a very high training in everything required, obviating the fact that the educational content is focused on the past and present reality of each country through the different areas of knowledge. Edwin, one of the students interviewed, comments in this regard:

Since I come from the United States, I don't know if the teacher has something against that, but it seems that it's like, "Ah, education is better there; you must know everything." That is, they think that they teach you geography from all the countries of the world there, but they only teach you the geography of the U.S., not world geography. And so on, in mathematics, in science . . . they believe that because you come from United States, you have to get all A's here.

Migrant students have had serious difficulties in performing adequately in history. This subject follows a chronological thread programmed and structured through the different grades of the different educational cycles of primary, middle, and high school. Migrant minors who arrive from the United States to attend middle school in Oaxaca will have greater difficulties learning and processing Mexican history than if they had enrolled in the first grade of primary school, where the teaching of this chronological thread starts at the beginning.

### No Diagnostic Testing

The diagnostic test is not part of the differentiated school circuits that U.S. American students experience in Oaxaca, so these circuits are aggravated by the absence of diagnostic testing. The principals and teachers in the cases studied were also conceptually confused about the difference between the diagnostic test and the instrument they call “socioeconomic examination,” or were absolutely ignorant of the former.

The diagnostic test is the instrument that measures and evaluates the level of knowledge of students enrolled in a certain academic major on content related to a variety of subjects; it should be applied at the beginning of each school year. In practically all the interviews and discussion groups with principals and teachers in the different schools, when asked about the availability and application of diagnostic tests for migrant students, the general response is, “Yes, here we apply a socioeconomic examination to see if the student’s family meets the conditions that would qualify them for a scholarship” (Santiago, school principal). On other occasions, the subjects directly acknowledge that they do not know what a diagnostic test is, that they do not administer them, and that they do not know if they have ever been given in their institution.

The socioeconomic examination is an instrument applied to students in the first grade of each school level –primary, middle, and high school– in order to identify, as its name suggests, the socioeconomic circumstances of the student’s family to assess whether this involves a set of conditions that make a child worthy of a scholarship. Several important issues arise in this socioeconomic examination in relation to migrant children coming from the United States.

In the first place, this instrument does not measure the student’s level of knowledge in any way, nor his/her command of the language of instruction. Therefore, in the case of migrant children, the socioeconomic examination does not act as an indicator of a student’s previous schooling. Secondly, among the relevant data that this socioeconomic examination can provide on migrant students is their place of birth; however, both this data and other information of possible interest to teachers about

these students remain at the administrative level of school institutions, reducing them to a simple record that remains unused and does not trickle down to the teachers. This increases these children's invisibility: teachers do not know who the students in their classrooms are, where they are from, where they were born, and what difficulties they have, since at first sight, these students, the children of Mexican parents, born, raised and educated in the United States, are undistinguishable from their non-migrant peers.

These students' provenance, learning problems, difficulties with the language, and related problems such as isolation and self-isolation and behavior, are discovered suddenly and unexpectedly by teachers during the school year, when they observe that certain students do their work in English, mix words from both languages, answer exercises with something that has nothing to do with what they were asked, do not turn in home or classwork, or who simply do not speak and virtually do not exist. The presence of migrant children in the classrooms of Oaxacan schools may also be discovered during an evaluation meeting in which these students' failure in many or even all their subjects draws great attention. These meetings take place more than three months after the beginning of the corresponding semester, however, when the students have already lost a great deal of time and the semester, and even the school year, is irretrievable for them. "A little more than half of the semester has passed when the students' results are analyzed and we discovered there, 'This student comes every day, but he is failing.' That's when teachers realize" (Alfredo, school principal).

## DIFFERENTIATED SCHOOL CIRCUITS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES FOR MIGRANT CHILDREN

Among the main consequences of the transit of these students through different lower quality and highly neglected school circuits are repeating grades and dropping out. Numerous students confessed to having repeated a course due to the multiple obstacles faced—in the language, in the learning of new communicative styles, in the learning and comprehension of new contents and methodologies of instruction, etc.—as well as the inattention and exclusion to which they are subjected, both by the educational system, the school institution, and even by their own teachers in many cases. Frequently the neglect they experienced in their transit through these different school circuits forces them to seek support from their closest relatives—primarily cousins and siblings—, which in no way guarantees passing the exams and the school year. "I've failed because I don't understand the topics that the teacher talks about. Nobody taught me to understand it and then . . . I asked my brother for help

explaining it to me. And also . . . I'm not sure what the teacher is saying because he/she says everything in Spanish. . . . I mean, I don't understand much and . . . anyway, the pronunciation in Spanish . . . I can't pronounce well; that's why I ask my brother to help me" (Rosa, student).

In other cases, families are forced to hire private tutors due to the educational system's academic requirements *vis-à-vis* their migrant children and, at the same time, to the neglect and exclusion they are subjected to. In other words, families must pay a private teacher in order for their children to receive the attention that the educational system does not provide them and to overcome these "deficits" and "lacks" in the language, in their "learning capacity," and in other elements determined by an educational system that accepts the presence of migrant children in their classrooms, but ignores them. It is highly contradictory that in a country that recognizes education as a right, and in an education system that is declared public and free (Article 3 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution, in Cámara de Diputados..., 2018), families with serious economic problems for which they migrated to the United States, and from where they have returned to Oaxaca mostly because they were forced to do so due to the tightening of Trump's immigration policy, must resort to hiring private teachers because their migrant children are neglected in school. "It's hard for me to understand . . . all this . . . the language, the history of Mexico, geography. . . . That's why I have private teachers who teach me about Mexico, about history, geography, and everything, and they also support me with Spanish. They go to my house to support me" (Mario, student).

There have also been cases of students who had to change schools because of the exclusion and neglect suffered in the centers where they initially arrived; this has affected the natural course of their educational process, their academic performance, and their mental health. The direct consequence of all of this is grade repetition due to the lack of tools available in the system to guarantee the promotion of migrant children and equal educational opportunities. "I come from another middle school and right now I'm here. . . . This ... I changed because at the other school the teacher scolded me for everything, good or bad. And . . . I didn't understand what she was saying, and it also bothered her that I came from United States because I delayed a lot in the activities. And I was like . . . left behind . . . No, she didn't teach me" (Jonathan, student).

On the other hand, ethnography has also shown cases of students who have dropped out of school as a result of the sum of all the elements analyzed here. As some teachers stated, these are students who leave school "because they can't stand the pressure" (Luisa, teacher). In addition to the pressure caused by the harsh obstacles and conditions in which these migrant children try to develop their teaching-learning process, it is necessary to point out the difficulties in adapting to a new educational

system radically different to that in the United States and the lack of understanding about this, all of which determines their present and future education possibilities. “These children who come from the United States don’t understand the classes, don’t speak Spanish, don’t understand anything, and . . . , no, they don’t understand the system, they don’t understand the system. And then . . . they fail or leave school” (Julio, teacher).

As Luisa, a teacher interviewed, pointed out, “Those who come from the United States do what they can and there they are.” This statement clearly reveals the existence of an educational system based on an inclusive exclusion (Gentili, 2007, 2009; Gentili and Alencar, 2001) or subordinate inclusion policy (Novaro and Diez, 2011; Hecht et al., 2015; Novaro, 2015, 2016) to deal with migrant children from United States, but that is hidden under the politically correct discourse of inclusion. It also shows that within this position of subordination is the student, who must “do what is possible” to integrate at school, since from the perspective of the educational system, it is the student who has a deficit measurable through their lack of knowledge of Spanish, of the content of the different subjects, of teaching-learning methodologies and procedures, etc. The clear need to subvert this logic of exclusion calls into question “the supposed uniqueness of an educational system that must offer the same possibilities and opportunities to all its students” (Braslavsky, 1994), but that relegates migrant children to subordinate ways of being at school (Novaro and Diez, 2011).

The reality analyzed shows how the forced return of parents directly impacts the lives of their children, causing a “forced school insertion” in Mexico due to the involuntary nature of the migration –both for parents and children– as well as to the Mexican educational system’s lack of preparation to properly insert and serve a population sector with completely different linguistic, social, and cultural capacities and competences. In addition, it should be taken into account that these students reach a state with great educational challenges even for those who are not national or international migrants. The arrival of an increasing number of U.S. American students adds a greater linguistic, social, and cultural complexity to that already existing in Oaxaca.

The complexity of the casuistry that we bring to the analysis is a consequence of the migratory tendencies and tensions between the United States and Mexico and their historically interdependent relationship. From the above, binational responsibilities are derived that are neither assumed nor shared, thus constituting a pending task of binational public policy.

On the U.S. side, these minors are citizens who must leave their own country because immigration policy affects their Mexican parents who are not citizens –but at other times were required as cheap labor– and, by extension, themselves as their minor descendants. On the Mexican side, and attending to the right of blood, these

students are also citizens, as children of Mexican parents (Article 30 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution, in Cámara de Diputados..., 2018). However, they encounter an educational system not prepared to assist them, so they must develop a “forced school insertion” and travel through differentiated school circuits that have repercussions on their educational present and future.

Therefore, given the past, present, and future migration trajectory between the United States and Mexico and the existence of children as “shared citizens” and affected by their complex relationships, both countries should jointly participate in the educational future of Mexican-American students, children of deported Mexican parents.

## CONCLUSIONS

The increase in the return –and particularly the forced return– of Mexicans from the United States to Oaxaca due to the Trump administration’s tougher immigration policy represents a big challenge for the Mexican educational system, which receives an increasing number of U.S. American children accompanying their parents on their return to Mexico.

This educational system’s lack of preparation for adequately addressing these students leads them on differentiated school circuits, of low quality and highly unattended, unlike the circuits travelled by their non-migrant peers. This implies, as our ethnography has shown, a broad inequality in opportunities created by their condition as migrants, leading to questions about the discourse of inclusion and equality in education policies and in the educational system.

The fieldwork has shed light on three of the main elements that are part of these differentiated school circuits that push U.S. American students into positions of exclusion in Oaxacan schools, despite being “inside” the educational system. These are the lack of knowledge of the language of instruction and the absence of programs aimed at teaching it; the disparity of study content between the countries of origin and destination and the lack of programs to bridge them; and the lack of diagnostic tests aimed at detecting a student’s level of knowledge and domination of the language of instruction upon arrival at school in order to act in an appropriate and planned manner, meet their educational needs, and ensure their school success.

The exclusion also arises from an overvaluation of these children’s school experience in the United States and, at the same time, and contradictorily, many teachers’ belief in their low capacity for academic performance. Ignorance about these students’ previous school and life experiences, added to the absence of strategies, methodologies, and programs aimed at their real inclusion, means that they may move from a brilliant

school career in the United States to grade repetition, dropping out, and school failure in Oaxaca, placing the course of their present and future education at serious risk.

Based on my results, I propose the creation of a welcome school program for the migrant population arriving in México from the United States as public policy recommendations. This program must include the application of diagnostic and socioeconomic exams when the student enrolls in the school –and not only at the beginning of the course–, a Spanish teaching subprogram, and a content subprogram. This last subprogram will work on subjects whose contents are very different from their counterparts in the United States –history, geography, language, and literature, among others. I recommend this program be continuously monitored to assess its impact on the performance and school insertion of U.S. American students in Mexican schools.

Likewise, and recognizing the binational responsibility in the educational future of the children of deported Mexicans born in the United States, I also suggest the creation of binational plans and programs aimed at addressing this responsibility in favor of present and future generations who find themselves in this complex position. I recommend that these plans and programs be built based on coordinating and linking U.S. and Mexican educational systems and their educational models, allowing students to develop mobility within both educational systems as they develop geographic mobility within both countries.

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