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Recognizing the Challenges Encountered by Teachers of Students with Migration Experience in a Primary School in Białystok

Tomasz Śliwowski¹**ABSTRACT:**

The article discusses the challenges faced by teachers working with students with migration experience in primary schools in Białystok. Using James Coleman's theory of social capital, the author analyses how the relationships between teachers, students, and their families affect the adaptation and educational success of students from different cultural backgrounds. Research shows that teachers face difficulties related to language, cultural and adaptation barriers of students. The article presents strategies used by teachers to overcome these challenges, such as individualization of work with students, the use of various teaching methods and the involvement of parents in the educational process. The results of empirical research show how teachers adapt their teaching methods and what actions they take to support students with migration experience. The article also contains recommendations for educational practitioners that can contribute to improving the quality of education of students with migration experience.

KEY WORDS: adaptation, challenges, migration experience, teacher

Introduction

In the context of the challenges faced by teachers working with students with migration experience, the theory of social capital, developed by James Coleman, offers a valuable theoretical framework for analysing and understanding these challenges. This theory assumes that social capital, i.e. resources resulting from social relationships, is of key importance for the educational success of students. Social capital includes

1 University of Białystok

E-MAIL: t.sliwowski@uwb.edu.pl ORCID: 000000029201317X

emotional support, social norms and trust, which can support the educational process of students with migration experience. In the context of teachers' work, this theory allows us to understand how the relationships between teachers, students and their families can affect the adaptation and educational success of students from different cultural backgrounds (Coleman, 1988).

Research shows that teachers often encounter difficulties in working with students with migration experience due to a lack of appropriate resources, support and training (Pamuła-Behrens & Szymańska, 2020). Therefore, it is essential that the education system provides teachers with the necessary tools and support to enable them to work effectively in a diverse school environment (Żmijewska-Kwirąg, 2022). Challenges faced by teachers working with children with migration experience include language difficulties, cultural barriers, social differences and adaptation problems of students. Teachers have to cope with linguistic diversity, which often requires additional support in learning Polish. Cultural barriers can lead to misunderstandings and difficulties in integrating students with their peers.

Strategies used by teachers to overcome these challenges include any teaching practices undertaken to improve the teaching process of children with migration experience. These include, among others, individualization of work with students, the use of various teaching methods and the involvement of parents in the educational process. Teachers often use teaching materials adapted to the needs of children with migration experience and undertake educational activities aimed at emotional and social support of students.

The aim of this article is to identify the challenges of teachers of students with migration experience from the perspective of social capital theory. The results of empirical research will be presented, which show how teachers adapt their teaching methods and what actions they take to support students with migration experience in the educational process. In addition, the article contains recommendations for educational practitioners that can contribute to improving the quality of education of students with migration experience.

In addition to Coleman's theory, recent Polish research provides valuable insights into the education of children with migration experience. Anna Młynarczuk-Sokołowska and Katarzyna Szostak-Król (2022) emphasize the importance of developing supportive methodologies for integrating Ukrainian students in Polish schools, especially in the context of forced migration. Their work highlights the need for teacher competencies and culturally responsive pedagogical tools. Urszula Markowska-Manista (2017) explores the socio-cultural dimensions of the migration crisis, advocating for educational environments built on trust, dialogue, and intercultural sensitivity. These perspectives complement Coleman's framework by underscoring the role of institutional and interpersonal support in fostering social capital among migrant students.

Some of the challenges educators face in working with children with migration experience

A child with migration experience is a student who came to Poland from another country, often as a result of displacements related to political, economic or social situations. In the educational context, such children often face language, cultural and adaptation barriers, which makes them classified as students with special educational needs (SEN) (Kamińska, 2019). In the scientific literature, one can find various approaches to defining students with migration experience. Kamińska (2019) emphasizes that the key element in defining „this” student is the experience of migration, which affects the child’s functioning in the new school environment. On the other hand, Żmijewska-Kwirąg (2021) draws attention to the need to take into account psychological and social aspects that can affect the adaptation and learning process. It is worth mentioning that children with migration experience often face a number of challenges in Polish schools. Lack of knowledge of the Polish language is one of the most important problems that makes it difficult for them to participate in classes and integrate with their peers (Żmijewska-Kwirąg, 2021). Additionally, cultural differences can lead to feelings of isolation and difficulty establishing social relationships (Kamińska, 2019). In the Polish educational system, there are various forms of support for students with migration experience. In accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 2011, schools are obliged to organise additional Polish language classes for foreigners (Journal of Laws of 2011 No. 61, item 306). In addition, there are integration programs that aim to support students in the adaptation and learning process (Gulińska, 2021). In the scientific literature, one can find a lot of research on the education of children with migration experience. Kamińska (2019) analyzes the problems and challenges related to the education of these students, emphasizing the need for long-term support in both the educational and psychological spheres. Żmijewska-Kwirąg (2021) presents practical tips for teachers that can help to better understand and support students with migration experience.

Therefore, it is worth noting that teachers in today’s schools face numerous challenges related to the cultural and social diversity of students. These barriers can significantly affect the educational process and the integration of students in the school environment. Cultural barriers arise from differences in intercultural norms, values, and practices. Students who come from different cultures may have different approaches to education, which can lead to misunderstandings and communication difficulties. For example, in some cultures, more emphasis is placed on memory learning, while in others, interactive methods and critical thinking are preferred (Frączek, 2018). In addition, differences in social norms can affect students’ behavior in the classroom. In some cultures, showing respect to the teacher may involve avoiding eye contact, which in

Western culture can be interpreted as disinterest or disobedience (Lendzion, 2015). As educators, we can also encounter social barriers, such as the isolation of students with migration experience, which is another challenge for teachers. These students often experience difficulties in integrating with the rest of the class, which may be due to language and cultural differences and lack of support from peers (Chrzanowska & Jachimczak, 2018).

Social isolation can lead to feelings of alienation and low self-esteem, which negatively affects academic performance and overall well-being of students. Teachers need to be aware of these challenges and take action to promote inclusion and support for students with migration experience (Dąbrowska & Szumilas, 2017). Teachers face a variety of challenges in working with children with migration experience, which may vary depending on the student's country of origin. These challenges include language barriers, cultural differences, and difficulties in adapting to a new educational system. One of the most important challenges that teachers face is language barriers. Students with migration experience often do not know the language of instruction, which makes it difficult for them to understand the teaching material and communicate with teachers and peers. Research shows that a lack of knowledge of the language of instruction can lead to learning difficulties and lower student motivation (Cashman, 2022). Educators need to use a variety of strategies, such as using visualisations, translations, and additional language activities, to support learners in learning a language (UNICEF, 2024). Another challenge is cultural differences. Students from different countries bring with them different norms, values and traditions that can influence their behavior and the way they learn. Teachers need to be aware of these differences and adapt their teaching methods to accommodate the needs of students from different cultures (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). Implementing culturally responsive practices that take into account the cultural diversity of students can contribute to better integration and increase student involvement in the educational process (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2024). In addition, students with migration experience often face difficulties in adapting to the new educational system. They may feel stress about their new environment, which can affect their ability to learn and their relationships with their peers. Research indicates that migrant students may experience emotional problems such as anxiety and depression that make it difficult for them to adapt (Yüksek Telsaç, & Telsaç, 2022). Psychological support and adaptation programs can help students cope with these challenges and better adapt to their new school environment (Cheng, 2023).

Specific examples of challenges include difficulty communicating with students who do not speak the language of instruction fluently. Students with migration experience often have limited language skills, which makes it difficult for them to understand the teaching material and to communicate with teachers and peers. Research

shows that language difficulties can lead students to withdraw from school activities such as participating in discussions or presentations, which in turn can affect their engagement and motivation to learn (Cashman, 2022). Teachers need to use a variety of strategies, such as using visualisations, translations and additional language activities, to support students in language learning (UNICEF, 2024).

Problems with the integration of students in the school community are another challenge. Students with migration experience may feel isolated and excluded from their peer group, which can affect their well-being and academic performance. Research indicates that a lack of integration can lead to emotional problems such as anxiety and depression, which make it difficult for students to adapt to their new school environment (Yüksek Telsaç, & Telsaç, 2022). A school's collaboration with parents and the local community can help create a more inclusive environment that supports the integration of students from different cultures (Gross, 2015).

Difficulties in communicating with teachers and peers are another challenge for students with migration experience. A lack of language proficiency makes it difficult for students to express their thoughts and feelings, which can lead to social isolation and emotional problems. Research indicates that students who have difficulty communicating may experience anxiety and depression, which affects their ability to learn and integrate socially (Yüksek Telsaç, & Telsaç, 2022). Teachers can support students by using nonverbal communication methods and by organizing team-building activities that promote collaboration and relationship building between students (Edutopia, 2021).

As a researcher and educator, I recognize that teachers in today's schools face numerous challenges related to the cultural and social diversity of students. These barriers, resulting from differences in intercultural norms, values and practices, can significantly affect the educational process and the integration of students in the school environment. First, cultural barriers, such as differences in attitudes toward education and social norms, can lead to misunderstandings and communication difficulties. I have noticed that students from different cultures may have different expectations of learning, which requires teachers to be flexible and adapt their teaching methods. Second, social barriers, such as the isolation of students with migration experience, pose a major challenge. These students often experience difficulty integrating with the rest of the class, which can lead to feelings of alienation and low self-esteem. In my opinion, teachers need to be aware of these challenges and take action to promote inclusion and support for students with migration experience. In addition, language barriers are one of the most important challenges that teachers face. Students with migration experience often do not know the language of instruction, which makes it difficult for them to understand the teaching material and communicate with teachers and peers. In my research work, I have noticed that the use of a variety of strategies,

such as visualizations, translations, and additional language activities, can significantly support students in language learning. Cultural differences also affect students' behavior and the way they learn. Teachers need to be aware of these differences and adapt their teaching methods to accommodate the needs of students from different cultures. The implementation of culturally responsive practices can contribute to better integration and increase the involvement of students in the educational process. Finally, difficulties in adapting to a new educational system and emotional problems such as anxiety and depression can make it difficult for migrant students to adapt to their new school environment. Psychological support and adaptation programs are crucial in helping students cope with these challenges.

In conclusion, teachers should develop their intercultural competences and apply educational strategies that take into account the diversity of students. Introducing educational programs that promote tolerance and mutual respect can contribute to better integration of students and create a more inclusive school environment.

Own research—the practice of teachers in primary schools in Białystok in working with children with migration experience

Challenges faced by teachers working with children with migration experience include a variety of difficulties related to the adaptation of students to a new educational environment. Teachers have to deal with linguistic, cultural and social differences that can affect the teaching and integration of students. The strategies used by teachers to overcome these challenges include a variety of pedagogical and educational approaches that aim to support students in their educational and social development. Teachers try to adapt their teaching methods to the individual needs of students and engage various resources and support to ensure the best possible conditions for learning and integration.

The subject of the research is the challenges in the work of teachers with children with migration experience in primary schools in Białystok.

Main aim of the research: To identify and analyze the challenges faced by teachers in working with children with migration experience

From the main objective, I have distinguished the following specific objectives:

1. To identify the most common difficulties encountered by teachers working with students with migration experience.
2. Assessment of the support offered by schools and educational institutions.

3. Examining the training needs of teachers in the field of working with foreign children.

On the basis of the objectives set out above, I have established the following **main research problem**: What challenges do teachers face in working with children with migration experience and what strategies are the most effective in overcoming them?

Specific problems:

1. What are the most common difficulties encountered by teachers in working with children with migration experience?
2. What other barriers (cultural, social) do teachers face?
3. What are the training needs of teachers in working with children with migration experience?

The research was carried out within the framework of qualitative orientation, thanks to which it focuses on learning about the experiences, thoughts, feelings and behaviors of the respondents in a specific situational context. The aim of qualitative research is to understand, describe and interpret social phenomena from the perspective of the respondents. The individual experiences of the respondents and their perception are of key importance, and the data obtained during the research procedure are closely related to the subjective assessment, experiences and values given by the respondents. The method of a semi-structured interview was used, and the research tool was dispositions for the interview. The selected research orientation allows for obtaining in-depth data in the context of the subject matter. The surveyed teachers have individual and unique experiences, and the results of the research show their specificity.

The selection of the sample for the study was deliberate and based on criteria such as: teaching children with migration experience in a primary school in Białystok. 9 teachers of various subjects took part in the study: early childhood education (3 teachers—N1, N2, N3), Polish language (3 teachers—N4, N5, N6), mathematics (3 teachers—N7, N8, N9). The answers are coded as follows: N(n), XX, ZZ, A, B/AB, where N(n)—means the teacher with an ordinal number in the interview, XX—means the age of the educator, ZZ—seniority, A—which class the educator considers in the interview, B—the number of children with migration experience, AB—the number of children in the class.

In the course of my research, I focused on the challenges faced by teachers working with children with migration experience. I conducted in-depth interviews with teachers from various schools in Poland to get a more complete picture of the situation.

I identified the most common language and cultural difficulties that hindered the teaching process. I focused on the training needs of teachers to better understand what skills are most important to them. The interviews allowed me to collect specific examples of activities undertaken by teachers. Thanks to this, I was able to identify the main challenges faced by teachers working with children with migration experience in a primary school in Białystok.

Difficulties encountered by teachers in working with children with migration experience

Analyzing teachers' statements on the most common difficulties in working with children with migration experience, one can notice several common threads and some differences. All teachers point to language barriers as the main difficulty. Lack of knowledge of the Polish language makes it difficult for students to communicate and understand the material. Children have problems with mastering basic vocabulary, which affects their academic performance. For example, one teacher says, *"The most common difficulties in my work are language barriers, which make it difficult for students to communicate and understand the material"* (N1, 35, 10, 2, 3/25). Another teacher adds: *"The biggest challenge is the lack of knowledge of the Polish language, which makes it difficult to learn and communicate"* (N2, 42, 18, 1, 5/22).

Another common thread is the differences in educational systems between countries, which cause additional adaptation difficulties. Students have different levels of knowledge, which requires teachers to make extra effort in explaining and explaining issues. As one teacher notes: *"In addition, differences in educational systems between countries can cause additional adaptation difficulties"* (N1, 35, 10, 2, 3/25). Another teacher points out: *"In addition, differences in educational systems between countries have caused additional adaptation difficulties"* (N4, 38, 15, 5, 4/28).

All teachers notice that the pace of learning is slower due to the need to spend more time explaining and explaining issues. For example, one teacher says, *"I often have to spend more time explaining and explaining things. All this makes the pace of learning slower"* (N1, 35, 10, 2, 3/25). Another teacher adds: *"I had to spend more time explaining and explaining things. All this made the pace of learning slower"* (N5, 45, 20, 6, 6/30).

However, mathematics teachers (N7, N8, N9) point to additional difficulties related to mastering mathematical terminology and understanding word problems. For example, one math teacher says, *"The most common difficulties I encountered were language barriers that made it difficult to understand math problems"* (N7, 40, 17, 7, 3/24). Another math teacher adds: *"The biggest challenge was the lack of knowledge of the Polish language, which made it difficult to learn mathematics"* (N8, 35, 12, 6, 4/26).

Some teachers (N3, N6, N9) emphasize the difficulties in adapting students to the new school and language environment, which affects their learning performance. For example, one educator says: *„I most often encountered difficulties in the adaptation of students”* (N6, 32, 8, 4, 3/26). Another teacher adds: *“Most often I encounter difficulties in adapting students to a new school and language environment”* (N3, 29, 5, 3, 2/20).

The synthesis of teachers' responses reveals recurring challenges such as language barriers, differences in educational systems, and adaptation difficulties. These issues not only hinder academic progress but also affect the social integration of migrant students. From the perspective of Coleman's theory of social capital, these challenges highlight the importance of building relational trust and shared norms between teachers and migrant students. Language barriers and cultural differences disrupt the formation of social capital, making it harder for students to integrate and succeed academically. Teachers' efforts to clarify content and adapt instruction reflect attempts to rebuild these relational bridges, fostering inclusion and mutual understanding.

Teachers face various cultural and social barriers in their work with children with migration experience

The teachers' statements indicate similarities and differences in the barriers encountered. All teachers point to cultural differences as the main difficulty. These differences can lead to misunderstandings and difficulties in integrating with peers. Children from different cultures may have different norms of behaviour, which sometimes leads to conflicts. For example, one teacher says, *“I often encounter cultural differences that can lead to misunderstandings and difficulties in integrating with peers. Children from different cultures may have different norms of behaviour, which sometimes leads to conflicts. In addition, some children may feel excluded because of their differences. It is important to create an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding in the classroom. I work to make students feel safe and accepted”* (N1, 35, 10, 2, 3/25). Another teacher adds: *“I encounter differences in social norms and behaviours that can lead to conflict and misunderstanding. (...) In addition, some children may feel excluded because of their differences”* (N2, 42, 18, 1, 5/22). As one teacher observes, *“I encounter differences in cultural values and norms that can affect relationships between students”* (N3, 29, 5, 3, 2/20). Another teacher points out, *“I often encountered cultural differences that led to misunderstandings and difficulties in integrating with my peers.”* (N4, 38, 15, 5, 4/28).

All teachers note that cultural and social differences can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings. For example, one teacher says, *“I encountered differences in social norms and behaviours that led to conflict and misunderstanding.”* (N5, 45, 20, 6, 6/30).

Another teacher adds: *"I encountered differences in cultural values and norms that affected relationships between students"* (N6, 32, 8, 4, 3/26).

Cultural and social barriers, as reported by teachers, manifest in misunderstandings and peer exclusion. These dynamics reflect a breakdown in social capital, where trust and shared norms are not yet established. Creating an atmosphere of acceptance is essential to rebuild these connections and foster a supportive learning environment.

Teachers have specific training needs related to working with children with migration experience

The analysis of teachers' training needs in working with children with migration experience is based on the statements of the surveyed educators. Many teachers emphasize the need for training in the field of methods of teaching Polish as a foreign language and techniques of working with children from different cultures, and point to the need for training on techniques of coping with students' adaptation difficulties and working with migrant families. *"I need training in the methods of teaching Polish as a foreign language and understanding cultural differences. I would also like to learn more about techniques for dealing with students' adaptation difficulties. Training in working with migrant families would also be very helpful. It is important to stay up to date with new educational methods and tools. This allows me to better support my students"* (N1, 35, 10, 2, 3/25). Another respondent points out: *"I need training in the methods of teaching Polish as a foreign language and techniques of working with children from different cultures. I would also like to learn more about how to help students cope with adaptation difficulties. Training in working with migrant families would also be very helpful"* (N3, 29, 5, 3, 2/20). Another adds: *"I need training in methods and techniques of working with children from different cultures. I would also like to learn more about techniques for dealing with students' adaptation difficulties"* (N9, 29, 6, 5, 2/22).

"I would like to participate in training (...) in the field of working with migrant families would also be very helpful. It is important to keep up to date with new educational methods and tools" (N2, 42, 18, 1, 5/22). Another adds: *"I wanted to participate in training on working with children from different cultures and techniques for dealing with language barriers. Training in working with migrant families would also be very helpful"* (N5, 45, 20, 6, 6/30). Some teachers point to specific training needs, such as methods of teaching mathematics to students with migration experience. *"I also need training on how to teach mathematics to students with migration experience. Training in working with migrant families would also be very helpful"* (N8, 35, 12, 6, 4/26).

The synthesis of teachers' responses reveals recurring challenges such as language barriers, differences in educational systems, and adaptation difficulties. These issues not only hinder academic progress but also affect the social integration of migrant students. From the perspective of Coleman's theory of social capital, these challenges highlight the importance of building relational trust and shared norms between teachers and migrant students. Language barriers and cultural differences disrupt the formation of social capital, making it harder for students to integrate and succeed academically. Teachers' efforts to clarify content and adapt instruction reflect attempts to rebuild these relational bridges, fostering inclusion and mutual understanding.

Conclusions and recommendations

The analysis of teachers' statements indicates that the main difficulties in working with children with migration experience cover several key areas. First, language barriers are the most commonly cited problem that makes it difficult for students to communicate and understand the material. Lack of knowledge of the Polish language affects academic performance and requires additional effort from teachers in explaining and explaining issues. Second, differences in educational systems between countries cause adaptation difficulties, which requires teachers to adapt teaching methods to the different levels of knowledge of students. Thirdly, the pace of learning is slower due to the need to spend more time explaining and explaining issues. Mathematics teachers additionally point to difficulties related to mastering mathematical terminology and understanding word problems. In addition, cultural and social differences can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings, making it difficult for students to integrate with their peers. Finally, teachers note that students with migration experience have difficulty adapting to their new school and language environment, which affects their academic performance.

To effectively support students with migration experience, schools should implement comprehensive programs. These trainings should include methods of teaching Polish as a foreign language, techniques of working with children from different cultures and strategies for coping with students' adaptation difficulties. It is also important to provide psychological support and adaptation programs for students to help them integrate and adapt to their new school environment. Practical solutions include organising additional language classes, creating support groups for pupils and parents, and promoting culturally responsive learning practices. For example, schools may organize intercultural workshops to help students better understand and accept cultural diversity. Funds for these activities can be obtained from various sources, such as educational grants offered by private foundations (e.g. the Gates Foundation,

the Ford Foundation), government and EU programs supporting the integration of migrants, as well as local social initiatives and non-governmental organizations. It is also worth establishing cooperation with academic institutions that can offer substantive and research support in the field of intercultural education.

The findings of this study align with Coleman's theory of social capital, emphasizing the role of relational networks in supporting migrant students. Teachers' practices, such as individualized instruction and collaboration with families, reflect the importance of trust, shared norms, and mutual support. These elements contribute to a more inclusive and effective educational environment. Future research could explore how institutional structures and community engagement further influence the outcomes for students with migration experience.

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