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Learning migration and diversity through artistic narration: an application of diasporic education to the Spanish context

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how artistic and narrative expression can enhance intercultural education in Spanish primary schools located in low-population-density areas with increasing cultural diversity. Grounded in the concept of diasporic education, the study focuses on the lived experiences of children—both migrant and non-migrant—who narrate and illustrate their perceptions of migration through written stories and drawings. The research adopts a qualitative ethnographic design with a participatory approach, involving 50 primary school students aged 11–12 from two schools in Aragón, Spain. By analysing these materials, the research explores how transmedia storytelling can serve as a pedagogical tool to promote empathy, inclusion, and critical reflection in the classroom. The study contributes locally by addressing the challenges of educational integration in rural Spain and globally by connecting with broader discussions on minority representation, educational equity, and creative pedagogies. Findings highlight the transformative potential of incorporating students' voices and artistic productions into teaching practices, fostering more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments.

Introduction

In developed Western countries, school systems struggle to respond effectively to the needs of children and young people from ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities, often resulting in persistent patterns of educational inequality. Spain is no exception. In recent years, schools in both urban and rural areas have experienced a significant increase in cultural and linguistic diversity, particularly due to the arrival of migrant families from Morocco, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. This study focuses specifically on the Spanish context, exploring how intercultural education can be enhanced through artistic and narrative expression in primary schools located in low-population-density areas. These local findings are connected to broader international debates about diasporic education and the role of creative pedagogy in addressing racism, social exclusion, and the marginalisation of minority students (Gholami & Costantini, 2025). Traditional school structures in the West historically tended to favour dominant groups, thus reinforcing discrimination and racism (Banks, 2013). Despite decades of policy formulation aimed at addressing these issues, challenges related to coexistence and educational equity persist. In many cases, intercultural policies have become disconnected from the social and political realities of schooling in different contexts, failing to consider the unequal effects of educational policy formulation (Gholami & Costantini, 2025).

Intercultural education emerges as a field of study within the sociology of education (Banks, 2013). Within this field, diasporic education is a concept developed by Gholami (2025) that refers to educational practices which recognise the transnational identities and cultural connections of minority

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communities. This approach allows for an understanding of the complexities of coexistence of people from different backgrounds and traditions, particularly in schools and communities with high levels of migration and cultural diversity. The concept of diasporic education provides a relevant perspective by recognising that the ties connecting minority groups to different countries and cultures can serve as valuable educational resources within conventional teaching. These perspectives bring new knowledge and approaches to educational programmes, making classrooms more diverse, creative, and inclusive (Gholami, 2025).

However, intercultural education and awareness of migration as a social and human phenomenon present challenges, though. The materials traditionally used—such as posters highlighting national flags or classroom activities centred on food and clothing from different countries—have evident limitations and may not be sufficient to generate empathy and understanding in students. For instance, classroom diversity is often framed as a subject of celebration, leading to a situation in which many minority students are called upon to represent a static and 'exotic' identity rather than acknowledging diversity as a dynamic reality (Gholami & Costantini, 2025).

In this context, while research on intercultural education in urban settings exists (Nieto, 2017), there is a shortage of studies addressing the topic from the students' perspective. Most studies focus on interventions designed by teachers, without exploring the perceptions and narratives generated by children themselves. In this regard, it is essential to adopt an alternative understanding of identity, reflexivity, and agency at both individual and community levels. According to Gholami (2025), the sociology of education has sought to address issues related to inequalities among minority students, particularly in terms of academic achievement, school dropout rates, and structural racism. However, there is a lack of analysis regarding diasporic dynamics, and this study seeks to contribute to this gap by applying Gholami's (2025) proposals within the Spanish context, particularly in local areas with high levels of intercultural diversity.

This study aims to provide evidence on the potential of artistic and narrative expression to inform the design of effective didactic strategies for intercultural education by exploring the perceptions of both migrant-background and native Spanish children regarding migration. These perceptions are captured through the narration of their personal experiences and their visual and artistic representations, such as drawings and comics. The approach consists of actively involving students in the production of transmedia narratives—that is, stories told across multiple platforms and formats, including writing, oral storytelling, illustration, and animation (Scolari, 2013)—about migration. Previous studies have shown that teaching based on personal narratives and the use of audiovisual materials facilitates empathy and meaningful learning (Chibici-Revneanu, 2020; Fernández–Labayen et al., 2022; Gholami & Costantini, 2025). In line with this, the present study suggests an alternative pedagogical approach that involves the creation of artistic materials by children, which are then used as teaching resources. This contribution supports the 'diasporisation' of the curriculum by incorporating the intercultural experiences of minority students, thus fostering more enriching and inclusive learning environments (Gholami, 2025).

The present article examines an approach that enhances intercultural education through a learning experience that preserves the students' direct and authentic expression while incorporating narrative expression and artistic production. Additionally, it seeks to analyse how primary school students in low-population-density areas of Spain perceive and represent migration through written stories and drawings in an educational setting. It also explores how children's artistic production can serve as a pedagogical tool for intercultural education.

Through this analysis, it becomes possible to identify didactic strategies that foster more effective intercultural education by recognising the value of narrative and artistic expression in building knowledge about diversity. This research is guided by the following questions:

1. How does the notion of diasporic education help to interpret these narratives and inform more inclusive teaching practices?
2. How do primary school students in low-population-density areas of Spain perceive and represent migration through written stories and drawings?
3. In what ways can children's artistic production be incorporated into pedagogical strategies for intercultural education?

By addressing these questions, the article examines the students' narratives and artistic productions and discusses how the findings contribute to the development of inclusive pedagogical strategies inspired by diasporic education. The text is structured as follows. First, the literature review addresses intercultural education, diasporic education, and the use of narratives and audiovisual materials in teaching cultural diversity and migration. The methodology section then outlines the qualitative design, participant selection, data collection procedures, and the analysis of children's narratives and artistic productions. The findings section examines how students perceive and represent migration through their stories and drawings. This is followed by a discussion that connects the results with previous research and considers the educational implications of diasporic education and narrative-based approaches. Finally, the article concludes by summarising the main contributions and suggesting future research directions to advance intercultural education in diverse school contexts.

Literature review

Throughout history, migratory dynamics have shaped societies, generating cultural diversity that presents both opportunities and challenges (Matos & Permisán, 2016) for social cohesion and intercultural coexistence. Diaspora has become a key concept for understanding certain elements of global migratory movements. Traditionally, it refers to the dispersion of individuals from their homeland and the settlement of communities in different countries while maintaining cultural or religious ties to their place of origin (Safran, 1991; Sheffer, 2013). However, this notion has evolved to encompass complex and dynamic dimensions, such as transnationality, hybridity, and shifting senses of belonging (Gholami, 2025; Hall, 1990). Scholars like Clifford (1994) and Gilroy (1993) further expanded the concept, emphasising that diasporic identities are not defined by a linear trajectory from origin to destination, but by ongoing processes of cultural negotiation, symbolic attachment, and multiple belongings across national borders. These perspectives highlight how diasporic communities are shaped by displacement. Yet also by continuity, reinterpretation, and agency. Thus, diasporic communities have the potential to transform sociocultural norms in host countries (Gholami, 2017).

In Europe, migration patterns have changed over time. Following World War II, there was a migratory flow from the south to the north of the continent, which slowed after the 1973 oil crisis. Later, with the fall of communist regimes, migration from Eastern to Western and Southern Europe intensified, a trend that continues today (Faa et al., 2014). In the Latin American context, Martínez Rojas et al. (2021) document how Chile has transitioned from being a country of emigrants to becoming a destination for migrants. A similar trend is observed in Argentina and Spain, where the presence of children from immigrant families, many of whom come from Latin American, North African, or Eastern European backgrounds, has brought challenges, such as discrimination and social exclusion.

Spain has experienced a transformation similar to that of Chile, shifting from an emigration country to becoming a major destination for immigrants (Jiménez Bautista, 2006). In 2022, Spain recorded its highest migratory balance in a decade (INE, 2023), with the foreign population accounting for 11.6% of the total, with Morocco and Romania being the main countries of origin (OPI, 2024; Statista, 2023). Catalonia is a particularly illustrative example of this phenomenon. Badia Martín and Devant Cerezo (2024) highlight that, over the past two decades, there has been a significant increase in students of immigrant origin in Catalan schools, especially from Latin America.

Alongside this increase in migration, Spain has also been affected by rural exodus, a process of movement from rural areas to cities that has been ongoing since the 1950s (Gracia Bernal et al., 2022). Migration has been proposed as a solution to rural depopulation. On the one hand, it has the potential to contribute to the rejuvenation of the population. The arrival of foreign families in low-density areas has helped rejuvenate Spain's demographic pyramid, with an average migrant age of 37 years (OPI, 2024). On the other hand, migration fosters socioeconomic development in these areas by revitalising public services (Pinyol-Jiménez et al., 2020).

From an educational perspective, diasporic and migratory experiences shape collective identities and contribute to the transformation of sociocultural norms within classrooms (Gholami, 2025). Intercultural education has been recognised as an essential tool for promoting social cohesion in diverse contexts, and it is explicitly included in international, national, and regional policy frameworks. The UNESCO

Guidelines on Intercultural Education underline that interculturality should inform the entire educational process, from curriculum design to teacher training (UNESCO, 2006). Similarly, the *Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights* (2010) and the UN 2030 Agenda (Target 4.7) emphasise the role of cultural diversity in advancing sustainable development (Council of Europe, 2010; United Nations, 2015). In Spain, the Education Act (LOMLOE) frames intercultural education as part of the principles of global citizenship and inclusive schooling (Ley Orgánica 3/2020, 2020, de 29 de diciembre). At the regional level, the curriculum of Aragón highlights respect for cultural, social, and linguistic diversity as a transversal aim across all stages of schooling (Orden ECD/794/2022, 2022, de 9 de junio). Building on this normative basis, the following sections examine how intercultural and diasporic education can enhance migrant integration in schools and promote coexistence in increasingly diverse societies.

Intercultural education

The terms intercultural education and multicultural education share elements but differ in their goals and approaches. Banks (2013) defines multicultural education as an educational reform movement aimed at restructuring curricula and educational institutions to provide equal opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds. Nieto (2017) expands this perspective, describing multicultural education as a transformative project that emerged in the 1970s in the United States, inspired by the Civil Rights Movement. This approach aimed to address educational inequalities by proposing a more inclusive curriculum that recognises and values the knowledge, traditions, contributions, and perspectives of cultural groups beyond the dominant European framework and challenges institutional power relations.

Intercultural education goes beyond recognising cultural diversity; it actively promotes exchange, dialogue, and mutual transformation between different cultural groups (Martínez Rojas et al., 2021; Matos & Permisán, 2016). Its distinctive dialogical nature seeks to build sustainable coexistence between people from diverse backgrounds (Hadjisoteriou et al., 2015). Unlike multicultural education, which risks being limited to the mere coexistence of different cultural groups within the same territory (Martínez Rojas et al., 2021), intercultural education aspires to create inclusive spaces that foster interaction and the recognition of multiple identities (Badia Martín & Devant Cerezo, 2024). It is therefore an approach based on interaction and the recognition of otherness (Parejo-Llanos et al., 2020), developing cultural literacy and intercultural competence among students (Dežan & Sedmak, 2023).

Conti (2025) attempts to define intercultural education for contemporary society by questioning cultural essentialism, emphasizing intersectionality to explain the social categories that shape life experiences, and framing its goals within the paradigm of inclusion. Among these goals is the transformation of the educational system, which requires teachers to develop intercultural competence, the ability to interact constructively with differences (Conti, 2025). Hagenaars et al. (2025) define it as the ability to think and act appropriately when engaging with people from other cultures. Intercultural competence focuses on behaving sensitively and effectively in intercultural interactions (Theeuwes et al., 2025). This means that intercultural sensitivity is an integral part of intercultural competence. Both Theeuwes and Gómez Yepes et al. (2023) draw on Deardorff's (2006) pyramid model, which identifies intercultural attitudes—respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery—as essential components of competence. In this sense, intercultural education and intercultural competence are inseparable, as the former provides the framework while the latter equips learners with the dispositions and skills needed to enact it.

The key objectives of intercultural education include promoting understanding, empathy, and mutual respect (Chibici-Revneanu, 2020); encouraging active participation in defending human rights and promoting social justice (Dežan & Sedmak, 2023), and transforming pedagogical and curricular approaches by empowering marginalised students and revealing hidden mechanisms of discrimination within the educational system (Faa et al., 2014).

At times, challenges have been identified in the implementation of intercultural education, particularly when it is reduced to a discursive strategy that softens rather than transforms intercultural relations shaped by a history of oppression and conquest (Coulby, 2006). Despite marking a shift towards a dynamic cultural interaction, sometimes it has contributed to the deepening of the social divisions and the perpetuation of structural racism (Conti, 2025). In many contexts, intercultural education has become

detached from the socio-political realities of schooling, failing to address the structural inequalities and power relations that shape students' lived experiences (Gholami & Costantini, 2025). As a result, it often remains at the level of symbolic recognition without translating into meaningful educational change. In this regard, diasporic education emerges as a complementary approach that can broaden and strengthen intercultural education by reconnecting it with the transnational experiences, identities, and struggles of minoritised communities.

Diasporic education

Diasporic education refers to educational models and practices developed in collaboration with diasporic communities. These practices do not necessarily follow dominant national curricular norms, and often challenge or subvert official discourses, policies, and pedagogical models. As such, they have the potential to be counter-hegemonic due to their transnational nature (Gholami, 2017, 2025). Their goal is to provide educational tools that support the integration of diasporic children and young people in their host countries (Gholami, 2017). Gholami (2023) expands this conceptualisation by questioning the traditional notion that an individual belongs exclusively to a single place, whether their country of origin or country of residence. Instead, he recognises the multiple identities and transnational connections that characterise diasporic communities (Gholami, 2025).

Coulby (2006) argues that intercultural education must transcend normative approaches and take into account the social, political, and global forces that shape it. In this vein, diasporic education focuses on the transnational connections of minority communities, facilitating a precise analysis of educational experiences, organisational networks, and integration strategies (Gholami, 2023). As Nieto (2017) points out, hegemonic narratives are challenged by avoiding the closure of national, ethnic, or religious identities. In this sense, diasporic education challenges dominant educational models, which are often characterised by a nationalist perspective (Gholami, 2017).

As an extension of the theoretical foundations laid out in the previous sections, it is important to consider the role of creative expression—through both personal narratives and audiovisual materials—in fostering intercultural and diasporic education. According to Nieto (2017), art and literature can play a significant role in helping students understand cultural diversity and migratory experiences. On the one hand, narratives provide diasporic students with opportunities to validate their identities and challenge hegemonic discourses of national belonging (Gholami, 2025; Nieto, 2017). On the other hand, the use of visual and artistic media offers alternative channels for expression that promote empathy and intercultural understanding (Fernández–Labayen et al., 2022; Gholami, 2023). The following two sections examine the pedagogical potential of narratives and audiovisual materials in greater detail.

Creative and narrative expression in intercultural and diasporic education

Narrative and artistic expression have proven to be powerful tools in intercultural and diasporic education. Their capacity to give voice to students' experiences, foster empathy, and challenge dominant discourses makes them particularly relevant in diverse educational contexts. The following review brings together contributions related to personal storytelling and the use of visual and audiovisual materials in educational settings. The use of personal stories in multicultural education makes diversity visible while also addressing power inequalities and promoting social justice (Nieto, 2017). In intercultural education, narratives contribute to the construction of social identity by facilitating the negotiation between community autonomy and structural dependence (D'Amore & Díaz, 2020).

Various studies and experiences have demonstrated that sharing personal stories facilitates migrant integration and strengthens their connection with host communities. In a teaching initiative in a Birmingham school, Gholami (2025) describes how students engaged in theatre workshops where they explored migration narratives—some based on their own family histories—and performed them collectively. This process generated empathy and a deeper connection with migration history (Gholami, 2025). Chibici-Revneanu (2020) conducted expressive writing workshops with Central American migrants and students from host communities, encouraging migrant students to share their stories and local students

to rewrite them as if they were their own. This exercise helped challenge hegemonic narratives and created an educational space where diasporic identity was validated.

Similarly, Fernández–Labayen et al. (2022) designed an audiovisual workshop in which students of various nationalities reflected on their diasporic identity by producing a documentary. This activity allowed participants to express their life stories and family memories, fostering a pedagogy centred on personal experiences. The work of Parejo-Llanos et al. (2020) with stories, letters, songs, and dances performed by young refugees contributed to humanising the migrant experience and combating negative stereotypes. Along the same lines, in the Badia Martín and Devant Cerezo (2024) project, the inclusion of migrant students' life experiences in the school curriculum helped raise awareness among teachers about migration-related grief and generated a more empathetic reception process. Personal narratives can also challenge exclusionary discourses and promote a more inclusive vision of citizenship (Gholami, 2023). In this sense, shared experiences in schools have proven to be a valuable resource for questioning racist discourses and fostering a cosmopolitan identity. The reflection on identity in these educational spaces allows students to strengthen their sense of belonging and redefine their place in society (Gholami, 2017).

The use of drama

In connection with narrative approaches, artistic practices and audiovisual materials have also gained prominence as tools for promoting intercultural learning and constructing diverse cultural representations. Experiences with students from diverse backgrounds have demonstrated that through artistic practices and digital narratives, it is possible to construct more inclusive and diverse representations of cultural identities. Within the framework of diasporic education, which seeks to provide educational tools to support the integration and recognition of young people from racially minoritised and diasporic backgrounds—whether recently arrived or born in the host country (Gholami, 2017)—audiovisual material becomes a valuable resource.

In addition to digital and audiovisual storytelling, performing arts—particularly drama education—also represent a valuable pedagogical tool for promoting cultural diversity and intercultural understanding, especially in primary education settings. The use of drama as a resource for fostering multiculturalism has been highlighted by Matuk and Ruggirello (2007), who underline its effectiveness in primary education. Similarly, Sánchez-Lázaro and García-Martínez (2017) explore the use of performing arts, particularly the figure of the clown, to promote cultural diversity acceptance and facilitate intercultural communication in the classroom.

Participatory and visual arts in intercultural education

Gholami (2017) highlights the role of Iranian supplementary schools in London, where cultural and artistic activities are used as part of a comprehensive educational experience. This approach enables students—many of whom are born and raised in the UK—to explore their cultural heritage, negotiate hybrid identities, and maintain symbolic connections with Iran, while engaging with their everyday British context. This resonates with influential understandings of diaspora as lived multiplicity, hybridity, and transnational affiliation (Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993).

Fernández–Labayen et al. (2022) emphasise the importance of audiovisual production and media literacy in art education, particularly among young migrants. Through workshops where participants create their own audiovisual representations of their migratory experiences, personal expression is encouraged, contributing to the construction of a multiple and transnational cultural identity. Macleroy and Shamsad (2020) explore the potential of art and multilingual digital storytelling to promote intercultural learning. In their Critical Connections project, theatre, improvisation, and media production are combined within a pedagogical framework that fosters language development and intercultural understanding. Such initiatives allow students to explore their identity in an environment that validates their experiences and cultures of origin.

Another innovative approach is proposed by Serber (2021), who highlights the use of techniques, such as photography and collage in socially engaged art projects. These practices encourage critical reflection on identity and diversity, challenging traditional conceptions and fostering dialogue on migration and interculturality. Likewise, Oliver-Barceló and Ferrer-Ribot (2022) propose a transformative art

education that enables the critical analysis of cultural and social contexts, encouraging more egalitarian practices.

It is worth highlighting the capacity for expression and awareness of encountered cultural contexts developed by animated productions, such as *Pequeñas voces*, directed by Carrillo (2010); *Mary and Max*, directed by Elliot (2009); *Ma Vie De Courgette*, directed by Barras (2016); *Interdit aux chiens et aux italiens*, directed by Ughetto (2022); or *Mariposas negras*, directed by Baute (2024); intercultural human portraits, such as *Persepolis*, directed by Satrapi and Paronnaud (2007); *Les Hirondelles de Kaboul*, directed by Gobbé-Mévellec and Breitman (2019); or *Flee*, directed by Rasmussen (2021); or works that denounce armed conflicts and scenarios of devastation, such as *Waltz with Bashir*, directed by Folman (2008); *Another Day of Life*, directed by Nenow and de la Fuente (2018); or *Nayola*, directed by Ribeiro (2023).

Methodology

Study design

This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic design with a participatory approach. The methodology combines the collection of personal narratives, classroom observation, and the creation of visual materials (drawings and comics) to analyse how children represent migration and interculturality. This approach is based on Grounded Theory, a qualitative methodology that enables the development of theories through the systematic analysis of empirical data without relying on prior hypotheses, providing a flexible framework for the interpretation of narratives and visual representations (Hernández Carrera, 2014).

A case study design was used to examine a proposal aimed at enhancing intercultural education through a learning experience, while also exploring primary school students' perceptions of migration through their narratives and visual representations. The methodology integrates elements of diasporic education, following Gholami's (2025) proposal, combining narrative collection, artistic production, and pedagogical intervention. A Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach was adopted, where the school community is both the subject of study and an active participant in data collection and analysis, with the goal of transforming its social reality (Balcázar, 2003).

The sample consisted of 50 primary school students aged 11–12, from two schools in Aragón, Spain. The process was initiated in two schools: CEIP Pierres Vedel in Teruel Province and CEIP Compromiso de Caspe in the town of Caspe. Both locations are low-population-density areas: Teruel has 36,000 inhabitants, while Caspe has around 10,000. These are rural areas where migrant populations are arriving to take up jobs in the primary sector. Both schools have a high level of cultural diversity, with a predominance of students from Morocco, Romania, and various South American countries. Many Moroccan children face language barriers and rely on peers from the same country to assist as interpreters.

The study is characterised by a qualitative approach, structured along two dimensions: First, the production of artistic material, based on narratives and illustrations created by final-year primary students about migration and intercultural coexistence. Content analysis was used to describe and interpret narrative and symbolic data in an objective and systematic manner (Krippendorff, 1980). Through content analysis, patterns were identified in children's narratives and their visual representations of migration (López-Aranguren, 1984). Third-cycle primary school students reflected on their daily lives and represented their experiences through written compositions and drawings. These tasks served as the foundation for the creation of an animated short film, illustrated with students' own artwork and narrated in their voices. The goal of this phase was to capture experiences from the children's perspective, offering an expressive and creative medium for storytelling.

Pedagogical intervention, including semi-structured interviews with teachers from the participating schools as well as parents and carers from migrant backgrounds connected to the school community. The interviewees were selected with the help of the teaching staff, allowing for a broader understanding of integration and intercultural dynamics in the educational environment. Qualitative interviews were used to capture the reality from the participants' perspectives, avoiding artificial settings and analysing interactions within their natural context (Hernández Carrera, 2014).

Three qualitative techniques were employed for data collection:

- Written narratives and drawings by students: Children reflected on their migration-related experiences, expressing them through texts, drawings, and comics. These materials were analysed using content analysis, enabling the identification of both explicit and latent meanings in communication (Krippendorff, 1980).
- Semi-structured interviews: Interviews were conducted with teachers, guidance staff, and members of the school community to understand their perceptions of intercultural education in their contexts. These interviews were analysed using Grounded Theory, allowing for the emergence of knowledge based on participants' experiences (Hernández Carrera, 2014).
- Participant observation: Classroom observations were carried out to document interactions and dynamics related to intercultural learning. This technique provides a holistic and contextualised understanding of the educational reality (Balcázar, 2003).

Research process

The research was conducted in eight phases, each involving specific actions:

1. **Coordination with schools**: Meetings were held with school directors and teaching staff to introduce the project and recruit volunteer teachers and guidance counsellors. The directors of both schools expressed their willingness to actively participate.
2. **Communication with families**: An informative letter was sent to parents, explaining the project's objectives and requesting their voluntary participation. In Teruel, a meeting with families was held, where all parents expressed interest in the project. In Caspe, there was greater reluctance, and some families did not grant permission for their children's participation.
3. **Work with students**: In Teruel, a sixth-grade class of 20 students participated, while in Caspe, two sixth-grade classes (36 students in total) took part. The students engaged in reflection sessions on migration and intercultural coexistence, led by the research team. They were encouraged to think about their daily lives and express their thoughts in written compositions and illustrations. Individual interviews were then conducted, focusing on the students' narratives and drawings.
4. **Interviews with the school community**: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and members of the school community with migrant backgrounds. Four teachers from both schools participated. These interviews aimed to provide a comprehensive perspective on the school environment and its capacity for integration.
5. **Systematic data collection**: Qualitative data were gathered from narratives, interviews, and drawings, which were then organised and categorised for analysis.
6. **Data processing**: The collected data were analysed, structuring the main conclusions and preparing materials for the next phase.
7. **Short film production**: Based on the processed data, students' illustrations and narratives were presented to Fine Arts students in Teruel, who took charge of the animation and production of the short film.
8. **Community feedback**: The short film was presented to participants, returning the final results to the school community and sharing the study's conclusions.

The collected data were analysed using thematic coding and content analysis, employing specialised software for the categorisation of narratives and visual representations. The discourse of both children and teachers was studied to identify patterns in how they conceptualise migration and cultural diversity. The next steps of the project focused on using the short film as an educational resource for intercultural education in the region where it was produced, incorporating teachers' suggestions from their interviews. The following section presents the results of applying diasporic education within this project, as proposed by Gholami (2023, 2025).

Results

The application of the concept of diasporic education involves considering two perspectives that focus on the transnational connections of minorities and their impact on the school environment (Gholami, 2025). On the one hand, the diasporisation of the educational space is examined, which studies the influence of students from diasporic backgrounds in classrooms, in the teaching of values, and in the curriculum, history, and shared values. On the other hand, attention is given to the complexities related to identity and students' sense of belonging.

The diasporisation of space, history, and values

This section analyses the educational effects of migration as summarised in Table 1. From the experiences observed in the schools of Caspe and Teruel, it is concluded that the educational space is highly influenced by students with diasporic connections, generating new narratives distinct from conventional ones in the school context and challenging structural educational inequalities (Gholami, 2025). The presence of migrant students introduces dynamics that transform classroom interactions and challenge the traditional structures of the educational system, altering students' perceptions and generating new forms of coexistence and learning (Huarte González et al., 2022). The emergence of new narratives confronts segregation and privilege within the educational system (Goenechea, 2016), while migrant students' adaptation strategies contribute to redefining pedagogy in schools, challenging pre-existing structural inequalities (Rodríguez-Izquierdo & Antolínez-Domínguez, 2023).

In both schools, students were given the freedom to express their migration experiences and incidents related to racist encounters in individual interviews, written compositions, and drawings. In Caspe, the smaller locality, there was greater reluctance among students to discuss these topics. Several interviews referenced a Moroccan student who arrived without knowing the language and was frequently teased by his classmates, but, within a year, learned Spanish fluently and became 'the smartest student in the class'. Occasionally, teenagers were mentioned, who, outside school, were identified as the most problematic individuals, perpetrating racist attacks against foreigners in the town. Interviews with teachers highlighted conflicts between older students from ethnic minorities, which seemed to be 'taboo topics' among younger children. Conflicts between local Roma groups and Moroccan-origin groups were particularly noted.

The transformation of educational dynamics is evident in both curriculum adaptation (Rodríguez-Izquierdo & Antolínez-Domínguez, 2023) and value-based teaching. Pedagogical practices, such as tutoring, adapt to intercultural realities in classrooms. An illustrative example is that of a teacher in Teruel, who, after the loss of a migrant student's grandmother, opted to conduct a small non-religious ritual instead of a traditional Catholic prayer. The formal curriculum is often set aside in favour of pedagogical strategies centred on linguistic and social integration. Teachers and students actively participate in adapting the curriculum to the needs of diasporic communities in the classroom. Both schools employ support teachers to facilitate the integration of students still learning Spanish. In Caspe, students spontaneously assumed interpreter roles to assist classmates who did not yet speak the language fluently.

The presence of migrant students challenges the notion of a homogeneous national education system. Multicultural classroom interactions introduce changes in teaching methodologies and question the traditional perception of the educational system as a rigid structure (Huarte González et al., 2022). However, these changes largely depend on the individual initiative of teachers and schools, rather than official curricular guidelines.

At an official level, the Spanish curriculum does not explicitly include migration studies (Orden ECD/866/2024, 2024). In Social Sciences education, the curriculum includes Spanish history and geography, but without a specific focus on migration. In Aragón, as in the rest of Spain, the curriculum follows national guidelines with some regional adaptations, such as local history inclusion. However, the history of diasporas remains marginal. Some initiatives have emerged to incorporate the history and culture of specific groups, such as the Roma community (Fernández Peña & Filigrana García, 2019), but these materials are not mandatory, and their implementation depends on each school.

Table 1. Educational effects of migration based on student and teacher narratives.

Main category	Subcategory	Representative examples (participant code and quotation)
1. Educational effects of migration	1.1. Transformation of classroom interactions *33 references*	• "They helped me with English and French … they translated for me." (TE2025A) • "Other classmates who spoke her language translated for her so she could understand and learn Spanish." (CC2025SO) • "Teacher Sonia helped me pronounce Z and C." (TE2025X) • "The teacher asked me to help him." (CC2025MO) • "I don't speak Urdu, but I try to learn how to say 'hello' or 'thank you' so the student sees their language is valued too." (TEACHTE2025MS)
	1.2. Segregation and privilege *38 references*	• "When I arrived, it was hard to make friends … I didn't feel like I fit in." (TE2025X) • "Here, there are groups: one of Spaniards, another of Moroccans, another of Pakistanis." (CC2025MO) • "They insult you for not speaking well, for being from another country, or for having a different skin color." (CC2025AD) • "We weren't registered, and my uncles were working all day." (TE2025X) • "Extracurricular activities are often not accessible to them. They don't attend due to lack of resources or family responsibilities." (TEACHTE2025MS)
	1.3. Racist encounters *177 references*	• "They told me 'go back to your country'." (TE2025A) • "They said that since I'm Muslim I can't play with certain people." (TE2025IM) • "I saw a guy in a store say to another man: 'Don't steal, I'm watching you,' just because he wasn't from here." (CC2025SO) • "Someone Spanish insulted someone who was Pakistani or Indian, said 'this is your country, go to yours.'" (CC2025KH) • "A mother once told me she didn't want her son sitting next to 'one of them'. I found it very serious. We talked to her, but it was very difficult." (TEACHTE2025MS)

Note: Participant codes refer to students (TE2025X) and teachers (TEACHTE2025XX). Translations from Spanish have been made by the authors.

In the schools studied, curricular efforts mainly focus on facilitating the integration of migrant students, but content adaptation to reflect their cultural experiences is not considered. Unlike educational projects in Birmingham, UK, where personal stories are used to foster empathy and understanding of racialisation and minoritisation (Gholami, 2025), similar initiatives in Spain remain limited despite the existence of projects, such as those by Badia Martín and Devant Cerezo (2024), Chibici-Revneanu (2020), Fernández–Labayen et al. (2022), and Parejo-Llanas et al. (2020).

Regarding values, diasporic education suggests that dominant models of citizenship and values education need updating. Spain's current Organic Law for Education Improvement has been adapted to international Agenda 2030 requirements, promoting global citizenship education and intercultural education in multicultural settings (Ley Orgánica 3/2020, 2020, de 29 de diciembre). This includes the creation of a Values subject, as an alternative to Catholic religion classes, and cross-disciplinary projects aimed at promoting intercultural education. However, these projects remain anecdotal once more and are not formally reviewed by authorities. Civic and ethical education focuses on themes, such as equality, diversity, and human rights (Vidal Prado, 2023), integrated transversally into the curriculum without a specific citizenship subject. Nonetheless, identity and citizenship education remain strongly linked to a nationalist perspective, with less room for reflection on cultural diversity and the values of diasporic communities (Vidal Prado, 2023).

Belonging, disintegration, and the homing desire

This section explores settlement and integration processes as summarised in Table 2. The experiences described revolve around the emotional negotiation of belonging in migratory contexts, a theme that relates closely to what Brah (1996) terms the homing desire—the longing to feel 'at home', not necessarily linked to a return to the homeland, but rather to the search for a sense of emotional rootedness. As Brah argues, this desire is distinct from a desire for a geographical homeland and reflects the fluid, ongoing process of constructing belonging in diasporic contexts.

Diasporic communities have reshaped classroom dynamics, despite overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers. In Teruel, many student migration stories were recorded, both from Muslim-majority countries

Table 2. Settlement and integration processes reflected in migration testimonies from students and teachers.

Main category	Subcategory	Representative examples (participant code and quotation)
2. Settlement and Integration Processes	2.1. Migration testimonies 208 references	• "I cried while packing … I was going to miss my family." (TE2025X) • "We traveled by car to Tangier, then took the boat and my father met us in Jerez." (CC2025KH) • "My parents were sad because they weren't with their family anymore." (CC2025RE) • "I couldn't say goodbye to my friends … I had to hold back." (TE2025A)
	2.2. Support from schools 110 references	• "In school they help people who come from abroad." (TE2025X) • "Teachers told the whole class to help him with the language and to play with him." (CC2025DI) • "From school: studying." (CC2025MA) • "If you see bullying, you should help … not play along." (TE2025MA) • "Sometimes the best support is just listening. Some kids arrive scared and silent, and what they need is calm." (TEACHTE2025MS)
	2.3. Same cultures groups 35 references	• "Many classmates are kind because they've also migrated." (TE2025O) • "Frany is my cousin … I've trusted him more since third grade." (TE2025E) • "In the park, there are groups: Spaniards here, Moroccans there." (CC2025MO) • "We also hang out a lot with Moroccans, with Spaniards, all together." (CC2025AD) • "Sometimes they isolate themselves in their language group. It's natural, but we try to mix them without forcing it." (TEACHTE2025MS)
	2.4. Sense of home building 239 references	• "Here I want to learn the language, finish school, get a job." (TE2025AM) • "My mother brought different food and customs. I like it, but my brother doesn't." (CC2025SO) • "I'd like to live there [in Morocco], to be close to my family." (CC2025RE) • "Some children live in constant transition, not feeling fully from here or from there. We try to create a space where they feel safe to be both." (TEACHTE2025MS)

Note: Codes identify participants as students (TE2025 and CC2025 series) or teachers (TEACHTE2025 series). Quotations have been translated from Spanish by the authors.

and South American nations. Most narratives highlighted difficulties in fitting in, particularly due to language barriers, initial loneliness, and longing for family left behind. The analysis of students' narratives and drawings shows that migration is depicted as an experience of uprooting and family reunification, with a strong emotional component. Most children expressed feelings of initial loneliness and linguistic difficulties upon arriving in Spain, aligning with previous research on children's perceptions of migration (Banks, 2013).

Regarding belonging, the European IMMERSE project (Martin et al., 2023) indicates that Spain demonstrates positive indicators in educational integration compared to other European countries. 60% of migrant students report a strong sense of school belonging. Nearly half of first-generation (49%) and second-generation (46%) students identify with both their culture of origin and the host country. 68% of migrant students perceive strong teacher support, exceeding the European average. These findings align with interviews conducted with children in Caspe, where all participants stated that their school was a place where they felt comfortable and accepted. Similarly, students in Teruel expressed feeling at ease in their schools. However, in both cases, they described situations where 'others' were unfairly treated by their peers. No complaints were recorded regarding teachers or the school system, as most students stated they felt good at school.

Despite this general satisfaction with their school environment, participant observation indicates that children tend to form friendship groups with peers from the same background. In particular, migrant girls tend to form bonds with those who share their language and culture, while among boys, sports activities facilitate greater intercultural integration. Several factors explain this limitation in transnational relationships. In the educational sphere, immigrant families often have less connection with schools due to cultural and linguistic barriers (Labrador Fernández & Blanco Puga, 2007). Many of the families in the

studied schools had very little direct contact with their children's teachers, relying instead on other families to stay informed about what was happening in the school.

In the cultural-religious sphere, restrictions on religious freedom hinder the creation of places of worship, relegating non-Catholic religions to urban peripheries, as seen in the case of 'Islam de los polígonos' (Islam of the industrial estates) (Planet, 2012). This exclusion encourages individuals to associate primarily with those from their own culture, thereby hindering their social integration. The tendency towards intracultural grouping is reflected in cultural and emotional support associations (Pinyol-Jiménez et al., 2020). In 2007, the Centre for Sociological Investigations (CIS, 2007) reported that 52% of Spaniards perceived that Muslims did not integrate into society, while 43% cited cultural and traditional reasons as the main cause of this lack of integration.

This reality particularly affects second-generation youth, who tend to identify more with their family roots than with Spanish society (Gest, 2010). From the perspective of Spanish youth, urban segregation of immigrant communities, especially Moroccan communities, hinders social interaction (Jiménez Bautista, 2006), fostering xenophobia and marginalisation of these groups (Jiménez Bautista, 2021).

Students' testimonies revealed diverse ways of building a sense of home. At the beginning of the project, a discussion was held on what it means to feel at home, helping to identify situations that complicate or enable this experience. It became evident that, in new environments, individuals find ways to belong—through learning the local language, adapting to customs, or sharing personal traditions. These strategies reflect the homing desire as a process of ongoing adaptation and emotional anchoring (Gholami, 2025). From a mental health perspective, this continuous negotiation of belonging can also lead to psychological distress (Kokanović & Božić-Vrbančić, 2015). The narratives of children with Cuban and Colombian backgrounds offer a particularly relevant example of what Werbner (2005) conceptualises as chaorder—a hybrid and non-linear structure in which diasporic identities emerge as fluid and context-dependent. These students often articulated conflicting senses of belonging, oscillating between attachment to their relatives' cultural heritage and adaptation to life in Spain. Their stories rarely followed a fixed national narrative but instead reflected a lived experience shaped by multiple cultural references, emotional dislocations, and evolving identifications. In this regard, their situation closely mirrors the dynamics described by Gómez Gutiérrez (2024) in the case of the Mexican diaspora: a constellation of emerging and unstable identities, not yet consolidated into a stable diasporic structure. This framework proves useful for interpreting the sense of in-betweenness and negotiation present in the students' accounts as indicative of diasporas in formation and shaped by transnational connections and family memories.

Children who had already become fluent in Spanish proudly expressed that they felt comfortable in Spain, with very few expressing a desire to return to their countries of origin. In some cases, students shared experiences of being rejected in their countries of origin for speaking Spanish, though their families protected them. The majority expressed pain and longing for relatives left behind, particularly their grandparents. Regarding this separation, many stated that they had come to a better place, reinforcing the idea of migration as a search for a better future—an ideal place (Kelly, 2024). However, the notion that grandparents or other family members remained in a 'worse' place caused them sadness. Many drawings and narratives depicted parents' migration journeys, showing how they arrived, felt alone, and disoriented.

Discussion and conclusions

The study highlights the impact of artistic narration and diasporic education in teaching migration and cultural diversity in the classroom. The students' narratives and drawings reflect a conception of migration centred on uprooting, family, and a sense of belonging. It is also observed that school coexistence fosters integration, although linguistic and cultural barriers influence the formation of friendship groups. The findings reinforce the idea that intercultural education should incorporate pedagogical strategies that allow students to express their own experiences and understand those of others (Nieto, 2017).

The use of the short film based on students' narratives and drawings proved to be an effective strategy for fostering motivation, reflection, and intercultural empathy. The audiovisual production aligned with previous studies highlighting the value of audiovisual material in intercultural learning. In

Fernández–Labayen et al.'s (2022) study, the creation of documentaries allowed migrant students to express their stories and challenge exclusionary narratives. Similarly, in this study, the short film enabled students to reflect on cultural diversity and reconsider their perceptions of migration.

The animation process allowed students to represent their experiences, and it also enhanced their active participation in the construction of their learning, reinforcing the impact of learning through artistic and audiovisual production (Macleroy & Shamsad, 2020). This methodology could be applied in future projects to further expand the understanding of cultural diversity in other school settings.

The narratives collected in Caspe and Teruel confirm that diasporic education is built in collaboration with diasporic communities (Gholami, 2023). Brah's concept of the homing desire is reflected in testimonies that combine longing for family with the creation of bonds at school (Brah, 1996). The students' stories and visual productions illustrate how they draw on support from both their immediate circles and the educational environment, generating a multiple sense of belonging that includes both the place of origin and the host community. In this regard, the study provides evidence from the Spanish context of how personal narratives reinforce processes of attachment and recognition, expanding intercultural education towards a transnational curricular dimension (Gholami, 2025).

The research also highlights the tension between students' tendency to form groups based on cultural affinities and the schools' efforts to foster integration. The segregation observed aligns with the patterns described by Labrador Fernández and Blanco Puga (2007) and Rodríguez-Izquierdo and Antolínez-Domínguez (2023), yet the pedagogical practices identified add nuance to this perspective. Teachers' efforts to learn expressions in students' native languages, the organization of inclusive rituals, and the design of supportive tutoring sessions show that schools develop initiatives of openness and care. These practices reflect core elements of intercultural competence, as they embody attitudes of respect, openness, and curiosity that underpin intercultural sensitivity (Deardorff, 2006; Theeuwes et al., 2025). Still, belonging and segregation are not only the outcome of goodwill but are strongly mediated by the school and social context, which can either enable or limit inclusive practices (Hagenaars et al., 2025). Teachers themselves often experience cultural shock and recognise that their initial training does not sufficiently prepare them to address diversity, making on-the-job adaptation and professional development essential.

This study contributes to a field in which the application of diasporic education remains emergent. In the Ibero-American context, there are experiences of artistic education and intercultural narratives (Fernández–Labayen et al., 2022; Oliver-Barceló & Ferrer-Ribot, 2022; Serber, 2021; Torrelles Montanuy et al., 2022), but the explicit integration of transnational connections of minority communities is still limited (Coulby, 2006; Gholami, 2023). The combination of audiovisual productions with in-depth interviews, where students articulate meanings and messages, represents a methodological step forward. This integrated approach exemplifies what Conti (2025) defines as transformative intercultural education: giving voice to students, recognising their epistemologies, and questioning knowledge hierarchies. By doing so, the study strengthens the potential of intercultural education to move beyond symbolic celebrations of diversity and to open possibilities for reconfiguring classroom practices in more participatory and justice-oriented ways.

Despite the richness of narrative and artistic strategies, their scope remains limited without structural transformations. As Gholami and Costantini (2025) warn, intercultural policies often remain detached from the socio-political realities of schooling, while Conti (2025) notes that intercultural education can risk reinforcing structural racism if it is not framed within a justice-oriented paradigm. The narratives gathered in this study reveal how children articulate identity and belonging in ways that challenge rigid curricular boundaries, but their voices remain marginal within institutional structures. This confirms that curriculum rigidity and systemic segregation continue to shape students' lived experiences in Spain (Coulby, 2006; Fernández Peña & Filigrana García, 2019; Vidal Prado, 2023). Addressing these barriers requires valuing the agency of students in constructing intercultural meanings and also embedding interculturality as a core framework guiding curricula, pedagogy, and policy. By applying Gholami's (2025) proposals to the Spanish context, this study shows that diasporic dynamics and children's reflexivity must be considered central elements for any transformation that aspires to move beyond localised good practices.

The findings should be interpreted in light of the policy frameworks that formally recognise intercultural education, while also considering the gaps in their implementation. At the national level, the Spanish Education Act (Ley Orgánica 3/2020, 2020) and the Aragonese curriculum (Orden ECD/794/2022, 2022) both establish diversity and inclusion as guiding principles, yet their translation into practice often remains at the level of general values rather than concrete strategies. International orientations, such as SDG 4.7 (United Nations, 2015), the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (Council of Europe, 2010), and the UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education (UNESCO, 2006) highlight the transformative potential of interculturality, but the evidence from classrooms suggests that this potential is still only partially realised.

In terms of long-term implementation, several initiatives in Spain and Aragón reveal sustained efforts to embed interculturality in practice. The Comprehensive Plan for the Management of Cultural Diversity in Aragon 2018–2021 (Gobierno de Aragón, 2022) introduced transversal measures across education, labour, and civic life, institutionalised mechanisms, such as the Immigration Forum and the Migration Observatory, and incorporated evaluation indicators to ensure continuity beyond political cycles. The *Guideline protocol for the inclusion of Roma history and culture in the school curriculum* (Fernández Peña & Filigrana García, 2019) represents a structural step by mandating curricular inclusion of Roma history and culture, moving from compensatory approaches towards long-term recognition and justice. At the local level, the *II Plan for the Coexistence of Cultural Diversity of the Bajo Aragón-Caspe Region 2023–2026* (Comarca Bajo Aragón-Caspe, 2023–2026) shows continuity with earlier cycles and relies on participatory diagnosis, though its scope remains territorially limited. Finally, recent research on rural schools in Aragón frames them as pillars of social justice and territorial equity, while also noting the lack of systematic evaluation of intercultural initiatives (Domingo Cebrián et al., 2025).

Taken together, these frameworks and strategies confirm that interculturality is present in policy discourse and that long-term planning efforts exist. However, they often remain fragmented, general, or under-evaluated, which constrains their translation into classroom practice. This study contributes by evidencing this gap: while policies and strategies establish interculturality as a normative priority, the experiences of students and teachers in Caspe and Teruel illustrate how structural rigidity, segregation, and limited teacher preparation continue to shape everyday intercultural dynamics.

Limitations and recommendations

While the findings suggest that diasporic education and narrative production are valuable tools for intercultural education, some barriers were still identified. One of them is the persistence of informal segregation among student groups, as they tend to form friendship bonds with peers of the same background. This aligns with studies indicating that, in the absence of explicit educational policies on migration and diversity, school socialisation tends to reproduce patterns of segregation (Labrador Fernández & Blanco Puga, 2007; Rodríguez-Izquierdo & Antolínez-Domínguez, 2023).

Another limitation identified is the lack of specific teacher training on addressing cultural diversity. The inclusion of migration in the curriculum is anecdotal and largely depends on individual teacher initiatives, as observed in the interviews. This finding aligns with the criticisms of Coulby (2006) and Fernández Peña and Filigrana García (2019), who argue that the lack of a coherent educational policy on diversity perpetuates the invisibility of migration histories.

The findings also suggest that intercultural education can be enriched through the use of personal narratives and audiovisual materials. Artistic representation and reflection on migration can contribute to empathy and the recognition of diversity both within the classroom and beyond. The role of the teacher and their involvement in the integration of students is key to fostering an environment of trust and intercultural dialogue. This role is also necessary in conveying more difficult narratives, particularly those that directly affect students or their close relatives, which are often shared only through trust. The creation of didactic materials based on students' lived experiences can therefore be an effective strategy to make diversity visible and valued in educational settings.

In methodological terms, one of the main limitations of the study was the difference in the number of visits made to the two participating schools. In Teruel, the more frequent presence of the research team fostered a stronger climate of trust, increasing students' willingness to participate and share

experiences. In contrast, in Caspe, where visits were less frequent, students showed greater reluctance to open up. A notable effort to omit negative circumstances was also observed in Caspe, where the content collection processes differed significantly. This suggests that the level of engagement with the classes directly influenced the degree of trust and effort students invested in their productions. Another key factor was the role of class tutors. In Teruel, active teacher involvement created a more trusting and collaborative environment, while in Caspe, teacher participation was less consistent, which may have contributed to students being less open about their experiences. These methodological and relational factors highlight the need for further studies in broader and more diverse educational contexts.

Directions for future research

This study should be interpreted as an initial step rather than a conclusive account, marking the beginning of a broader research project designed to apply diasporic education strategies in the Spanish context. Building on the evidence gathered in Caspe and Teruel, the next phase will extend this approach to urban and more heterogeneous educational environments, to analyse how diasporic narratives and intercultural practices can be embedded within different school settings.

Future research should also explore the long-term impact of integrating diasporic narratives into school curricula, assessing whether the intercultural empathy and sense of belonging fostered through narratives and visual productions endure beyond the short term. Longitudinal studies following students over time could provide insights into the sustainability of these effects.

Another promising line is to focus on teachers and their professional development, examining how training, mentoring, and collaborative practices affect their ability to integrate intercultural content into the curriculum. This would clarify the structural barriers highlighted in this study, such as limited preparation and reliance on individual initiatives. Additionally, comparative studies between rural and urban schools would be valuable for understanding how demographic density, institutional resources, and community dynamics influence the implementation of diasporic education.

Finally, cross-national comparisons could test whether the methods applied here—particularly student-produced audiovisual materials—are transferable to other contexts. This would contribute to the construction of a shared international framework for diasporic and intercultural education.

Ethical approval

The study was reviewed and approved by the Data Protection Department of the University of Zaragoza (Declaration ID: 100742).

Informed consent

Before data collection, an information session was held with families, and written informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians of all participating students. Students without signed consent forms took part in the educational activity, but their data were not included in the research. Teachers also provided their informed consent to participate.

Confidentiality

The voices of students and teachers were recorded for research and audiovisual purposes. In all transcripts and in the short film, participants were anonymised using identification codes to ensure confidentiality.

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