

Education and Protection: A Study of Secondary Education of Young People in Protection

Educación y protección: un estudio sobre la educación secundaria de jóvenes en protección

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Abstract

Education is crucial in helping young people integrate into society and professional life, especially those transitioning from residential care. However, this group faces greater challenges in completing secondary education. This article aims to raise awareness of the obstacles influencing their access to secondary education and their successful progression through this educational stage. Thus, a research study has been designed employing a mixed-methods methodology. A questionnaire (EVAP4- TABA International Research) was administered to 139 young individuals who had previously been in residential care, and 22 interviews were conducted with this group. Besides, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 15 professionals from the Second Chance Schools attended by these young individuals. The results suggest several obstacles preventing this group from participating in and completing their secondary education, including issues related to their educational self-perception, past experiences, educational center methodologies, and language difficulties, as well as the need for adaptation. On the other hand, there is a clear need to work on this group's social labeling. Young people internalize the labels associated with them, which influence their educational self-perception.

Keywords: child safety; dropout; secondary education; access to education; residential care.

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Resumen

La educación es crucial para ayudar a las y los jóvenes a integrarse en la sociedad y en la vida profesional, especialmente para quienes han salido de los recursos residenciales. Sin embargo, este colectivo se enfrenta a mayores retos a la hora de completar con éxito su educación secundaria. Este artículo pretende dar a conocer los obstáculos que influyen en su acceso a la educación secundaria, así como en el éxito de esta etapa educativa. Para ello, se ha diseñado una investigación que sigue una metodología mixta. Se administró un cuestionario (EVAP4-TABA International Research) a 139 jóvenes que habían estado bajo la medida de protección del acogimiento residencial y se realizaron 22 entrevistas con este colectivo. Además, se realizaron entrevistas a 15 profesionales de las Escuelas de Segunda Oportunidad a las que asisten estas y estos jóvenes. Los resultados sugieren que existen varios obstáculos que les impiden participar y completar su educación secundaria, entre los que se incluyen cuestiones como su autopercepción educativa, experiencias pasadas, metodologías de los centros educativos y dificultades lingüísticas, así como la necesidad de adaptación. Además, es evidente la necesidad de trabajar sobre el etiquetado social que arrastra este colectivo, pues, interiorizan las etiquetas a las que se les asocian e influyen en su autopercepción educativa.

Palabras clave: protección a la infancia; abandono de estudios; enseñanza secundaria; acceso a la educación; acogimiento.

Introduction and objectives

Over the years, global agendas have consistently emphasized that the right to education must be a fundamental pillar of all human rights and a pivotal tool that can perpetuate or eradicate inequalities. Although fighting for equal opportunities should indeed be one of the keys to education, sometimes education can perpetuate inequalities (Torres, 2008). Thus, the objective of education is defined from a social perspective, as its purpose is to comprehensively prepare individuals to understand society and equip them to actively intervene and contribute to its improvement (Melendro, 2009). We understand education as a fundamental right for all individuals; however, for children and adolescents within the protection system, education becomes a protective factor for their present and future (Melendro et al., 2017).

School failure, generally understood as not completing secondary education and not obtaining the corresponding qualification (Longás & Riera, 2011), is a handicap some adolescents suffer that can perpetuate and generate opportunity inequalities (Melendro, 2009). However, school failure mainly affects lower socio-economic and cultural level groups, where the risk of exclusion is higher, and therefore, it is not a neutral phenomenon (Fernández-Simo & Cid-Fernández, 2020). Many young people who experience school failure come from complex family backgrounds, such as broken homes or broken families (European Commission, 2001). Suppose we add a difficult family situation, such as low expectations or little interest in education from the immediate environment, a challenging social context, indifference to acquiring skills or economic difficulties, and being part of a peer group with little interest in education. In

that case, we are creating an ideal situation for early school leaving. Besides, in some cases, low self-esteem, learning difficulties, discipline problems, etc., are also added to the conditions for early school leaving situations (Longás & Riera, 2011).

Fernández-Simo and Cid-Fernández (2020) consider that school failure is a reality constructed by different agents and can be shaped by several causes, such as socio-cultural, family, institutional, and individual causes. These authors point out that, although not all students start in the same situation, schools still tend to impose the same goals for all, suggesting that the responsibility for students' educational reality does not lie with the school environment. However, these authors explain that schools cannot be oblivious to this reality; they cannot demand the same objectives or academic results from students who do not have the same opportunities. Thus, homogenizing education leads to early dropout (Corchuelo-Fernández & Cejudo, 2013).

Early school leaving can mean a lack of academic preparation and fewer job opportunities. School failure also influences the expectations of these young people, lowering their aspiration levels and decreasing their confidence in their abilities to face the future. The lack of sufficient training often leads to increased job instability, especially among vulnerable groups characterized by limited educational attainment and significant challenges in accessing the labor market, frequently resulting in precarious, low-paying employment opportunities (Garcés Delgado et al., 2019; Melendro, 2009; Sulimani-Aidan, 2022).

This study examines a group affected by the school failure phenomenon, specifically young people whom the child and adolescent protection system has assisted. Several studies report a lack of data on this population's school success or failure, which leads to statistical invisibility (Montserrat et al., 2015). The educational reality of this population has remained invisible for an extended period, leading to a lack of awareness of the problem and a failure to develop intervention programs necessary to respond to their needs (Montserrat et al., 2015). Although this group is statistically invisible, some studies affirm that it is among the first groups to leave the formal education system (Melendro, 2009; Miguelena et al., 2022; Rodríguez, 2022). Their exit from the education system significantly influences this population's transition to adulthood. The job market is characterized by instability, with education level being one of the primary criteria for candidate selection. Consequently, education is recognized as a critical factor in the socio-occupational integration of young people (Goig & Martínez, 2021; Martín et al., 2020).

The educational reality of children and adolescents in residential care

Few studies have analyzed this group's educational environment in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. Muela et al. (2013) investigated the social and school adjustment of 318 young people aged between 13 and 18 under the protective measures of residential foster care in Gipuzkoa, Basque Country. Teachers' observations regarding the group of young people revealed that this group exhibited greater social and school adaptation challenges than their counterparts in the normalized population. As a result, they encountered more pronounced academic difficulties, which included problems related to motivation, attention, learning, and cognitive challenges. Interestingly, despite the results of teachers' assessments, students' perceptions of their school adjustment did not significantly differ from that of the normative population.

Epelde (2016) analyzed the educational background of the young people who had left the protection system and had migrated to the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country without family references. Most of the young people in this study had no access to the education system in their home country. Among those with access, their educational completion typically culminated in elementary education, except for a single participant who completed the first year of high school in his home country. The study data revealed that upon their arrival in Spain, professional qualification programs were the preferred choice for most of them. Besides, their results show that this young group studies until they reach the age of majority.

The protective measure ends upon reaching legal adulthood, at which point these young individuals gain total legal capacity, while administrations typically discontinue resource support (Álvarez & Mases, 2021; Epelde, 2016; Goyette, 2019;). While they aspire to continue their studies, their circumstances often prevent them from pursuing extended educational opportunities. These results align with those obtained by Rodríguez (2022), revealing that almost 83% of the study participants, mostly young migrants, wanted to continue studying. The study by Inglés et al. (2005) reveals slightly different data, with 36% of participants expressing a desire to continue their education. Nonetheless, in both studies, consistent with the conclusions of Casas and Montserrat (2012), a clear motivation for pursuing education is evident: the desire for better job opportunities. In most cases, participants stated their intention to continue their studies to improve their future employment prospects.

Miguelena (2021) collected and analyzed data on the educational environment of children and adolescents under the protection measure of residential care in Gipuzkoa-Basque Country during three school years from 2015/2016 to 2018/2019. The research findings emphasize that individuals in residential care face more significant educational obstacles than their peers. These challenges manifest in various ways, including higher grade repetition rates, lower grade-level suitability, increased truancy, and a higher prevalence of special educational needs compared to others of the same age. This study shows that this group in residential care is mainly directed towards short-term itineraries that allow them a quick socio-occupational insertion. In contrast, the normalized population attends longer formative studies, generally bachelor's degrees. This study, like that of Fernández-Simo and Cid-Fernández (2018), emphasizes the importance of the participation of this group in the choices of their own lives. However, this research explains that, on many occasions, they are not considered when making decisions about their studies, which is why this right to participation is repeatedly violated. These results are in line with the studies mentioned below.

Rodríguez (2022) analyzed the educational paths of young people who exit the protective measure of residential care and the factors that influence them. This study highlighted the difficulties faced by this group in the educational sphere, such as the fact that they usually experience school failure in formal education and need to carry out complementary training. Thus, they would be enrolled in secondary education, and they would complement it by taking a basic vocational training course. Regarding young migrant individuals, the findings of this study highlight a significant gap in formal education. Some have been unable to access their country's education system, while others have completed only basic studies.

These results align with studies that have analyzed the educational environment of this group. Miguelena (2021), among other studies mentioned above, has shown that this group tends to have a lower level of education, a lower suitability rate, a higher repetition rate, and higher absenteeism compared to the normalized population (Fernández-Simo et al., 2020; García-Molsosa et al., 2021a; 2021b; Miguelena, 2019; Miguelena et al., 2022). The results presented by Rodríguez (2022) regarding the group of young people who have migrated without family references align with those of Epelde (2016) and Nuñez and Arqué (2020), who speak of a low level of education in the countries of origin.

Research has focused on studying and identifying the factors that influence the trajectories of these young individuals (Fernández-Simo et al., 2022; Goig & Martínez, 2019; Rodríguez, 2022). Among other factors, we can highlight the following: the low educational expectations of the academic team of the residential resources, the educational support provided by the educational center, aspirations, self-motivation or some limitations of the educational system.

Justification and objectives

This contribution aims to reflect on the formal educational environment of young people who have reached the age of majority under the protection measure of residential care in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. The purpose is to raise awareness of this group's obstacles in accessing and obtaining the Secondary Education qualification, focusing on those who migrated from their countries without a family reference. The results are part of a doctoral thesis that analyzed the educational paths of this group and the factors that influence them. Several factors influenced educational pathways, including family, peer networks, country of origin, and the transition to adulthood. However, it is the school-related factors and their experiences within the educational system that significantly impact their completion of secondary education, which is the primary focus of this article.

Method

This study employs a mixed-methods concurrent embedded design (Creswell, 2009). In which the questionnaire guides the research, and the data collected through the interviews supports the study. The EVAP4 questionnaire (TABA International Research - Melendro et al., 2017) was applied to young individuals who left the child and adolescent protection system. The reliability of this questionnaire is between .87 and .84, according to the Spearman-Brown formula (Melendro et al., 2022).

To further explore the issues raised in the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were conducted with young students and professionals from the educational team of the Second Chance Schools (SCS) in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. Two interview scripts developed by Montserrat et al. (2011) were modified and adapted to the sociolinguistic reality of our study.

Participant criteria included reaching adulthood under protective measures, being between 18-22 years old, and studying in SCS. Due to its voluntary nature, the ques-

tionnaire reached 69.8% (n=139) of the total study population (n=199). The school directors selected the young participants to be interviewed.

Population and Sample Size

The questionnaire sample consisted of 139 young individuals between 18 and 22 years old, with a mean age of 18.43 years (SD=0.682). Regarding gender, 95% (n=132) identified themselves as male, while 5% (n=7) identified themselves as female. Most of the sample, 94.2% (n=131), came from a country other than Spain, mainly from the Maghreb (92.7%). The remaining 5.8% (n=8) were born in Spain.

The average duration of stay for the sample within the foster care system was 1.77 years (SD=0.689), and the mean number of residential resources in which they stayed was 2.65 (SD=1.752).

Of those originating from other countries, 61.8% (n=81) had a residence permit, 38.2% (n=50) did not, and only 9.2% (n=12) had a work permit, compared to 90.8% (n=119) who did not. All of them reached the age of majority while under the protective measure of residential care in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. However, it is noteworthy that at the time of data collection, Royal Decree-Law 903/2021, dated 19 October, amending the Regulations of Organic Law 4/2000 regarding the rights and freedoms of foreigners in Spain and their social integration.

The SCS provide diverse educational opportunities for young people between the ages of 15 and 29 who are unemployed or have faced challenges in traditional education settings. These schools employ an innovative pedagogical model to engage their students. In the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, there is a total of 10 SCS, including Peñasal Kooperatiba and Fundación Adsis, which is the context of this study.

A total of 22 young individuals and 15 professionals participated in the interviews.

Concerning the interviews with the group of young individuals, there were 20 boys and 2 girls, and the average age was 18.77 years. Among them, 21 young people had migrated without any adult reference, 20 were from Morocco, one young woman was born in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, and another was from Cameroon.

As for the group of professionals, 15 professionals participated, 9 women and 6 men. Their average age was 45.4 years, ranging from 29 to 62 years. They had an average of 13.2 years of experience in SCS and a diverse range of university and vocational training qualifications in their academic background.

There is a clear bias in the gender and nationality of the participants, with almost all of them being men and migrants. Although this bias is under the normative sample in those who carry out studies including this population, the results of this study must be taken with caution.

Procedure and Statistical Analysis

This study used SPSS v.25.0 statistical software for the quantitative data analysis, primarily conducting descriptive analyses using frequencies and percentages.

The interviews were analyzed using a content analysis method with a deductive-inductive approach. A thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interviews, beginning with predefined themes derived from the theoretical framework. Information was organized and classified into successive fields, ultimately developing general themes and subthemes encompassing the data gathered during the fieldwork (Rodríguez et al., 1996).

To conclude this data analysis, all the quantitative and qualitative information previously analyzed was triangulated, ordered, and categorized. Table 1 shows the dimensions, categories, and subcategories extracted from the data triangulation.

Table 1

Dimensions, categories and subcategories of the data

Dimensions	Categories	Subcategories	
Educational paths and participation in school choices	Educational level		
	Participation		
	Attitude towards studies	Satisfaction with current studies. Intentions to continue studying in the future. Reasons for wanting to continue or not to continue studying.	
Factors obstructing completion of Secondary Education.	Educational self-concept through previous experiences	Self-concept and their self-image. Skills and competencies. Perception of these schools.	
	Secondary schools' Methodology		
	Language difficulties	Spanish language	
		Basque language	

Results

Educational paths and participation in school choices

Through the EVAP 4 questionnaire, this study collected data on this group's educational path and attainment levels in Spain and their countries of origin. As shown in Table 3, most young individuals (48.9%) passed the 1st basic vocational training course (n=67). We found that 4.4% (n=6) of youth pursued education up to the high school level, while only one individual had reached the first stage of university studies. In contrast, only 5.8% (n=8) had completed up to primary education. Two of the young people (1.5%) chose the "other" option, indicating that they had completed a course provided by Lanbide (Basque Employment Service).

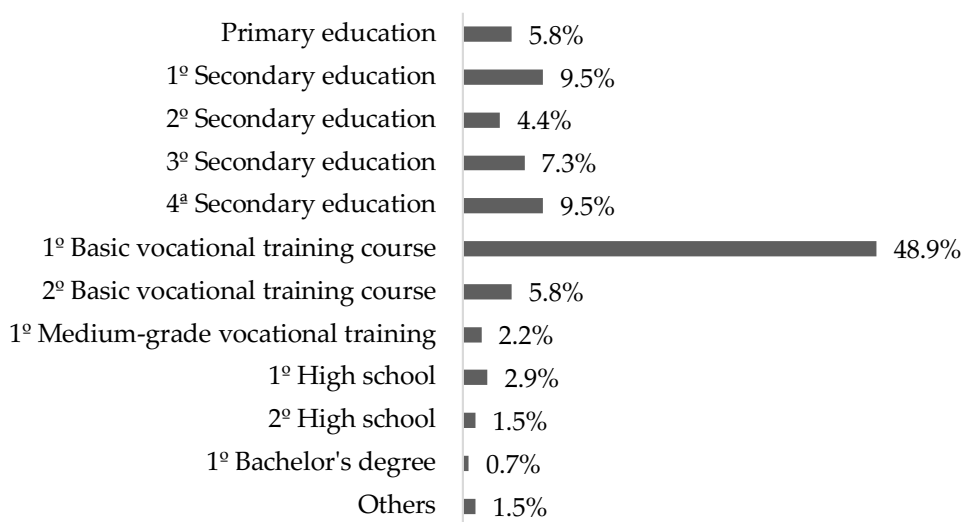


Figure 1. Educational levels of participants.

The results of the interviews with the group of young migrants reveal that most of them had not finished the studies equivalent to secondary school in their countries of origin. Although some had the possibility to complete secondary school in the SCS at the same time they were doing the basic vocational training: *“when I was doing the 2nd year of the basic vocational training, some of us were chosen to do extra work to get the secondary education, so I did the basic vocational training and the secondary education”* (San José, young man).

Regarding participation in the choice of their studies, it is notable that most young people did not feel involved in selecting their studies, both in the case of those who enter the protection system before the age of 16 and those at a later age. Their participation focused on the choice of specialty.

I wanted to study secondary education when I arrived when I was 15, but they enrolled me here. They told me, «In the end, we haven't signed you up for secondary education, and you must go to basic vocational training courses because you can't change». I told them that I wanted to sign up for the 4th year of Secondary Education and then go to high school, but in the end, the center only signed me up for cooking (San José², young man).

2 All names are pseudonyms proposed by the participants themselves.

Regarding the specialty, the experiences were different, with the majority having the possibility of choosing which basic vocational training course they wanted to take: “Yes. Business, kitchen, plumber... whatever. I chose business” (Cedrik, youth).

Attitude towards studies

Before focusing on the obstacles identified for completing secondary education, we want to capture the attitude of the young people toward the studies they were pursuing. Thus, this study analyzed their satisfaction with their current studies and intentions to continue studying. Regarding their attitudes, as shown in Figure 2, 93.4% (n=128) liked their current studies, while the remaining 6.6% (n=9) did not.

In the interviews, participants strongly desired to acquire the Secondary Education qualification and its potential advantages, mainly regarding finding employment, “the boys told me, if you complete secondary education, you will have more job opportunities” (Yassin, young person). In this context, one of the SCS offers the possibility of completing secondary education while finishing the basic vocational training course if “you get a final mark of 8, you get the Secondary Education diploma” (Anas, young person).

Another aspect collected in the questionnaire was whether the group of young people wanted to continue studying in the future. Based on the responses, 83.2% (n=114) of the participants intended to continue studying, while 16.1% (n=22) did not intend to continue their educational path.

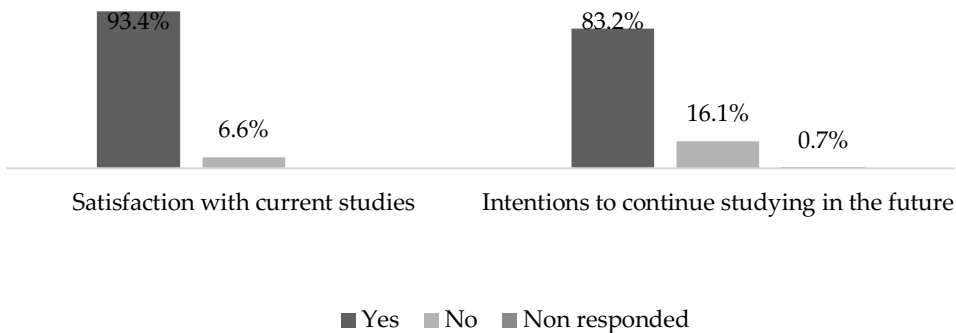


Figure 2. Study satisfaction and future educational intentions

Of those who intended to continue studying (Figure 3) (n=114), 38.6% (n=44) linked this to having a good job 28.1% (n=32) would continue studying to learn more and/or because they like to study, and 1.8% would continue studying to help their family, although they did not specify what type of help they would provide. 10.5% (n=12) said they wanted to continue studying to improve their current or future situation to have a better future, and 2.6% (n=3) to improve their life. A 5.3% (n=6) mentioned that they intended to continue their studies for various reasons. Finally, 13.2% (n=15) did not want to answer this question.

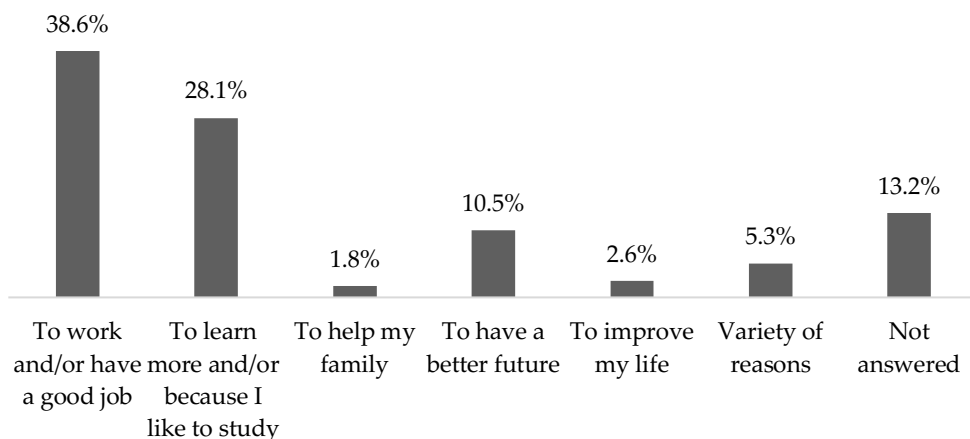


Figure 3. Reasons for wanting to continue studying

Regarding the refusal to continue studying (Figure 4), the main reason would be the desire to start working 68.2% (n=15), followed by wanting to improve their life 9.1% (n=2).

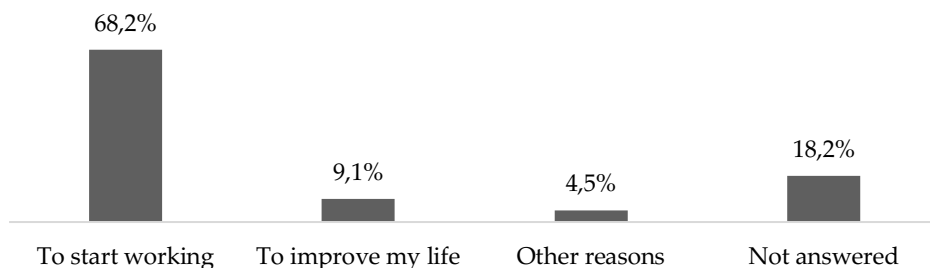


Figure 4. Reasons for not wanting to continue studying

Note: This figure represents the reasons why participants choose not to continue studying.

The responses were similar in the interviews. The reasons to discontinue their studies were closely linked to the desire or need to work: *“I don’t think so, because now I have to work to help the family because I haven’t worked for 3 or 4 years or anything because since I came here, it is more difficult. Now I have to work”* (Assif).

Factors obstructing completion of Secondary Education

According to the professionals interviewed, various factors affect young people's non-completion or drop out of the formal education system. The following factors may hinder these young people from continuing their studies in formal education and obtaining the Secondary Education qualification: factors related to educational self-concept, school methodology, and language difficulties. The research also revealed factors related to the family, the peer network, and the protection system. However, in this article, we focus on the school-related hindering factors and their experiences in school so that this group can complete secondary education successfully.

Educational self-concept through previous experiences

The study reveals that young people's initial self-concept and self-image regarding their school abilities as they enter SCS have a notable impact on their educational environment. The responses from professionals consistently illustrate a shared narrative, emphasizing significantly diminished levels of self-esteem and self-concept within this youth group. The professionals made it clear that these young people arrive with their self-esteem *"very damaged"* (Itziar, professional 1) and *"at rock bottom"* (Ane, professional). In Aitor's (professional) words, *"self-concept and self-esteem, all very low"*. Professionals mentioned that most young people think they are not apt for studying or are not good enough to do anything. In the words of Ainhoa (professional): *"When they come in here, they often say, I don't want to, I don't know, or I'm not worth doing anything"*. One of the factors contributing to the weakened educational self-concept observed among the students under investigation was their previous academic experiences, along with feelings of embarrassment regarding their inadequate education.

Most of the time, they are embarrassed because of their lack of education, so they don't feel comfortable in the classroom because they realize they don't know how to read or write (Sara, professional).

The professionals highlight that most young individuals come to the SCS with the perception of being academically disadvantaged, feeling like they have failed due to labels attributed to them or perceived by the teaching staff. In the words of Ane (professional):

They come from being at the bottom of the class, in general, they feel a little bit like being left out, like «OK, I know I won't be able to,» or they perceive that the teachers have said, «this one won't finish».

Thus, several professionals agree that this negative feeling about their educational skills and competencies can be a psychological limitation.

Although the group of young people did not explicitly refer to this factor, the perception they reflected in the interviews regarding their educational self-concept was positive. For example, Movid (a young man) said he likes to learn things and is a fast learner: *"I don't know what I'm going to study, but learning... I mean... I'm a fast learner, and I like to learn more things"* (Movid, young man).

Some professionals explain that sometimes young people attend SCS out of obligation, with the erroneous perception that these schools are intended for those who have failed, who have criminal behavior, or are considered problematic, even “*they think that this is going to be a war*” (Aitor, professional). However, this vision fades once they get to know and interact with the students.

Some of those in the child protection system are forced to come here and have an idea that they come here where all the losers are «delinquents». Sometimes, they have a general idea, and when they are here, they say, «Yes, they are normal people like me». So, the idea they bring is not what they later find (Paula, professional).

The methodology of secondary schools

The results emphasize the necessity of a methodology that aligns with young people’s needs and characteristics rather than attempting to fit them into a pre-existing framework. This approach allows them to progress towards attainable goals, considering the diverse academic backgrounds many students bring to the school. In this regard, they emphasize the significance of providing support during formal education and the necessity for personal resources within and outside the classroom. The educational team emphasizes that the absence of these approaches and resources leads to academic failure: “*The educational system does not value where these children come from and where they have reached*” (Miren, professional).

In the end, because we have this very individualized methodology, what happens when you leave here, and they are not under our care a little bit? They’re going to get a slap in the face. They are not going to be on top of it, so if these young people of ours are not prepared to go out to this more regulated, traditional, and more formal education, then it is a factor that can prevent them from continuing their education (Aritz, professional).

Language difficulties

Language is a hindering factor in their educational trajectories. One of the professionals asserted that even though these young people initially arrive in the destination country without knowledge of the language, they can successfully communicate in Spanish within a few months. However, he further noted that once they reach a level of competence in language expression, they often tend to diminish the significance of further studying the language.

Well, with all the unaccompanied foreign minors with the language, even though they are the best, I mean, half a year in France, and I don’t know how to say good afternoon. And they are here for 4 months, and it’s amazing (Unai, professional).

One of the professionals expressed that young people who have migrated without family references have an added obstacle factor in the territory of Gipuzkoa: the linguistic model established in that province for formal education in the public education system³. *“Here we have very few places for exclusive secondary education in Spanish, at least in Gipuzkoa”* (Sara, professional). For the young people interviewed the language essential to learn is Spanish, while they think that learning Basque is not important for their future: *“it is not important. You can speak in Spanish, the Basque language only works here, for example, you go out to Madrid and say ‘agur,’ and they don’t understand you”* (Jalil, young person). Three of the young individuals mentioned that neither the residential protection facilities nor the educational institutions they had attended had provided them with Basque language instruction, but they do practice it in their daily interactions, as *“in the villages, they speak a lot in Basque”* (Assif, young person).

The educational team mentioned the importance of including Spanish language instruction in the educational journey of these young individuals. They explained that they typically conduct an initial language assessment to find out what level of Spanish the young people have: *“a review is usually done at the beginning, a diagnosis with some tests that we have of Spanish to see what level of Spanish they have”* (Aritz, professional). However, one of the professionals expressed the lack of devices or resources to provide training in Spanish.

We have been providing Spanish classes funded by the ministry for many years, and we have found that more and more people need this kind of help. A language base and that there is less and less money for it. When you go to a foreign country, the first thing you have to do is to learn a language (...) They need to work on a language, and we find that resources are increasingly scarce, so we find that they come with very basic Spanish (Ainhoa, professional).

Discussion and conclusions

The results reveal several challenges that affect secondary education achievement. As supported by our research findings and prior studies (Fernández-Simo & Cid-Fernández, 2020), autochthonous young people often experience challenges in conventional formal education and seek additional training opportunities. Thus, they are enrolled in secondary education, but simultaneously, they are doing some basic vocational training courses. Our data are in line with other studies, showing that this group tends to have a lower educational level, a lower suitability rate, and a higher percentage of repetition and absenteeism compared to the average population (Cardoso & Dalbosco, 2010; Miguelena et al., 2022; Montserrat et al., 2015).

³ In the Basque Autonomous Community, there are three educational models. Model A: Spanish as the primary language of instruction; Model B: An equal proportion of Basque (the Basque language) and Spanish as languages of instruction; and Model D: Basque (the Basque language) as the primary language of instruction. In the other provinces of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, this linguistic model also exists, but it is in the province of Gipuzkoa where this linguistic model D is undoubtedly predominant in schools.

The situation of young migrants is particularly concerning. Much like the findings of Epelde (2016), which highlighted the absence of formal education in their countries of origin, elementary studies, and a limited level of training (Núñez & Arqué, 2020), the current study has also drawn the same reality.

Regarding students' involvement in choosing their courses, our research data points out situations where their participation ability is limited. Students are often pushed to enroll in basic vocational training courses or other pre-determined programs, which restricts their capacity to pick the subjects they prefer. The outcomes of the current study reinforce the findings and conclusions reached in most of the prior research in this field, affirming that facilitating children's and adolescents' participation in the decisions for their academic path remains a challenge for the protective system despite the well-established benefits it offers to this demographic (Miguelena, 2019).

Looking more closely at the factors influencing educational pathways and secondary education attainment, our data alludes to the importance of schools' involvement in this group's educational environment. These data align with Cid-Fernández and Fernández-Simo (2014), Montserrat (2021), and Montserrat and Casas (2012), who identified this factor as a determinant in the prevention of school dropout. Thus, according to the educational team of SCS, schools need methodologies adapted to young people's needs. These methods help them develop their academic itinerary, with the minimum school requirements being real and adaptable based on the situation or reality of each person. These results support the idea mentioned by Fernández-Simo and Cid-Fernández (2020), who state that the education system cannot remain oblivious to the social reality of the students. This system cannot expect all students to achieve the same results in different contextual, personal, and family situations. As reflected in our data, several studies have shown the importance of collaboration between the various agents influencing the well-being of these young individuals, such as families, educators at the residential protection resource, and teachers at the educational centers. It emphasizes the imperative of shared responsibility in education, requiring active cooperation from all participants within the educational sphere (Fuentes-Peláez, 2010; Miguelena, 2019).

Language was another of the factors identified by both groups that determined the educational environment of young migrants who had left the protection system. The data indicate a linguistic challenge that hinders the success and continuity of formal education, specifically, the absence of knowledge in Spanish. Besides, the difficulties in teaching this language due to the scarcity of resources for this purpose are also mentioned. The current results seem to coincide with those set out in the Ararteko research (2021), which mentions that language difficulties, added to the need for urgent economic autonomy, influence the qualification of this young group. Thus, they are occasionally sentenced to precarious jobs and the underground economy.

In the context of Gipuzkoa, one of the professionals points out an additional hindering factor: the presence of the Basque language. While both Spanish and Basque are official languages in Gipuzkoa, the prevalence of the Basque language in public schools exceeds that of Spanish. These findings closely align with the conclusions presented in Miguelena's doctoral thesis (2019), where Basque is identified as a factor

that hinders the educational environment for children and adolescents in residential care, representing a challenge for the protective system in terms of its normalization, and promotion for the full social, educational and labor inclusion of these children and adolescents.

Financing

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