Away from Home Studying in Brazil: Bulgarian Children's Experiences of Brazilian Education

Bojana Matelova*
University of National and World
Economy, BULGARIA

Abstract: This paper presents findings from an extensive study conducted in Brazil. The main subjects of the study were Bulgarian children living and studying in Brazilian schools. The main goal was to indicate what kind of problems and obstacles they experience during the school time in Brazil and how the Brazilian government and people support these Bulgarian children. The data was collected by a Bulgarian research team that travelled to the remote regions of Brazil where many Bulgarian citizens live and work. The researchers took interviews with the Bulgarian children and their parents as well as school staff at the schools in Brazil with a high population of Bulgarian children. The analysis revealed many different problems that Bulgarian children and their parents highlighted, such as problems with the language of instructions, misunderstandings of school rules and general problems related to living in the remote areas of Brazil, such as weather and heat-related issues. Although many Bulgarian families reported some problems, they were still determined to continue their life and career in Brazil, and they want to continue to pursue their dreams.

Keywords: *Bulgarian children, Brazil, intercultural education, qualitative study, social inclusion.*

Introduction

Education is the most important aspect of our lives. Even in ancient Greece and medieval Bulgaria people understood the importance of Education (Tupkova-Zaimova & Miltenova, 2011). According to Aristoteles, "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all" (Duran, 1992). That is why it is important to combine different forms of education for all people and especially children.

Bulgarian people started to move to Brazil several decades ago and especially they chose the remote areas because it is easier to live there and get some basic jobs. When they moved, they believed with their heart that this is the move towards a better life. Their children had to adapt to the new environments and go to regular rural schools in Brazil, where all education was in local languages, predominantly in Brazilian Portuguese, that differs significantly from Bulgarian. According to a very interesting book Empowered Educators (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), it is important that children also receive education in their native languages because it helps them and empowers them. In current world constructivism is very important in education and teachers should encourage children to be critical and reflect on the knowledge they get from the teachers (Gray & MacBlain, 2015; Maxim, 2010; Oldfather & West, 1999).

The research questions of this study are:

1. What kind of problems and obstacles Bulgarian children experience during their school time in Brazil?
2. How the Brazilian government and people support the Bulgarian children?
3. What are parents' experiences with Brazilian education settings?

In order to answer these questions, a team of Bulgarian researchers travelled to remote regions of Brazil where many Bulgarian citizens live and work. We conducted interviews and observed schoolwork. This work is an important project

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* **Correspondence:**
Bojana Matelova, ul. "8-mi dekemvri", 1717 Studentski Kmpl., Sofia, Bulgaria. ✉ bojanamatelova@aol.com

that highlights the main challenges and important issues that immigrant children might experience everywhere in the world.

Literature Review

Before the research start a thorough literature review has been done. In this section, the most important theories will be highlighted.

The research is mainly based on constructivist education theory (Gray & MacBlain, 2015; Maxim, 2010; Oldfather & West, 1999). The gold standard of constructivism is that it highlights the importance of active involvement and constructive criticism in the classroom (Danforth & Smith, 2005; Oldfather & West, 1999). Children should be able to reflect on their knowledge and decide what is relevant (Danforth & Smith, 2005; Paredes, 1993). Furthermore, the new wave of constructivism is now emerging in Bulgaria: we call here constructivism-remix-edition (Matelova & Ibrahimova, 2014; Totseva, 2014). The main focus is on the modern societies where immigrants and immigrant children have a special place and special rights to education and normal childhood (Calderon, 2015; Espinoza-Herold et al., 2017; Nowak et al., 2013). It is very important to adapt the existing curriculum to diverse children's needs (Smilkstein, 2011). Nevertheless, the main challenge with immigrant children is that they often don't speak the majority languages and thus find themselves in the unfavorable situations (Garcia-Sanchez & Orellana, 2019; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). Different research studies around the world showed the importance of mastering the language especially for immigrants. Knowing local languages on a very high level helps immigrants to integrate better in the local societies and find a better place in the new country and new environments (Garcia-Sanchez & Orellana, 2019; Oldfather & West, 1999; Pringle et al., 2019). The local governments must support schools with very high immigrant percentage because both teachers, children and last but not least parents dealing with a lot of stress and pressure because they everyday find themselves in cross-cultural communication (Bekerman & Kopelowitz, 2008; Dasen & Akkari, 2008; De Bot et al., 1991; Klein & Hundeide, 1996). In this sense, constructivism-remix-edition is very similar to the theories about intercultural education. Intercultural education emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural communication in the classroom and puts a focus on those children who do not speak majority languages (Adams & Kirova, 2007; Carlsson, 2008; Espinoza-Herold et al., 2017; Kiuchukov, 2010). Many researchers are very concerned with those schools that ignore intercultural perspectives in education and only focus on majority and native children (Guo, 2014; Ijalba et al., 2019). What is also important is to provide good language teaching and support from second language teachers. There has been extensive research in the Portuguese language as a second language and indigenous languages teaching (Cowles et al., 2006; Montrul et al., 2011). Portuguese teachers use critical approaches to teaching including usage of communicative language teaching and applying different tasks to encourage learners to start speaking as soon as possible (Figueiredo, 2017; Montrul et al., 2011). There are many examples in the literature of successful approaches to the second language teaching in Brazil, all of these examples show that Brazilian teachers are very passionate and caring (Dantas, 1981; Marquez & Torrico, 2012; Paredes, 1993). The studies conducted on indigenous language teaching are all great and provide deepest insight into the field (Dean, 2000; Reyhner, 2010). They show that learning an indigenous language is a difficult process and require a lot of effort from students. In some rare cases researchers report that governments in some countries ignore the importance of the indigenous language teaching and support and this is sad. When it comes to research on Bulgarian children, there is not a lot of literature around. There were made some studies on Bulgarian immigrants, including children adaptation in Greece, Canada and Spain (Jurkova, 2014; Markova & Sarris, 2007; Stanek, 2009). All these studies show that this is very challenging to be immigrant and even more challenging if you have children (Adams & Kirova, 2007; Armstrong & Tsokova, 2019; Denov et al., 2011; Gray & MacBlain, 2015).

When it comes to the Brazilian education system, the literature review has shown that Brazilian government is slowly moving towards new research approaches and would like to see improvements in rural regions (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra (Brazil), 2005; Paredes, 1993; Vendramini, 2000). However, there is no evidence in the literature that Brazilian researchers are concerned with Bulgarian children's future, which is of course important. It is especially important for me as a person because I am Bulgarian and I grew up in a foreign country, where I could not speak the local language and teachers in my school were not really supportive. Here rises a question of social inclusion, social justice and social interactions and what role they play in the education process. Global research on social inclusion showed that support from local communities and help with integration and language help new immigrants to integrate better in the new environments (Gbadamosi, 2016; Glazzard, 2010; Hands & Hubbard, 2011; Ibeneme et al., 2012; Rose, 2010; Sheehy, 2005). When it comes to integration via language, some studies have been made and they all show the importance of social interactions (Carlsson, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2014; Lew, 2006; Sanchez Sorondo et al., 2007). Inclusion and social help support parents and from parents, this support is forwarded to the children. If parents feel supported and empowered of course they will help their children to feel the same way (Adams & Kirova, 2007; Dovigo, 2018; McConaughy, 2008). But if the parents are poor and do not have any friends or social network, they surely have no time to work with the children and help them to do homework or even play with them and this is very sad (Adams & Kirova, 2007; Calderon, 2015; Hands & Hubbard, 2011; McConaughy, 2008). According to previous studies, many researchers call educational places like schools to take action, because they have to step up and encourage local children and parents to help emigrants (Armstrong & Tsokova, 2019; Hands & Hubbard, 2011;

McConaughy, 2008; Towl & Hemphill, 2016). Emigrants have some problems that are very specific (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Sheehy, 2005; Thomas, 2016; Towl & Hemphill, 2016). The research highlights that support is a key element (Hands & Hubbard, 2011; Schlup & Blochowiak, 2007).

This section presented some important theories and studies that created a solid base for the current research project. These studies and theories will be used to analyze the findings.

Methodology

Research Goal

The research goal was to find out what kind of problems and obstacles Bulgarian children experience during their school time in Brazil. Furthermore, the research team wanted to research how the Brazilian government and people support the Bulgarian children. Additionally, the aim was to analyze parents' experiences with Brazilian education settings.

Sample and Data Collection

The data was collected by a Bulgarian research team that travelled to the remote regions of Brazil where many Bulgarian citizens live and work. I was the team leader and took all interviews with children myself.

The participants were 247 Bulgarian children and 318 Bulgarian parents. They all live in remote regions in rural Brazil. Some of the children were from the same families. Many families have 2-3 children of school age. The age of the children who participated in this study varied from 7 to 16 years old. They all studied in local schools and have resided in Brazil from 2 to 15 years. The parents were all of the native Bulgarian origins and have moved to Brazil many years ago – from 2 to 44 years ago. They moved to Brazil to work there because working conditions in Bulgaria are not as great as in Brazil and that is why they decided to find a new place to support themselves and raise children. All parents had a basic knowledge of Portuguese; some spoke pretty fluently. Several parents spoke some indigenous languages that are native to these remote areas of Brazil. Some children spoke very little Brazilian Portuguese, while others were as fluent as local children. Many children had a basic knowledge of indigenous languages and 9 children were fluent in indigenous languages, such as Ticuna and Nheengatu. Four children spoke good English as a foreign language. Two children spoke Ndebele as a foreign language. At home, all children spoke Bulgarian to the parents. The children reported that they watched a lot of Brazilian television and Bulgarian Youtube videos.

The researcher conducted interviews with children individually. Of course, parents were in the same room where the interviews took place, but the parents did not participate when the children were interviewed. The parents were interviewed later. Couples were interviewed together. Single mothers were interviewed individually.

Additional participants were school staff members at the schools where the research study was conducted. There were 55 staff members in total who agreed to participate in interviews. Some of the interviews were conducted in groups. The staff members were all native Brazilians. All of them spoke fluent Portuguese and some of them additionally spoke indigenous languages. No one of the staff members could speak Bulgarian.

All interviews were conducted in schools, on location. The research team members were deeply thankful for the permission to conduct this research inside the schools and to use classrooms to conduct the interviews. The interviews were recorded using a voice-recorder application on an iPhone.

A special thing about this study is that the research team also collected samples of red and blue algae from the remote rivers of Brazil. This was done for a different project conducted by another Bulgarian team that aims to research algae types of South America. Parents who participated in the current study helped the researchers to find a way to the rivers and thus spent a lot of time with the researchers. This was a big advantage because during algae collection time the parents shared more experiences of Brazilian education and they were more relaxed and open than during the official interviews. Some of the conversations with the parents were recorded during the field trips.

Last but not least, several observations in schools have been conducted. The researchers worked in pairs and they attended classes and recorded them using the same procedures. The observations provided valuable insight into the schools and helped the researchers to understand the learning process.

All participants signed the participation papers and all research procedures were according to Brazilian law and Bulgarian law. All participants could stop participating and skip questions and they did not need to explain why. No participant chose to withdraw.

Analyzing of Data

During the analysis stage of the research, a mixed analysis approach was applied to raw data. On the first stage, the research team used IPA - Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Dicks, 2012; Jason & Glenwick, 2016; Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004; Weinberg, 2002). The team used MAXQDA+ software to code the interviews and create

subcategories that later were analyzed with the IPA method. The coding process was complex. The research group was split into two groups and both groups coded the data separately. This is called a double-blind coding approach that is especially relevant in ethnographic research (Atkinson, 2001; Jason & Glenwick, 2016; Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004; Tusting, 2020; Weinberg, 2002). Later codes were compared, contradicting categories were discussed during the group meetings and irrelevant codes and categories were eliminated. On the final page of the analysis, in-vivo code approach was applied to add reliability (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004; Tusting, 2020). The charts with code categories were analyzed and compared with a help from an external specialist from Czech University of Life Sciences. The external specialist verified the coding process and issued an independent corroboration for the coding of the data. Subsequently, the ethnographic qualitative analysis was used to understand the subcategories and analyze the data appropriately (Atkinson, 2001; Jason & Glenwick, 2016; Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004; Tusting, 2020). The ethnographic approach is especially relevant when analyzing the experiences of communities and emigrants who live close to each other and have a similar culture. To provide better reliability the research team consulted with several leading researchers and professors in ethnographic research methodology from Bulgaria and Uruguay, who offered help with the data analysis. When the data analysis was finished, the data was anonymized and uploaded to a special server that is available to everyone in the research team. To get access the team members and other researchers had to send an e-mail with an official request to the author of this paper. Additionally, the team recruited two master students who kept journals of the data analysis process and later used this experience as a part of their degree.

On the final stage of the analysis, the reports were printed out and stored in the research room at the home university of the research team. The total amount of the analysis reports exceeded 27000 pages. In the next section, the results will be presented and discussed using the theories. The finding will be also related to the studies conducted earlier in the same field.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the results showed that there were many challenges experienced by children, parents and school staff members. The main reason behind these challenges is the difficulties and obstacles that they were evoked due to language problems and problems with support services. This section is divided into 4 subsections: 1. challenges at schools: children's perspectives, 2. challenges at schools: parents' perspectives, 3. challenges at schools: school staff members' perspectives, 4. challenges outside of schools. All quotations in this section have been translated from Bulgarian into English by a professional interpreter, who has a university degree in translation and translation sciences. The interpreter worked with anonymized interviews, so he did not know the real names of the participants.

Challenges at schools. Children's perspectives

During the analysis the research team found out that many children were affected by social differences as well as they lacked language support during their studies. One child said: "*I wish there could be better support for us Bulgarian kids because we are so many, but no one seems to care about our special needs and issues*". This is true. Children felt isolated and very shy. The situation was very unusual. In some of the classrooms, the Bulgarian children made about half of the pupils, so it is a very large number. Social isolation and non-inclusion have been discussed in the field of intercultural education and the theorists call school personal to provide better support to improve integration within the schools (Adams & Kirova, 2007; Carlsson, 2008; Espinoza-Herold et al., 2017; Kiuchukov, 2010). According to the children, the teachers did not care about the Bulgarian language development and only focused on math, geography, Portuguese language and history. Another child said: "*We really wanted to improve our Bulgarian too. We wanted to read Bulgarian books and other stuff, but the teachers insisted on Portuguese staff*". This is a very alarming situation and previous studies highlight the importance of children being able to improve their native languages and develop professionally (Bekerman & Kopelowitz, 2008; Dasen & Akkari, 2008; De Bot et al., 1991; Guo, 2014; Kiuchukov, 2010).

There were also positive experiences. Some children really liked their fellow pupils, who were genuinely curious about the Bulgarian classmates and even asked about Bulgaria and Bulgarian culture. This was a very good sign. We were happy to see those findings. A child in the 5th grade shared: "*I love my classmates; they are interested in me. We play together and during our free time we learn from each other. They learn something about Bulgaria, I learn something about Brazil*". This type of productive communication is very good because it helps children to develop and connect to each other. This was also important in some earlier studies (Carlsson, 2008; Guo, 2014; Oldfather & West, 1999; Sanchez Sorondo et al., 2007).

The research team reported that children felt that they were assessed unfairly. Their experiences were negative because of their language skills. They were not able to write as good assignments as they might hope for. They struggle at home and no one really can help them, because the parents usually don't speak any Brazilian Portuguese. It is very tragic, that the children find themselves in those horrible situations. Several studies make a point of the importance of good and fair assessment in schools where pupils are of different backgrounds (Fernandez, 2003; Ho, 2013; Keengwe & Onchwari, 2019). The intercultural education theory shows it very clear that schools should take responsibility and help children if the parents are unable to do it (Carlsson, 2008; Dasen & Akkari, 2008; Espinoza-Herold et al., 2017; Marquez & Torrico, 2012).

In some cases, children were quite melancholic during the interviews. They shared that they often felt sadness because they were homesick. The author of this article has a colleague who is a psychologist. She lives in Bulgaria, but when the research team conducted the interviews with these sad children, we asked her to conduct a skype session and speak to them and kind of help the problems in this way. She agreed and it gave very good results. The children became immediately happier and forgot about Bulgaria. This also reveals one problem. None of the schools where we did the study had a school-based psychologist. Of course, once a month a psychologist from Rio de Janeiro visited the rural schools, but this surely was not enough at all. One of the children who was in the 8th grade said: "*I really want to speak more with a psychologist because it helps me. I wish the visiting psychologist could speak Bulgarian. Portuguese is of course fine, but still I cannot express my feelings as perfect as I would do in Bulgarian*". Earlier research studies in psychology show the importance of being able to provide support when people really need it (Espinoza-Herold et al., 2017; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Vikman, 1990). When it comes to children it is as twice as important (Adams & Kirova, 2007; Bruggman & Ortiz-Hartman, 2017; Garcia-Sanchez & Orellana, 2019; Lew, 2006).

Children who were in grades 1-4 were usually more satisfied with classes and teaching approaches than older children. The children from grade 5th and above thought that the approaches to teaching history were very old. The teachers required the pupils to learn everything by heart and then tell about the learned stuff in front of the whole class. This is of course difficult and even old fashioned. The researchers around the world say that new approaches to teaching history are very nice and that all teachers should teach according to the new approaches (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Denov et al., 2011; Gbadamosi, 2016; Ibeneme et al., 2012). One kid in the 6th grade in one of the rural schools said: "*Learning math is very boring, and teachers don't really motivate us. I wish they used Bulgarian teaching methods; they are much better*". Here is again a problem that the teachers were not prepared to teach the Bulgarian children, they knew nothing about teaching approaches used in Bulgaria and thus did not provide any good and appropriate teaching methods. Research studies in Bulgaria show that the newest approaches are very productive (Matelova & Ibrahimova, 2014; Totseva, 2014). The discussion of the newest approaches has been especially active in compulsory education and secondary education sections.

Challenges at schools: Parents' perspectives

During the analysis of the interviews, the research team became aware of many problems that parents' experience on a daily basis because of the lack of support from both schools and the Brazilian government. In the majority of cases, the parents experienced problems with Portuguese language and could not fully participate in the parents-school meetings and discuss their children's progress in schools. One parent said: "*I was a silent person sitting in the corner, there were discussions and questions and I could not understand anything. No support was provided, and I felt excluded*". This example is very alarming and early studies in the field of sociology highlight the importance of social support (Glazzard, 2010; Lansford et al., 2007; Park & Kao, 2018).

Furthermore, the parents told that they also felt excluded from the society around them. The members of the research team were devastated when we heard these words: "*I am a single mother and I don't know anyone here. I spent all my weekends alone and my children are always busy too. I have never been that lonely as I am now*". That woman started to cry at the end of the interview because she was so sad about this situation. International researchers are very clear that social inclusion is one of the main principles of modern society and social inclusion should be for everyone no matter if they are local or not (Adams & Kirova, 2007; Calderon, 2015; Dovigo, 2018; Hands & Hubbard, 2011; Jackson, 2010; Rose, 2010; Schneider et al., 2007; Sheehy, 2005; Towl & Hemphill, 2016). The research team decided to demand from local government to take action to support the parents and provide better support in the form of integration and probably Brazilian Portuguese language classes. During our time in Brazil, we even received some answers and local officials were very open and willing to help poor Bulgarian people. There was a meeting scheduled in one of the regions with a very high percentage of Bulgarian people. Earlier studies in the field make a strong claim that the willingness to acknowledge a problem and to improve integration in the local communities is considered to be an essential step towards the social inclusion and improving of positions of immigrants in local communities (see Gbadamosi, 2016; Glazzard, 2010; Hands & Hubbard, 2011; Ibeneme et al., 2012; Rose, 2010).

A very common problem that the parents described was related to access to health services. One parent said: "*Kids get sick all the time. I don't know maybe it is because of the extensive heat and high humidity. But going to doctors is always a nightmare. I don't speak Portuguese very well and cannot explain about my kids' problems*". Some other parents reported that when the children were sick it was difficult to book an appointment at the doctor's office. When they visited the hospitals, no one could speak Bulgarian there and parents had to use Google Translate software to help themselves. In rural Brazil there are many special diseases that are non-existent in Bulgaria and Bulgarian children are very vulnerable. Parents mentioned especially Chagas disease and Neurocysticercosis. Healthcare is very important for everyone (Bruggman & Ortiz-Hartman, 2017; Schneider et al., 2007; Thomas, 2016). Without access to healthcare no one can guarantee social equality that is why it is important to address this issue as soon as possible.

Challenges at schools: Teachers' perspectives

It would be unfair to only talk about problems that children and parents described, that is why the research team decided to include a section on teachers' perspectives on the problem. Teachers were generally very open to the suggestions coming from the research team. They really wanted to improve their practices and did their best. The main challenge was that the majority of the teachers knew nothing or very little about intercultural education theory and teaching methods associated with intercultural education. Intercultural education highlights that teachers and other school staff must work together to ensure the equality and to help all the children regardless of their race or nationality (Espinoza-Herold et al., 2017; Guo, 2014; Ho, 2013; Klein & Hundeide, 1996; Marquez & Torrico, 2012). One teacher said: "*Today I hear for the first time in my life about cross-cultural education. Why nobody told us before about it. I think I can definitely use something of it*". Exactly, if the teachers had better support and were better informed about new teaching approaches, they would probably use them in everyday life.

Another challenge was the overwhelming number of Bulgarian children in classes that were always chatting in Bulgarian even during the assignments. A teacher in a class where about half of the children were Bulgarian said: "*They only speak Bulgarian. They don't care about Brazilian. Their classmates are confused about this situation*". Research in the field of compulsory education emphasizes the significance of creating a classroom where all children are equal and participate in learning together (Calderon, 2015; De Bot et al., 1991; Jackson, 2010; Rose, 2010). If children are divided because of the language, it creates problems. Teachers must address this issue. Additionally, when teachers held meetings with parents, they were distracted by parents speaking Bulgarian among themselves.

During a group interview at one of the schools where Bulgarian children made 32% of all children, a principal said that they wrote letters many times to central government and asked to find a teacher who speaks Bulgarian, but their letters were ignored. All staff members agreed that it is necessary to have a teacher or student counsellor who speaks Bulgarian to improve the services within the school and create equal opportunities for all children. Lacking support from central government and lack of the qualified school counsellors has been previously mentioned in research on the challenges in intercultural education (see Dasen & Akkari, 2008; Espinoza-Herold et al., 2017; Marquez & Torrico, 2012). The theorists and researchers call governments for action especially in the areas with increased diversity in population.

Further challenges included those of organizing group work and group activities for pupils. Many Bulgarian children were not familiar with traditional Brazilian sports or plays and they were not able to fully participate in them. Sports and group activities such as plays are considered to be very important for all children of all ages (Agergaard, 2018; Testa & Amara, 2016). Teachers must work together to ensure full integration and satisfaction of all pupils. During sports activities, the teachers had to use more time to explain to the children what the aims of the activities are and what are their rules. Brazilian children were very open to helping their Bulgarian peers and enjoyed sports with them.

The teachers in one of the schools shared that they once organized a cultural event on the Independence Day of Bulgaria. They did this to acknowledge the children's and parents' cultures and try to be more intercultural. The teachers reported that the cultural event went very well, they all sang Bulgarian songs and danced a lot. Both Bulgarian and Brazilian children enjoyed themselves and learned a lot about the Bulgarian culture that is rich in folklore and traditional tales. This initiative goes along with the main aims of intercultural education that encourages teachers to be open to discover new cultures (Bekerman & Kopelowitz, 2008; Dasen & Akkari, 2008; De Bot et al., 1991; Park & Kao, 2018). All teachers must teach children that there are many beautiful cultures exist in our world and we have to respect all cultures: American, African, Brazilian and of course Bulgarian.

One group of teachers revealed that they even bought some Bulgarian books to give children and to encourage them to learn more Bulgarian. The parents celebrated this initiative and were very thankful to those teachers. This also corresponds to the main goals and features of cross-cultural educational approach (Bekerman & Kopelowitz, 2008; Dasen & Akkari, 2008; Espinoza-Herold et al., 2017; Marquez & Torrico, 2012).

Challenges outside of schools

In this section, the research team decided to reveal some common challenges that the families experienced in their everyday life. Although these challenges do not have anything to do with school or educational process, they still do impact the integration and motivation.

Many parents were very concerned that they did not have access to Bulgarian food or other everyday items frequently used by Bulgarian people in Bulgaria. This list includes customary pastry, vegetables, sour dishes, Bulgarian fabrics to make ceremonial clothes, traditional Bulgarian skincare and make up products as well as Bulgarian books and newspapers. A couple of parents said: "*We cannot fully celebrate our Bulgarian holidays because we don't have any opportunity to make sacramental food and sew ceremonial gowns. We cannot buy the materials anywhere and ordering from Bulgaria is too expensive*" Lack of these items made a very strong impact on the Bulgarian people well-being and they suffered a lot being away from home. Moreover, the Bulgarian families did not have many friends and their network was kind of limited, they did not communicate much with neighbors and were not very communicative on

local markets. Many studies that focus on the integration of migrants into the new communities put significant focus on the importance of creating a network of friends and supportive people (Armstrong & Tsokova, 2019; Carlsson, 2008; Denov et al., 2011; Lew, 2006). Some studies showed that if emigrants were welcomed into the new communities they contributed to their development and generally improved everyone's level of lives.

The Bulgarian families were generally quite poor and could not afford to participate in social events or go to concerts. This was very unfortunate because the lack of cultural life puts some further impact on their integration.

In spite of the various challenges that were described in this paper, the majority of Bulgarians were very thankful to Brazil and to the local communities that became their new home and provide great opportunities for their children. The Bulgarians wish that this research will shed life on their difficult life and will help the Brazilian government to understand the Bulgarian people better.

Conclusion

This research has been a delightful and challenging process. The team travelled many thousand kilometers to rural areas of Brazil to meet our fellow citizens, who live, work and study there. It was surprising how well they kept their cultures and languages and how determined there were to transfer all this cultural knowledge further to their children.

The main advantages of being in Brazil were higher salaries that in Bulgaria, better climate and better social services. In spite of some of the advantages, this paper put emphasis on the challenges and problems. The majority of the problems were related to the lack of integration to the local communities and the lack of knowledge of the Portuguese language. Many children had troubles in understanding new rules and cultural features of Brazil that made it difficult to participate in cultural activities and engage in discussions with their peers.

The practical limitation of this study was that it was not possible to interview all Bulgarian children and families that showed interest in participating in the project. The main reason was that some of the families were living in very remote areas, that required special preparation, permissions and vaccination to be able to travel and visit them. Additionally, the theoretical limitation of the research is that the findings were analyzed through the lens of the current tendency of applying constructivist approach to teaching and learning, while in some cultures and communities, other approaches might be considered more relevant and beneficial.

The main contribution of this research is providing deep insight into Bulgarian children's experiences of Brazilian education system. The recommendations that are coming from the research team are three-folded. First, the team recommends that teachers and other school personnel emphasize the importance of applying intercultural educational approaches to education, motivate and integrate minority children as much as possible. Second, better support is needed especially in children's native language, that is Bulgarian. This includes psychological and educational professional support services in Bulgarian, in person or via internet, preferably via video-calls. Third, there should be better regulations in school policies and materials provided to the teachers that work in the rural schools. These recommendations can be implemented in practice if Brazilian government steps in and acknowledges the diversity in rural schools and promotes cross-cultural education and communication.

Education is one of the main aspects of our lives and ensuring that our children get the best education possible is very important. This paper opens a little door to the lives of Bulgarian people in Brazil and can be used as a trigger to improve educational services for everyone in the country.

Acknowledgements

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